

CITIES OF ORIGIN, CITIES OF EXILE  
MAGHREBI JEWISH DIASPORIC LIFE-WRITING IN FRENCH, 1985-2011

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To my grandparents, Marjorie Anne Sanders and Ira Adolph Budwig,

May their memory be a blessing

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## INTRODUCTION

During the height of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, large crowds of rioters ransacked Jewish shops and the *Grande Synagogue* in Tunis, across the street from where seventeen year-old Colette Fellous lived. She was just about to take her baccalaureate exams in literature and dreamed of going to Paris for her university studies. The numerous Jewish families in the neighborhood anxiously watched through their blinds as the public symbol of their community was destroyed. “On ira même jusqu’à dire que vingt siècles se sont effacés en un seul jour... Nous n’avons été prévenus de rien, nous découvrons à peine le nom du pays où nous habitons. Cette terre qui brûle là-bas et qui est en guerre, nous la connaissons encore moins.”<sup>1</sup> Triggering the last of many migratory waves, these traumatic events signaled the end of the long-standing Jewish presence in Tunisia and the beginning of a new diaspora. For Fellous and her co-religionists, the question of where they belonged and who they were became unavoidable. Fellous returns to this apocalyptic moment in her book *Aujourd’hui* (2005) lingering on the way that sights, sounds, and smells from Tunisia overlay those in France.

Decades after this traumatic departure, Fellous felt drawn inexplicably back to Tunisia, both the land itself and transitional years from the protectorate to independence that she grew up in. In part, she hopes to discover what motivated Jewish migration, but also what made her Tunisian, what linked her to Israel and France though she had never set foot in either country. Far from being unique to Fellous, this impulse to write the Maghrebi Jewish story after painful years of exile has generated an ever-expanding body

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<sup>1</sup> Collette Fellous, *Aujourd’hui* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 78-79. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the text or in footnotes.



of writing that lingers on the “twenty centuries” of Jewish roots in the Maghreb and the “one day” that spelled the end of this presence.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the “end” of Jewish life in the Maghreb is constantly deferred in Fellous and many of her coreligionists’ writing. The act of writing about the past requires returning to it, both physically and mentally. Indeed, the irony is that Fellous frequently goes to Tunisia to write books about her traumatic separation from it. Life-writing emerges as an everyday practice of diasporic return that reanimates the past as an object of desire, only to show the impossibility of recovering it. The writer has to deal not only with his or her personal forgetting, but the fact that many around the world have no idea that there were Jews in the Maghreb for “vingt siècles,” nor who these Jews were and what made them different from their more identifiable coreligionists in Europe and America.

In the wake of the Second World War, over 500,000 Jews lived under French rule in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. According to recent estimates, the population numbers less than one percent of the postwar total, fewer than 5,000 altogether. Jews’ disappearance from the Maghrebi landscape seems all the more surprising given their centuries-old, pre-Islamic roots there.<sup>3</sup> Most Jews born in the Maghreb are now concentrated in Israel, France and the Americas. Historians have attempted to understand the reasons for departure, coming up with varying explanations including the desire for

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<sup>2</sup> The late Moroccan Jewish writer Edmond Amran El Maleh entitled one of his major works, *Mille ans, un jour* (Marseille: André Dimanche ([1986] 2002)). The back cover offers a brief exegesis: “Mille ans ils ont vécu en terre arabe, en un jour ils l’ont quitté.” Haïm Zafrani, one of major historians of Moroccan Judaism first published a survey entitled, *Deux mille ans de vie juive au Maroc: Histoire, culture, religion, et magie* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998). The figure of 2,000 years has since become as much rhetorical as historical, a way of asserting Jewish rootedness in the Maghreb (and precedence over Arabs, who arrived in the seventh century CE).

<sup>3</sup> Though historians disagree on the exact dates, they agree that Jewish communities in the Maghreb flourished during Carthaginian and Roman rule. A necropolis in Gammarth and a synagogue near Hamman-Lif, both in the greater Tunis area, date back to the third century CE. Jewish symbols have been found in the ruins of Volubilis, a Roman city in the north of Morocco, built in the first century CE. See Zafrani, *Deux mille ans de vie juive au Maroc*; and Paul Sebag, *Histoire des Juifs de Tunisie* (Paris: Harmattan, 1990). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, whether in the text or in footnotes.

economic advancement, Zionist and Arab nationalist fervor, anti-Jewish persecution, and the profound Westernization of the younger generations.

*Cities of Origin, Cities of Exile* examines the works of a group of authors remembering Casablanca and Tunis from the late colonial period to their departures in the first years after independence, writing from Paris and Montréal, between 1985 and the present. Armand Abécassis, Bob Oré Abitbol, Salomon Benbaruk, Anny Dayan-Rosenman, Armand Lévy, Victor Malka, and Abraham Serfaty write about Casablanca. A larger group writes about Tunis—Sophie Bessis, George Cohen, Colette Fellous, Gisèle Halimi, Serge Moati, Albert Naccache, Gilbert Naccache, Maya Nahum and Brigitte Smadja. I argue that their affirmation of their Maghrebi roots in these works maintains their long-standing claim to a French-Jewish-North African identity in conflict with the national-state projects that prevailed during decolonization. Living under French protectorates, most Moroccan and Tunisian Jews never became French citizens during colonial rule, making their post-independence choices about where to settle more complicated than those of Algerian Jews.

By claiming to be fully Jewish, French and Maghrebi they assert the right to be fully invested in multiple identities, creating a new transnational diaspora. They do this through narrating their diasporic experiences in what I term first-person plural life-writing—creating a dynamic intertext that fellow Jews from the Morocco and Tunisia can identify with and contribute to, by publishing their own stories in print and online. Rather than diverse communities imagining themselves to be one nation, these writers affirm the diversity of their origins and experiences preserved in spite of the triumph of nationalism. Maghrebi Jewish life-writing created and continues to create a shared sense of diasporic

community around cosmopolitan roots, rather their experience of life in new national contexts.<sup>4</sup>

### **A Triple Identity: Jewish, Maghrebi, French**

Jews of the Maghreb had traditionally identified themselves along several axes including the village or town they were from, with *al-Andalus / Sepharad* (Iberia), with *eretz Israel* (the Land of Israel), and with the exiled Jewish people writ large. Part of the multi-confessional mosaic of the Maghreb and Levant, the intrusion of European state power dramatically changed their self-conception. The crumbling of the Ottoman Empire led to the construction of a whole host of smaller nation-states with narrowly defined ethno-linguistic criteria. It seems remarkably coincidental that just as Greece won independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1830, the French invaded Algeria. These two political and military events would have inestimable repercussions for the Jews of the Muslim Mediterranean. These conquests and the national realignment that followed would detach Jews from Muslim sovereigns and populations, and drastically reorient them toward Europe.<sup>5</sup>

In the context of colonialism and nationalism, and a general polarization of the European world against the Muslim world, how were Jews to position themselves? In the

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<sup>4</sup> An important contrast could be made with two of the foundational coming of age novels of “Beur” literature, written about the experiences of young French Muslims of North African descent. In Mehdi Charef’s *Le thé au harem d’Archy Ahmed* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1983) and Azouz Begag’s *Le Gone du Chaâba* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1986), the young protagonists living in the poor suburbs of Paris and Lyon know little of their Algerian roots, and only understand and speak Arabic at a basic level. In both these novels Algeria appears as a distant past. Moroccan and Tunisian Muslim literature engages with a different problematic, the desire to return home, but to a home with greater economic opportunity and democratic freedoms. These are relatively remote from the concerns of Jews, who came to feel that they had no future in the Maghreb, as a result of the decolonization process.

<sup>5</sup> Norman Stillman, “Middle Eastern and North African Jews Confront Modernity: Orientation, Disorientation, and Reorientation” *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*. Ed. Harvey Goldberg (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2006), 59-69.

Moroccan and Tunisian context, France looked upon them ambivalently. On the one hand they provided badly needed linguistic and commercial intermediaries for the colonial administration. On the other, European settlers in Algeria had reacted violently to Crémieux Decree of 1870, which automatically naturalized the Algerian Jewish population.<sup>6</sup> The nascent Moroccan and Tunisian nationalist movements looked askance at Jews' enthusiasm for French rule, and particularly at the attempts of local Jewish elites to place the community under French jurisdiction and lobby for mass naturalization.<sup>7</sup> They also saw Jewish flirtation with France as a deplorable lack of solidarity with oppressed Muslims. These movements defined themselves as part of the Arab and Muslim world, which made mass Jewish participation even more problematic.<sup>8</sup>

Upon arrival in their new homes, particularly in France and Québec, Maghrebi Jews confronted established Jewish populations of Ashkenazi origins. In response to this tendency of the nation-state to construct itself more narrowly, Maghrebi Jews responded by asserting national identities they had never really occupied before departure. With respect to the dominant Ashkenazi Jewish establishment in France and Canada, they appropriated the label of "Sépharades," though many of them were not descended from the Iberian exiles and those that did had been thoroughly "Arabized" in cultural and linguistic terms.<sup>9</sup> As Maghrebi Jewish communities gained power and visibility in Jewish

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Taïeb, "Tumulte autour d'un décret: Le décret Crémieux ou la première logique," *Les Nouveaux Cahiers* 123 (1996): 69-79.

<sup>7</sup> Colette Zytnicki, "Les juifs de Tunisie à l'heure des choix," *La Tunisie mosaïque: Diasporas, cosmopolitisme, archéologies de l'identité*. Ed. Jacques Alexandropolous and Patrick Cabanel (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2000), 157-169; Michael Laskier, "Developments in the Jewish Communities of Morocco, 1956-1976," *Middle Eastern Studies* 26.4 (1990), 465-505.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Schroeter, "The Shifting Boundaries of Moroccan Jewish Identities" *Jewish Social Studies* 15.1 (2008): 145-164 (158-159). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the text or the footnotes.

<sup>9</sup> Some important exceptions are the Jews of Northern Morocco and Western Algeria, who because of their proximity to Spain retained Medieval Castilian as a primary language. Nevertheless it was deeply inflected

institutions, they felt more comfortable claiming their belonging to Moroccan and Tunisian identity in a cultural sense.

The period in which these works were written and published (1985-2010), also witnessed the flagging of the traditional notion of a unified French language and culture. While the notion of “multiculturalism” and a pluralistic France still encounter wide opposition in politics, in literary and cultural domains, more and more French people have reclaimed their roots outside the *métropole* (especially those writing from France’s former colonies). The profusion of autobiographical writing elaborating hybrid identities has been one of the most remarkable cultural manifestations of decolonization and post-colonial migrations.<sup>10</sup> While some synthetic histories have been produced and more will surely be written in the coming decades, they are dwarfed in number and as well as in the detail by these autobiographical accounts.

French literary historian and critic Guy Dugas attempted to catalog and analyze a corpus of Judeo-Maghrebi literature in several works in the 1980s culminating in his monograph, *La littérature judéo-maghrébine d’expression française* published in 1990.<sup>11</sup> Dugas’ definition helped set this corpus apart from two other similar bodies of literature, *pied-noir* and *beur* literature. Both of these corpuses comprise autobiographical accounts written by authors born in the Maghreb, but who come from European Christian tradition in the first case and Maghrebi Islam in the second. Dugas surveyed Judeo-Maghrebi literature in French from its origins in the late nineteenth century to 1990, but

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by Moroccan Arabic, and was called *hakitia* rather than Spanish among its speakers. The *Grana*, or Livornese Jews are another group that traced its roots back to Iberia; the first generations spoke Portuguese and Spanish, but gradually transitioned to Italian.

<sup>10</sup> See Bart Moore-Gilbert’s *Postcolonial Life-Writing: Culture, Politics, and Self-Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2009). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the text or the footnotes.

<sup>11</sup> Guy Dugas, *La littérature judéo-maghrébine d’expression française: Entre Djéha et Cagayous* (Paris : Harmattan, 1990). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the text or the footnotes.

concentrated much of his study on authors born before World War II. Contrary to Albert Memmi's prediction that "la littérature colonisée de langue européenne semble condamnée à mourir jeune" and Dugas's expectations, since 1990 the production of Judeo-Maghrebi literature in French has flourished.<sup>12</sup> Hence, this dissertation follows the trail, but attends to the particular situation of a new generation of writers; the last to be born in the Maghreb before the great migration.

If these autobiographies are born out of a particular spatio-temporal context, their particularity is that they look back to a time in some way beyond their own experience. Just as they break down the overly facile distinctions between colonizer and colonized, French and Arab, homeland and diaspora, they also work between memory and history. Since recent Maghrebi Jewish history has been so tempestuous and dynamic and since this diaspora was at first not recognized for its distinctive triple identity, autobiographers also function as historians and ethnographers, documenting everything from the political evolution of the community to its everyday eating habits. The literary and historical boundary breaking taking place in these works stems from the cataclysmic finality of the events; the knowledge that Jews will most likely never return to live in the Maghreb in large numbers, combined with the ardent desire to resurrect the polyglot, cosmopolitan cities left behind. What results is a strange *va-et-vient*, between physical and literary departure and return that marks all of contemporary Maghrebi Jewish literature, and indeed much of modern Sephardic literature itself.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Dugas himself acknowledged the surprising staying power of this sub-genre in his article, "Le nouveau roman judéo-maghrébin d'expression française (1985-2005)" *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 11.2 (2007), 277-290.

<sup>13</sup> These dynamics are amply revealed in Elias Canetti's three volume *Memoirs* (2000) *The Tongue Set Free, The Play of the Eyes, The Secret Heart of the Clock*; see Jonathan Schorsch's extremely thorough "Disappearing Origins: Sephardic Autobiography Today" *Prooftexts* 27 (2007): 82-150.

But what made Tunis and Casablanca special places for the genesis of Jewish autobiographers? How do these writers reconcile the conflicting aspects of their identity, being Jewish, born in a predominantly Arab-Muslim region, and writing in French? Why do so many of these writers prefer autobiography in addressing Maghrebi Jewish exile and what makes them opt for a first-person plural focus? Finally, what is their relation to their places of origin and exile? After sketching some preliminary responses to these questions, I will give an overview of the authors and works examined, and briefly summarize the thrust of each chapter.

### **Cities of Origin: Why Tunis and Casablanca?**

Colonial Tunis and Casablanca were cosmopolitan cities with many different communities living in close proximity where Jews constituted an epicenter of the negotiation among different sectors. Both port cities whose size increased exponentially during the colonial period due to integration in industrial European-American networks of production and distribution. Tunis and Casablanca were also emblematic of the economic transformation of North Africa, particularly in the movement of dispossessed peasants and artisans from the countryside looking for work. In economic and demographic terms, both cities became the effective capitals of their protectorates, dwarfing their nearest competitors. At the end of the Second World War, around 60 percent of the total Tunisian Jewish population lived in the capital, some 42,000 altogether.<sup>14</sup> Casablanca's Jewish population reached 75,000 by 1951.<sup>15</sup> In both cities, Jews were a visible, important minority, with certain neighborhoods, streets and

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Sebag, *Histoire des Juifs de Tunisie: de l'antiquité à nos jours*, 256.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Luc Pierre, *Casablanca et la France: XIXe et XXe siècles, mémoires croisées* (Casablanca: Editions de la Croisée des Chemins, 2002), 115.

apartment buildings identified with them, as well as dozens of synagogues and kosher butchers.

Both were the sites of multiple Jewish communities; they drew internal migrants from smaller towns and villages, while also serving as a springboard for migration to destinations further afield, particularly Israel, France and the Americas. From a legal standpoint, both were protectorates rather than colonies along the lines of Algeria and as a consequence the pulls of French influence versus indigenous influence were usually much more balanced. Jews also did not automatically have French citizenship and there was a multifaceted political identity as such. Individual naturalization was the general rule as opposed to Algeria where Jews were naturalized en masse in 1870. Within the same Jewish family, some members might hold French citizenship, while others remained Moroccan or Tunisian subjects. The protectorate status also meant that Jews' primary interaction with France came through schooling, whether by the French government toward the end of colonial rule, or by the private French-Jewish schools run by the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*.<sup>16</sup>

All these factors contributed to the creation of culturally and linguistically diverse environments where Jews regularly encountered and had to deal with colonized Muslims and colonial Christians in everyday life. Some Jews who served in the French military were able to obtain citizenship, and more actively participated in the colonial project, but

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<sup>16</sup> The Alliance Israélite Universelle was founded in Paris in 1860 to fight anti-Jewish persecution and spread the model of French Republican Judaism (*Franco-Judaïsme*) to oppressed Jewish communities. Beginning with the northern Moroccan city of Tetuan in 1862, the Alliance would create hundreds of French-language schools around the Mediterranean and Middle East. See André Kaspi, ed. *Histoire de l'Alliance israélite universelle de 1860 à nos jours*. (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010). For the concept of "Franco-Judaïsme" as deployed at home and abroad, see Lisa Moses Leff, *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity: The Rise of Jewish Internationalism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).



they were in the minority.<sup>17</sup> Jews in these cities had already been exposed to European influence before colonial rule and France might be the dominant point of reference, but certainly not the only one. Zionist organizations had a long history of recruitment and propaganda in the Maghreb. While they had little success with the bourgeoisie, the disinherited artisans and peddlers from the countryside proved to be fertile ground.

Besides France and Israel, the Americas emerged as an option, especially after France's defeat during the Second World War and the influx of American soldiers, consumer goods, and cultural production helped reorient the Morocco in particular and the Mahgreb more generally toward the Americas.<sup>18</sup> A child growing up in the last decades of the protectorate would be exposed in the house, on the streets and markets, in schools, in cinemas to what seems, even by contemporary standards, to a bewildering multitude of linguistic and cultural practices. In addition to the claims his or her family and religious community might make, a young person in the late colonial period was already caught up in larger competing flows of knowledge and everyday practices (alternatively identified as modern, European, American, and so on).

However diverse the urban environment might be, Moroccan and Tunisian Jews still functioned as communities within a larger community, just as Muslims from different towns did. In Tunis, internal migrants from Djerba were typically greengrocers, roasters of chick peas and coffee were from Tataouine, the vendors of the best beignets came from Ghomrassen, and the preferred concierges for apartment buildings were

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<sup>17</sup> Sebag (182-184).

<sup>18</sup> Brian T. Edwards, *Morocco Bound: Disorienting America's Maghreb, from Casablanca to the Marrakech Express* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); as well as "Marock in Morocco: Reading Moroccan Films in the Age of Circulation," in *North African Cinema in Global Context: Through the Lens of Diaspora*, ed. Andrea Khalil (Routledge, 2008).

Moroccans on their way to or coming back from Mecca.<sup>19</sup> Lucette Valensi underscores the importance of these migrant communities within the city:

Cette distribution des rôles selon l'origine géographique et la spécialisation technique est l'un des secrets de l'harmonie des desseins qui formaient la mosaïque d'ensemble. Car chacun pouvait trouver dans son groupe d'origine un lieu de formation et d'apprentissage, un espace de solidarité et d'échanges d'informations et de savoir-faire, une niche écologique telle que les rapports économiques et sociaux entre membres des différents groupes étaient régulés, fondés sur l'égalité de connaissance des règles du jeu, des compétences et des qualités de chacun des protagonistes.<sup>20</sup>

Casablanca and Tunis were cosmopolitan metropolises with migrants from near and far representing all three of the Abrahamic faiths, but they remained informally divided along ethno-religious lines until the end of the protectorate. Different sections of the cities were known to be group enclaves. In Tunis, Maltese immigrants dominated the area near the medina known as *Malta-Srira* (little Malta), Sicilians and Calabrians congregated in La Goulette and Le Kram, neighborhoods popularly known as *Piccola Sicilia* and *Piccola Calabria*.<sup>21</sup> All these migrants began arriving years before France took control of Tunisia, belying the notion that the Maghreb was closed to outside influences before colonialism. Jews and Muslims tended to occupy defined quarters (*mellah* and *medina* in Casablanca, *hâra* and *medina* in Tunis). The boundaries were dynamic and more mixed neighborhoods emerged towards the end of French rule, Tunis and Casablanca's residents' ethnic and religious backgrounds could often be identified. Nevertheless, commercial necessities brought all of Tunis and Casablanca's residents into contact with others on the streets and in the markets. As we will see, these spaces are

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<sup>19</sup> Lucette Valensi, "La mosaïque tunisienne: fragments retrouvés," *La Tunisie mosaïque*, 24-25. For a remarkably similar typological description see André Nahum, *Tunis-la-juive raconte* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2000), 11-14. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the text or in the footnotes.

<sup>20</sup> Valensi, "La mosaïque tunisienne," 25.

<sup>21</sup> Michele Brondino, *La stampa Italiana in Tunisia: storia e società, 1838-1956* (Milan: Editoriale Jaca, 1998), 55.

remembered as zones of contact where languages and customs collided and combined. Jewish, Muslim and Christian holidays punctuated the year with various intercommunal rituals and exchanges.

Franco-Judeo-Maghrebi writers cut an unlikely figure, growing up in a disoriented, hybrid environment, yet tenaciously rooted in an identity that continues to have a hold in exile. In addition to an attachment to Moroccan or Tunisian music, foodways, landscapes, saints and holy places, they carry a sense of belonging to Jewish traditions whether they uphold them at home, in the synagogue, or only by remembering them in writing.<sup>22</sup> As if these two heritages were not complex enough, these writers were all primarily educated in French and write their life stories in it. Paradoxically most of them had never been to France before exile. They reaffirm their attachment to their cities of origin in their autobiographical works, just as they dreamed of France and sang of Jerusalem in Morocco and Tunisia. Their whole lives have been deeply marked by attachments to multiple places, often conflicting. Maghrebi Jews' culture was (at least) triple. Jews from the north of Morocco tended to look toward Spain, and some of those from Tunis traced their origins back to Italy, adding even more poles to an already complex identity.<sup>23</sup>

While Morocco or Tunisia, France and *eretz Israel* were all points of reference, Jews tended to look first and foremost at their villages and cities of origin. As Casablanca

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<sup>22</sup> See Yosef Haym Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish Memory and Jewish History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005) for a striking account of the modern transition in Jewish writing about the past.

<sup>23</sup> During the great Jewish migrations of the 1950s and 1960s, some Tunisian Jews of Livornese origin returned to Italy, though many migrated to France as well. See Lionel Lévy, *La nation juive portugaise: Livourne, Amsterdam, Tunis (1591-1951)* (Paris: Harmattan, 1999). Moroccan Jews from the north of the country tended to choose Spain, Argentina, and Venezuela, reflecting the lasting importance of the Spanish language and culture for them. See Joseph Bengio, "Les juifs marocains en Espagne" *Juifs du Maroc: Identité et Dialogue* (Grenoble: La Pensée Sauvage, 1980), 353-357. See also Robert Assaraf, *Juifs du Maroc à travers le monde: Émigration et identité retrouvée* (Rabat : Editions Bouregreg, 2009), Chapter XVI, "Les originaires du Maroc dans le Nouveau Monde" 245-252.

and Tunis boomed under French rule, Jews were drawn there from smaller communities. Casablanca absorbed migrants from towns with much longer-standing Jewish populations including, but not limited to Tangier, Tetuan, Essaouira-Mogador, Safi, Fez, Marrakech, Rabat. In the Tunisian context, Jews from Sousse, Bizerte, Gabès and Nabeul were drawn to Tunis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, joining the existing communities, the *Twansa* (autochthonous Jews and *Grana* (Sephardic exile who had come to Tunis by way of the free port of Livorno). These Jews from elsewhere who moved to the capitals constituted miniature *kehilot* (autonomous Jewish communities) maintaining their own synagogues and attempting maintain in-group marriage. Daniel Schroeter points out that “the relatively recent ‘Moroccan’ identity replaced other more primordial identities based on places of origin within Morocco (city or community, region), language (Arabic, Judeo-Spanish, Berber) or even rite (Sephardi or Castilian, and “native” or *toshav*).”<sup>24</sup> By venerating particular rabbis and using liturgies developed in their communities, they continued to identify with their town of origin, even when families had settled in Tunis or Casablanca for decades. Hence “Moroccan” and “Tunisian” or what has more recently emerged as “Maghrebi” Jewish diaspora have come to subsume a whole host of other genealogies and trajectories.

The diversity of origins combined with multiple languages to contribute to a fractious sense of multiple identities. While French became the language of cultural prestige for many Jews in the capital cities, Hebrew and Jewish dialects of colloquial Arabic constituted the affective, gastronomical and religious vocabularies. New arrivals in Casablanca from Tangier or Tetuan also spoke *Haketia*, a form of medieval Castilian with significant imports from Hebrew and Moroccan Arabic. Those in Mogador spoke

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<sup>24</sup> Schroeter, “Shifting Boundaries,” 146-147.

English because of the commercial and familial links they maintained with Mogadorian Jews in London beginning in the eighteenth century. Tunisian Jews growing up in the late colonial period were frequently brought up hearing Italian in the home environment, because of the enormous Livornese influence and the substantial Sicilian, Calabrian and northern Italian immigrant communities there. These languages left significant imprints on Moroccan and Tunisian dialects of Arabic, audible today, more than fifty years after decolonization.<sup>25</sup>

### **Cities of Exile: Why Paris and Montréal?**

Jews' reorientation toward the West was such that for many Jews, France and the Americas became replacements for the traditional Passover exclamation "Next year in Jerusalem" that served as a reminder of the messianic promise of an end to dispersion.<sup>26</sup> Alongside the religious connection to the land of Israel, Colette Fellous describes the imaginary migration that Jews practiced before leaving that derived from European cinema.

Je fais la star devant le miroir, je me regarde droit dans les yeux et je chuchote : alors, rendez-vous l'an prochain à Paris, chiche ? Je suis la dernière de la famille à partir et c'est tellement grisant. Je saluerai cette chambre pour la dernière fois... mais je ne serai pas triste du tout puisque la vraie vie est en France, tout le monde le dit, allez, au revoir petite maison, ciao Tunis, tu n'étais qu'une répétition (*Aujourd'hui* 66-67).

Outside of France, in the United States and Canada were glimpsed in visions of big cars, skyscrapers, and wealth. Whereas France could seem distinctly old-world and moribund

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<sup>25</sup> Meriem Zlitni, "Plurilinguisme et contacts de langue entre Italiens et Tunisiens: quelques aspects linguistiques des échanges entre les deux principales communautés de la Tunisie coloniale" in *Lo spazio linguistico italiano e le 'lingue esotiche': rapporti e influenze* (Rome : Bulzoni, 2006), 349-371; see also Barabara Airò, "Vecchi et nuovi italianismi nell'arabo tunisino" in *XII Incontro Italiano di Linguistica Camito-semitica*, ed. Marco Moriggi (Milan: Rubettino, 2007), 169-176.

<sup>26</sup> Guy Dugas notes this "sacrilège" was already attested to in the 1920s and 1930s, *Littérature judéo-maghrébine* 89.

economically and Israel seemed as dangerous and uncertain as the Maghreb, the Americas incarnated newness and modernity. Montreal in particular appealed to Moroccan Jews because it represented a French-speaking outpost in the land of free enterprise. Needless to say, the visions of a better life in the metropolises of Paris and Montreal were confronted with the more ambivalent situation of struggling immigrants.

These works of Maghrebi Jewish life-writing are written during a period in which the mirage of a coherent, singular French and Québécois identity are dramatically transformed by immigration. In France and Québec of the 1980s and 1990s, the multicultural and multilingual nature of urban populations became increasingly visible, fundamentally redefining the nation. Immigrants and the children of immigrants from all corners of the formerly colonized world assert their right to claim French or Québécois identity while maintaining their connections to their homelands.<sup>27</sup> In France, Maghrebi Jews' public display of Jewish identity and their propensity for recreating kinship ties in Parisian neighborhoods such as Belleville and Sarcelles threaten the French ideal of homogenous culture and the fear of "communautarisme ethnique." The maintenance of ethno-religious origins and traditions by those born outside of France is perceived as intransigent, anti-civic behavior. In another way, immigration did not get Maghrebi Jews away from their former Muslim neighbors, since many of them have ended up in France in search of economic opportunity, often settling in the same areas.<sup>28</sup> As Victor Malka put it, "nous ne savions pas que nous vivions une brève parenthèse et que la même page

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<sup>27</sup> Alec Hargreaves, *Multi-ethnic France: Immigration, Politics, Culture and Society* (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Karin Albou's film *La Petite Jerusalem* (2005) dramatizes the tensions between Maghrebi Muslim and Jewish enclaves in the working-class suburb of Sarcelles. The protagonist's family comes from Djerba in Tunisia, a community known for its fierce adherence to tradition and site of the Ghriba, an ancient synagogue that draws Maghrebi Jews from around the diaspora for the *Lag Ba'omer*, a pilgrimage in honor of second-century rabbi and mystic Shimon Bar Yochai.

serait rouverte un peu plus tard et ailleurs.”<sup>29</sup> The geographical proximity and the imaginary linkages between Jewish and Muslim communities originally from the Maghreb parallel that in Montréal.

Québec’s struggle for recognition of its distinctive language and culture dramatically advanced in 1977 with the *Loi 101*. French was recognized as the province’s sole official language. Yet the Québécois nationalists themselves were wary of the ever-expanding immigrant populations in Montreal, whose narrative did not correspond to their own struggle against Anglophone cultural and economic hegemony. Many of the immigrants were “allophones,” speaking neither English nor French as their first language. They remained attached to other origins and languages, setting them apart from the new national project of a French Québec. For many Québécois nationalists, immigrants were welcome only on the condition that their children incorporate into the French-language educational system. Those who resisted learning French were also seen as weakening the Francophone demographic, crucial for Québec’s claims to sovereignty. Thus Maghrebi Jews have become part and parcel of a “flow of people [that] has inscribed itself in a twofold process: the strong affirmation of a francophone national identity... and the emergence of a transcultural urban fabric which questions, subverts, and contributes to the explosion of a single, national, francophone identity.”<sup>30</sup> In recent years, Montréal has come to recognize its own diversity, linguistic and otherwise, through the strategic valorization of immigrant cultures and the burgeoning of “écriture migrante,” denoting literature by recent immigrants as well as those established in

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<sup>29</sup> Victor Malka, *Avons-nous assez divagués: Lettre à mes amis musulmans* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2006), 10. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Berrouët Oriol and Robert Fournier, cited in Susan Ireland and Patricia Proulx, eds. *Textualizing the immigrant experience in Contemporary Québec*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 2.

Québec for generations that focuses on diasporic roots and routes.<sup>31</sup> Maghrebi Jewish-life writing certainly fits in the category, since it emphasizes movement, both the author's and the text's, between different worlds.

As many allophones “transfer” their primary language to English as to French, and often have connections on multiple continents. The Québécois nationalist project has yet to fully adapt to the new realities. The public debates over “reasonable accommodations” to immigrants revealed a deep reservoir of nationalist anti-immigrant paranoia and racism, particularly in the rural regions.<sup>32</sup> While Muslims from the Maghreb and Middle East along with Ultra-Orthodox Jews are the focus of most of the vitriol in both France and Québec, contemporary Maghrebi Jewish writers are part of the broader contestation of the demands the modern nation-state places on its citizens to melt their particularities away into a unified whole. Constructing themselves as others through their life-stories, they insist on the right to be recognized as full citizens without having to support the separatist project.

### **Why First-Person Plural Life-Writing?**

Why does Maghrebi Jewish writing focus so intensely on the community as the lens for subjective memory, sometimes privileging it over the individual? French autobiography in the 20<sup>th</sup> century focused overwhelmingly on the struggle between writers' creation of the self against a hostile collective; usually the family and society at

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<sup>31</sup> See Susan Ireland and Patricia Proulx, “Negotiating New Identities in Québec’s écriture migrante” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 13.1 (2009): 35-43.

<sup>32</sup> Daniel Salée “The Quebec State and the Management of Ethnocultural Diversity: Perspectives on an Ambiguous Record,” Ed. Keith Banting, Tom Courchene and Leslie Seidle, *The Art of the State: Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada*, III (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2007), 105-142.



large. Philippe Lejeune and Michael Sheringham, both prominent scholars of French autobiography, argue that this tendency goes back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*.<sup>33</sup> Lejeune even asserts that applying the term "autobiography" before Rousseau and outside of Western Europe makes no sense because of the genre's reliance on self-conscious individual subject. The notion of autobiography was a distinctly literary and mostly male genre, one subservient to the "higher forms" of the great books, such as novels, poetry, and philosophy.

Life-writing on other hand is a concept that has evolved against the reductive, elitist character of the autobiographical canon. Encompassing the construction of the self through diverse forms such as the eye-witness account, oral history, correspondence, journals, and transcribed oral forms of expression in addition to the more familiar autobiographical novel and the memoir, life-writing helps us see the construction of self on manifold levels of literary production. It veers away from the biographical tradition, one that dates back to Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, that promotes the study of illustrious persons for moral improvement. Life-writing also allows for vastly different expressions of self-understanding than those associated with autobiography, where the philosopher, artist, or writer struggles to overcome external influences, to be completely determined by him or herself. Besides eschewing an overly simple description of the individual against the collective, this new designation also takes seriously ways that people tell their life stories "outside of the written form: including

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<sup>33</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975); Michael Sheringham, *French Autobiography: Devices and desires, Rousseau to Perec* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

testimony, artifacts, reminiscence, personal narrative, visual arts, photography, film, oral history and so forth.”<sup>34</sup>

Maghrebi Jewish life-writing differs not only from classical auto/biography, but also from the more recent “égo-histoire,” in which professional historians turn their scrutinizing gaze on their own life trajectories.<sup>35</sup> While there are strong affinities between the two, the historian’s effort to write against his or her own personal biases, to achieve the distance and dispassionate third-person perspective differs considerably from diasporic life-writing. Maghrebi Jewish life-writing operates within a first-person perspective, but one in which the singular dwells within the plural. In terms of subject pronouns, the “je” weaves in and out of the “on” and “nous.” Authors speak about and on behalf of the family, the neighborhood, the Jews of a particular city, or even the diaspora as whole rather than an abstract Rousseauian notion of “society,” and not from some Archimedean point achieved by a regime of rational discipline. Rather its diasporic conditions of production mean that authors are remembering a whole universe reduced to fragments and traces. These works remember not only the Jews of a particular neighborhood and the colonial metropolis; they also often speak of and for Moroccan and Tunisian Jewries as a whole. Paradoxically, the diversity of all the micro-communities reconciles itself with a national (“juif tunisien” and “juif marocain”) and regional identity (“juif maghrébin”) that were not the salient forms of identification before exile, when

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<sup>34</sup> Margaretta Jolly, “Editor’s Note,” *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, 1 (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), ix.

<sup>35</sup> See Jeremy Popkin’s essays “Historians on the Autobiographical Frontier” *The American Historical Review* 104.3 (1999), 725-748; and “Ego-Histoire and Beyond: Contemporary French Historian-Autobiographers” *French Historical Studies* 19.4 (1996), 1139-1167. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or the footnotes.

“most of them were first and foremost Jews, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others.”<sup>36</sup>

The plurality of voices represented in Maghrebi Jewish autobiography brings its into proximity with other genres besides history, particularly travel writing and ethnography. Yet the voyage undertaken is back to the self’s origins, and the groups described are also one’s own community, marking it out from Amitav Ghosh’s experimental work, *In an Antique Land* (1992).<sup>37</sup> Ghosh, a Bengali novelist, did an ethnographic study of Egyptian villages, then juxtaposed this work with a romanced account of a medieval Tunisian Jewish merchant with a servant (probably of Indian origins), based on Cairo Geniza archive. Whereas Ghosh’s own experience as the son of a colonial military officer is dealt with through his Indian novels, the Egyptian works are an effort to think about a radically different but somehow similar place and its history.

Maghrebi Jewish “ethnographic” writing internalizes the gaze of French scholarship, but then subverts this distanciation by showing how the non-French past is in fact at the heart of the writer’s experience. Beyond these characteristics, the Jewish writer is neither completely identifiable as colonizer nor colonized, French or Maghrebi. His or her identity disrupts these categories through its excess and indeterminacy.

Autobiographical techniques mix with auto-ethnography to produce works that strive to reconnect with the author’s past, which seemed normal as a child, but is now understood to be incompatible with hegemonic French culture. The strange mixture of identification and distanciation at work in Maghrebi Jewish autobiography can also be explained by the choice of French as language of expression. While Maghrebi Jews born around the time

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<sup>36</sup> Norman Stillman, “Middle Eastern and North African Jewries,” 69.

<sup>37</sup> Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1993).

of the Second World War in Tunis and Casablanca are commonly thought to have universally spoken French as a first language, their autobiographies belie this assumption.

French as language and regulative cultural system emerged primarily at schools. The home environment, typically dominated by the mother, was a hybridized linguistic space. Judeo-Arabic or heavily modified Mediterranean French could often make a stronger claim to be the “*langue maternelle*” than the Parisian French taught in schools, but for most it was a spoken language. Jews moved toward writing in French, both out of idealization as well as pragmatism. The value of the written word in the French colonial order of things was apparent to anyone who had to fill out administrative forms. Nevertheless, the decisive move toward French created a significant irony after exile and dispersion. In their desire to recover elements of the pre- or non-French past, they resort to the only means available to them; writing in French.

### **Between “*Littérature*” and “*Témoignage*,” Memory and History**

In an interview with Rachel Muyal, the former owner of Tangier’s preeminent European bookstore *La Librairie des Colonnes*, I named some of the writers whose works would be discussed. She approved of well-known literary figures such as Edmond Amran El Maleh, Albert Memmi and Colette Fellous, but vehemently insisted that some of the non-professional writers were not creators of “*littérature*,” but rather amateur “*témoignages*” (testimonies).<sup>38</sup> While such a distinction might be useful in abstract categorization, as with the equally facile “*fiction*” versus “*non-fiction*” distinction, it obscures more than it reveals. Theorists of autobiography and life-writing have revealed that remarkably similar techniques of narration, plot, characterization, temporality, and

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<sup>38</sup> Rachel Muyal, Personal Interview, December 3, 2011.

spatiality are used both modes of writing. In additions to the similarities on the level of production, reception of “fiction” and “non-fiction”, between “memory” and “history” are equally slippery. Works of “literature” and “fiction” make truth claims about the author’s experience of events, enjoining the reader to see a vision of reality through the narrative voice.

Going beyond these facile distinctions is of vital importance for understanding the deeper connections between works of Maghrebi Jewish life-writing. To do as postcolonial literary critics have done in reducing Jewish experience in North Africa to exemplary writers such Albert Memmi or Jacques Derrida is to commit a double error. On the one hand, it flattens out the idiosyncracies of these writers’ lives and works, making them stand in for a whole host of diverse trajectories. On the other, it confuses judgments about aesthetic quality with generic representativity. Their exemplarity hinders us from seeing their rootedness in a particular place and time, and how that determines the contours of their work. Walter Benjamin underscored the necessity for literary criticism to be attentive to the margins and extremes of any given genre to approach to its inner dynamics. “The life of the form is not identical with that of the works which are determined by it, indeed the clarity with which it is expressed can sometimes be in inverse proportion to the perfection of a literary work.”<sup>39</sup> Contradictions within Maghrebi Jewish life-writing between personal experience, oral history, and professional history are not simply marks of intellectual confusion, amateurism, or inferior technique; rather they point to its queer origins and impossible aspirations.

Maghrebi Jewish life-writing from its humblest to its most experimental aspires to tell the author’s story and the story of a community of thousands of people; it presents the

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<sup>39</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 2009), 58.

subjects as faithful Jews, ancient North Africans, modern Frenchmen, and lovers of Israel (all at the same time). Maghrebi Jewish authors slide from past to present, subjective to objective without justifying or sometime even signposting these transgressions of realistic autobiography. Far from resolving these stylistic and generic contradictions, Maghrebi Jewish writers present them, with varying degrees of self-awareness, as constitutive of their lives and works. These impossible identities and desires become productive in a uniquely autobiographical space.

In *Le pacte autobiographique*, Philippe Lejeune argued that autobiographical writing depends on an agreement in which the author agrees to disclose personal and intimate information, even if in fictionalized form (34-35). The creation of autobiographical space gives us the impression that we are in the presence of the writer's life experiences. Nevertheless, the close connection does not prevent the writer from employing literary devices used by fiction. These range dramatic shifts in time and voice, to changing characters' names, to coalescing two distinct events into one in order to emphasize their invisible affinities. The boundary crossing nature of much contemporary Maghrebi Jewish writing becomes evident with respect to writers and editors' difficulties in categorizing it. For instance, Edmond El Maleh and Colette Fellous's works have been published as "récit" (story and narrative) or "roman" depending on the edition. Armand Lévy revindicates the subjective and objective nature of his work *Il était une fois les juifs marocains* with the revelatory subtitle: *Témoignage et histoire de la vie quotidienne*. While writers might fictionalize the names of their characters or put apparent distance between the authorial and narratorial voice, they still reclaim their origins as authentic historical experience.

Beyond the limited scope of the text itself, authors engage in paratextual conversations through interviews and prefaces for later editions that inflect reader's understanding of how they make the story of their own lives into the story of a broader first-person plural subject; a "nous" that strives to encompass all Jews from Tunisia or Morocco. The tensions created by such a vast scope with such objectives are not resolved; rather they are constantly manifesting themselves in the discordances and inconsistencies within the texts. Colette Fellous admits as much in *Aujourd'hui*: "Je sais que je confonds les villes et les années pour voir plus clair, car c'est le temps que je veux toucher. Poser la main sur des moments brûlants" (57). Once we recognize that the life-writer is appealing to us from a the basis of personal experience to assert certain truth claims about particular events and historical moments, while also trying to persuade us to see through his or her eyes, then we can better understand how the fact/fiction distinction is fundamentally misleading.

Il ne s'agit plus de savoir lequel, de l'autobiographie ou du roman, serait le plus vrai. Ni l'un, ni l'autre ; à l'autobiographie, manqueront la complexité, l'ambiguïté, etc. ; au roman, l'exactitude ; ce serait donc : l'un plus l'autre ? Plutôt, l'un *par rapport* à l'autre. Ce qui devient révélateur, c'est l'espace dans lequel s'inscrivent les deux catégories de textes et qui n'est réductible à aucune des deux. Cet effet de relief obtenu par ce procédé, c'est la création, pour le lecteur, d'un "espace autobiographique." (Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* 42)

Whereas in Lejeune's formulation of the pact, the reader's engagement with the writer's story depends on the unity of the author, narrator, and protagonist, Maghrebi Jewish life-writing manages to create "autobiographical space," by employing both the techniques of "fiction" and the truth claims of "non-fiction," while complicating the relationship between these figures. Authors may diffract the narrative voice into two selves, one younger and older. They also may change the name of the main character supposed to represent their own experiences. Finally, some will draw on other contemporary

testimonies, which they then synthesize with their own to draw a picture reflecting collective experience. The uthor/narrator/protagonist are simulateaneously articulated through singular and plural forms.

Authors will also occasionally consult with historians, place historical works in a bibliography at the end, demonstrating how professional history blends with first-person experience.<sup>40</sup> The disappearance of visible Jewish patrimony in the Maghreb also leads amateur writers to invest their works with a historical mission. Jeremy Popkin points out that the craft of reconstructing the past brings historian and autobiographer in methodological proximity:

Not only do autobiographers and historians both claim to give factually accurate reconstructions of the past, they also share the retrospective double vision that comes from knowing what the actors in the past thought they were doing and what actually happened as a result of their actions. Like historians, autobiographers implicitly or explicitly suggest causal connections, underline discrepancies between intentions and results, and point out ironies that are only recognizable with the benefit of hindsight. (“Historians on the Autobiographical Frontier,” 725-726)

While the motivation to tell one’s story can be related memory transmission in the family, it also can be seen as part of a collective effort to save the past from historical forgetting. Life-writing represents an opening up of access to self-narration and to historical writing, because it emphasizes the collective edification of memory rather than literary virtuosity.

Using the idea of life-writing helps make sense of the way that one author would write multiple texts that inscribe themselves in a variety of autobiographical genres that blur the lines between fact and fiction, personal narrative and social commentary. Albert Memmi’s itinerary offers ample evidence of this tendency. His first work *La Statue de*

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<sup>40</sup> For example in *Les Belles de Tunis* (1983), a melodramatic novel following of the women of a Tunisian Jewish family from 1856 to 1956, Nine Moati thanks historian Lucette Valensi for providing consultation during her research.



*Sel*, described the travails of Alexandre Mordechai Benillouche, whose situation mirrored the author's in many respects. In *Portrait du colonisé, portrait du colonisateur*, published in 1957, Memmi drew extensively from his own experience and used Tunisia as a case study to address the psychological, social, and linguistic ramifications of colonialism. His next work *Agar* was a kind of autobiographical novel describing his return to Tunisia in the 1950s with his French, Catholic wife. The difficulties of their adaptation alienate the protagonist from his family and his wife. He later wrote *Le Pharaon* in which Armand Gozlan, a university professor of Tunisian Jewish origins who has returned to Tunis after studying in Paris, witnesses the downfall of the colonial system. More recently, he published the *Le Nomade Immobile* a more straightforward account of his life and times that nonetheless makes reference to his more "novelistic" works. Hence Memmi has been writing about himself, his life, and his experiences for some fifty years. He told and wrote different versions of the same basic story in multiple works, such as getting a visa for France in the last days of the Protectorate.<sup>41</sup>

In *Le Pharaon*, he makes his alter-ego/protagonist Alexandre Benillouche reappear alongside the alter-ego/narrator Armand Gozlan. Beyond the particular forms he has used, the first-person plural frame is the constant. Despite his notorious criticisms of the Tunisian Jewish community, first published in *La statue de sel*, he has never since ceased to write about it. This is why "life-writing," with fluid and even imprecise boundaries, accommodates the generic flexibility and multiplicity of recent Maghrebi Jewish texts, in which the multiplicity of the self and narrative forms are not only as a

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<sup>41</sup> This appears first as an anecdote in the preface to *Portrait du colonisé*, then cited in *La terre intérieure*, and fictionalized in *Le Pharaon*.

result of colonial displacement, but rather a constitutive trait of a diasporic, cosmopolitan community.

As we have seen in the case of Memmi, Maghrebi Jewish life-writing occupies a queer position with respect to the fact/fiction, memory/history dichotomy as it functions in most literary genres. Just as the same author might write multiple texts referencing the same set of experiences from different angles, so the division between “historian” and “writer” has become more difficult to trace. First of all, many of the main historians to write about Maghrebi Jews are themselves of Maghrebi Jewish origin. Lucette Valensi, born in Tunis in 1936, became engaged in the Tunisian Communist Party, left for France after independence and now is one of the premier specialists on the pre-colonial Maghreb and a distinguished professor at the prestigious *Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales* (EHESS). Valensi has written on the late colonial period, sometimes drawn from her own experience, which she melds with archival sources.<sup>42</sup> The overlapping of historical and memorial sources is one of the defining techniques of Maghrebi Jewish life-writing.

As opposed to scientific ideals of historic objectivity, in this new era of diasporic history, what Frantz Fanon called “l’expérience vécue” becomes increasingly important. Fanon’s notion of using his own story and his encounters with fellow Antilleans in the métropole to better understand their condition dovetails with the way Maghrebi Jewish writers attempt to give a holistic view of their “forgotten” community. Maghrebi Jews’ marshaling of lived experience read against the grain of the political order, is analogous to Fanon’s struggle “between the universal, collective, historical ‘I’ and the force of the

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<sup>42</sup> Valensi was interviewed about her experiences for Lucie Caries’ documentary, *Bon baisers... from la Goulette* (2007). She also gave plenary lecture for a conference on *La Tunisie mosaïque*, held at the University of Toulouse-Le Mirail in 1999, published in *La Tunisie mosaïque* (2000).

more subjective, personal and still-in-formation ‘I’.”<sup>43</sup> Yet for Maghrebi Jewish life-writing the goal is also a “we,” constituting itself in the present out of the most ancient (2,000 years) and most recent past (one day).

Maghrebi Jews’ contributions to the overall history of the Mediterranean and that of their particular homelands have been overlooked for a variety of reasons. The violence struggles of the late colonial period increasingly divided multi-confessional societies into French/Europeans on the side against the Arab-Muslim indigenous population on the other. Employing the concept colonial manicheanism, Fanon demonstrated how the colonizer, first and foremost, fixes the colonized into a mythic, uniform identity. The diverse components of North Africa simply became “l’Arabe” or “l’indigène” in the eyes of colonizer. The struggle against colonialism also created unifying forms of identity as Memmi noted in his *Portrait du colonisé* (147-148). Divisions between classes, for example, the bourgeois city-dwellers on the Tunisian coast, and the semi-nomadic herders and peasant farmers of the arid interior, were temporarily subsumed under the rubric of national struggle against the French.

During this period where homogenizing forms of identity prevailed, France reconstituted its identity as a modern, European nation-state (not a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Empire).<sup>44</sup> Morocco and Tunisia were preoccupied with unifying the discrepant elements of their own populations (Arabs, Berbers, Jews, city dwellers, peasants, semi-nomadic “Bedouins” and so on) into coherent national groups. The historical imperative, given direction by Mohamed V and Bourguiba’s unification of the

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<sup>43</sup> Anjali Prabhu, “Narration in Frantz Fanon’s *Peau noires, masques blancs*: Some reconsiderations” *Research in African Literatures*, 37.4 (Dec. 2006), 189-210 (201).

<sup>44</sup> Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: the Algerian War and the Remaking of France*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006; Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the reordering of French culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1995.

nation around “Morocanité” and “Tunisianité,” was to describe a logical, organic evolution of a unified identity.<sup>45</sup> Lucette Valensi underscores the mechanism of behind this tendency to downplay minorities’ contributions to national history.

En Afrique du Nord, quand les individus appartenant aux groupes majoritaires et dominants décrivaient leur société comme formée d’unités homologues, chacune réunissait l’ensemble des traits qui fondent une identité collective, ils désignaient aussi comme allogènes les éléments dominés (les “noirs,” les juifs...) pour justifier leur exclusion du jeu.<sup>46</sup>

For Moroccan and Tunisian Jews to retell their story from a first-person plural perspective responds to a historiographical imperative; to make their contributions to national patrimony known and recognized. The movement between these levels of experience, history, memory, and narration are foundational for diasporic life-writing, whose authors are born in the midst of a dying colonialism and come to consciousness as the “last generation” of ancient community.<sup>47</sup>

### **“Between Exile and Diaspora”<sup>48</sup>**

Exile has typically been formulated as an individual experience of being forced out of one’s homeland by the government, whereas diaspora is understood as the scattering of a community to a number of different places. Yet the first-person plural creates a dialogue between individual experience of departure and the emergence of a

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<sup>45</sup> Karim Mezran, *Negotiation and Construction of National Identities* (Boston, MA: Martinus Nijhoff, 2007), 49-50; 113-118.

<sup>46</sup> Lucette Valensi, “La tour de Babel: Groupes et relations ethniques au Moyen-Orient et en Afrique du Nord”

*Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 41.4 (1986), 817-838 (835).

<sup>47</sup> Though Jews continue to be born in Morocco and Tunisia, authors see the “grand départ” as the end of an era.

<sup>48</sup> I employ this phrase in the wake of Nico Israel’s engaging study of Joseph Conrad, Theodor Adorno, and Salman Rushdie, *Outlandish: Writing Between Exile and Diaspora* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Unfortunately, Israel’s focus on these three all-too-familiar great men of letters does little to move us forward on a practical level, to see how “ordinary” writers might also work in the spaces between the two paradigms.

“new” collective identity: “Juifs tunisien” or “juifs marocains” for our purposes. The notion of diaspora in the context is also complicated by the fact that the first term “juif,” is of course linked to the origins of the term “diaspora.” The overlays of multiple diasporas (and multiple individual exiles) necessitates a move away from the solar-system model of diaspora, with dispersed communities symbolically “revolving” around the mother country. What has taken place after decolonization is that Morocco and Tunisia have become “homelands” that compete for centrality with France, Israel, and Canada.<sup>49</sup>

They are dependent on returns from those other centers to negotiate their own role. Hence, we have a multilayered diasporic model, in which each location has its place. France and Canada monopolize the institutions of higher education, Morocco and Tunisia are the natural choices for summer vacations and pilgrimages to saints’ tombs, synagogues, and family patrimony, whereas Israel remains the ideal place to be buried, to learn Hebrew, and visit Biblical and Rabbinical sites. As we will see in the texts, these roles are themselves in flux, and beyond these specialized roles, many Moroccan and Tunisian Jews have attachments, whether in the form of property or friends and family settled in all of the different places. Movement between these places is not always perceived in hierarchical terms, moving from better to worse, or vice-versa, but rather back and forth among multiple destinations.

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<sup>49</sup> See André Lévy, “Center and Diaspora: Jews in late twentieth-century Morocco” *City and Society* 13.2 (2001), 245-270.

## Why did Jews leave Morocco and Tunisia?

While professional historians continue to explain the various factors that motivated Jews to leave the Maghreb en masse in the 1950s and 1960s, amateur historians, bloggers, and journalists feel free to respond decisively, usually appealing to one of two absolutes. On the one hand, the Jews were miserable and constantly oppressed under Muslims, or on the other, Jews and Muslims coexisted in perfect harmony until the French arrived and the state of Israel emerged. Mark Cohen and Joel Beinin described the first position as a “neo-lachrymose conception of Jewish-Arab history,”<sup>50</sup> according to which innate Muslim hatred and persecution of Jews is integral to the historical development and practice of Islam.

For historians such as Bat Ye’or (née Gisèle Orebi Littman) Jewish history in Muslim lands is one of relentless persecution. Born to an Egyptian Jewish family in Cairo, she and thousands other Egyptian Jews were expelled following the Suez Crisis. Creating the term “dhimmitude,” derived from the Arabic word for Jewish and Christian status within the *dar al-Islam*, Ye’or argues that Islam is fundamentally intolerant towards religious diversity, and incompatible with Western democracy. Most recently, she has aligned herself with the civilizationist discourse disseminated by Bernard Lewis<sup>51</sup> and Samuel Huntington,<sup>52</sup> writing in her most recent work about the “coming of the Universal Caliphate.” The clash discourse sees Israel and Jews more generally, on the

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<sup>50</sup> Mark R. Cohen, “The Neo-Lachrymose Conception of Jewish-Arab History,” *Tikkun* 6 (May-June 1991): 55–60; Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 14-19.

<sup>51</sup> Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002); see also “The Roots of Muslim Rage: Why so many Muslims deeply resent the West, and why their bitterness will not easily be mollified” *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990.

<sup>52</sup> *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

side of the “West,” nevertheless assigned to a subordinate place in the “Judeo-Christian” tradition.<sup>53</sup>

On the other side, Maghrebi Jewish leftist intellectuals, Sion Assidon, Edmond Amran El Maleh, Simon Lévy, Abraham Serfaty in Morocco and Georges Adda in Tunisia countered with an equally extreme view: they blamed European colonialism and Zionism to explain away the trauma of Jewish migrations, denying any governmental discrimination against Jews. Arguing that the French conspired to drive Jews and Arabs apart, that Jews were paid and coerced to leave by Zionist agents, and there was no anti-Jewish sentiment among the Moroccan and Tunisian people, they paint a picture of the Maghreb as a model of tolerance. In general, these Jews see themselves as diametrically opposed to Ashkenazi Jews, considered colonizers and oppressors of the Palestinian people. In some case, these left-wing Jewish figures, along with many non-Jewish anti-Zionists, go as far to make comparisons between the Nazi genocide of European Jews, the French colonization of North Africa, and the Israeli occupation of Palestine.<sup>54</sup> The metaphor of deportation in Edmond Amran El Maleh’s work served to link the “forced” departure of Moroccan Jews by Zionist agents, and the Israeli army’s uprooting of Palestinians during the Nakba.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See Mark Silk, “Notes on the Judeo-Christian Tradition in America” *American Quarterly* 36.1 (Spring 1984): 65-85, for a helpful synthetic history of the evolution of the term from the Second World War to the late 1970s. The noted scholar of Islam, John Esposito has advocated the notion of a “Judeo-Christian-Islamic” tradition in his popularizing works *Islam: the Straight Path*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) and *The Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) but the place of Islam in this trio remains hotly disputed by conservative Jews and Christians.

<sup>54</sup> See Abraham Serfaty, *Écrits de prison sur la Palestine* (Paris: Arcantère, 1992). Serfaty, El Maleh, and Assidon filed a lawsuit to have then Israeli Defense Minister Amir Peretz tried for war crimes under Moroccan jurisdiction during the 2006 Israeli bombardment of Lebanon and Gaza, since Peretz had retained his Moroccan citizenship. *Ha’aretz*, August 3, 2006.

<sup>55</sup> Rachel Nisselson, “Locating the Productive in the Unthinkable: El Maleh’s Zionist/ Nazi Comparisons.” *Expressions maghrébines* (December 2010), 15-32.

These two camps maintain a “dialogue de sourds”<sup>56</sup> with each side advancing a one-dimensional account of Jewish departure. While each of them undoubtedly emphasizes important push and pull factors, their narrow and polemical interpretations are more concerned with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict<sup>57</sup> or debates about Islam in Europe rather than documenting and understanding complicated lived experiences of Jews in Muslim lands. All these discourses tend to focus on where Jews have gone rather than where they came from, even when they are ostensibly speaking about the past.

Maghrebi Jewish autobiographical literature works the other way around, moving from a disputed present into a richer, more colorful past. It dwells on and tarries with the past, allowing for a more complex treatment of the reasons for leaving, whether personal, professional, political or religious. Rather than creating a unified narrative of departure, such as Jews left because the French left or because the Zionists made them, the writers examined here describe multiple push and pull factors of varying importance. As the third generation exposed to the French educational system, they had been “prepared” for emigration at the level of the imaginary. Learning French history and geography, coming to writing through French literature, and discovering Jews special relationship with France, all helped shape cultural aspirations. As a corollary, the departure of Europeans from Morocco and Tunisia encouraged them to leave. These factors led to a view a Francophone world system in which Paris constituted the center, and the Maghreb part of the periphery.

Second, the life-writing I examine here emphasizes the fear and uncertainty resulting from France’s departure. Jews’ vertical alliances with colonial administration

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<sup>56</sup> Marc Angenot, *Dialogues de sourds: Traité de rhétorique antilogique* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2008).

<sup>57</sup> See Lela Gilbert “The ‘Nakba’ of Morocco’s Jews” *Jerusalem Post* April 28, 2010.



and even more importantly with the *métropole* had come to replace traditional horizontal ties with Muslims. The Jewish investment in serving French power during the Protectorate became a liability, even a mark of disloyalty, after independence. Popular suspicion about Jewish loyalty reached periodic paroxysms during moments of tension in the Middle East. In the wake of the Suez Crisis, Jews unable to prove the local presence of their ancestry going back two generations were expelled from Egypt. France's refusal to evacuate its troops from the naval base in Bizerte sparked hostilities in July 1961, when Tunisian Jews were accused of giving covert assistance to French troops.<sup>58</sup> Most dramatic were the riots during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, during which two Jews were murdered in Meknes and crowds pillaged and set fire to Jewish shops and the *Grande Synagogue* in Tunis.<sup>59</sup>

On a broader level, the Jewish refusal to simply melt into the new Moroccan and Tunisian nation created problems with nationalists. Habib Bourguiba told Jewish community leaders that they needed to consider marriage with Muslims and drop kosher laws to become fully integrated into the Tunisian nation. Aid from American Jewish organizations and the *Alliance* was also looked at as a mark of foreignness. Jews had benefited from modern education and occupied many key positions in the economy, provoking the ire of left-wing parties who advocated the “Marocanisation” and “Tunisification” of the economies. In fact, many Jews preferred a system in which difference was institutionalized and where they could maintain communal autonomy. The drive to make Jews and Muslims the *same* proved to be the greatest problem.

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<sup>58</sup> Colette Zytynski, “Les juifs de Tunisie à l’heure des choix” *La Tunisie mosaïque*, 166.

<sup>59</sup> For an analysis of discrepancies between Jewish and Muslim explanations of the Meknes murders, see Emanuela Trevisan Semi, “Double Trauma and Manifold Narratives: Jews’ and Muslims’ Representations of the Departure of Moroccan Jews in the 1950s and 1960s” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 9.1 (2010): 107-125 (116-122).

Overall, Moroccan and Tunisian Jewish writers engage in a moderate and nuanced reading of decolonization that finds fault on all sides, but avoid excessive accusatory language toward their countries of origin. As opposed to Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Libya, all countries where Jews were more or less forced out of the country by governments, Moroccan and Tunisian Jewish writers do not see their departure, on the whole, as an expulsion or deportation. In fact, a remarkable number of authors write positively about the rulers after independence, Mohamed V and Hassan II, or Habib Bourguiba, in part as a way to maintain their identification with their countries of origin while living in the diaspora. On the other hand, writers tend to blame Nasser, the Arab League, and Arab nationalism, along with the fallout from the Arab-Israeli conflict for the climate of tension and insecurity that hastened their departure. Externalizing the responsibility and causes for anti-Jewish sentiment allows them to minimize the trauma experienced during departure, and leave the door open for return (whether through summer vacations or more long-term resettlement).

### **What Kind of Return?**

Given the texts analyzed here were written recently, do they foreclose the possibility of actually going back to Morocco and Tunisia in the present or future? I argue that they actually constitute a space where return can be staged and restaged, while also being deferred. Several of the writers narrate their own journeys back to their cities of origin and more specifically their homes. Morocco and Tunisia of all the countries in the Arab world have distinguished themselves by their relatively welcoming stance toward Jews returning to visit or to resettle. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, both

country's leaders, Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hassan II in Morocco launched "rebranding" campaigns that sought to improve their countries' images in the West.<sup>60</sup> Jews became part of the larger movement of French tourists spending summers in the Maghreb, while also returning in increasing numbers for "heritage" tourism and pilgrimages. This built off Hassan II's earlier initiatives to foster Arab-Israeli dialogue and to symbolically reclaim Israeli Jews of Moroccan origins as Moroccan nationals, based on the juridical concept of "perpetual allegiance" from subjects to the throne.

As such returns in Maghrebi Jewish fiction are not the physically violent, cataclysmic experiences of Ashkenazi writers seeking the disappeared shtetls, ghettos and concentration camps of Eastern Europe. If the built environment seems somewhat similar on first inspection, the human landscape has completely shifted. Along with the Jews, the mostly working-class Southern Europeans who comprised such a distinctive part of Tunis and Casablanca's urban fabric—Sicilians, Maltese, Portuguese, Spanish, Italians, Corsicans, Greeks—have disappeared. Arabs and Berbers from the rural regions swarmed to the cities in the 1960s and 1970s occupying the vacated spaces. In some cases, old neighbors and acquaintances are still around, but they too suffer from nostalgia and typically seem to have been left behind by the dramatic population exchanges. The recurring question troubling Maghrebi Jewish writers is why their families and communities "had to leave" as they were told or at least inferred. Physical and textual

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<sup>60</sup> André Azoulay, who worked as a journalist in Morocco until 1966, then as a public relations executive for BNP Paribas in France, was brought in by the Monarchy to direct its international communications. Azoulay helped found the "Identité et Dialogue" group in 1976, an organization for Moroccan Jews to maintain their identity in the diaspora. After becoming one of Hassan II's right-hand men in the late 1990s, Azoulay has maintained a central role with Mohamed VI. He also orchestrated the spectacular return of Abraham Serfaty to the country in 2000.

return to the Maghreb does not generate easy responses to this question. The tranquil, mundane nature of most return visits makes the trauma of departure more acute.

## **The Authors and the Corpus**

### *Casablanca*

The Jewish community of Casablanca distinguished itself through its heterogenous composition. Armand Lévy called it the “dernier né” of the great Jewish cities of Morocco. Before the gradual transformation of the city from a modest, bustling coastal port into major industrial and financial metropolis, the mellah comprised a small section of the medina. The demographic evolution of the city and its Jewish population after Marshal Philippe Lyautey’s decision to make it the economic capital of the Protectorate was nothing short of astounding.<sup>61</sup>

Jews from all over Morocco came to make Casablanca their home, displacing former Jewish bastions such as Essaouira and Tangier on the coast, and the former imperial capitals of the interior, Fez, Meknès, and Marrakech. The Casablanca Jewish “community” was in fact multiple communities. As the *ville nouvelle* emerged on the overcrowded mellah’s edge, such that Jews found themselves spatially in between the French and Muslims. Middle-class families moved into the nearby streets just outside of the mellah in 1920s and 1930s, constructing synagogues based on shared places of origin (Essaouira, Meknès, Tangier, and so on).

Moroccan Jewish writers remember nostalgically growing up in the company of extended family and neighbors. The polyglot sounds of the streets and markets resonate strongly in their memory. The emphasis on the relative poverty of their families,

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<sup>61</sup> Cohen and Eleb, *Casablanca: mythes et figures d’une aventure urbaine*, 41.

combined with an excess of human emotions distinguishes their work. In contrast to France and Canada, whose cold climate parallels the frigidity of their demeanor, Casablanca appears full of color and life. The summer sun and salt water swimming pools on the beach clubs are unforgettable places. Casablanca's old Jewish quarter, the mellah, crystallized the ambivalence of Moroccan Jewish memory: overcrowded and poor with overwhelming smells and sounds, it also was the center mystical spirituality, profound piety and the warmth of communal life.

The authors examined here are all either born or spent an important part of their life in Casablanca. There are fewer Jewish women from Morocco (particularly in the generations born before World War II) who have written their autobiographies. This can be attributed in part to the belated establishment of French-language education for women and the more robust resistance Moroccan Jewish communities offered to the Alliance on this point. Whereas Tunisian Jewish elites allowed and even encouraged girls' entry into European education, first in private French and Italian schools and later through the Alliance, Moroccan Jews maintained a greater level of communal cohesion in the face of Franco-Jewish influence. French control did not expand across the country until well into the 1920s.

**Armand Abécassis**, born in 1933 in centre of Casablanca's mellah, now resides in Bordeaux where he teaches philosophy. A scholar of the Hebrew Bible, the Gospels, and Jewish-Christian relations, Abécassis published his first Biblical analyses in the early 1980s. His memoir *Rue des synagogues* appeared in 2008.<sup>62</sup> Abécassis's father spoke Judeo-Arabic and French, while his mother hailing from Tetuan, spoke *Haketia*. The

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<sup>62</sup> Armand Abécassis, *Rue des synagogues* (Paris : Robert Laffont, 2008). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

name of the work derives from his childhood street, also the mellah's main street. As he grew up, his parents moved to the area near the *Place de Verdun* (now called the *Oued el Makhzine*), taking him from a more traditional, observant environment to a Westernizing Jewish middle-class milieu. His work elides many personal details to focus on major themes: the relationship between Moroccan Jews and their faith, the role of the Alliance in Westernizing and secularizing Jews, the growing rupture with Moroccan Muslims, and the anti-Semitism of European Catholics during his school years. Having left Morocco in the 1950s to pursue university studies in Bordeaux, Abécassis claims to have instinctively understood that he would make his life in France. He passes over much of the Moroccan struggle for independence. Abécassis's narrative voice comes across as formal, moralizing and didactic. He employs first person narration throughout the work, occasionally focalized on his own reflections, sometimes acting as a character among others in certain vignettes from childhood. Judaism as an intellectual tradition remains most salient pole of identity for him, though he considers himself profoundly Moroccan and French.

**Bob Oré Abitbol**, born during the Second World War on the rue Lusitania in the heart of the new Jewish quarter not far from the *Place de France*, has lived in Paris, Montreal and Los Angeles. A writer, producer and entertainment manager, Abitbol's first work *Le goût des confitures* (1986), was a collection of short pieces describing his youth in Casablanca and his mother's adaptation to life in Montreal. The centerpiece of the book is a letter from his mother, who decided years after he left, to come join him in Montreal. In *Les faucons de Mogador* (1994) Abitbol traces his life after exile and

describes his return to Morocco as an adult.<sup>63</sup> Abitbol's style mixes colorful descriptions of Casablancon life with nostalgic interjections. His friends and neighbors are not just characters from the past; he often interjects with information about where they now live and wonders if he will see them again. His writing tends to be pithy and humorous, though he captures a significant amount of detail concerning daily life in the new Jewish neighborhoods constituted by recent transplants from the mellah.

**Salomon Benbaruk**, born in the mellah of Casablanca in the 1920s migrated to Montreal along with the first wave of Moroccan Jews in the early 1960s. A leader of the Jewish community in Casablanca, Benbaruk had access to Moroccan officials including Hassan II. Upon arriving in Montreal, he set about helping set up the Moroccan Jewish community as an autonomous *kehila*. Benbaruk and other leaders of the community wanted to maintain the Sephardic rite and French language, and hence decided to bypass the dominant Anglophone Ashkenazi Jewish institutions. The first half of his fragmentary memoir, *Trois-quarts de siècle de pêle-mêle* published in 1990, recounts the life of the mellah in great detail with considerable attention devoted to street life, colloquial language and religious practices.<sup>64</sup> In the latter section, he discusses his determination to help reconstruct the Moroccan Jewish community in Montreal, independent from the existing Ashkenazi framework. Benbaruk's writing pays homage to and emphasizes the importance of Jewish practice and participation in communal life.

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<sup>63</sup> Bob Oré Abitbol, *Le goût des confitures* Lasalle, Québec: Editions Hurtubise HMH, 1986; *Les faucons de Mogador* Montréal: Editions Balzac, 1994. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

<sup>64</sup> Salomon Benbaruk, *Trois-quarts de siècle pêle-mêle: Maroc-Canada 1920, 1950, 1990* (Lachine, Québec: Imprimerie du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle, 1990). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

**Anny Dayan-Rosenman**, one of the younger writers of the group, was born in Casablanca after the Second World War. She teaches Jewish literature and film at the Université de Paris-VII (Denis-Diderot). Her work focuses on trauma and testimony, primarily in the work of Ashkenazi writers confronting the Shoah. With Lucette Valensi, a Tunisian Jewish scholar of Mediterranean Islam, she co-directed a seminar on the Jews of the Maghreb and Mediterranean from 1998 to 2002 at the prestigious *École des hautes études en sciences sociales*. She published an autobiographical reflection “Ciné-Casa” in the edited volume *Les Juifs de la méditerranée* about the years leading up to the “grand départ” to France and Israel.<sup>65</sup> Dayan-Rosenman describes cinema as an entry point into Moroccan Jewish life coming to an end. Cinema made Moroccan Jews dream of other lands and supplied them with the vocabulary of the everyday, where nicknames were attributed to members of the community derived from the stars they resembled. She describes how Jews were constantly projecting exile even before they left, and how the look back to the Maghreb retrospectively confronts this projection.

**Edmond El Maleh**, the most well-known Moroccan Jewish writer in the French literary world, was born in Safi, an old Atlantic port south of Casablanca. El Maleh came to Casablanca in the 1930s to do his secondary studies at the Lycée Lyautey. He joined the *jeunesses communistes* and later directed the press service for the *Parti communiste marocain* (PCM). He continued to work clandestinely in the face of French police repression. After independence, El Maleh retired from political life to become a professor of literature at the Lycée. He left Casablanca for Paris in 1965, after being arrested in the crackdown on student protests in March. El Maleh’s affective connection to small port

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<sup>65</sup>Anny Dayan-Rosenman, “Ciné-Casa” *La Méditerranée des Juifs: exodes et enracinements*. Ed. Paul Balta, Catherine Dana, and Régine Dhoquois-Cohen (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2003), 213-220. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.



cities of Asilah, Safi and Essaouira dwarfs that of Casablanca. Nevertheless, his testimony of life in the late colonial metropolis sheds light on the difficult political position of the Jewish community, stuck between the colonial authorities and the Moroccan masses struggling for independence. El Maleh's writing blurs the boundaries between French and Judeo-Arabic through stream-of-consciousness style, moving among multiple characters that serve as focalizing agents for the narrative (some of which reemerge while others speak briefly and then recede into the background). His first novel *Parcours immobile* was published in 1980, when El Maleh was 63.<sup>66</sup> El Maleh briefly evokes Casablanca in other works, including *Aïlen, ou la nuit du récit* (1983/2000) and *Mille ans, un jour* (1986/2002).

**Armand Lévy** was born in Casablanca in 1932 to parents from Mogador-Essaouira. Lévy's *Il était une fois les Juifs marocains: témoignage et histoire de la vie quotidienne* mixes short personal vignettes with details from anthropological and historical sources. He cites scholars of Moroccan Jewry, and sees himself first and foremost as a "witness" to the everyday customs of Moroccan Jews. His account focuses extensively on the historical role of Essaouira's Jewish community, along with rich detail on Casablanca in the post-war period. He frequently uses the pronoun "on" to describe Casablancon Jews or himself and the reader, occasionally using first-person singular and plural when describing his family's practices as a specific example. Lévy remained in Morocco after independence, but gradually became aware that he and his children would be at a disadvantage in the new order.

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<sup>66</sup> Edmond El Maleh, *Parcours immobile* (Paris: André Dimanche [1980] 2001). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

**Victor Malka**, a writer and journalist originally born in Casablanca has written several works that specifically deal with Moroccan Jewish history and memory. *La mémoire brisée des Juifs du Maroc* (1978) treats the situation of Jews after independence and their reasons for leaving. More recently his *Avons-nous assez divagué? Lettre à mes amis musulmans* (2006)<sup>67</sup> addresses the major Jewish-Arab *différends*: negative attitudes toward Jews in the Quran and modern Islamic reformism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the accusations of double loyalty leveled at the Jews, and so on. Malka's engagement as a journalist for the Istiqlal Party, the main organization that galvanized the struggle for Moroccan independence in the 1940s and 1950s, allows him to give intimate details about the press and government's positions towards Jews. He structures his letter around the opposition "nous," Moroccan Jews and Jews more generally, and "vous" corresponding to Muslims.

**Carlos de Nesry**, a Tangier-born journalist documented the transformations of the Jewish community in the early days of Moroccan independence. His work *Israélites marocains à l'heure du choix* (1958) opens with an extensive description of Jewish youth in Casablanca.<sup>68</sup> Nesry takes the *mellah* and the Parisian cafés near the *Place de France* as two representative poles of Jewish life in Morocco. Nesry's work has the feel of the *socio-diagnostique* pioneered by Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon. He certainly feels some kinship with the group he describes, but as with Memmi and Fanon, strives to fully analyze it (including in its weaknesses and contradictions)

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<sup>67</sup> Victor Malka, *Avons-nous assez divagué? Lettre à mes amis musulmans* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2006). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

<sup>68</sup> Carlos de Nesry, *Les Israélites marocains à l'heure du choix* (Tangier: Editions Internationales, 1958). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

**Abraham Serfaty**, the son of a Tangerois merchant who migrated to Brazil and then set up a business in Casablanca in the 1920s, was born in 1926. In a series of interviews with Moroccan Jewish sociologist Mikhaël Elbaz, he told his life story, published as *L'insoumis: juifs marocains et rebelles* (1999).<sup>69</sup> His parents first settled on the outskirts of the medina next to the central city market before moving to small house on *Rue de Lusitania* near the *Place de Verdun*. Abraham could attend French schools because his father had obtained Brazilian nationality during his time there. Along with El Maleh, he became politicized through contact with Spanish Republicans and Communists exiled in Casablanca, joining the youth section of the *Parti Communiste Marocain* in 1945. He later became involved in the struggle for independence, being tortured and deported by the French government on the pretext of being a foreign national (given his father's Brazilian nationality).

Ironically, Serfaty received similar treatment from the Moroccan government after his opposition to the regime's crackdown on students, striking mine workers, and its occupation of Western Sahara. Known for his violently anti-Zionist positions, he eventually became a supporter of a two-state solution in Israel, and also mended relations with the Moroccan monarchy. On coming to power in 1999, King Mohammed VI restored his Moroccan citizenship and invited him to return. Serfaty lived the last years of his life in Morocco and passed away in 2010.

**Daniel Sibony**, a prominent psychoanalyst was born in the medina of Marrakesh in 1942. Leaving for France at a young age, he has written extensively on psychoanalysis

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<sup>69</sup> Abraham Serfaty and Mikhaël Elbaz, *L'insoumis: juif marocains et rebelles* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1999). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

and religion.<sup>70</sup> *Marrakech, le départ* (2009), represents his first foray into life-writing.<sup>71</sup> In this work, his alter ego is a crime fiction writer who returns to Marrakesh to finish his next book. He alternates between his childhood memories, full of Judeo-Arabic words and vivid images of Jewish ritual customs, and the vestiges of the community years later. Though he does not evoke Casablanca, he describes an interesting encounter with a group of Tunisian Jewish tourists staying at his hotel. His description of departure being inscribed in the minds of Jews mirrors Anny Dayan-Rosenman's observations and those of many Tunisian Jewish authors.

### *Tunis*

Tunis developed later than the illustrious urban centers of Carthage, Kairouan and Mahdia, but its superb geographical situation gave it increasing importance as Mediterranean trade, piracy and slavery boomed in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Transformed into a major commercial center, it became the Ottoman provincial capital. The Hussainid Beys ruled Tunisia under the Ottoman aegis from 1701 to 1881 and then as figureheads under the French protectorate from 1881-1957. Mohammed es-Sadok Bey (1859-1882) promulgated a modern constitution (considered the first in the Arab world), opened the country up to European influence and settlement during his rule. Under European pressure, he improved the status of Jews, if in legal terms only.

By the time that France occupied Tunisia and placed it under protectorate status, the capital already hosted significant Italo-Sicilian and Maltese populations. Almost all of

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<sup>70</sup> Most directly related to the issues of diaspora and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, see Daniel Sibony, *Nom de Dieu: par-delà les trois monothéismes* (Paris: Seuil, 2001); *Proche-Orient: psychanalyse d'un conflit* (Paris: Seuil, 2003); *L'énigme antisémite* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

<sup>71</sup> Daniel Sibony, *Marrakech, le départ* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2009).

the European immigration in the first decades of the protectorate was concentrated in Tunis. The Jewish community was divided between the *Grana* (Sephardi Jews coming from Livorno and Pisa) and the *Twansa* (autochthonous Arab-speaking Jews). These communities that up until the twentieth century remained distinctive began to legally merge. Indeed many of the writers analyzed here are offspring of “mixed marriages” between Twansa and Grana (Serge Moati, Colette Fellous, Albert Naccache), demonstrating the ironic emergence of a unified “Tunisian” Jewish identity just as the community was about to leave.

The European neighborhoods built outside the old city eventually attracted these upwardly mobile Jews. In these Mediterranean-style apartment buildings, Jews left behind the older courtyard-centered houses of the *hara*. These new neighborhoods were typically occupied by families of fairly modest means, who nonetheless expressed their modern aspirations by adopting European dress and when possible placing their children in French schools. Jews also concentrated in nearby villages that evolved into streetcar suburbs. L’Ariana, six kilometers south of the capital was over a third Jewish. During the torrid summer months, Jews abandoned their houses in the city center for the coastal villages accessible by the small railroad running from Tunis to La Marsa. La Goulette, Kherredine, Carthage and La Marsa were filled with apartments and villas gathered near the beaches. Jewish writers often speak of their Tunis homes as “winter homes” and their seaside rentals as “summer houses.” The beaches were not by any means limited to the wealthy; poorer families would set up outdoor camps in empty lots.

Tunisia’s longer contact with France and the Franco-Jewish establishment meant that modern schooling was much more widely available for Morocco, particularly for

girls. In contrast to the stereotypes of Maghrebi Jewish patriarchy, there were nearly as many girls as boys (and sometimes more) in Alliance and French public schools from 1905 onward.<sup>72</sup> The widespread proficiency in French has resulted in a much higher number of Judeo-Tunisian memoirs, many written by women. Nevertheless, Tunisian Jewish women did not necessarily enjoy social freedoms commensurate with their education. This gap was a major source of discontent that finds its way into their memoirs, in which they reclaim and return to the city spaces that they previously had limited access to.

### *Authors*

**Sophie Bessis** was born in Tunis in 1947 to a wealthy family that included Albert Bessis, the first Jewish Minister in a post-independence Tunisian government. A journalist, historian, and member of the Tunisian left, Bessis wrote a definitive, critical biography of Habib Bourguiba, the nation's father and President from 1957-1987. She recently turned from academic writing on the condition of women in the Arab world and globalization to her own life-story. *Dedans, dehors* (2011) goes back and forth between Tunis and Paris, between Bessis' experiences as a militant and professor.<sup>73</sup> The title itself expresses many of the contradictions of her itinerary; a woman in male-dominated leftist organizations, a Jew in an Arab-Muslim dominated society, a critic of France's neo-colonial interventions teaching Paris.

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<sup>72</sup> Keith Walters, "Education for Jewish Girls in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Tunis and the Spread of French in Tunisia" *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa*. Ed. Emily Benichou Gottreich and Daniel Schroeter (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2011) 257-281 (268). Subsequent references to Walters will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

<sup>73</sup> Sophie Bessis, *Dedans, dehors* (Tunis: Elyzad, 2011). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

**Georges Cohen**, born in the Ariana in the 1920s wrote *De l'Ariana à Galata: Itinéraire d'un Juif de Tunisie* (1993), his only published work.<sup>74</sup> Cohen considers his book as a portrait of the transitional generation of working-class Jews whose children achieved success through French public secondary and higher education. Along with many other contemporary Tunisian-born intellectuals, he attended the multi-confessional *Lycée Carnot*.<sup>75</sup> Cohen became a professor, returning to Tunisia to teach in the French school system that remained after independence. His Tunisian nationality created problems at work, and he decided to apply for French citizenship and leave Tunisia. Cohen's writes in short sections detailing different everyday spaces: streets, schools, beaches, etc.

**Colette Fellous**, was born in Tunis in 1950. Her family lived just across from the Grande Synagogue<sup>76</sup> on the *Avenue de Paris* (now known as *Avenue de la Liberté*) in an area known as the Quartier Lafayette. Fellous has written several autobiographical works about her family's history and her life in Tunisia. *Avenue de France* (2001) takes the reader through the decisive moments of her family and the country's modern history, from her grandfather's encounter with the French in 1879 to her own departure in 1967.<sup>77</sup> *Aujourd'hui* (2005) centers on a single day, June 5, 1967, when enraged crowds ransacked Jewish shops, broke into the Grande Synagogue across the street from

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<sup>74</sup> Georges Cohen, *De l'Ariana à Galata: Itinéraire d'un Juif de Tunisie* (Vincennes: Racines, 1993). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes

<sup>75</sup> The list of alumni includes Habib Bourguiba, the father of Tunisian independence, former Grand Rabbi of France, Joseph Sitruk, linguist Claude Hagège, filmmaker Ferid Boughedir, painter Hatem el-Mekki, and related to the present work, writers Albert Memmi, Colette Fellous, Gisèle Halimi and Serge Moati (père).

<sup>76</sup> The Grande Synagogue represented a rapprochement between Grana and Twansa, both of whom would celebrate marriages and bar-mitzvahs. It gave the Tunisian Jewish community a modern, monumental building that showed their importance in Tunisian society and commerce. During the Tunisian Revolution of December 2010 – January 2011, there were anti-Israeli protests in front of the synagogue, which will be discussed in the conclusion. Construction began on a replica of the Grande Synagogue in the Israeli coastal city of Netanya, showing the continued attachment to the structure.

<sup>77</sup> Colette Fellous, *Avenue de France* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes

Fellous's house, and set fire to the Torah scrolls.<sup>78</sup> In *Plein été* (2007) she returns to her family's summer house in La Marsa and the summers of her youth. Fellous' works are intensely personal, relating painful chapters of her mother's nervous depression, her father's philandering, and her own sexual development.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, her free-floating narrative voice, never anchored in one time or one place, allows her to give an experiential account of major political and historical events. Fellous now lives in Paris, but travels extensively as the creator and host of *Carnet nomades*, a well-respected and wide-ranging radio program on France Culture.

**Gisèle Halimi**, born Zeiza Gisèle Taïeb in 1927 in La Goulette to a Twansa father and Grana mother, the corresponding subjects of her two autobiographical works dealing with Tunisia. In *Le lait de l'oranger* (1988), she remembers her father Édouard who had deep roots in Arab Tunisia, but adopted French customs and identity wholeheartedly, though her mother persisted in calling him a "Bedouin."<sup>80</sup> She also touches on the discrimination Jews faced from the French during the Vichy years and an encounter with Habib Bourguiba during the height of the Algerian war. *Fritna* (1999) has an altogether different tone.<sup>81</sup> Halimi's relationship with her mother Fortunée was riddled with tension and misunderstanding. Her choice to become a lawyer and a feminist activist caused a great deal of friction with her mother.

Halimi's account of her childhood and adolescence in Tunis is anecdotal and organized thematically; she describes a number of interesting scenes, including her

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<sup>78</sup> Colette Fellous, *Aujourd'hui* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes

<sup>79</sup> Colette Fellous, *Plein été* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes

<sup>80</sup> Gisèle Halimi, *Le lait de l'oranger* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes

<sup>81</sup> Gisèle Halimi, *Fritna* (Paris: Plon, 1999). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes



suffering during the Second World War at the hands of anti-Jewish teacher, to her initiation by Communist Party into activism. Struggling against the patriarchy of colonial Tunisia, she took on some of the toughest cases of her time: defending FLN activists, women seeking abortions, and juvenile criminals. Most recently, Halimi was the subject of a television documentary on France 5, *Gisèle Halimi: L'insoumise* (2010), directed by fellow Tunisian Jew, Serge Moati.

**Georges Memmi** was born in Tunis in 1934, the younger brother of Albert Memmi, considered one of the fathers of modern Francophone Maghrebi literature. Albert's success in school and stubborn refusal to learn their father's trade left Georges in the position of an apprentice. Though he later attended the French lycée, his relationship to his mother and father and Tunisian Jewish tradition differs radically from his brother's. While Albert Memmi's work tend to emphasize the rupture with tradition and resulting alienation, Georges deliberately resituates the reader inside the world of Tunisian Jewish oral tradition, recapturing the magic of storytelling that gave the community a sense of eternity, despite its displacements. In his first work *Qui se souvient du Café Rubens?* (1984), Memmi alternates the narration between the stories his mother, father and elders told him and his own adult melancholy for Tunisian Jewry's past.<sup>82</sup> The flowing narrative recasts historical events in a non-linear story world, where Biblical, rabbinic and Arabic legends all intersect with his childhood and adolescence growing up during World War II and Tunisian independence. His later work *Ma France* (2004) chronicles his difficulties in acquiring citizenship in France and becoming an "immigrant" when he had thought

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<sup>82</sup> Georges Memmi, *Qui se souvient du Café Rubens?* (Paris: J.-C.Lattes, 1984). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes

himself “French.”<sup>83</sup> He generalizes his experience to discuss the condition of immigrants in contemporary France, though ultimately wants to distinguish the Jewish experience from that of immigrants who have not been French educated.

**Serge Moati**, born Henry Haïm Moati in the Belvédère neighborhood of Tunis in 1945. His Grana father with French citizenship was a playwright, political activist with the Socialist Party and journalist. His Twansa mother came from the *Passage* neighborhood near the *Gare du Nord*. After his parents died in 1957, his older sister (and fellow novelist) Nine took him to Paris with her. Moati since became a writer, director and producer for film and television. His two-part autobiography / family history *Villa Jasmin* and *Du côté des vivants* were published in 2003 and 2006 respectively.<sup>84</sup> They have since been adapted for television as *Villa Jasmin* by Tunisian director Férid Boughedir, airing on France 2 in 2010. Moati adopts a ghostlike presence (along the lines of Colette Fellous in *Avenue de France*) to narrate his mother and father’s lives up until his birth. He gives voice to his characters whether his father or mother, or historical figures such as Lamine Bey (the last ruler of the Hussainid dynasty) or Marcel Peyrouton (the repressive Resident-General of Tunisia) who reflect in first-person voice about their situations and dilemmas. The host of a political talk show *Ripostes* on France 5 from 1999-2009, Moati has a certain celebrity status as a representative of the Tunisian Jewish diaspora.

**Albert Naccache** born in the Ariana in 1943, lives in Paris where he manages IBM France’s public relations and writes on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. After having

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<sup>83</sup> Georges Memmi, *Ma France* (Paris: Gilbert Werndorfer 2004). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes

<sup>84</sup> Serge Moati, *Villa Jasmin* (Paris: Fayard, 2003); *Du côté des vivants* (Paris: Fayard, 2006). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

written short remembrances for the Tunisian Jewish web forum, <harissa.com>, Naccache wrote a full-length memoir *Les Roses de l'Ariana* (2010).<sup>85</sup> Naccache left Tunisia in 1961, the year of the Bizerte crisis that marked the departure of thousands of Jews. His memoir contains a great deal of biographical material, including pictures and descriptions of family members, along with thick description of spoken Judeo-Tunisian language in the late colonial period. As with many other Judeo-Maghrebi autobiographies, the text functions as homage to past generations and a nostalgic remembrance for colorful, cosmopolitan atmosphere of the author's childhood.

**Gilbert Naccache** was born in Tunis in 1939, lives in France. A longtime political activist and left-wing intellectual, Naccache remained in Tunisia after independence working with the *Perspectives*, a Trotskyist organization. He had originally followed the example of his oldest sister and joined the Tunisian Communist Party (PCT) while attending lycée. After independence, the party was dissolved as part of Bourguiba's monopolization of power. Naccache and his friends became radicalized. Eventually imprisoned by the government for their denunciations of state corruption and authoritarianism, Naccache was in prison from 1968-1979, enduring torture and solitary confinement. There he wrote his memoir in novelized form on the papers lining the cigarette packs his visitors brought him. After his release, he collected these fragments together into a book *Cristal* (1983).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Albert Naccache, *Les Roses de l'Ariana: Une enfance et adolescence en Tunisie, 1943-1961* (Turquant: L' Apart du temps, 2010). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

<sup>86</sup> Gilbert Naccache, *Cristal: récit* (Tunis: Salammbô, 1982). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes

His non-fiction sequel, *Qu'as-tu fait de ta jeunesse? Itinéraire d'un opposant au régime de Bourguiba, 1954-1979* was published in France and Tunisia in 2009.<sup>87</sup> While both works concentrate on his political evolution and that of the far-left opposition, he also reflects eloquently on the impossible position of Jews during the tumult of the struggle for independence. One of the few Jews in the revolutionary moment who remained behind in Tunisia, Naccache also dealt with occasional discrimination because of his origins. The “Jasmine Revolution” of December 2010 - January 2011 gave new life to former opposition figures such as Naccache, who has since frequently intervened to defend the popular character of the movement and to call for a constitution guaranteeing democracy.<sup>88</sup> He has also attacked those former Bourguiba officials who have attempted to reinsert themselves into politics in the void left by Ben Ali's overthrow.

**André Nahum** born in Quartier Lafayette in Tunis later became a reputed medical doctor. He decided to stay after independence to help reconstruct a health care system lacking in personnel because of the departure of French doctors. As the member of the *syndicat médical* and editor of its journal, Nahum believed he could participate in the reorganization of a new medical system, training up local doctors alongside the French professionals who staffed the hospitals during the Protectorate. The Bizerte crisis in 1961 created an environment of suspicion in which Jews were cast as agents of French neocolonial designs, and Nahum became disillusioned with the anti-Jewish and anti-European discrimination that resulted. He wrote his first book *Partir en kappara* in 1977

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<sup>87</sup> Gilbert Naccache, *Qu'as-tu fait de ta jeunesse ? Itinéraire d'un opposant au régime de Bourguiba, 1954-1979: Suivi de récits de prison* (Paris-Tunis: Editions du Cerf-Les Mots Passants, 2009). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes

<sup>88</sup> See the interviews: Gilbert Naccache “Tunisie, une révolution en marche?” TV5 Monde;

relating his difficult decision to leave for France. Later works, including the short story collection, *Le Roi des briks* (1992) and his collection of proverbs, anecdotes and jokes *Tunis-la-juive raconte* (2000) document the lost landscapes of everyday life in Tunis.<sup>89</sup> Nahum's memories of street vendors, beggars, rabbis and teachers reconstruct Tunisian Jewish memory on popular lines. Nahum has made himself one of the champions of Tunis' Judeo-Arabic.

**Maya Nahum** born in Tunis in [1950?] is best known for her popular young adult fiction in France. Her short novel *Les Gestes* (1999) draws on her experience of narrating events from children's perspectives. The principal narrator, Malou Saadun is an eleven-year old girl whose family is spending the summer of 1961 in the seaside village of Kherredine. The recent Bizerte crisis has set off a wave of French and Jewish emigration, and her parents are secretly preparing their departure for France. Malou's father Victor (himself the son of a Twansa father and Grana mother) sympathizes with the FLN and Bourguiba, but understands that Jews will only have headaches in a Tunisia overcome with Arab nationalist fervor. Malou attempts to understand the complex linguistic and political situation her family has to navigate, giving the non-Maghrebi Jewish reader remarkable insight.

**Brigitte Smadja** is the youngest of the group, born in 1955 in Tunis. Her short time in Tunis helps contextualize the subject material and perspectives of her two main autobiographical works, *Le jaune était sa couleur* (1998) and *Mausolée* (2001). In the first, Smadja's main Tunisian character is Mina, whose traumatic memories of childhood in a small village come back to her as a lonely, aging woman in Paris. Her daughter Lili

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<sup>89</sup> André Nahum, *Partir en kappara* (Paris: Piranhas-Editions, 1977); *Le roi des briks: nouvelles* (Paris: Harmattan, 1992) ; *Tunis-la-Juive raconte* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2000). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

(based on Smadja herself) has an ambivalent relationship with Judaism and her Maghrebi origins, based in part on her lack of direct experience with her mother's world. In *Mausolée*, Sylvain and Magda are siblings with very different attitudes toward their native Tunisia. Sylvain, the older brother, remembers everything about life in Tunis. Unhappy in Paris, he dreams of going back to restore the Turkish café or *Casino* in La Goulette, a famous spot where Jews, Muslims and Christians played dominos and cards, while catching up on the latest news. Magda was very young when their family left and lives in a deliberate amnesia toward the past. The siblings return to Tunisia still under Ben Ali's dictatorship and discover the impossibility of going back. Smadja's work conveys the difficult position of Maghrebi Jews who came to France at an early age and cannot find their place in the nostalgic memories of their parents and elders.

### **Overview of Chapters**

In **Chapter I, Writing Maghrebi Jewish Speech in French: Polyglossia in the Paratext**, I trace the central position of orality in this body of literature. Engaging with Fanon and Memmi's theories of colonial language dynamics, I show the Jewish linguistic situation in Casablanca and Tunis to be multilingual rather than bilingual. While today French is the language of Maghrebi Jewish diasporic literature and memory, writers use a variety of paratextual strategies to bring a variety of languages (some of which are more properly Jewish and others not) into the written work. Upsetting notions of "native language" and "langue maternelle," Maghrebi Jewish works show that "proper" French was anything but the only language on the scene. Elder generations continued to speak Judeo-Arabic among themselves and in interactions with Muslims, most Tunisian Jews

were exposed to Italian at home and in the streets, as were many Moroccan Jews with Spanish, and Hebrew expressions continued to function as references to an idealized Jewish identity. Jewish speech practices radically diverged from home to street, from the market to the synagogue, from schools to leisure spaces. In language as well, Maghrebi Jewish authors affirm their multiple, conflicting identities.

## **Chapter II: Cosmopolitanism from Below in Casablanca and Tunis:**

**Encountering the Other in the Everyday.** In contrast to France's elaboration of liberalism as the resolution of difference through equality, Maghrebi Jewish autobiographies highlight that the stated boundaries between ethno-religious communities permitted modes of cosmopolitan coexistence. They describe a much more fluid relationship than a monolithic elaboration of the "colonizer" and "colonized" allows for. The spatial and communal divisions in the cities allowed for identity maintenance in the midst of colonial occupation. While Jews, Muslims and other non-French groups (Italians, Sicilians, Maltese, Spanish, Portuguese) preferred to live amongst themselves particular neighborhoods, a host of commercial, gastronomical, cultural and even religious interdependencies brought them together in highly ritualized and structured encounters. For Maghrebi Jewish autobiographers, these other others constitute an essential part of memories of the self.

**Chapter III: The Writer Before the Law: Decolonization and Questions of Citizenship,** examines the complicated legal status Maghrebi Jews throughout the twentieth century and show how the incompatibility of their multiple identities with the nation-state's demands. Maghrebi Jews' narrative of their personal and collective identity is constantly inflected by the nation-state's exigencies for an identifiable, monolingual

citizen. This applied as much to Morocco and Tunisia as to France and Québec. As members of overlapping diasporas, Jewish writers situate their life-stories at the intersection of these different identities, arguing that they are more French than the French, faithful Jews and that their roots in the Maghreb predate the arrival of the Arabs. Their excess of identity manifests itself through a charged relationship with passports and being able to prove their indigeneity. In literature, they come closer than perhaps any other space of being able to tell all the different sides of their story, where they can be simultaneously French, Maghrebi and Jewish.

**Chapter IV: Second-Hand Memories: Writing / Return / Home** analyzes the various stories of return in contemporary Maghrebi Jewish literature. Decades after their departure, writers return as tourists and pilgrims to the places they once called home. Finding strangers in their former houses, empty synagogues that seem more like museums and a disappearance of visible Jewish presence, they attempt to understand where their place is in this new Maghreb. These visits reveal their deep attachment and lasting fascination for their homes. Physical return is transformed into memorialization in literature, often leading the writers back into the past through a diasporic memory, what Colette Fellous calls “la mémoire aimantée.” Sensory experiences beyond the reach of post-colonial urbanism that has changed the built landscape are primary conduits for memories of roots. Nevertheless, meditating on the gap between one’s memories and the present shows how return (and writing return) have more to do with the survival of memory than the recovery of the past.

**Chapter V: Décalages d’exil: Screening and Staging Jewish-Arab Nostalgia,** moves from the written text to visual media, reflecting the generational shift in the



diaspora. I discuss two forms, the one-man show and the historical melodrama that represent and reflect upon the violent “déalage” of exile. The many films and stand-up comedy performances released in the past decades, often involving collaboration between Maghrebi Jews and Muslims, have created a recognizable Maghrebi Jewish image, including speech, dress and gestures. Whereas the literary works that preceded elaborated communal memory through the recreation of everyday linguistic and spatial practices, these newer creations make the Maghrebi Jewish story transposable and allegorical so that young people in Europe, the Americas, and the Maghreb can identify with it. They also re-nationalize Maghrebi Jews recognizing them in the post-independence narratives of Morocco and Tunisia, where they have not been able to otherwise find a place.

In the **Conclusion**, I look at the future of Maghrebi Jewish memory in the wake of the social revolutions collectively dubbed the “Arab Spring” of 2011. While many Jews were anxious about seeing long-standing regimes being challenged by popular contestation, and the rise of Islamist parties, the dramatic events also created an opportunity for public solidarity with their homelands. I also look at the ways that contemporary forms of cultural circulation have transformed diasporic communication and identity construction. Briefly analyzing the web sites and discussion forums where participants post family photos, postcards, recipes, stories, and reminiscences of the Maghreb, we see how diasporic history enters into a more democratized and decentralized phase. Along with these sites, I highlight the need to put into conversation the life-writing of different Maghrebi-born communities, Spanish, Italians, Sicilians, Maltese, Moroccan and Tunisian Muslims. Using a similar methodology by focusing on common place-memories, linguistic markers, foodways, return visits as pilgrims/tourists,

one could gesture toward the possibilities and limits of diasporic, cosmopolitan life-writing.

## CHAPTER I

### WRITING MAGHREBI JEWISH SPEECH IN FRENCH: POLYGLOSSIA IN THE PARATEXT

Qu'un juif marocain en vienne à écrire en français, il y aurait là une sorte de logique naturelle : autant à la limite se demander pourquoi et comment un français écrit en français. Sauf à se poser une question fort impertinente à première vue, qu'est-il advenu de la judéité et de la maroquinité, on devrait dire l'arabité, de cet écrivain, revêtu à s'y méprendre des vêtements neufs de l'occidentalité ?<sup>1</sup> Edmond El Maleh

French has dominated the literary landscape of the majority of Maghrebi Jews in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>2</sup> Maghrebi Jews' preference for French does not merely include those living in France or Canada; it applies to many Israelis of Moroccan and Tunisian origin, who write in French as well as Hebrew.<sup>3</sup> To a much greater extent than Modern Hebrew, French connects Maghrebi and Levantine Jews wherever they find themselves. In the second half of the twentieth century, the defining characteristic of Jews identified as "Sephardic," whether from the eastern or southern Mediterranean, is the primacy of French in their education and forms of cultural expression, supplanting earlier vernacular languages like Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) and Judeo-Arabic. French remains the only language available for Maghrebi Jewish writers interested in reaching the largest possible audience in the diaspora. Edmond El Maleh pointed out the irony of this very particular linguistic situation:

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<sup>1</sup> El Maleh, *Le Café bleu* 38.

<sup>2</sup> In spite of the brief flourishing of Tunisia's Judeo-Arabic press and literature lasting from the mid-eighteenth century until slightly after the Second World War, today only a small number of Maghrebi Jews can read Judeo-Arabic.

<sup>3</sup> Born in Tunisia, now a professor emeritus of French literature at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Claude Sitbon has lobbied for Israel's membership in the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie*, pointing to the estimated 300,000 fluent Francophone Israelis (about five percent of the total Jewish population) as proof. Moroccan-Israeli writer Ami Bouganim and Tunisian-Israeli writer Chochana Boukhobza write primarily in French. Moroccan-Israeli filmmaker Ronit Elkabetz also has brought French and Judeo-Arabic into Israeli cinema through her film *Prendre femme* (2004).

Sans compter qu'on ne s'arrête pas à se demander comment son authenticité supposée puisse passer par des mots qui ne sont pas ceux de la tribu, des mots étrangers qui auraient le pouvoir de faire revivre une mémoire, d'amener sous le regard une communauté vivante. (*Café bleu*, 40)

This chapter answers El Maleh's critical questions by showing how writers incorporate their Jewishness and North Africanness in French-language autobiographies. Judeo-Maghrebi writers confront an essential linguistic dilemma that illustrates the difficulty of postcolonial writers more generally. French language and literary tradition have replaced their own written traditions in a radical way; nevertheless their autobiographies attempt to gesture to their non-French origins. Maghrebi Jewish autobiographers use marginal textual spaces and devices to counter the trajectory of acculturation and alienation implied by language shift. Showing the rarely discussed, but highly political implications of Gerard Genette's concept of the paratext for post-colonial life-writing, I examine Maghrebi Jewish writers' introduction of polyglossia as a way of creating another level of discourse extending beyond the confines of the French text.<sup>4</sup>

While Jewish writers and their non-Jewish counterparts move across the "thresholds" of identity, Maghrebi Jewish autobiographies move back towards the colonized past, whereas many Muslim authors' focus on migration to France. Jewish authors' spatial focus (on Casablanca or Tunis, in this case) and temporal focus (before independence) relate directly to their assertion of multifarious identities in a cultural climate dominated by binaries. Against tropes of essential and eternal antagonism between Jews and Arabs, Europe and Islam, these autobiographies narrate a more nuanced past.

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<sup>4</sup> Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Seuil, 1986). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes. For an interesting application of the paratext to the colonial era, see Lia Nicole Brozgal's "Reading Albert Memmi: authorship, identity, and the Francophone postcolonial text," Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University, 2007, which examines the relationship of Albert Camus's and Jean-Paul Sartre's prefaces in the reception of Albert Memmi's *La statue de Sel* and *Portrait du colonisé, précédé de Portrait du colonisateur*. Brozgal highlights how both Camus and Sartre appropriated Memmi's insights for their own projects, while deflecting his critique of European intellectuals' role in assimilating colonized voices.

Beginning with a brief look at the theories on the relationship of the language of colonized and colonizer in French anti-colonial thought, this chapter moves to the practical implications of writing in the colonizer's language: first, how writers distance themselves from their own speech through prose and second, how non-French language lives on, but only on the condition of becoming translatable and being moved to the margins. This brings us to Genette's formulation of the paratext, as a tool of structural literary analysis. I then argue that though Genette sees his enterprise as one strictly limited to literary structure, tracing the concept of the paratext in post-colonial Maghrebi Jewish autobiographies highlights political implications of hierarchies between languages. For the corpus I examine, the paratext functions simultaneously to encapsulate the presence of non-French words in the French text, while also introducing orality into written prose. While domesticating the queer presence of the foreign, the paratext also leaves a trace that leads readers from the text to a critical engagement with colonial history and modernity.

Many French-language writers born outside France and writers from former colonies in particular, have an intense, troubled relationship with the French language. Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, both of whom moved inside and outside the colonial system, dissected the colonized's neurotic relation to French in their seminal works on colonial psychology, *Peau noire, masques blancs*<sup>5</sup> and *Portrait du colonisé*.<sup>6</sup> For Memmi and Fanon, the desire to be accepted by the colonizer, to find recognition in his or her eyes, pushes the colonized (later immigrant) writer to an anxiety-ridden engagement with French schooling and literature. The colonized writer's relation to French often takes on fantastic figurative dimensions. El Maleh for example represents French as a male force invading "le lit de la langue maternelle" and ravishing

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<sup>5</sup> Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé, précédé de Portrait du colonisateur* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005). The sub-section on "Le bilinguisme colonial et la situation de l'écrivain," 124-128.

<sup>6</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Œuvres* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011), especially the chapter "Le Noir et le langage," 71-88.

it (1998, 72). Nor are these erotic metaphors limited to male writers. Tunisian Jewish writer Katia Rubenstein, whose *Mémoire d'une fille illettrée d'Afrique du Nord* (1979) attempted to transpose spoken French into the written text, described the French language as a tall, handsome blond man she dreamed of being seduced by (1982, 332). Moroccan-Israeli literature professor Shlomo Elbaz remembers waiting anxiously as a child for the “distribution des prix avalisant et récompensant notre application à la conquête de cette princesse, la chatoyante langue française.”<sup>7</sup> In their fascination with the eroticized and whitened figures, Jewish writers reveal the profound restructuring of the imaginary that took place at school.

While they could always point to the “Arab” who occupied the lowest rung in colonial North Africa, Jews too were caught in the racializing gaze of the French. The more the young colonized child applies himself or herself to learning French and adopting the values promoted in school, the more the child’s indigenous home life appears retrograde. The child who masters French writing carves a legitimate space for him or herself in French history, literary and otherwise. He or she aspires to move from the level of “indigenous” (dependent child) to an autonomous subject recognized by a prestigious cultural tradition. For Fanon, “parler, c’est être à même d’employer une certaine syntaxe, posséder la morphologie d’une telle ou telle langue, mais c’est surtout assumer une culture, supporter le poids d’une civilisation” (*Œuvres*, 71).

In the context of the Maghreb, Edmond Amran El Maleh argued that writing in French continues to reinforce Maghrebi Jews’ alienation from their countries of origin. This only confirms original alienation that occurred during the colonial period, when Jews first transformed their traditional way of life in a desperate attempt to become French. Rather than seeing this transformation of the ex-colonized writing in the language of the ex-colonizer as a

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<sup>7</sup> Shlomo Elbaz, “Réflexion sur l’imaginaire judéo-maghrébin et ses avatars” *Présence juive au Maghreb: en hommage à Haïm Zafrani*, eds. Nicole Serfaty and Joseph Tedighi (Paris: Editions Bouchène, 2004), 121-127 (124).

part of colonial domination-subjection, Memmi identifies it as the larger complex of “dépendance-pourvoyance,” translated as “codependence,” though in his more recent works he has articulated a version of the concept that is closer to what we might call “interdependence.”<sup>8</sup> Ex-colonized writers sometimes produce texts in literary Arabic, which while being their primary written language, learned in religious and secular schools, is not their primary spoken language. Far from resolving the problem of alienation from everyday spoken language, writing in literary Arabic maintains it another form. Spoken Maghrebi dialects, since geographical situation and Spanish, Italian, and French influences differ dramatically from those spoken in the Arab Middle East. Needless to say, the difficulties of finding a publisher and audience often constitute insurmountable obstacles.<sup>9</sup>

Beyond these practical obstacles that a Maghrebi writer encounters in writing in his or her “own” language we might call ethical. Does writing an essentially spoken language not also deprive it of its relational vitality? French thus allows colonial or post-colonial writers to reach a wider audience outside their primary language group, but at the risk of replication the cultural damage wrought by colonization. For Maghrebi writers in particular, French continues to be the premier choice for literary expression despite aggressive Arabization campaigns in all the constituent countries after independence. This kind of “consented dependence” does not exclude writers from radically reshaping the language, from introducing all kinds of neologisms, bringing the oral into the written, and the foreign into the familiar. Writing in French offers the possibility of writing for their fellow diasporans, but also opens the conversation to the world. Increasingly,

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<sup>8</sup> Albert Memmi, *La Dépendance* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979) as well as *Le Racisme: descriptions, définitions, traitement* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994). For the English version see, Albert Memmi, *Racism*, trans. Steve Martinot (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 95.

<sup>9</sup> See Fouad Laroui, *Le drame linguistique marocain* (Léchelle : Editions Zellige, 2011), who argues for making *darija* Morocco’s *de jure* national language, to be used in scientific research, government policy, and literary creation. Laroui notes that literary Arabic’s lack of connection to spoken language deprives writers from reaching a wide audience (who are dialect speakers).

Maghrebi Jews are not the only diasporic group pushing French beyond the narrow boundaries of metropolitan history and concerns. The signatories of the 2007 manifesto “Pour une littérature-monde en français” declared themselves against the traditional category of “littérature francophone”, which cantons foreign writers to a marginal relationship to “littérature française.”

Le temps nous paraît venu d’une renaissance, d’un dialogue dans un vaste ensemble polyphonique, sans souci d’on ne sait quel combat pour ou contre la prééminence de telle ou telle langue ou d’un quelconque “impérialisme culturel”. Le centre relégué au milieu d’autres centres, c’est à la formation d’une constellation que nous assistons, où la langue libérée de son pacte exclusif avec la nation, libre désormais de tout pouvoir autre que ceux de la poésie et de l’imaginaire, n’aura pour frontières que celles de l’esprit.<sup>10</sup>

The manifesto unfortunately neglects the historical conditions by which Maghrebi writers were recruited into the “pacte exclusif avec la nation,” through French schooling. Hence, to achieve this emancipation, we must be attentive to the way Maghrebi Jewish life-writing reflects on the conditions of its own production, and how they result from colonial regeneration, also understood as alienation.

Despite the modern Maghrebi Jewish attachment to the French language as the primary vector of belonging to an idealized France (very different from the “actually existing” France), many Moroccan and Tunisian Jews only acquired French in the generation before exile. Those that grew up before the Second World War in the traditional Jewish quarters, the mellah of Casablanca (Salomon Benbaruk) or the hâra of Tunis (Albert and Georges Memmi), grew up speaking Judeo-Arabic until they started attending the schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. Even for the younger generations who consider French their first language, other languages especially Arabic, Hebrew and often Italian (Colette Fellous) and Judeo-Spanish (Armand Abécassis) surrounded them at home and on the streets. The cataclysm of the Second

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<sup>10</sup> Jean Rouaud and Michel Le Bris, “Pour une littérature-monde en français” *Le Monde*, March 15, 2007.



World War brought English and German, the languages of conquering armies into the Maghreb on unprecedented level.<sup>11</sup>

How do those Maghrebi Jewish authors who considered themselves unequivocally French look back at the often heavily accented and amalgamated version of the language they grew up speaking in a literary context? In North Africa, Jews and Muslims needed to speak “proper” French in order to be eligible for social promotion; in contemporary France, Jews and Muslims have to write in “proper” French and pay homage to certain literary conventions to be published. However by all accounts, spoken and written forms of proper French were difficult to find on the streets or in homes, even among the European settlers of non-French origin who eventually acquired French citizenship in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Paratext: Political Implications of a Literary Construct**

The tense boundary between the author’s affirmation of Frenchness and the strategic deployment of aspects of Judeo-Arabic language, culture and practices finds its clearest expression in the use of paratextual elements, the note in particular. Gérard Genette defines the paratext as that which, while not essential to the body of the text, helps contextualize and render it “readable.” Using the metaphor of a threshold (*seuil*) over which the reader steps inside, Genette attempts to definite the paratext in its many forms (titles and intertitles, author’s names, prefaces, afterwords, notes). As with Lejeune’s notion of a contractual space between author and reader, the paratext is “ce par quoi un texte se fait livre et se propose comme tel à ses lecteur, et

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<sup>11</sup> See Brian T. Edwards, *Morocco Bound: Disorienting America’s Maghreb, from Casablanca to the Marrakech Express* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), especially the section “Taking Casablanca.”

<sup>12</sup> Until the 1923 law declaring automatic naturalization for any child of two European parents born in Tunisia, non-French, especially Italians, dwarfed the number of settlers from metropolitan France. See Henri de Montety, “Les Italiens en Tunisie” *Politique étrangère* 5 (1937): 409-425; Mark I. Choate, “Identity Politics and Political Perception in the European Settlement of Tunisia: The French Colony versus the Italian Colony” *French Colonial History* 8 (2007): 97-109.

plus généralement au public. Plus que d'une limite ou d'une frontière étanche, il s'agit ici d'un seuil, ou... d'un 'vestibule' qui offre à tout un chacun la possibilité d'entrer" (*Seuils* 7-8). For the foreign writer, whose hybrid name (Colette, Edmond, Armand, Albert contrasting with Fellous, El Maleh, Abécassis, Naccache respectively) already makes us aware of their sameness and difference, this threshold will lead us to another time and another place.<sup>13</sup> Genette further uses the term *frange* to emphasize these elements' liminality.

Cette frange, en effet, toujours porteuse d'un commentaire auctorial, ou plus ou moins légitimé par l'auteur, constitue, entre texte et hors-texte, une zone non seulement de transition, mais de *transaction* : lieu privilégié d'une pragmatique ou stratégie, d'une action sur le public au service, bien ou mal compris et accompli, d'un meilleur accueil du texte et d'une lecture plus pertinente (*Seuils* 8).

Genette remains uncertain about the status of the original authorial note. At first glance, the very fact that the note has been marginalized spatially and, often, typographically would seem to indicate a less important status. Nevertheless Genette argues that the note, often unintentionally, creates another level of discourse that forces us to rethink the original text. He also recognizes the logic of this argument also eventually undermines the paratextual nature of the note. The more significant the note becomes for the text's comprehension, "elle prolonge, ramifie et module plutôt qu'elle ne le commente" (330). The paratext becomes paradoxically such that it threatens to become a central part of the reading experience, at which point it would no longer be "para," that is "beside, adjacent to" or "beyond or distinct from, but analogous to."<sup>14</sup> For his part, Genette focuses almost exclusively on the literary dimensions of his theory, leaving aside what I

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<sup>13</sup> Lejeune stresses the importance of the name, without considering how it could contain a whole history of otherness. "Le nom premier reçu et assumé qui est le nom du père, et surtout le prénom qui vous en distingue, sont sans doute des données capitales de l'histoire du moi. A preuve que le nom n'est jamais indifférent, que l'on adore ou qu'on le déteste, qu'on accepte de le tenir d'autrui ou qu'on préfère ne le recevoir que de soi," *Le pacte autobiographique*, 34-35.

<sup>14</sup> "para- prefix" *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, Twelfth edition. Ed. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (Oxford University Press, 2008) <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t23.e41017>>, accessed March 14, 2012.

propose are the very important ramifications of the paratext for the construction of self and other by writers whose linguistic and ethnic identities are in question. When an author chooses to include something in the body of the text, as opposed to putting it down at the bottom of the page or at the end of the text, this implies that such material is less than essential to the immediate comprehension of the text. For multilingual life-writers, how could the choices that create such hierarchies of importance not have implications about the author's construction of identity?

Genette does not discuss the status of foreign language words in a text nor does he taken on the disclosure of autobiographical narrative through them. This practice has multiple implications for understanding the boundaries and functioning of a text. What does an author hope to accomplish through introducing a word or expression that will likely disrupt the reader's experience of the text? An author might wish to periodically emphasize his or her foreign origins to the reader, to highlight cultural authenticity as well as to give a taste of the (familiar) exotic. The "dépaysement" promised by all travel writing, is accompanied by a pledge of authenticity, guaranteed by the author's foreign last name, an image of a woman in traditional Arab or Berber dress (Memmi, *Le mirliton du ciel*), or photos of family members (Halimi, *Fritna*, Naccache, *Les roses de l'Ariana*), or recognizable North African settings (Abécassis, *Rue des synagogues*, Cohen, *De l'Ariana à Galata*, Sibony, *Marrakech, le départ*, all of Fellous's works).

The issues at stake in the paratext go far beyond simple marketing and presentation. As El Maleh repeatedly emphasized throughout his career, the Maghrebi Jewish author also attempts to remember a way of speaking and being that no longer exist. "C'est en ce sens qu'il travaille à subvertir cette langue acquise et fait basculer le monde qu'elle sous-tend en l'autre, celui de la langue maternelle refoulée au prix d'une catastrophe inépuisable."<sup>15</sup> The introduction of spoken language from Morocco and Tunisia into the literary text breaks down the illusion of complete

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<sup>15</sup> El Maleh, *Parcours immobile*, 17.

assimilation seemingly implied by the author's "French writing." Maghrebi Jewish life-writing deterritorializes the French language, and resituates it in a multilingual, multi-confessional world.

Against the traditional view of Judeo-languages as superannuated "patois," these works instead signal a lack or void in the French language, made readable by the resurgence of involuntary memories (especially sense-memories).<sup>16</sup> By reinserting the vernacular into the literary text, they highlight its unique and continued significance in their own lives. French, however magnificent its range of expression and color might be, cannot account for the specificity and affective charge of the local. Authors use a variety of devices including italicizing the words, putting French translations next to them, sometimes parenthetically, or referring the reader to a note through an asterisk or footnote.

The widespread use of footnotes, endnotes, glossaries, lexicons and captioned images in Maghrebi Jewish works constitute the kind of uncertain border that poses problems for Genette's definition. These paratextual devices function as linguistic and cultural translators for the reader, while domesticating the author's foreignness. By offering the reader a digestible dose of foreign words spatially and typographically marked off from familiar French, I argue that these paratexts and the strange spaces they create within the text also make way for colonized practices (linguistic, cultural, gestural) to find their way back into proper French. They go to the heart of the Maghrebi Jewish autobiographical endeavor: how to use autobiography, a well-established genre and register of French writing, to reanimate what El Maleh called a "société parlée," one

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<sup>16</sup> Though the Proustian inspiration is important in the more self-consciously "literary" Maghrebi Jewish works, Colette Fellous has developed a more diaspora-specific notion in her works, what she calls "la mémoire aimantée." "C'est quand on arrive dans le lieu de sa mémoire, donc là par exemple en Tunisie, dans lieu de mon enfance, et qu'on [ne] parle pas forcément de soi, de son enfance, mais qui ce se passe dans le réel, comme si le réel écoutait ce qu'on avait à l'intérieur de soi" *Un livre, un jour*, interview with Olivier Barrot, France 3, November 9, 2007. I will discuss this concept in more detail in Chapter 4.

which French and Franco-Jewish colonization played a large part in destroying (*Café bleu*, 78). Hence the doubly impossible task of Judeo-Maghrebi writing which by necessity must grapple with the questions of how to translate any language other than French into French and more generally, how to translate a dynamic oral culture into writing.

Nevertheless, a crucial aspect in the publication of autobiographies for external audiences, be they French Ashkenazi Jews or non-Jewish French readers, involves the creation of linguistic and geographical distance, often in the form of an ethnographic approach that exoticizes the Maghrebi Jewish writer's personal trajectory.<sup>17</sup> The valorization of the past as essentially different serves the writer's attempt to mediate the distance between the Maghrebi past and French present and between his or her own childhood and adulthood. In addition to an interesting life narrative, the non-Maghrebi reader expects a certain "dépaysement," integral in French travel literature. Publishers and authors are also working with these expectations, as can be witnessed on book jackets. For example, the jacket of André Nahum's work *Tunis-la-juive* features the Orientalist descriptions "hauts en couleur," "coloré" and "pittoresque" in addition to expressions belonging to a more nostalgic register; "faire revivre un monde disparu."<sup>18</sup> Here we have the double imperative of Judeo-Maghrebi literature in French, to revisit a bygone part of the author's life and community, but also to highlight an irreducible difference.

Drawing on Philippe Lejeune's notion of the pact between autobiographer and reader necessary for creating a space of veracity and mutual intelligibility<sup>19</sup>, we could say that part of the pact of autobiographical Francophone literature is for the author to reveal his or her "non-French" or more than French aspects to the reader. Would so many Moroccan and Tunisian Jews

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<sup>17</sup> A similar tendency occurs in a great deal of colonized writing, and even occupies a central place for pied-noir writers from North Africa. See Anne Roche, "La posture ethnographique dans quelques textes à compte d'auteur de Français sur l'Algérie" *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée* (1984): 165-174.

<sup>18</sup> Nahum, *Tunis-la-juive*, back cover.

<sup>19</sup> Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique*, 46.

been able to have their stories published if there was not something different or intriguing about their itineraries? Furthermore, one of the most faithful publishers of Maghrebi Jewish life-writing in French has been Éditions de l'Harmattan, which specializes in North and sub-Saharan African cultures. Harmattan published works by Jewish authors, including André Nahum, Albert Bensoussan and Max Guedj (both from Algiers), and Gilles Zenou (from Meknès in Morocco) in the Harmattan's *Écritures arabes* collection, alongside those of Maghrebi Muslim writers.<sup>20</sup> Once again, Jews are able to reclaim their place as "Arab" through French-language literature, without changing the fact

### **A (Not So) Native Language**

While many Maghrebi Jewish writers evoke the elegance and prestige of French, their description of the acquisition process reveals the tell-tale symptoms of a deep-seated anxiety about the language. Whether in Alliance or French government schools, French teachers' stringent standards of grammar and pronunciation created an endless source of frustration and feelings of inferiority. When students returned home, their elders were likely to speak Jewish languages. Parents often made an effort to speak French with the children, but they spoke the language in heavily accented way, code-switching, with words from Arabic (*darija* - Moroccan Arabic or *tunsi* - Tunisian Arabic), Hebrew, Italian, Maltese Spanish and Portuguese.

French colonial rule sought to attenuate the anarchic dimension of Maghrebi polyglossia, but ended up adding to it. Indeed, the uneasy coexistence between multiple languages that marked the colonial period predates European expansion. In addition to Arabic's own multiplicity (divided between classic forms and regional dialects), Berber languages, and

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<sup>20</sup> See, André Nahum, *Le roi des briks: nouvelles* (Paris: Harmattan, 1992); Albert Bensoussan, *L'échelle algérienne: voies juives* (Paris: Harmattan, 2001); Max Guedj, *Mort de Cohen d'Alger: roman à deux vitesses avec jeux* (Paris: Harmattan, 1986); Gilles Zenous, *Les nuits: récit* (Paris: Harmattan, 1989).

Turkish, Romance languages have had long-lasting presence and impacts on local speech. Linguists have documented loans from Arabic into Italian dialects as well as loan from Romance languages in Arabic dialects. Moreover, historian Jocelyn Dakhliia has argued that Mediterranean *lingua franca*, a simplified synthesis of Italian, Spanish, French and Portuguese, represented a widely-spoken tool for communication between rulers, diplomats, slaves, and masters of all origins in the Maghreb from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

Given this history of linguistic pluralism and the continuing waves of colonial migration that added new linguistic diversity to modern North Africa, a young Casablancon or Tunisian Jew would be exposed to many languages in their daily life and would engage in a “bricolage”<sup>22</sup> taking available from school, the streets, home, and the synagogue into a fairly self-reflexive body of linguistic knowledge.

Dans cette littérature, le texte se présente comme une mosaïque ou un patchwork de langues où l'une complète l'autre, chaque langue venant exprimer ce qu'elle sait le mieux faire, dans une construction du sens, fortement ancré dans un territoire. La multiplicité des langues exprime l'identité plurielle d'un sujet qui vit ses diverses allégeances sur le mode de la complémentarité et de la richesse mutuelle.<sup>23</sup>

The young generations were all too aware of the amalgamated nature of their linguistic environment, being exposed to the modern idea that each nation naturally spoke its own language, differentiating it from other nations. Maintaining boundaries around Jewish identity required mastery of a number of registers that might need to be deployed at any time. While in school, an Arabic word slipping out might entail punishment by teachers, whereas on the playground, an insult in French would seem effeminate and might miss its intended audience. When speaking Arabic with Muslims, Jews would alternately dissimulate or emphasize their

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<sup>21</sup> Jocelyne Dakhliia, *Lingua franca : une langue métisse en Méditerranée* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss opposes the “bricoleur” to the scientific figure of the engineer: “De nos jours, le bricoleur reste celui œuvre de ses mains, en utilisant les moyens détournés par comparaison avec ceux de l’homme de l’art.” *La pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), 30-31.

<sup>23</sup> Colette Touitou-Benitah, “De la co-présence pacifique à la co-présence créatrice: Le kaléidoscope des langues dans la littérature judéo-maghrébine” *Traduction, terminologie, rédaction* 9.1 (1996), 117-137 (124).

accent and Hebrew loan words depending on whether they wanted to highlight proximity or distance. For instance, Gilbert Naccache, a Marxist Jewish dissident against Bourguiba's one party rule remembers that during his imprisonment, his colleagues (all Muslim) complimented him on his nearly perfect accent in Arabic. He realized that they were lauding him for ironing out any Jewish sonority, and by extension his Jewish particularity in service of the Tunisian people's struggle. "Cela suffit généralement pour que je ne trouve plus mes mots ou que je récupère malgré moi un accent très perceptible" writes Naccache (*Cristal* 136).<sup>24</sup>

Alienation both from French and Arabic (not mention Hebrew) helps make sense of the "hypersensibilité lexicale" so common in Maghrebi Jewish literature. Sometimes experienced as lack or pathology (in relation to "standard" French) or as play and mastery (the unique ability to be linguistically equal with both Muslims and Europeans, when this was out of reach politically). It is no wonder that Judeo-Maghrebi writers' reflections on language, ranging from Memmi to Derrida to El Maleh, are constantly resorting to images of "prosthesis,"<sup>25</sup> (unwittingly) borrowed homes,<sup>26</sup> different kinds of clothing, etc. In all these cases, Jewish language(s) can only become "naturalized" through complex critical apparatuses that undermine the very idea of organic belonging to language itself. For those living through the death throes of French colonial role, their linguistic situation was not reducible to a "simple richesse polyglotte, qui bénéficie d'un clavier supplémentaire mais relativement neutre; c'est un drame *linguistique*" (*Portrait du colonisé* 125). Nor does this *drame* end with colonialism, since Maghrebi Jews migrated to two

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<sup>24</sup> Naccache's contrarianism in the face of an asphyxiating "Arab" identity echoes Baghdadi Jewish writer Naïm Kattan whose participation in the Iraqi Communist Party lead him to emphasize his Jewish accent as a way of advocating a more pluralistic notion of Iraqi identity. Kattan addresses the impossibility of full Jewish participation in Arab nationalist movements that united themselves in opposition to Zionism. See "Juif d'origine et de culture arabes" *Covenant* (September 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Le monolinguisme de l'autre, ou la prothèse de l'origine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> See El Maleh, "Nous avons longtemps habité une maison que nous pensions être notre propriété légitime, nous en avons tiré une extrême jouissance, exploré toutes les richesses et les avantages qu'elle pouvait offrir, puis soudain un jour quelqu'un frappe à la porte et nous découvrons que nous ne sommes pas chez nous, que nous occupons un lieu qui n'est pas nôtre" *Café Bleu*, 46.



nation-states with strong monolingualist policies, France and Israel. While Judeo-Arabic continued to lose ground in both, it reappears in memoirs as the key to the past.

### **Linguistic Inferiority and Acculturation**

How did this linguistic tragedy emerge? Why did Maghrebi Jews succumb so completely to French? Colette Fellous's richly developed autobiographical novel *Avenue de France* attempts to grasp this question over the course of a century (1879-1967), during which the Jews of Tunis gradually abandoned their traditional languages (Judeo-Arabic, Italian and Hebrew) for French. Her novel stakes out familiar territory; a Maghrebi Jewish character in France who gets transported through the return of repressed memories back to their lost home.<sup>27</sup> Fellous feels inexplicably drawn back to her native Tunis, at times against her will. Wherever she might be, she returns compulsively to "ces années que je n'ai connues, là-bas, en Tunisie... je n'arrive plus à me séparer de ces scènes, elles respirent, avec moi en permanence et je me dois de les nommer, moi, la petite dernière de la tribu" (*Avenue de France* 23). Her voyage back to Tunisia blurs time itself, including narrations of her grandfather's experiences in 1879 on the eve of the establishment of French protectorate as well as to her brother's return to the country in 1967, a decade after independence. These two dates stand out among the many explored by the narrator, both of them moments where a male member of Fellous's family suffers because of his lack of linguistic knowledge, in a way that is particular to the Jewish community. Both incidents arrive out of interpellation by agents of power, making it clear to the Jewish protagonists that they are out of place because of their language.

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<sup>27</sup> Serge Moati's *Villa Jasmin* and *Du côté des origines* follow this structure as does Algerian Jewish writer's Annie Cohen's works, *Le marabout de Blida* and *Géographie des Origines*.

In the first case, Fellous's grandfather (14 years old at the time), walks along the *Avenue de France*, the embryonic Tunisian version of the *Champs Elysées*. There he encounters an aristocratic Frenchman. After seeing an apple fall from the man's basket, her grandfather rushes to pick it up and return it to the man. Though Lolly tells us that the Frenchman says "merci" to her grandfather, he fails to understand, knowing only Judeo-Arabic.

Il entend la voix basse de l'homme, mais un doute soudain entre dans ses yeux: est-ce que ce mot à peine chuchoté veut dire merci ou voleur? En quatre secondes, une grande passion se lève aussitôt en lui. Une passion, une colère et une révolte liées pour un même feu. La décision est prise... merci ou voleur? Ce doute est insupportable (109).

Her grandfather's decision to abandon Arabic and learn French has heavy overtones of the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden. The Frenchman appears as a variant on the serpent inciting Fellous's innocent grandfather toward knowledge of good and evil, allegories for the French language and European modernity. Picking up the fallen apple, he decides that he must know what the man knows, even if it means leaving behind the paradisiacal beauty of Judeo-Tunisian culture and language. This primal scene of temptation directs the course of his life and that of Tunisia's Jewish community toward Europe. Her grandfather resolves to learn French, see Europe and never turn back. Later Fellous reveals herself to him as he walks toward the medina, where he lives and works. He tells her that he will learn French for her sake, so that she will be "at home" in the new Tunisia. Fellous, having come back from a time when Tunisian Jewish culture is in danger of extinction, compounded by her own woeful ignorance of all but the basics of Arabic, wants to tell him to keep some of his language to pass on to her. She has come too late: "J'ai levé mon bras pour l'arrêter, mais c'était trop tard, l'histoire marchait à grandes enjambées, sa décision était prise, celle de nous tous aussi. Prendre la France en vrac" (111). Her grandfather goes to become a European traveler, representing the Bey of Tunis on various missions in Germany and Italy, and bringing back European commodities (clothing and art

objects) to Tunisia. He becomes an agent of European modernity in his own family and in the protectorate.

In 1967, Fellous prepared to take the *baccalauréat* exam and go off to France for her university studies as her older brother, who she calls her “Pierrot passant,” has done.<sup>28</sup> The exams with their focus on French literature and European thought represent Fellous’s passage into adulthood and her literal move to France. The logical extension of their schooling leads her and her brothers to leave Tunisia behind. In the spring of 1967, Pierrot comes home to Tunis to spend time with his family. Near the house, he encounters two young Arab women and approaches one of them, asking her to go for coffee with him. The girls turn their faces and walk away. Moments two informers set upon her brother and drag him to the police station, claiming he has assaulted the women. All the while, the men around him are speaking in Arabic, while he can only speak French. This exasperates the police, who ask how someone with a Tunisian passport could be completely unable to speak the country’s official language. The encounter goes beyond a personal tragedy, symbolizing Arab-Jewish tensions after independence.

Ils [les policiers] sont en colère ils ne savent plus à qui ils s’adressent, si c’est à mon frère ou si c’est une communauté tout entière, ils lui reprochent, même s’ils le disent pas avec ces mots mais avec des yeux de fougue, d’avoir choisi la France, d’avoir méprisé le pays, d’avoir suivi l’envahisseur, ils parlent toujours en arabe, et lui mon Pierrot passant, il ne peut pas trouver de place pour dire simplement que c’est ce pays qu’il aime (242).

These two scenes function as historical bookends for the modern Jewish experience in Tunisia, 1879 representing the arrival of the French and the birth of the protectorate, 1967 when the repercussions of the Arab-Israeli war to the pillage of the *Grande synagogue* and the definitive

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<sup>28</sup> “Pierrot” is a stock character derived from the *Commedia dell’arte* tradition, in which he loses out to Harlequin in the search for the love of Columbine. His later appropriation by successive generations of male poets, Romantic, Decadents, Symbolists, and Modernists was due in part to his association with sensitivity, innocence, and his mistreatment at the hands of women. Given Fellous’s frequent attendance at the Cinémathèque after her arrival in Paris in the summer of 1967, Jean-Luc Godard’s *Pierrot le fou* (1965) seems a natural point of reference. For more on Pierrot’s influence, see Robert F. Storey, *Pierrots on the Stage of Desire: Nineteenth-century French Literary Artists and the Comic Pantomime* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

departure of most of the Jews who had remained after independence. If in the first case, the grandfather is “recruited” into the French colonial project, Pierrot is “stopped” in the way Sara Ahmed describes in *Queer Phenomenology*: “For bodies that are not extended by the skin of the social, bodily movement is not so easy. Such bodies are stopped, where the stopping is an action that creates its own impressions. Who are you? Why are you here? What are you doing?”<sup>29</sup>

Though Pierrot thinks that he is returning home, the police encounter makes it clear to him and other Jews that they are not part of the new body politic created by and for authentic Tunisians.

In each case of linguistic interpolation, Fellous’s grandfather and brother are made to feel out of place. They are obliged to define themselves in response to new iterations of power that invalidate previous modes of identification and relation. The writer/narrator expertly conveys the indecidability of each of these moments. The reader, like the grandfather, never knows whether the Frenchman says “thief,” or “thank you.” In the second case, the reader never knows exactly what the police accuse her brother of, since the character himself does not understand Arabic. In each case, the “foreign language” is the crux of the encounter, and yet the text refuses to translate it exactly, leaving it in the last instance, in a state of suspension. Though Fellous does not use footnotes or typographic resources to set aside the transition from French to Arabic, what is supposed to be said remains simultaneously essential *and* external to the text. The incompleteness of translation leads to another level implied by the text, just out of the reader’s reach.

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<sup>29</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 139.

## Using Childhood to Deconstruct Linguistic Categories

Among the many literary strategies Judeo-Maghrebi writers use to convey the babel-like linguistic environment of the colonial Maghreb, diachronic narration best expresses the gap between childhood and adulthood, home and exile. The author-narrator will typically begin in the present, writing from France or Canada and move back to their childhood and adolescence in Morocco and Tunisia. Occasionally, they will use the same tone and perspective to narrate past events, but some attempt to render the temporal and spatial distance with a different narrative point of view.

Using a younger version of one's self to narrate past experiences enables the author to frame political and historical events through the lens of ignorance.<sup>30</sup> The children and adolescents that they were understood certain things, for instance that one must never speak of Israel in public after independence<sup>31</sup> or that Christians, Muslims and Jews could share many things but that they were fundamentally different from each other. Children's unsystematic understanding of language gives the authors ample opportunity to show the endlessly elastic polyglossia of colonial metropolises. These child narrators observe their parents, grandparents, teachers, housemaids, and religious leaders using different expressions drawn from the various languages available to them. Through children, authors are able to go back to a time and place in

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<sup>30</sup> Lynne Huffer, "Derrida's nostalgia" *Algeria & France, 1800-2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia*, ed. Patricia M.E. Lorcin, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), offers a critical reading of Derrida and Cixous' use of the childhood perspective to explain the avoidance of Jewish responsibility during the Algerian War. She neglects to mention the structural conditions that made it so difficult for Jews' to "choose sides," their deep attachment to France, and French citizenship, the completely uncertain future that awaited them under a nationalist Algerian government, not to mention the violence that they were subject to from all sides: especially the brutal bombings and assassinations by the FLN and OAS in the last years of the conflict. For a better understanding of how French rule created a crisis of Jewish agency, see Benjamin Stora, "L'impossible neutralité des juifs algériens"

<sup>31</sup> In Bob Oré Abitbol, *Le goût des confitures* describes how Casablanca Jews spoke of migrating to "Texas" to avoid even mentioning Israel (26). See also Maya Nahum, *Les Gestes* "Ici, le mot Israël n'est jamais prononcé, il vaut mieux dire là-bas" (82).

their own lives (and in the history of the diaspora) where their relationship to language was instinctive and intuitive.

At this point, we will briefly move away from Tunis and Casablanca, to examine Victor Teboul's life-writing. Teboul was born in Alexandria just before the military coup in 1952. His experience corresponds to that of Casablanca and Tunisian Jewish writers, having left his homeland at a young age, passing briefly through Paris, before finally settling in Montréal. Teboul constructs his autobiographical novel *La lente découverte de l'étrangeté* (2002) using the first-person narration "je" throughout, moving from the childhood to adult perspective depending on the sections.<sup>32</sup> The first comprises his childhood, spanning from 1950 to 1958, focusing on his family's exile from Egypt during the Suez Crisis and their interminable search for a new home around the Mediterranean, in Beirut, Tunis, Naples and in France. The second frame unfolds over a series of conversations with his aging father taking place in Montreal in 1990. Throughout the chapters set in the 1950s, Teboul employs a seemingly naïve perspective with respect to language, which incorporates the polyglossia by subjectivizing it—obscuring the words spoken in their original form, while drawing attention to their uneasy coexistence in the same spaces. The lucid innocence of the child allows him or her to perceive things outside of the fixed categories through which adults perceive the world.

Rather than using "Arabic" or "French", Teboul's childhood narrator identifies different languages with the people that use them. In the first chapter, "Alexandria, 1950" Victor calls Arabic "la langue parlée par les domestiques" (15), "langue du marchand" (17), and the "langue

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<sup>32</sup> Victor Teboul, *La lente découverte de l'étrangeté* (Montréal: Les Intouchables, 2002). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes. The childhood "I" is of course given voice and framed by the adult author/narrator looking back, even when Teboul implies that the writing from the 1950s came from journals he kept at the time. Significantly his father discouraged from writing down his experiences, thinking it might fall into the wrong hands and show how Jews truly felt. The parental interdiction on writing demonstrates how life in exile temporarily silenced Jews from the Arab world.

du pays” (21). Victor calls Greek, “langue de ma mere” (14, 18) since his mother and maternal grandmother are Greek Orthodox immigrants from the island of Chios. Though his mother converted to Judaism, his grandmother occasionally would sneak him into church services, where he was exposed to ancient Greek as a sacred (but illicit) language. Modern Greek awakens hunger in him, since he hears it in the kitchen while his mother cooks.

His father’s side of the family has a different but complimentary story. Born in Ottoman-ruled Palestine, in the town of Kiryat Arba, his paternal grandmother moved to Tunisia before moving to Egypt. She speaks Arabic and some French, which Victor identifies primarily as “la langue de mon pere” (14). Meanwhile, his father reads him stories about the first generations of Zionist pioneers in Israel in Judeo-Arabic: “Je remarque dans le livre de mon pere des lettres comme celles que j’ai déjà vues au temple. Cette langue s’écrit de droite à gauche. Et je me dis: ‘Non, pas encore une autre langue qui s’écrit de droite à gauche’” (19). To complicate matters further, Victor attended a school administered by the Church of England, introducing English as another prestige language. His father, schooled by the Alliance, imports cellophane from France and passes for an expert on all things French. On his visits to the shops he supplies, he acts as a language policeman, correcting signs and displays in faulty French. “Fermer le samedi! Vous vous rendez compte comment vous avez écrit ‘Fermer’, sur votre affiche s’exclame-t-il, offusqué. Cela s’écrit avec un ‘e’ accent aigu” (24). Here again, we see how Jews schooled by the Alliance internalized the ideals of linguistic purity promoted by the organization. They also took on the colonial anxiety about hybridity and mimicry, highlighting the inferior imitation of Europe.

Despite the seeming innocence of the narration, Teboul occasionally inserts comments that remind us we are reading the work of a skilled writer and not just a perplexed child.

Reflecting on his Pavlovian relationship to Greek, Teboul extends a particularly poetic metaphor of salivation and hunger to language: “Je suis nourri de mots que je n’apprendrai jamais à écrire, car je ne les verrai dans les livres et ne saurais reconnaître leur forme de mes yeux. Ils logent dans ma bouche, se roulent dans ma salive” (14). Teboul’s reflection on his naivety as a child reinforces the nostalgia he feels as an adult. When faced with the constant “chut!” from his parents and grandparents “j’apprends qu’il faut toujours que je taise une partie de moi-même” (20). Such interdictions reveal Maghrebi Jewish polyglossia not simply as ludic multilingualism, but also reflect the fractures and fault lines of identity in such a cosmopolitan environment. While the older generations are depicted as more at ease with their mixed origins and identities, Teboul and his peers, are all too aware the incompatibility of this diversity with the nationalist fever personified by Gamal Abd’el Nasser himself.

### **“Mais quelle langue parlions-nous?”: Recovering Judeo-Maghrebi French**

Albert Naccache chose this seemingly straightforward question as a section title in his memoir, *Les roses de l’Ariana*.<sup>33</sup> Naccache undoes the typical assumption that most city-dwelling Jews spoke only French by the end of protectorate. Even if French was almost certainly the maternal language for a Jewish child born around the time of the Second World War, Maghrebi Jewish authors end up qualifying this affirmation. Naccache’s statement that “la langue que nous parlions était la dernière métamorphose du parler de la région” (*Les roses* 67). Naccache gestures to the arrival of the Jewish and Muslim survivors of al-Andalus in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries initiated a period of intense migration and linguistic intermingling, with many Mediterranean groups (Sicilians, Neapolitans, Calabrians, Maltese, Livornese Jews) all contributing their own nuances to Tunisian Arabic.

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<sup>33</sup> Naccache, *Les roses de l’Ariana*, 68-73.



On the one hand, France succeeded in imposing its language in schools and convincing Jewish children of its prestige, which they internalized and enforced in the home. Nevertheless, the Ariana, a lower-middle class Jewish suburb six kilometers from the center of Tunis, had its own language. Hebrew and Arabic, though banished from French colonial schools, came back through religious school (transliterated as *kottab* or *kotteb*) and the streets themselves, where young boys spent much of their childhood. “Notre parler était coloré, déformé, ouvert à toutes les origines... le français que nous parlions s’était adapté à nous, à notre accent et de nombreuses expressions et locutions directement traduit de l’arabe” (69). Calling standard French the native language of Moroccan and Tunisian Jews must at some point come into question when Naccache affirms that “l’arabe et l’hébreu faisaient partie de notre être le plus intime (ibid).” Though Naccache and many of his generation looked down on the use of Arabic in school, regarding it as a language for the elderly and uneducated, at home it was natural. Complicating matters further is that Naccache’s mother, with her limited abilities in French and frequent code-switching, was properly speaking his first language teacher.

As they walked through the produce market, Naccache acquired all the dialectal vocabulary, derived from multiple languages. For instance French peas were called “bisilouch’ de l’italien ‘pisello’ ou du vénitien ‘bisi’” (70). Other vegetables’ circuitous etymologies mirrored Mediterranean Jewish migration routes, with Arabic words coming to the Iberian peninsula and coming back to the Maghreb in altered form with the Andalusian exiles (both Muslim and Jewish). The Livornese Jews were exemplary of this trend, since they spoke Spanish and Portuguese, then settled in Tuscany before dispersing to all corners of the Ottoman Empire, especially to Tunis. In other cases, the French name itself is shown to be derivative from Arabic: “‘al-batingel’ pour l’aubergine dont le nom français provient du catalan ‘alberginia’, lui-même

issu de l'arabe qui l'a emprunté au persan 'bâdengân'" (71). Remembering the strange linguistic trajectories of everyday words for fruits and vegetables creates another level of discourse in the manner of the paratext. Each word opens up a seemingly endless series of Mediterranean cities or countries and source words, showing the diverse roots and routes of Jewish-Arab diaspora. Even more significant, Naccache knew only the Arabic names for basic foodstuffs until adulthood. That such an important part of daily life resisted translation into French calls into question its depth and breadth as the supposed "maternal language" of Maghrebi Jews.

The association of Arabic with his mother is absolute, "l'arabe était la langue de l'intimité familiale" (71). She sang to him and blessed him in Arabic. Naccache considers the expression "ya omri" (my love, my life), the most beautiful of all the blessings she would shower him with (73). Even after leaving their mother's care for French-language school, Jewish children continued to be haunted by the dialectal language of the market and streets. Naccache notes that many basic expressions were directly calqued from Arabic to French (69). Beyond the overly facile distinction of "French" and "Arabic" as monolithic linguistic entities, Jewish writers describe a subtle modulation of dialect and register in everyday life. Tunisian Jewish writer Maya Nahum uses her protagonist Malou Saadun, a young Jewish girl spending the summer at the beach in the Tunis suburb of Khéredine, to articulate these complexities. With her parents discussing politics (the interminable Algerian War and the place of Jews in Tunisia's future) with their French guests, Malou and her brothers quickly lose interest.

Ils n'écoulaient pas les discussions des grands, quel intérêt ? Surtout quand leurs parents parlent en français chic, comme ce soir. Les gosses ne les supportent pas quand ils sont comme ça, ils les trouvent alors non seulement très agaçants mais très hypocrites.

Il faut savoir qu'à Tunis, il y a mille façons de parler. Ça dépend du moment et de l'interlocuteur, comme si l'on est plein de gens en un seul et que l'on peut choisir lequel de ces gens doit s'exprimer à ce moment-là (*Les gestes* 75).

Malou's is perhaps the most lucid assessment her community's linguistic situation. Tunisian Jews could channel different voices from within when the situation called for it, from Judeo-Arabic with more Hebrew expressions between each other, officious French when speaking to policemen and civil servants, Arabic when speaking to Muslims. In each situation, the language chosen came with a strategic posture. For example, choosing to speak Arabic with Muslims was considered a mark of courtesy, and Muslims would often reciprocate in French.<sup>34</sup>

Malou's description of many people inhabiting the same person also provides an elegant metaphor for Judeo-Maghrebi autobiography. The writer simultaneously attempts to evoke the past for his and her co-religionists, while telling their story in literary French (often using the *passé simple* and referencing canonical texts) in order to be published. These authors also channel their speech patterns as children and adolescents for the reader. As we have seen with Naccache, this does not preclude a retrospective understanding of how important Arabic was and the nostalgic hold it maintains over Maghrebi Jewish writers, even if at the time it seemed an obstacle to passing as cultured.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed Tunisian Jewish writers such as Colette Fellous gesture toward the political implications of this sort of linguistic plurality through their child and adolescent narrators. In an early work that marked her literary "return" to Tunisia, *Le Petit Casino*, Fellous retraces her own infancy through the family's summer house, located just above a Turkish-style café (known as a

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<sup>34</sup> Naccache, "Les deux langues coexistaient harmonieusement et se substituaient selon des règles subtiles. L'utilisation simultanée des deux langues lors d'une conversation entre deux adultes juif et musulman se faisait par courtoisie, ainsi : le juif parlait arabe et le musulman parlait français" *Les roses*, 69.

<sup>35</sup> The idea of being betrayed by one's accent when speaking to "Français de France" was a constant fear for schoolchildren and even adults. See El Maleh, "on revêt les habits de l'assimilation, on s'aventure dans les merveilles de ces récentes acquisitions, tombées grâce d'un ciel lointain, un vers de Victor Hugo, une page du Petit Larousse illustré : on trébuche, on surveille avec inquiétude la trahison de l'accent, l'intonation." *Parcours immobile*, 13.

“casino,” an Italianization of “gazino”).<sup>36</sup> She describes herself as a child seeking the quiet spaces in the house, where she could watch and listen to everything going on. Far from being a solely personal trait, remaining out of view, in silence was a fundamental characteristic of colonized space.

Quand on pousse dans un pays qui en contient au moins deux et qu'on ne sait jamais lequel est vrai, on est obligé d'en apprendre très vite les règles du jeu. C'est un exercice qui fait partie de la grammaire locale... On ne reste jamais en place, on lance une phrase et on veut la retourner aussitôt, on l'essaie à l'envers, on soulève les accents, on met là où il n'y en a pas, on saupoudre le français d'arabe et l'arabe d'Italien, on imite tous les voix... on joue avec les noyaux d'abricots, on fait pareil avec des mots (*Petit Casino* 95).

The reference to a particularly Tunisian version of marbles, played with apricot pits, evokes the playful, but violent linguistic exchanges that took place on the streets. The virtuoso linguistic performance of the Maghrebi Jewish author, conditioned in such an environment, is perhaps not so surprising. Following Maya Nahum's idea of each person being able to summon multiple speakers within themselves for the proper occasions, Fellous reminds us that the indeterminacy of Tunisian speech related directly to questions of national-state sovereignty.

### **Treasure or Curse? Judeo-Arabic's Afterlife in Life-Writing**

How do the last generation of Maghrebi Jewish authors deal with Judeo-Arabic, often their parents' first language, but one that they themselves found embarrassing and outdated? Furthermore, whatever an author's feelings toward Judeo-Arabic, how did one go about interacting with family members who spoke the language? After Morocco and Tunisia became independent in 1956, how did authors deal with the increasing public visibility and status of

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<sup>36</sup> Georges Cohen offers the following explanation: “Ce nom de Casino, à bien réfléchir, ne s'expliquait pas vraiment. On n'y jouait ni à la roulette, ni à baccara. Certes les joueurs de cartes ne manquaient pas: rami, poker, belote, scoubba, un jeu probablement importé d'Italie, la ‘scopa’, à moins que ce ne fût pas le contraire. Mais cela méritait-il le nom pompeux du Casino? Je me demande aujourd'hui s'il n'existe pas un rapport avec le ‘Casino’ turc, qui n'est pas autre chose qu'un café ombragé?” *De l'Ariana à Galata*, 139-140.

literary Arabic (*fus 'ha*) as a national language? After reading a wide range of texts, at least three main positions emerge with respect to Judeo-Arabic, the first two adopted by relatively small minorities and the third being the by far the most common.

The first, what we might call the “patois” position denies any value to the language, and goes as far to refuse to admit its existence as language at all. As one of the most well-known francophone Maghrebi Jewish writers, Albert Memmi maintained this position in his early works.<sup>37</sup> For Memmi, Judeo-Arabic was doomed to obsolescence as Maghrebi Jews opened themselves up to the West through French. Memmi’s description of Judeo-Arabic as “patois,”<sup>38</sup> a localized spoken dialect with no accompanying literature, shows his internalization of French linguistic chauvinism. Later in his career, his first volume of poetry, *Le mirliton du ciel* (1990) showed a rather different side of his relationship toward Judeo-Arabic, in which certain words and expressions take a mysterious, quasi-allegorical character.

The second position, on the opposite end of the spectrum from the early Memmi, finds its most eloquent advocates in the medical doctor and folklorist André Nahum, also from Tunis and Edmond Amran El Maleh, along with Memmi’s younger brother Georges, Moroccan Jewish psychoanalyst Daniel Sibony, and Ami Bouganim, a Moroccan-Israeli writer.<sup>39</sup> These writers treat Judeo-Arabic in a way that parallels contemporary Jewish interest in cataloguing and preserving Yiddish and Ladino (Judeo-Spanish). They regard Judeo-Arabic as a lost treasure of centuries’ of lived experience. Full of wisdom, humor and spirituality, finding its full expression

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<sup>37</sup> Memmi describes the mother tongue of the colonized as “une langue ni écrite ni lue, qui ne permet que l’incertaine et pauvre culture orale” (*Portrait du colonisé* 124).

<sup>38</sup> According to the *Littre*: “1) Parler provincial qui, étant jadis un dialecte, a cessé d’être littérairement cultivé et qui n’est plus en usage que pour la conversation parmi les gens de la province. Le patois normand, gascon... 3) Par dénigrement, langue pauvre et grossière. Patois se dit aussi pour mauvais style. Quel patois !”. Accessed at <<http://francois.gannaz.free.fr/Littre/xmlittre.php?requete=patois&submit=Rechercher>>.

<sup>39</sup> André Nahum, *Humour et sagesse judéo-arabe* (1998); Georges Memmi, *Qui se souvient du Café Rubens?* (Paris: J.C. Lattès, 1984); Daniel Sibony, *Marrakech, le depart* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2009); Ami Bouganim, *Le cri de l’arbre* (Tel Aviv: Stavit, 1983).

in women's spaces through the mother and grandmother, Judeo-Arabic becomes the truest dimension of Maghrebi Jews' being, their most profound cultural creation reaching its apotheosis in music. Though these writers do not make reference to the fairly substantial Judeo-Arabic press and translations that flourished in Tunisia from 1850 to 1950, and to a more limited extent, Morocco, they manage to incorporate spoken Judeo-Arabic, destabilizing the French reader's sense of familiarity and appealing to the Maghrebi Jewish reader's memory.

Among the various stances toward language, we find many Moroccan and Tunisian Jewish authors with a deep appreciation but limited knowledge of Judeo-Arabic. This mysterious, mostly unknown language resonates deeply with their parents and grandparents, but always remains outside their full grasp. Here, French prose takes on a new role, attempting to describe spoken Judeo-Arabic in fundamentally different linguistic context. When reporting particular expressions or scenes, these writers will often write "mon (grand)père / ma (grand)mère disait en arabe," and then report the speech in French.

When not simply translated into French, writers will set Judeo-Arabic apart typographically or spatially. On the typographical side, writers may put words in italics, quotation marks, or parentheses. Using paratextual devices such as footnotes, glossaries, lexicons, authors move the original text or translation to a marginal space. As straightforward as these practices might seem on first inspection, they represent the conflict at the heart of the Maghrebi Jewish autobiographical enterprise. French and Judeo-Arabic are not merely two languages spoken by Maghrebi Jews: they represent the passing of generations and the end of Jewish life in the Maghreb.

More than interspersing the text with a few Judeo-Arabic expressions, Armand Abécassis gives one of the most interesting renderings of everyday speech in the heart of the Casablanca

mellah in *Rue des synagogues*. His attempt to capture the salutations, *formules de politesse*, blessings and insults that punctuate negotiations in French and Judeo-Arabic over prices between male Muslim merchants and female Jewish customers reveals the problem of translation. On the *rue des Synagogues*, the *mellah*'s main street, Abécassis relates an encounter between Brahim, the mint-seller and Madame Sebbag. He “positions” himself first as observer and transcriber, then after the conversation suddenly intervenes in the conversation to mollify Madame Sebbag. With this strange intervention of the wise child (who is of course none other than the author himself), we see the mediating position of the Maghrebi Jewish writer, who in his or her work as auto-ethnographer, also takes on the role of translator.

Abécassis puts the Arabic and French in regular type, and putting them in parentheses with a literal translation and then a more colloquial equivalent, using equal signs to convey the relationships. Yet at moments, the original Arabic expression is moved to parenthetical space. The merchant's greeting reads as follows: “Esslamah ! (Sur la paix = bonjour !) Médème (Madame), 'Ach-'ekhbark ? (Quelle est ta nouvelle = comment vas-tu ?) Voici pour toi un beau bouquet de Meknès, apport ce matin même, tout frais” (*Rue des synagogues* 73). While the basic salutations are easy enough to translate, other expressions peculiar to Maghrebi Jewish French, themselves directly calqued from Judeo-Arabic, are more difficult to convey. For example, when Brahim sets the price at one *rial* (five francs) per bunch, Madame Sebbag responds with the idiomatic “C'est tout ce que tu as trouvé chez moi ! Un rial ! (Cela signifie: si tu savais que j'avais plus d'argent, tu en aurais demandé plus ! En d'autres termes : c'est tout ce que j'ai, cinq francs, tu veux tout me prendre !)” (74). Abécassis's text quickly becomes a blurred palimpsest, with each expression calling forth another for clarification and nuance, requiring movement between multiple levels of language.

The exchange between Madame Sebbag and Brahim seems fairly ludic up to this point, each believing that they have triumphed over the other in getting the best price. Yet, as Abécassis highlights, Madame Sebbag openly insults the merchant, with the Judeo-Arabic curse “itteh mezzalo”. Derived from the Hebrew word for luck “mazal,” this fairly common expression among Moroccan Jews translates as “may your fortune fail.” As Madame Sebbag negotiates for a lower and lower price, squeezing Brahim’s already thin profit margins, he calls her “lihoudiya” (the Jewess), claiming that she is ruining his business by driving too hard of a bargain. She takes a parting shot, appealing to the other Jewish women shopping for their families: “Regarde d’abord comme les marchands arabes font avec nous. Ils ne cherchent pas à vendre, ils cherchent à nous dévaliser” (77). Madame Sebbag demonstrates the value of strength in numbers that motivated Jews to live in the mellah, and continue to shop there even after they moved out.

For Abécassis, long-standing patterns of interaction and interdependency between Jews and Muslims held the conflictual dimensions of the merchant-client relationship in check. Though the Jewish women were on their home turf in the *mellah*, Brahim belonged to the majority that could exercise its power on the streets. Privately, Madame Sebbag also admits that the quality of his product is excellent: As Abécassis underscores, “Aucun des deux n’était arrivé à se tromper sur l’autre. Ils savaient tous les deux à qui ils avaient affaire à la place de l’interlocuteur, et parce qu’ils avaient besoin l’un de l’autre, ils savaient les limites à ne pas franchir, dans la parole et la geste ” (80). Memmi’s concept of interdependence (dépendance-pourvoyance) applies here, as Abécassis dissects the speech of everyday life. Describing the rituals that bound Jews and Muslims together, the principal feature is the shared speech itself, full of humor, affection, violence, references to fortune and the divine. This language lies at the



heart of the Maghrebi Jewish experience, and remains (despite authors' best efforts) almost impossible to translate.

Highlighting the impossible imperative of translation, In *Le cri de l'arbre*, Ami Bouganim dramatized the sufferings of Moroccan Jewish immigrants in the Israeli *ma'abarot* (transit camps), which later became known development towns, once houses and permanent infrastructure were built. Expecting to be welcomed with open arms by their true homeland and countrymen, Moroccan Jews (along with Iraqi and Yemeni counterparts) were instead pushed away from settling in the larger Israeli cities and towards marginal arid lands and border regions with majority Palestinian populations.<sup>40</sup> Overcrowded in tent cities, far removed from the urban centers and sources of employment, North African and Middle Eastern Jews suffered tremendous psychological and cultural trauma during their "integration".<sup>41</sup> *Le cri* chronicles discontent and nostalgia that overwhelmed Moroccan Jews as they attempted to survive in the dust-choked, refugee camp tent cities hastily assembled to accommodate them. Bouganim's narrator reports the frequently nostalgic conversations of residents in the hybrid French-Arabic-Hebrew speech peculiar to these exiles. Long sequences of alternating speakers inevitably begin with "là-bas", a spatial reference referring to the speaker's city of origin in Morocco, and a temporal indicator of life before exile. These conversations inevitably devolve into angry rants about inadequate living conditions in Israel, and the superiority of life in Morocco. Bouganim-the-author interrupts one of these conversations with a universal Maghrebi Jewish expression, "ya hsra" (also

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<sup>40</sup> See Erez Tzadifia, "Public Housing as Control: Spatial Policy of Settling Immigrants in Israeli Development Towns" *Public Housing* 21.4 (2006): 523-537; see also Azziza Khazzoom, "Did the Israeli Engineer Segregation? On the Placement of Jewish Immigrants in Development Towns in the 1950s" *Social Forces* 84.1 (2005), pp. 115-134.

<sup>41</sup> See Robert Assaraf, *Juifs du Maroc à travers le monde: Emigration et identité retrouvée* (Rabat : Editions Bouregreg, 2006), Chapter 6 'L'immigration en Israël: Le traumatisme de la sélection' pp. 111-124.

transliterated “ya hasra”).<sup>42</sup> Instead of providing an in-text translation, the asterisk leads the reader to a paragraph-long footnote:

Expression en judéo-marocain intraduisible en français, que l’auteur recommande chaudement à l’Académie Française. Bah, la France – résidence tertiaire du Seigneur après Israël et le Maroc – récompenserait bien le judaïsme marocain pour ses juteuses contributions à la francophonie, en enrichissant sa langue de quelques expressions que le génie français – sans commentaire – ne parviendra jamais à forger. Aussi, soumettons-nous aux illustres Immortels – hi ! paix à ma grand-mère qui, à la veille de mourir, déclarait toujours que le vent est immortel – l’article suivant :  
*Ya hsra* : Ô perte inestimable de jouissances incomparables datant d’une époque douloureusement révolue (77).

The footnote relativizes the importance of France and the prestige of French itself, written, of course, in elegant literary French. Bouganim mocks the *Académie*, charged with the policing of French’s purity, in prose reminiscent of its own officious style. Comparing his grandmother’s folk wisdom to that of its members, he touches on the centrality of Judeo-Arabic to Maghrebi Jewish identity. Relegated to marginal status in Israeli society, Moroccan Jews continue speaking their Jewish dialect that draws equally from Moroccan Arabic and French. After calling the expression untranslatable, Bouganim nevertheless offers a kind of definition that also perfectly describes the impetus of Maghrebi Jewish exilic writing.

Guy Dugas asserts that in registering the loss of pre-colonial Jewish-Arab culture, “le passage à l’écriture est, quoi qu’il en soit, toujours rupture” (*Littérature judéo-maghrébine* 212). Yet the terrible irony of this situation is that writers have no other recourse for expressing this other reality than through asterisks or other such paratextual disruptions of the French text. Maghrebi Jewish writing in French, for all its striving to reconstruct the way things were, always finds itself pointing back to experiences that cannot be translated into the present.

Collette Fellous employs the notion of paratextual space to describe her own impetus for autobiographical writing. “Notre vie, c’était l’Afrique, et notre langue, le français” (*Le petit*

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<sup>42</sup> André Nahum also insists on the unique meaning of “ya hasra”: “expression intraduisible en français” *Tunis-la-juive raconte*.

*casino* 38). This fundamental split between belonging and aspiration generated a tension that forced Jews to respond. “Certains se sont perdus, d’autres ont accepté de se faufiler, d’autres encore se sont bâti une langue étrangère à l’intérieur de leur langue maternelle, pour faire vivre les deux pays simultanément. Pour les sauver et se sauver dans un même geste. C’est ce que j’ai choisi de faire” (39). Fellous’s play on words reveals the author’s difficult position between multiple cultures that she feels an obligation to, but wishes could coexist in peace. “Se sauver” means “to escape” or “to run away from” just as much as it means to “save oneself”. Constructing a home inside the text proves an escape from the schizophrenia imposed on those who transcend cultural binaries.

### **After Independence: The Failure of Re-Arabization**

For the youngest generations, learning Arabic became an imperative after independence. Though many Jewish children remained in Alliance schools in Morocco and in French-run schools in Tunisia in the transitional years immediately after independence, Arabic emerged as the national language across the Maghreb. For Jews who had struggled spent decades struggling to speak proper French, the new task of learning literary Arabic proved to be a major obstacle to finding their place as citizens. Though many Jew continued to speak dialectal Arabic in everyday life, both Moroccan and Tunisian dialects were essentially spoken languages that had considerably evolved away from classical Arabic, which in turn served as the basis for the Modern Standard Arabic created by Islamic reformists in the nineteenth century. Since Jews, barring a few elite scholars, had no exposure to the *Qu’ran*, they were deprived of exposure to the classical foundations of the language and its writing. Those who did write in Judeo-Arabic continued the longstanding practice of using Hebrew script or characters.

Despite all these difficulties, a lively press culture took root in Tunisia during the second half of the nineteenth century, with the growing desire for news from around Europe and the Ottoman Empire. As with Judeo-Spanish in the Ottoman Empire, carried on vigorous existential debates, including whether or not it would be better to write in French or Hebrew, how the language could and should be standardized, and whether writers should try to reproduce the language in its spoken form, and how they should adapt to the reforms promoted by the *Nadha*.

The position of the Alliance Israélite Universelle had always been to emphasize French's centrality, with secondary attention given to Hebrew and little or none to Arabic. Transformed into the *Ittihad* in post-independence Morocco, students in the nationalized version of the Alliance schools were now taught to read and write in classical Arabic.<sup>43</sup> Along with language instruction, the Alliance schools transformed their cultural references to include figures like Maimonides who embodied Jewish-Arab cultural synthesis. These changes in the décor failed to transform the students' imaginary. The two hours per day of Arabic were insufficient to change prevailing patterns; above all qualified Jewish teachers were lacking.<sup>44</sup> Carlos de Nesry, though originally from Tangier, wrote that future of Moroccan Jewry could be grasped in the contrast between two places in late 1950s Casablanca: the mellah and the *place de France*. Strolling with the reader from the mellah to the place, de Nesry noted that elderly Jewish men could hardly be distinguished from Muslims. Young Jewish men, however, had two cultural models—they dressed along the lines of Marlon Brando and the cafés they frequented resembled those of Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris.<sup>45</sup> Above all, Jews continued to be schooled mostly amongst themselves. A small number of Muslims attended the *Ittihad* schools, and Jews and Muslims

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<sup>43</sup> See Michael Laskier, "Developments in the Jewish Communities of Morocco, 1956-76" *Middle Eastern Studies* 26.4 (1990), 465-505 (481-483).

<sup>44</sup> Simon Lévy, "La communauté juive dans le contexte de l'histoire du Maroc du 17<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours" *Juifs du Maroc: Identité et Dialogue* (Grenoble: La Pensée sauvage, 1980): 105-152 (141).

<sup>45</sup> Carlos de Nesry, *Les israélites marocains à l'heure du choix* (Tanger: Editions Internationales, 1958), 12.

attended French lycées that continued to be funded from abroad after independence, but in general the Arabization campaign failed to bridge the cultural gap between young Jews and Muslims. Many Jewish parents worried about the transmission of ethno-religious identity outside of the framework of the Alliance-Ittihad (Simon Lévy, “La Communauté juive” 141).

In Tunis, Albert Naccache was promoted to the Lycée Alaoui in 1958, where for the first time, he found himself in a majority-Muslim classroom. For the Jewish students along with some of the bourgeois Algerian Muslim students, whose families had fled the war, literary Arabic was simply baffling. Though they learned all sorts of words at home, at the marketplace, on the streets, these words were dialectal. On the first day of Arabic classes, the professor gave a speech in literary Arabic that the students found completely incomprehensible. In response to what they considered an assault on their identity, the Jewish students in the class spontaneously sang out a Hebrew song from Passover rituals. Ironically, French was the only language spoken fluently by everyone in the classroom. The professor’s nationalistic speech in Modern Standard Arabic and the Jewish students’ Hebrew songs functioned more as political postures than meaningful speech. For all intents and purposes they were “empty signifiers,” since the dialect-speaking students (both Jewish and Muslim) could not understand the professor, and the Tunisian Jewish students could not actually speak in modern Hebrew, but rather a few fragments from religious ritual, whose content they did not fully understand.

It was not only Jews who were behind in Modern Standard Arabic: most Moroccan and Tunisian Muslim teachers were themselves trained in French. The split between classical Arabic, a written language restricted to small cadres of scholars, and spoken dialects of Arabic varying widely from region to region, posed and continues to pose a significant obstacle to Arabization

campaigns<sup>46</sup>. The Moroccan and Tunisian dialects diverged considerably from the restructured classic Arabic promoted by the nineteenth-century Lebanese intellectuals of the *Nahda* (Islamic Awakening). In the Maghreb, most Muslim boys only learned the rudiments of Arabic grammar along with recitation of the Quran in the *kotteb*, just as Jewish boys learned the Hebrew alphabet through recitation of the Torah in their religious schools. As the governments of the newly independent states decided to Arabize the educational system of their countries, the existing national cadres of teachers were pushed aside. A Casablancon Jewish woman remembers that by “1961–2 in our lycées, we were landed with teachers coming from countries such as Syria and Egypt. Their culture was not Moroccan, either in religious or other terms.”<sup>47</sup> Jews and Muslims in Morocco occupied interconnected but distinct cultural spheres; now young Moroccans were being reoriented away from French and toward the Middle East and back to the Arab language. This was another factor leading to the breakdown of the entente between Jews and Muslims in the Maghreb.

Jews never completely accepted the notion of Arabic as a modern language, essential to their future. After all, Judeo-Arabic had come to be seen both by the Alliance, then by Maghrebi Jews themselves, as part of their primitive past. In order to undo the changes that had taken place under the Protectorate, Jews would have to resort to rigorous immersion, an uncomfortable re-Arabization. Armand Lévy recalls a conversation with Abraham Serfaty took place in 1957, after the latter decided to send his son to a Quranic school to learn classical Arabic. “Ma surprise était d’autant plus grande que je connaissais les idées de la laïcité de mon interlocuteur... Je restais

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<sup>46</sup> See Fouad Laroui’s provocative essay *Le drame linguistique marocain* (Casablanca: Le Fennec, 2011). Laroui argues that classical Arabic should be replaced by *darija* as the language of government, scientific research, and literature in Morocco, putting an end to the written/oral divide that has impeded literacy campaigns and has encouraged the continued use of French.

<sup>47</sup> Emanuela Trevisan Semi, “Double Trauma and Manifold Narratives,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 9.1 (2010): 107-125 (115).

étonné quelques instants, puis je compris à la réflexion que cet homme avait raison.”<sup>48</sup> Despite his resolutely secular Marxist ideology, Serfaty understood on a practical level that Jews would never be able to fully integrate into the new Morocco, without knowledge of its official language: literary Arabic based on Quranic texts.

For most Jews, however, the notion of sending their children to a Quranic school seemed beyond the pale. In the pre-colonial period, Jews and Muslims educated their children separately, with religious instruction privileged over secular learning. Most parents continued to send their children to Hebrew school alongside the Alliance, demonstrating their skepticism toward the quality of the Hebrew and Torah taught there. Even as late as the 1960s, Jewish parents felt comfortable sending their children to learn in a Jewish environment. How could they countenance having their children’s education based on the Quran and Islamic literature?

At the other extreme of the educational spectrum, French institutions such as the famous Lycée Carnot in Tunis continued to have a majority French staff well into the 1960s.<sup>49</sup> None other than Michel Foucault spent 1966-1968 as a professor at the Université de Tunis. In this environment, students like Collette Fellous continued on with the same baccalaureate subjects as any other French student. In 1967, just before the riots around the British and American embassies, and later the synagogue, Fellous was reading up for her exam on: “La littérature est-elle art ou arme?”. While an important question for students in France and Tunisia, many of whom would take to the streets not long after to contest the legitimacy of the existing regimes; it remained an abstract exercise for Fellous, who dreamed of society life in Paris. Rather than reading anything related to Tunisia itself, her foundational reading experiences were with Nietzsche, Rimbaud and Lautréamont. The world inside the *Lycée Carnot* came into question

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<sup>48</sup> Armand Lévy, *Il était une fois les juifs marocains*, 150.

<sup>49</sup> The *Lycée Carnot* remained a French overseas school under the aegis of the *Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale* until 1983, when it came under Tunisian control as the *Lycée Habib Bourguiba*.

when Fellous and other female students (whether “European,” those with French citizenship, or “Tunisian,” indigenous Jews and Muslims) were verbally harassed in Arabic while walking home from their classes. On the day of her departure, she ended next to a Muslim man from the Tunisian south who spoke only Arabic. They communicated as best they could, which led her to another reflection on her ignorance of her country’s most widely spoken language. For Fellous’s generation (born between 1940 and 1950), the pact has been sealed. She and her brothers only know the rudiments of Arabic by the time they leave Tunisia in the 1960s: “je sais dire merci en arabe. Je sais aussi dire bonjour, comment allez-vous, de quelle ville êtes-vous, excusez-moi, à demain, bonne nuit” (*Avenue de France* 61). These basic expressions become dramatically insufficient after independence, as Europeans gradually leave the country. By educating their young in French along the lines of the French system, parents all but ensured that they would end up going to France for higher education. Tunis’s only university institution in the 1960s lacked many different academic tracks that were available in France.

Morocco offered another case, in which Jews were generally much more proficient in Arabic. Whereas the Tunisian middle class youth such as Fellous, Moati, and others could say only a few words in Arabic, the average Moroccan Jewish youth born around the same time usually spoke at a more conversational level. Moroccan Jews’ Arabic fluency involved significant code-switching with French, sometimes beginning sentences in one language and ending them in the other. Whereas Tunisian Jewish writers often describe themselves as set apart from Muslims, Bob Oré Abitbol uses the notion of understanding half of what it meant to be Moroccan. While his mother entertained the women’s table at a dinner shared by Jews and Muslims in his neighborhood, Abitbol followed as best he could. “Comme je ne comprenais qu’à



moitié, je ne riais qu'à demi."<sup>50</sup> Abitbol's story mirrors that of many other working-class Casablanca Jews. His parents and elders spoke Judeo-Arabic as a first language, though they were functionally competent in French (though his father was illiterate, his mother worked as a secretary in an office). Bob, on the other hand, had no formal instruction in Arabic. His generation's half-knowledge of Arabic parallels their sense of being only partly involved in the political changes in Morocco.

Carlos de Nesry also writes of the hybrid language that young Casablanca Jews continued to speak after independence became a reality and the state's Arabization campaign began in earnest. "Des jeunes gens passent, alternant dans leurs propos le français et l'arabe. La vérité marocaine aurait-elle le visage de cette adolescence hybride ? ... Où sont les problèmes posés par le Maroc nouveau, les interrogations dramatiques sur nos destinées dans ce pays ?" (*Israélites marocains* 16). Yet the young hybrid Jews who de Nesry wrote of were dreaming of studying and settling in Paris or Montréal, precisely what most of their teachers at the Alliance had prepared them for.

If during the post-independence period, new points of reference were introduced into the Jewish schools, including ancient and medieval Judeo-Arabic masters such as Bahya Ibn Paquda and Maimonides from Andalusia or Saadia Gaon in Babylon, it could not reverse decades of the idolization of more contemporary French cultural heroes such as Victor Hugo and Emile Zola. Language continued to orient young Jews' lives away from their Muslim peers, who were invested in becoming the next generation of political and economic leaders. After moving away from the *mellah* (Casablanca) or *hara* (Tunis), the linguistic transformation was reinforced. Armand Abécassis describes his return to the *rue de Fez* in the mellah after having moved out to

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<sup>50</sup> Bob Oré Abitbol, *Le goût des confitures*, 17.

the most Jewish, middle-class *rue Lacépède*. Running into his former Muslim playmate Mohammed, Abécassis had to confront the breach that had formed between them.

When Abécassis invited Mohammed to come play soccer over in his new neighborhood, Mohammed put his finger on the central issue: “[Tes amis], parlent-ils français ou arabe? – Ah, surtout le français! Peu d’arabe!” As Mohammed understood intuitively, he would not be at home in this new space. He said as much to Armand, “Comment veux-tu alors qu’ils me comprennent? Je ne parle que l’arabe, moi. Au moins, quand vous parliez en français parfois, vous me traduisiez et vous vous moquiez de moi !” (*Rue des synagogues* 70). For Abécassis and others his age, speaking French had affective consequences as well as political ones. In aligning the community with France, the Alliance also indirectly encouraged the community to sever its ties within older networks of Jewish-Muslim sociability and conviviality.<sup>51</sup>

### **And if it hadn’t been France? Counterfactual speculations**

Part of the Alliance’s ideology and the overall French justification for colonization was the supposed superiority of French as the language of universal culture. The decreasing knowledge of Biblical and liturgical Hebrew, the language of traditional Jewish culture and the disengagement from the Central European *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) and *Nahda* (nineteenth century Arab cultural renaissance) were all directly related to the place of French in Maghrebi Jewish education. Collette Fellous’s notion of having signed a pact with France or having taken France in bulk (“en vrac”) certainly applied to this process, whereby North African Jews had accepted the idea of French superiority.

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<sup>51</sup> Michael Laskier, “Aspects of the Activities of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in the Jewish Communities of the Middle East and North Africa: 1860-1918” *Modern Judaism* 3.2 (1983), 147-171 (151-152, 162).

Yet the question of what would have happened if France had never colonized the Maghreb frequently (re)emerges in autobiographical reflection. Armand Abécassis and his fellow students at the *Ecole Moïse Nahon* found that their professor Isaac Amsellem (an Algerian Jewish Alliance teacher fleeing the outbreak of the Algerian War) challenged them to realize the importance of their Moroccaness. As the boys argued about what would have been if France had not colonized Morocco, Amsellem interjected: “C’est facile... les juifs marocains auraient continué à parler arabe et à s’instruire en arabe, comme les juifs américains en anglais, et les Juifs français en français” (*Rue des synagogues* 274). This simple realization deeply upset Armand and his peers, forcing them to admit the disdain they felt toward Arabic culture, which they preferred to think of as belonging to the Muslim other. “Je trouvais cruelle la conclusion de notre professeur, parce qu’elle nous remettait en question nous-mêmes. C’est une vérité dure à dire et à écrire aujourd’hui” (ibid). Amsellem’s remark made the boys take stock not only the arbitrary nature of their commitment to France, but also of their own racism and how they had benefited from the colonial system that had oppressed Muslims.

While Abécassis’s counterfactual leads him to scathing criticism of the Alliance’s role in de-Morcanizing and de-Judaizing its pupils, Colette Fellous as author/narrator finds the prospect of speaking another language besides French easier to imagine. The recurring description of the interior of her family’s home conjures up words from many languages, French for the print of Cézanne’s *Joueurs de cartes*, Berber for the rugs, Italian for pictures of Venice, and so on. Colette wishes that she had inherited words from each of the languages as well as the objects, but they remained intangible. She prefers observing the world around her as opposed to trying to capture it with words. “Si la France n’avait touché ces côtes d’Afrique, je n’aurais peut-être parlé que l’arabe. J’aurais peut-être été muette. Je n’en sais rien. J’aurais peut-être parlé l’italien, le

berbère, l'espagnol, le portugais et d'ailleurs je m'en fiche, ça m'est égal de savoir ou de ne pas savoir, je préfère regarder, écouter" (*Avenue de France* 161). Fellous' writing itself evokes the tension between an irresistible return to her origins and her desire to lose herself in travel.<sup>52</sup>

Albert Naccache too came to reflect on the strange destiny of so many Jews, ending up in France, a land to which that they had no long-standing connection. Given the predominance of Italians in Tunisia throughout the colonial period and how close Italy came to taking Tunisia for itself, "nous aurions été pleinement de culture italienne et nous nous serions retrouvés à Rome ou à Milan, ce qui montre qu'il n'y eut pas de véritable choix" (*Les roses* 140). Naccache disrupts the notion of "chosenness" that Jewish Francophiles had given to the history of French colonization (i.e. that France had come to bring the values of the revolution and the rights of man to North Africa, and especially to Jews).

Bob Abitbol and Serge Moati, both minors when Morocco and Tunisia gained independence, faced a rather different prospect, as we will see in chapter three. His whole family ended up going to France and Canada, but Abitbol later found out from his mother that she had considered having him sent to Israel, only to change her mind at the last minute. When Serge Moati's father passed away in 1956, followed by his mother in 1957, his uncle André who had already moved to Israel argued that Serge should be placed in a kibbutz. His older sister and writer Nine was going to Paris for her university studies and intervened to take Serge with her. He wonders what would have happened to him in Israel, though without much interest. At the age of 13, he already knew where he wanted to go: Paris. "Ma famille était sûrement sortie peu de temps auparavant de ce ghetto, et moi, je ne voulais pas y retourner! On avait fui: je n'y

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<sup>52</sup> Besides being a novelist, Fellous created and hosts *Carnet nomade*, a radio program on *France Culture* in which she travels around France and the world, interviewing artists, writers, historians and everyday people.

reviendrais pas. En France, au lycée, plus tard, je me suis arraché de l'accent de là-bas.”<sup>53</sup> Once again migration and being at home are formulated in terms of language. The word “arraché” reminds us of ripping out the roots of a tree or a confession in interrogation. Serge finally becomes French once he no longer carries the accent that belied his Maghrebi origins. If the first generations of Maghrebi Jews living and working under colonial rule tended to regard French as the ticket to socio-economic advancement and cultural prestige, Fellous, Naccache and others look back much more ambivalently. While these writers admit that French was determinant in their own lives and that of their community, their appraisal of the association between Mediterranean Jews and French as “arbitrary” represents a deeply undermining assertion.

After such reflections on the uncertainty over the “langue maternelle,” the authors’ highly reflexive and performative relationship with written French and the historical arbitrariness of French as the premier language of Maghrebi Jewish diaspora, how does one come to understand the various poses of the Maghrebi Jewish writer? Or following Edmond El Maleh’s formula, “qu’en est il quand une langue étrangère envahit le lit de la langue maternelle, se substitue à elle et prend possession de l’écriture ?” (*Café bleu*, 72) Can the (true) mother tongue come back to take its rightful place? Despite this painful admission and realization at the heart of El Maleh’s work, he asserts that the living connection between Europeanized child and Arab mother, French writer and Judeo-Arabic oral culture remained the true source of his literary creativity. “Dans la matrice de la langue maternelle vous pouvez vous retourner à l’infini, ouvrir tous les chemins, trace en rêve tous les parcours, rompre tous les cordons, mais vous ne pouvez oublier la tiède tendresse du tissu qui les enserre” (78). Whatever the writer brings to the text in terms of craft, memory will always precede and exceed it. El Maleh integrates more Judeo-Arabic into his texts without immediate restatement or paratextual translations than almost any other Judeo-Maghrebi

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<sup>53</sup> Serge Moati, *Du côté des vivants* 103.

writer. Beyond raising the question of readability for the French reader, his use of Judeo-Arabic goes to the heart of his literary project, elaborated in the preface for the 2000 edition of his first book, *Parcours immobile*. El Maleh affirms without hesitation that Judeo-Arabic *is* the mother tongue. Yet, he writes only in French. Seeing his project as a balance between tradition and destruction, he aims to “subvertir cette langue acquise et fait basculer le monde qu’elle sous-tend en l’autre, celui de la langue maternelle refoulée au prix d’une catastrophe inépuisable” (17). El Maleh desires to denaturalize French, to make it accommodate Judeo-Arabic rather than the other way around. El Maleh’s work explores the limits of such a project of recuperation in his novels / memoirs.

His notion of a dynamic written tribute to all things Judeo-Arabic finds a parallel in André Nahum’s work. Nahum published one of the earliest autobiographical works describing Tunisian Jewish exile after independence, *Partir en kappara* in 1977. A medical doctor who remained in Tunisia after independence, believing his place was with the young nation, Nahum eventually left for France, disappointed with the discrimination he faced as a Jew. Yet, Nahum remained deeply attached to Tunisia, and more specifically to the everyday life and speech of the Jewish community in Tunis. The title of his first book itself draws from an expression heard in Jewish communities around the Maghreb, “Nemché yènè Kappara aêlék” translated in French as “Que je meure à ta place”. The word kappara is derived from the Hebrew “kippour” for sacrifice. Hence, Nahum established himself in Judeo-Arabic from the beginning of his career as a French author.

The streets of Tunis constitute the primordial spaces of Nahum’s narratives. If the home and synagogue were the fundamental Jewish spaces in Casablanca and Tunis, the streets were the domains where Jews interact intensely with other Mediterraneans: Arabs, Black Africans,

Maltese, Sicilians, Italians, Spaniards and Portuguese. Whereas Parisian French reigned in the schools, the language of the streets, sometimes known as *sabir*, was a mixture of the various dialects. In Tunis, the fruit and vegetable sellers were experts, “mélangeant allégrement l’arabe, l’arabe, le français, l’italien pour vanter ses produits” (*Tunis-la-Juive raconte* 18). Nahum and Bob Abitbol remember nutsellers in Tunis and Casablanca respectively playing off colonial public health discourse to increase their profit margins: “*Pistaches, z’amandes, voilà les bon takouits...! Bel Bidouze Ya! Pistaches, amandes grillées, voilà les bons fortifiants! Avec de la vitamine B 12! Oui!*” (19). In Casablanca, Abitbol also remembers the exaggerated call of one Arab vendor for “almendras kilométricas,” vaunting the size of the product. This playful appropriation of Spanish illustrates how each group, while strongly adhering to their communal identity, were capable of taking on the other’s words and voice.

### **The Name of the Author, The Name of the Other**

In addition to cataloguing the remarkable variety of street vendors’ language, Nahum has a small chapter on nicknames, familiar to any reader of Judeo-Maghrebi literature. By the outbreak of World War II, most Jews in Casablanca and Tunis had some combination of a French first name, whether a “Christian name” (Colette, Gisèle, Albert, André, Robert) or a Biblical name rendered in French, a Judeo-Arabic surname (Fellous, Halimi, Naccache, Nahum, Abitbol) and finally nicknames that deformed the French names Jews had acquired. Known as *simra* (from Hebrew) or *kharja* (from Arabic), these usually took the forms of diminutives, but also deformed the original French to make it fit in the local context.

Nahum lists some of the most common: “Chou’â (Sauveur), Kiki (Jacob), Chouchou (Joseph), Chmi’en (Simon), Rirette (Henriette), Bébert ou Braitou (Albert), Toutou, Sissi

(Nessim), Zizette, Gagou (Isaac), Guguss (Gustave), Lalou, Lilo (Elie), Zeiza (Louise), Tita (Esther), Vivi, Maxo” (59). In a French classroom, students would want to be addressed by their “proper” French name, hoping to avoid their full name with its Arabic and Hebrew connotations. Especially in Tunis, where access to French public schools was far more common, having one’s full name read out from the role in front of the whole class would expose the Jewish child to ridicule in front of metropolitan and pied-noir schoolmates. Attempting to distance themselves from Arabs, Jews were caught short in their assimilation.

While the adoption of French first names continued even for those Jews who remained in Morocco and Tunisia after independence, the vast majority of Jews never considered changing their family names. Once again, Maghrebi Jews adapted a certain amount from French, but held on to what they considered to be the most important marker of identity, the family name. In the few cases where the younger generation attempted make a total break with Hebraic naming traditions for male children, as Albert Memmi’s protagonist does in *Agar* it the source of major conflict.<sup>54</sup>

Later in France, the practice of deforming the French first name would fall away under the pressure to professionalize. In an inventory of where his friends have gone, after leaving Morocco, Bob Abitbol remembers one such case: “Jojo Benzaquine, à Paris. Il paraît qu’il a très bien réussi mais qu’il s’appelle Jean-Luc maintenant. Faut s’adapter” (*Le goût des confitures*, 21). While in North Africa, to go by a nickname meant being part of the community, of those that knew where one came from and had no illusions about their Jewishness. Losing that familiarity parallels the common depiction of exile as a collective process of disillusionment and growing up.

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<sup>54</sup> See Memmi, *Agar* 90-91.



The hybrid composition of the Judeo-Maghrebi name reveals the specter of assimilation inherent to colonial modernization. The “Christian name” supposed to belong to that individual, setting them apart from others in the group. Yet for Jews the origins of this name were foreign, keeping with the newly acquired French dimension of their collective identity. Yet to keep Judeo-Maghrebi family names in exile highlights the Arab origins of these immigrants. Names such as Abitbol, Benbaruk, Moati, Fellous, Naccache, Teboul, Haddad, all derive directly from Arabic, and in some cases are shared by Christians and Muslims in or from the Arab world.

In contemporary French political discourse, some center-right thinkers, including the ex-communist Tunisian Jewish writer Guy Sitbon, asserted that North African Muslims should consider changing their family names in order to be accepted in France.<sup>55</sup> Sitbon’s assimilationist turn is all the more remarkable because of his autobiographical novel *Gagou* that plays extensively with the politics of naming in colonial Tunisia. For the present however, the memorializing, genealogical approach seems to have triumphed in Judeo-Maghrebi literature. Given the desire to reconnect with Maghrebi roots as representatives of the last Jewish generation born there, authors’ affirm rather than agonize over the hybridity of their names, “véritables révélateurs d’une origine” even after religious practice has diminished or Arabic no longer reigns in the home. (Dugas, *Littérature judéo-maghrébine* 104) Their claims to multiple identities, French, Jewish and Maghrebi, are all contained in the name,

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<sup>55</sup> See Guy Sitbon and Hamid Barrada’s conversations, ed. Philippe Gaillard, *L’arabe et le juif: dialogue de guerre* (Paris: Plon 2004).

## CHAPTER II

### COSMOPOLITANISM FROM BELOW IN CASABLANCA AND TUNIS: ENCOUNTERING THE OTHER IN THE EVERYDAY

Having examined, the complex linguistic identities that Maghrebi Jewish authors remember and restage in Chapter 1, we now move to how they write about space. Just as they incorporated words and phrases from other languages into their everyday speech, Jews' proximity to a whole host of others from around the Mediterranean left a lasting imprint on their sense of self. In this chapter, I will focus on Jewish memories of encountering the other in city spaces. We begin with the Jewish quarters, the mellah of Casablanca and the hâra of Tunis, supposedly impermeable islands of Jewish identity where we see visions of daily life that are much more porous. Next we see how Jews moved out from these neighborhoods into the "villes nouvelles," built for Europeans, but where they reestablished Jewish majorities in a building or on a particular street. While tracking these moves in space, I also highlight ways the non-Jewish other could be intimately involved in the "practice of everyday life"<sup>1</sup>: cooking, religious holidays, and music. Finally, we move to memories Jews participating in left-wing political movements to see what the possibilities and limits of Maghrebi cosmopolitanism were in an age of nationalism. I argue that the political utopia of the left failed in its rejection of everyday material cosmopolitanism in favor of an abstract notion of equality that necessitated the erasure of difference.

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<sup>1</sup> See Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien: Les arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), especially the section, "Pratiques d'espace," 39-89.

To make sense of how linguistically and religiously diverse populations in Tunis and Casablanca depended on each other in myriad facets of their daily existence, while retaining of strong sense of their difference, I draw on Benedict Anderson's rethinking of cosmopolitanism from "below" rather than "above," rooted in popular culture and street spaces as opposed to powerful elites.<sup>2</sup> Through an analysis of Chinese-Indonesian journalist Kwee Thiam Tjing's serialized memoirs, Anderson reconstructs the multilingual and multicultural urban life of Dutch-controlled Java in the 1920s, as well as the complex identification of colonized peoples with Indonesian nationalism and elements of European culture.<sup>3</sup> Anderson traces a cosmopolitan outlook in Kwee's work open to the flows of people, customs, languages and ideas that characterized the late colonial period, demonstrating how one could be a cosmopolitan without ever leaving the colony.

In the Maghreb too, the world came to even the poorest, most rooted members of the Jewish community. In addition to the extensive contacts with Jews from Europe and the Ottoman Empire, the trans-Mediterranean migrations of nineteenth century brought thousands of Europeans to the Maghreb. In Tunisia, the beys had been pressured by European consults to allow the free circulation of their subjects; these came from Malta (subjects of the British), Sicily, southern Italy, and Piemonte (all under the control of the Italian monarchy), and with numbers from Spain, Portugal, and Greece. Morocco too witnessed a substantial Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese migration.<sup>4</sup> These poor southern European immigrants formed distinct communities in the pre-colonial period and during the Protectorate, occupying a space distinct from the small French elite (the "Français de France" as they were commonly known) living in

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson, "Peculiar, Bracing Cosmopolitanisms in the Twilight of Empire" October 1, 2008, Lecture at Columbia University as part of the Committee on Global Thought series, electronically accessed at <[www.vimeo.com](http://www.vimeo.com)>

<sup>3</sup> Cynthia Foo, "Interview with Benedict Anderson" *Invisible Culture* 13 (2009): 4-21.

<sup>4</sup> Guy Dugas, Guy Dugas, "La Tunisie en partage" *Tunisie, rêve de partage* (Paris : Omnibus, 2005), iii-xii (ix).

closer contact with Muslims and Jews.<sup>5</sup> In Morocco and Tunisia, to paraphrase Anderson, the Mediterranean world came to the colony.

The two conditions that Anderson argues are necessary for the formation of egalitarian spaces among the colonized are: the relative powerlessness of all the non-European communities compared with the metropolis and the sudden increase in migration, with Europeans and others coming from outside the colony as well as villagers from the hinterland coming to the coastal cities. These transformations lead to a society where one had to speak (even if poorly) many different languages, be familiar with myriad religious practices, and where one became used to dealing with widely diverging ways of life in a given space. Anderson's notion of cosmopolitanism from "below" helps us rethink the Maghrebi situation in at least three ways.

First, he frames a kind of cosmopolitanism generated in the global South, comprised of regions that were prime zones of European intervention during the modern period. Second, the "below" means "among the colonized" themselves, in contrast to the colonizer's embrace of aspects of colonized culture in the creation of a supposedly universal poetics or aesthetics of exile.<sup>6</sup> Third, Anderson's focus on a diversity of actors, rooted in their respective communities, but engaging in forms of sociability that extend beyond them helps avoid the typical construction of minority cosmopolitan subjects as "deracinated" individuals who renounce their particular identities.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Laura Davi, "Entre colonisateurs et colonisés: les Italiens de Tunisie (XIXe-XXe siècles)" *La Tunisie mosaïque: diasporas, cosmopolitisme, archéologies de l'identité*, Jacques Alexandropoulos and Patrick Cabanel, eds. (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2000), 99-114.

<sup>6</sup> Edouard Glissant's reading of Saint-Jean Perse in *Poétique de la relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990) does just this, equating Perse's poetry of exile with a cosmopolitan critique of the totalizing spirit behind the totalizing culture of capitalist modernity. As a son of the *béké*, the planter class in the French Caribbean and a member of the French diplomatic service, Perse traveled extensively. As Benedict Anderson points out, he is the figure of what many consider to be the cosmopolitan, "it implies elitism, it implies travel, it implies access."

<sup>7</sup> See Will Hanley's insightful "Grieving Cosmopolitanism in Middle Eastern Studies" *History Compass* 6.5 (2008): 1346–1367, for an extensive critique of this position. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

If we focus in on the ways cosmopolitanism has been deployed in studies of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, we find the reproduction many of same tendencies Anderson decries: privileging of wealthy and mobile European elites as true cosmopolitans and a general papering over of class differences within communities. Will Hanley sums up the deficiencies of existing accounts as follows: “in writing about the Middle East, cosmopolitanism is characterized by a particular scope (focus on elites), a particular approach (invocation of a tag rather than pursuit of an idea), and a particular tone (grieving nostalgia).”<sup>8</sup> Hanley contends that historians tend to deliberately ignore the everyday cosmopolitanism of the poor, the rural and the religious, all groups who are thought not to have participated in circuits of European aesthetic and cultural modernity. While Hanley focuses on grief crystallized in memories of elite figures produced by colonial modernity, the question remains do grief or nostalgia for “lost” pasts, typically criticized as insidious desire for colonial hegemony or upper-class condescension toward the poor, hold out any critical potential?

Taking Hanley and Anderson’s important critiques into account, I highlight the rooted, everyday cosmopolitanism in the late colonial metropolises of Casablanca and Tunis through diasporic life-writing. This cosmopolitanism forces us to revise notions of Maghrebi society and cities and the various communities living in them as closed, hermetic entities. As Stuart Hall has argued, North Africa and the Levant were ideal spaces for a brand of “cosmopolitanism of trade”, in which “different cultures don’t merge into something entirely new, but they become known as places where many cultures coexist and there are many friendships... across cultural lines”.<sup>9</sup> I will attempt to highlight how autobiographies attempt to give an account of ordinary

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<sup>8</sup> Hanley, “Grieving Cosmopolitanism,” 1358.

<sup>9</sup> “Cosmopolitanism, Globalisation, and Diaspora: Stuart Hall in conversation with Pnina Werbner” *Anthropology and the new cosmopolitanisms: rooted, feminist, and vernacular*, ed. Pnina Werbner (New York: Berg, 2008), 345-365 (354).

people leading a cosmopolitan existence in everyday spaces. In the second section, I look at how political groups organized and imagined utopian spaces of coexistence between different communities in the Maghreb. The second section shows the strain caused by nationalism and the ultimate undoing of the *modus vivendi* established through the everyday. Political organizations represented the opposite of the intercommunal exchanges linked to food, music, and religious rituals, in which each community opened itself to the other, while reaffirming difference. Organizations like the Moroccan and Tunisian Communist Parties proposed to create formal equality by eliminating visible markers of difference altogether. After decolonization, this vision gave way to the feverish nationalism that swept the Arab world. Arabic language and Muslim practice became the unifying forces, leaving Jews to the side.

### **Everyday Practices of Cosmopolitanism in and outside of the Jewish Quarter(s)**

Life-writing's role in the fashioning of the individual and collective self's identity would perhaps seem to be a strange space for registering otherness, but in fact the description of "Jewish" places and the practices of everyday life in them nearly always reveals the fundamental presence of non-Jews in significant roles. This is true for the poor as much or more for the rich. Wealthier Jews, especially the Livornese, strove to associate themselves exclusively with metropolitan French and upper-class Italians, even during the summers at the beach.<sup>10</sup> Horizontal interactions between Jews and other marginal subjects in the protectorates (first and foremost Muslims, but also Black Africans, Spanish in Morocco, Sicilians and Maltese in Tunisia, and even some Black Americans after the Second World War) were part and parcel of making a

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<sup>10</sup> Alain Medam, "Jusqu'en fin d'adolescence, les étés s'étaient passés au Kram, entre la Goulette et Carthage, et même, plus précisément, le long d'une certaine rue du Kram où une fraction de la communauté juive italienne s'était établie, chaque famille n'étant qu'un élément partiel – mais indispensable ! – de la brochette clanique allant de la gare du chemin de fer Tunis-Goulette-Marsa à la Grande Bleue." ("De Tunis à Jérusalem à New York" 175).

living, but also took place in the context of entertainment and leisure. Through foodways, music, holidays, and political organizing, Jews could maintain interdependent relationships with others, in contrast to their relations with the French, often described through the registers of fear and envy. Each category, the dimension is in some way dependent upon the participation of non-Jews and connected Jews to other coreligionists from far away. Cultural interdependence was in fact encouraged by each group's minority status and distinct practices, rather than hindered by it. Hence we arrive at a model of cosmopolitanism that does not imply a fusion of cultures through the disappearance of each one's particularities, but rather a construction of the self with and through interaction with the other.

Cosmopolitanism has often been caricatured as a false universalism, a refusal to attach oneself to any one particular place that actually privileges rich, mobile Westerners.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, I highlight a cosmopolitan outlook in first-person plural Maghrebi Jewish life-writing that allows for rootedness with attachments and commitments that extend outward in multiple directions. In contrast to the common assumption that Jews' only interactions with colonized and colonizing was limited to commercial exchange, Maghrebi Jewish autobiography shows a profoundly shared culture. Indeed, even commerce implies much more than simply monetary considerations:

If only to exercise their professions, the Jews also needed to respect prevailing codes concerning the division of sexual roles, acceptable behavior according to each person's rank and tradition—in short, a whole set of social rules that assume common notions of categorization and thinking... Wherever we look, Jewish culture, in its regional diversity, was one of the constituent elements and variants of the larger culture of the Maghreb.<sup>12</sup>

One might argue that the presence of non-Jews in “Jewish” space and time was a function of the small size of the Moroccan and Tunisian Jewish communities relative to the overall Muslim

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<sup>11</sup> For example, in *Postcolonialism* Robert J.C. Young contrasts Gandhi's supposedly “rooted” resistance to English colonialism versus Nehru's rootlessness and lack of belonging. Once again, cosmopolitanism is characterized as a deracinated, elite phenomenon.

<sup>12</sup> Lucette Valensi, “Multicultural Visions: The Cultural Tapestry of the Jews of North Africa” *Cultures of the Jews*: (New York: Schocken Books, 2002): 165-210 (177). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

population, yet we must look not only at the practical reasons for such contacts, but why Jews look back with great fondness on these interdependent relations with multiple ethno-religious others.

Theorists of cosmopolitanism have posited public space as the defining character of a modern city which can produce forms of sociability that enable citizens to go beyond ethnic and religious differences.<sup>13</sup> This line of thinking pits the traditional “Arab” or “Muslim” city against the “European” city precisely around the question of non-sectarian public space. Orientalist urban studies portray the Maghrebi and Middle Eastern city comprised of communal quarters walled off from each other. In the context of Jewish studies, the tendency has been to transpose the concept of ghetto onto the non-Ashkenazi world. The ghetto as a symbol of cultural isolation, internal focus, destitution, etc. fits perfectly into the schema of the “Oriental” city divided along ethno-religious lines into hermetically sealed bastions.

A great deal of Maghrebi Jewish writers internalize these Orientalist views of Jewish quarters in their general descriptions, only to undermine them with concrete details. The words used to characterize the Jewish quarters of Casablanca and Tunis, mellah and the hara respectively, “éternité” appears with a remarkable frequency. Albert Memmi described the hâra of Tunis as “bâtie pour l’éternité.”<sup>14</sup> Carlos de Nesry wrote about the Casablanca mellah in 1959 as a “univers hors du temps” (*Israélites marocains* 11). The ambivalence of this phrase becomes clear when one reads the typical ideas about these Jewish quarters: that they are stuck in a mythic past, outside of the march of the time itself, “indifférent aux événements” (ibid 10). The mellah and hâra were eulogized even as they continued to exist, as though their way of life was destined to disappear. Hence the two-sided representation of the old Jewish quarters: they are witnesses to

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<sup>13</sup> André Raymond, “Islamic city, Arab city: Orientalism, myths and recent views,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 21.1 (1994), 3-18.

<sup>14</sup> Albert Memmi, *La terre intérieure: entretiens avec Victor Malka* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).



Jewish survival through faithfulness to tradition, but also grim relics of another era slated for demolition. Repositories of millenarian culture, the modern Jewish observer cannot help but look at them as embodiments of his or her own atavistic past.

Jewish quarters and communities in Tunis and Casablanca in the late colonial period were anything but static. Most Jews that could chose to move out of the Jewish quarters, while still returning for shopping and religious services.<sup>15</sup> Even the walls that used to separate them from the ville nouvelle were being demolished in favor of archetypal modern capitalist structure: the billboard. During the 1930s, the wall dividing the mellah from the Place de France gave way to a “palissade,” large boards which companies could rent as advertising spaces. The passerby on the European side saw only images of modern consumer goods; the Jewish child on the other side looked for gaps through to slip through. It was not long before the informal sector accommodated itself to the new order; second-hand merchants set up their wares on the mellah-side of the barrier. Salomon Benbaruk notes that the Second World War created a special windfall for them. “Derrière la palissade, c’était devenu un marché aux puces inimaginable par tout ce qu’on pouvait y trouver. Les voleurs venaient y écouler leur butin, depuis des lunettes, jusqu’au battle-dress américain.” (*Trois-quarts de siècle*, 61). The black market literally flourished as the obverse, obscene side of modernity. One could argue that billboards not only made the black market possible, but necessary, by encouraging people to buy the latest imports from France, over the artisanal products crafted in the mellah and medina. All but the wealthiest were unable to afford French goods at the department stores; hence the informal sector stepped in to fill the demand. The two-sided barrier controlled and redirected exchange between the mellah and the European quarter rather than preventing it.

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<sup>15</sup> Abécassis, *Rue des synagogues* 42-43.

The penetration of the modern into these quarters was not limited to peripheral spaces. In the heart of the mellah and hâra, one could hear French and see the effects of colonial modernity.<sup>16</sup> Yet no aspects of Jewish life in the Maghreb were and continue to be more mythologized than the Jewish quarters. The quarters were constantly attacked by colonial urban planners and community leaders on the grounds of public health and were razed after independence, such that there are few visible remains of the mellah and hâra in Casablanca and Tunis today.<sup>17</sup> In the late 1950s, Tunisian Jewish scholars Paul Sebbag and Robert Attal analyzed the hâra in Tunis, revealing the constant negotiation of space that took place during the quarter's transformation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Despite using the European term "ghetto," their analysis showed a dynamic, porous space of exchange, rather than the fixed relations with the outside traditionally ascribed to Eastern European ghetto.<sup>18</sup> More recently, Susan Gilson Miller<sup>19</sup>, Emily Gottreich<sup>20</sup>, and Jean-Louis Cohen<sup>21</sup> have shown that Jewish quarters in Tangier, Marrakech and Casablanca respectively, were much porous than previously assumed.

Salomon Benbaruk remembers the fabric of communal life in the mellah of Casablanca during the early years of French protectorate first and foremost as Jewish space. However,

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<sup>16</sup> See Elias Canetti's failed search for authentic Judeo-Arabic culture in the mellah of Marrakesh. When he enters into a house, his hosts proudly take him to the most European-style room of the house and speak to him in French. *The Voices of Marrakesh* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978).

<sup>17</sup> Richard Parks, "The Jewish Quarters of Interwar Paris and Tunis: Destruction, Creation, and French Urban Design" *Jewish Social Studies* 17.1 (2010): 67-87.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Attal and Paul Sebag, *L'Evolution d'un ghetto nord-africain: la hara de Tunis* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1959). It should be noted that scholars of European Jewries are strongly challenging the traditional notion of the ghetto completely closed off to the non-Jewish world. See Kenneth Stow, *Theater of Acculturation: The Roman Ghetto in the sixteenth century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001); Shaul Bassi, "From All their Habitations: The Venetian Ghetto and Modern Jewish Identity" *Judaism* 51.4 (2002): 469-480.

<sup>19</sup> Susan Gilson Miller, "The Beni Ider Quarter of Tangier in 1900: Hybridity as a Social Practice" in Susan Gilson Miller and Mauro Bertagnin, eds. *The Architecture and Memory of the Minority Quarter in the Muslim Mediterranean City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Emily Gottreich, "Rethinking the 'Islamic City' from the Perspective of Jewish Space," *Jewish Social Studies* 11:1 (2004): 118-146.

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Louis Cohen and Monique Eleb, *Casablanca: mythes et figures d'une aventure urbaine* (Paris: Editions Hazan, 1998).

Benbaruk highlights the presence of others with great frequency and in multiple spaces. Foodways once again provided shared practices bridging the gaps between disparate groups. Given the rural Andalusian origins of many Spanish immigrants, they tended to specialize in animal husbandry, coming into the mellah each morning with a herd of goats that they would milk for Jewish housewives.<sup>22</sup>

Moroccan-style tea, comprised of a base of strongly brewed green tea (most often Chinese gunpowder tea) combined with fresh mint and generous amounts of sugar, was a fundamental element of hospitality in Jewish and Muslim homes. Mint, absinthe and other herbs were used to make infusions long before tea arrived in Morocco through British influence in the early nineteenth century. As with other dimensions of Maghrebi foodways, Jews distinguished themselves from their Muslim counterparts by preparing their tea differently. Moroccan historian Abdelahad Sebti argues that one of the major variations in tea preparation came from Jews: “Moroccan Jews use a lot of mint and very little tea. So little in fact, that they often say, ‘I’ll have a glass of mint,’ meaning a glass of tea” (76). Despite the different quantities of mint used, the daily tea-drinking linked Muslims and Jews in a common practice of hospitality that foreigners came to think of as typically Moroccan, even though it originated with an English gift to the sultan. In an anecdote that reveals the intimate patterns of exchange and specialization, Salomon Benbaruk notes Jews in the mellah were able get around Sabbath restrictions through the presence of Muslim merchants. Forbidden from kindling fire, Jews would buy boiled water from Muslim charcoal vendors who set up giant vats in the streets on Saturday mornings. Jewish women only had to step outside their doors with their tea-pots (*Trois-quarts* 63). These small episodes demonstrate how Jews and Muslims had developed intimate knowledge about each other’s practices that created interdependence, and necessitated openness to the other’s presence.

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<sup>22</sup> Benbaruk, “Trois-quarts de siècle,” 62-63.

Shared foodways and music also provided a base for humor that brought actors from different communities. Benbaruk and Bob Abitbol remember the Sabbath as a day when Arab and sub-Saharan African street performers drew huge crowds in the Casablanca's Jewish neighborhoods (both the mellah, where Benbaruk grew up, and the new Jewish quarter concentrated around the rue Lusitania and rue Lacépède). Saadane, a trained monkey who pantomimed and danced, entertained the crowds after the substantial Shabbat lunch. Saadane's most popular sketch was "L'ihoudi sabaa skhina"<sup>23</sup> appear in Abitbol's text in French as "le juif après le dafina."<sup>24</sup> Saadane would arch his back, hobbling along, with his stomach protruding up in the air to imitate the Jewish members of the audience who would be full to bursting from the sumptuary Sabbath meal. Non-Jews were present in an intimate way on the holiest day of the week, the day which inscribes Jewish identity in a temporal framework setting them apart from their non-Jewish neighbors. Moreover the familiarity and intimacy that permitted such contacts was profound enough to allow for shared humor.

Finally, even Jewish houses and cemeteries allowed for the presence of others. Following a fairly widespread tradition in Morocco, Muslim men and women who grew in shared Jewish-Muslim houses (with separate apartments) might become engaged in businesses run by Jews. For instance, in Casablanca many families knew "un vieil Arabe qui proposait de laver les tapis à la fontaine, ayant grandi et vécu sans doute dans une maison juive, récitait les psaumes et les prières sans aucune hésitation. Il se mêlait quelquefois aux groupes de *haverim* [friends] au cimetière qui venaient lire des *hachkavoth* [the Sephardi memorial prayer] aux endeuillés." (Benbaruk, *Trois-quarts de siècle* 60). Even today, the Muslim caretakers of Jewish cemeteries and shrines will chant prayers in Hebrew for a modest sum. The boundaries between groups

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<sup>23</sup> Salomon Benbaruk, *Trois-quarts de siècle*, 64

<sup>24</sup> Bob Oré Abitbol, *Le goût des confitures*, 23

created opportunities for specialization and division of labor, such that whatever their inner feelings were about the other, their regulated presence in the Jewish quarter was nothing remarkable. In the next section, we see how Jews evoke the tastes of Casablanca and Tunis, revealing highly sophisticated mechanisms for affirming identity and otherness.

### **Jewish Adaptations of Mediterranean Foodways in the Late Colonial Period**

Previously regarded as a secondary effect of material culture or innocuous differences in “taste,” anthropologists such as Sidney Mintz have given prominence to the notion of “foodways” at the center of debates about collective identity and history.<sup>25</sup> Foodways denote not only what is consumed, but also the actors and spaces involved in its growing, cooking, and eating. Given the Maghreb’s long position as a crossroads both on land and sea, its cuisines offer a dazzling kaleidoscope of agricultural and gastronomic influences, but Jewish cuisine is fascinating for the ways that it dynamically incorporates external influences and synthesizes them with legal/religious concerns about group identity through *kashrut* laws. The creation of Jewish vernacular of circum-Mediterranean foodways exemplifies cosmopolitanism from below, in the sense that the Muslim and Christian others are borrowed from and depended upon, even while Jewish praxis provided a framework for subordinating these external influences into its symbolic universe.

More specifically, Maghrebi Jewish memory and diasporic identity have been established under the sign of food itself. Three of the four principal sites connecting Maghrebi Jewish communities online bear food names. Moroccan Jews meet at <dafina.net> (named for the

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<sup>25</sup> Sidney Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996). Diasporic practices of agriculture, cooking, and eating are increasingly at the center of foodways discourse, as in *Taking Food Public: Redefining Foodways in a Changing World*, Ed. Psyche A. Williams-Forsen and Carole Counihan (New York: Routledge, 2011).

Moroccan Sabbath dish), Tunisian Jews at <harissa.com> (a fiery red chile paste characteristic of Tunisian cuisine), and Algerian Jews at <zlabia.net> (a sweet dessert of Andalusian origins according to oral tradition). *Harissa* and *zlabia* are eaten by Jews and Muslims alike, in fact *zlabia* has become the pastry of preference during the nightly breaking of the fast during Ramadan. Though *dafina* emerged in response to the cooking conditions of the Sabbath, Muslims were intimately involved in various aspects of its fabrication and were admirers of its flavors. Thus, the words meant to symbolize Jewish identity are directly linked to culinary practices shared with Muslims.

Moroccan and Tunisian life-writing attests to the cosmopolitanism of foodways on multiple counts. First, through the multilingual vocabulary for fruits, vegetables and dishes, drawing on Arabic, Hebrew, Italian, French, Spanish, the principal linguistic sources in colonial Tunis and Casablanca. Second, Jewish writers remember the vital interaction with non-Jews at all the various steps of the culinary process, at the market, at communal ovens, and in the Jewish quarter. We see how Jewish tradition and law could both define strict boundaries around foodways to maintain difference as well as construct interdependences.

Food markets were exemplary cosmopolitan spaces in which various ethnic, linguistic and gender boundaries were crossed. As we saw in the previous chapter, learning the words for fruits and vegetables in the markets already linked the Jewish child to the Mediterranean and beyond. The example of sunflowers illustrates the importance of diaspora in creating cosmopolitan foodways. Originally from Mesoamerica, brought back to Spain by conquistadors, roasted sunflower seeds became an important food across colonial North Africa in street kiosks and by itinerant vendors. Sunflowers were supposed to have come to the Maghreb via Andalusian Jews and Muslims who were expelled in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries from

the Iberian Peninsula. (*Les roses* 70) Hence even native Jews were able to connect themselves to the glorious Sephardic past, through an ordinary snack.

The Arabs themselves brought more than a dozen crops from Persia, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent to the Maghreb and Iberia in the wake of their conquest, among them key components of Sephardic Jewish foodways as diverse as hard wheat, spinach, eggplant and various forms of citrus.<sup>26</sup> Retracing the routes of words for foods also illuminates diasporic movements for Maghrebi Jewish writers. In a reimagined historical encounter in *Du côté des vivants*, Serge Moati uses foodways to affirm rootedness. He imagines his father upbraiding Pierre Voizard, appointed Resident General in 1953, for claiming to know Tunisia better than him. Back at home, Serge waxes eloquent about the real Tunisia, which he locates in its diverse, colorful populace and their culinary repertoires. In addition to the Arab population that the colonial authorities regarded with a mixture of disdain and paranoiac suspicion, “y a tous les juifs (ça vous embête, hein?) et puis les italiens, longtemps plus nombreux que les Français, et les Siciliens, et les Maltais, et les Sardes, et les Grecs, et même les Russes blancs!” (161). Rather than using “taste” to prove one’s cultured status, Serge uses it to demonstrate rootedness and attachment. The ability to distinguish between different kinds of pasta dishes testifies to the average Tunis resident’s exposure to many different regional cuisines. A shared culture among the colonized revolves around their love for flavorful, spicy food the French found unrefined and virtually inedible. “De toute façon, vous auriez été malade, Monsieur le ‘Français-de-France’, en mangeant avec nous! Nous les Arabes, les juifs, les Maltais, les Siciliens, les Grecs, les Italiens, ce que l’on aime, c’est le piment fort et la harissa dans la bonne huile d’olive où on trompe le pain... Et plus le piment est fort, plus on adore ça !” (163). As noted earlier, the identification

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<sup>26</sup> Andrew M. Watson, “The Arab, Agricultural Revolution and Its Diffusion, 700-1100” *Journal of Economic History* 34.1 (1974), 8-35 (10).

with harissa is such that the Jewish community uses it as the name for the web forum that binds the diaspora together. Here the taste for spicy food distinguishes those who have adapted to the local environment against the colonizing elite, who are only “de passage”. In a curious iteration of Bourdieu’s analysis of taste to distinguish oneself and deploy one’s cultural capital, taste in the context of life-writing appears more as a marker of one’s rootedness and connection to a common Mediterranean culture.<sup>27</sup> It marks Jews as “indigenous” in a positive sense.

If the linguistic mixing at the market and on the streets demonstrates the simultaneous proximity and tension that permeated Jewish-Muslim relations in the public sphere, other culinary practices demonstrate a surprising level of dependence on the other. The typical perception of *kashrut* as a way of distinguishing Jews from their non-Jewish neighbors certainly is valid in the Maghrebi context, but it would be a mistake to read separation as isolation. Known as *adafina*, *t’fina* (“buried” in Arabic) or *skhina* (“hot dish” in Arabic), the *dafina* shows how Maghrebi Jewish foodways simultaneously marked the boundaries with and incorporated the other. The ingredients are prepared on Friday, put into the pot and then slowly simmered overnight either in the home, or more commonly in communal ovens owned by Muslims, who could continue working and kindling fire on the Sabbath unlike Jews. The dish is finally consumed for the second Shabbat meal on Saturday afternoon. The major dish of Maghrebi Jewish cuisine, the composition of *dafina* varies from community to community, nevertheless it functions as a sumptuary meal in terms of flavor and richness, as well as the time spent in preparation and cooking (typically 15 hours).

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<sup>27</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction: Critique sociale de jugement* (Paris: Editions du Minuit, 1979). For Bourdieu, taste is never solely based on the particularities of the individual’s personality, but rather is inculcated through education and everyday rituals. Yet Bourdieu’s work does consider the way taste operates in colonial and cosmopolitan settings, where social class operates differently.



As stated earlier, even if *dafina* symbolizes Jewish particularity in the Maghreb, a careful reading of autobiographies reveals a number of ways in which it depended on the Muslim other. Though a Jewish mother would prepare the dish, the *dafina* would often be taken to and from the communal oven by young Muslim housekeepers, who would often partake in the meal afterward.<sup>28</sup> So while *dafina* was *stricto sensu* a Jewish dish, it involved Muslim culinary influences and labor in a direct way. Shabbat not only brought Muslims into sacralized Jewish domestic space, but also the sacralized Jewish quarter. Through the creation of an *eruv*, Jews could extend the space in which they could “carry” from the private (home) to the public (street). Yet certain restrictions remained regardless of one’s location, the most wide-reaching being the interdiction on making any kind of fire (extending to lighting a *kanoun* or a “primus” stove, the two most widely used heating devices in Maghrebi Jewish kitchens during the colonial period). In a devout Jewish community, maintenance of essential culinary practices required intimate collaboration with the non-Jewish other.

Lucette Valensi notes that the ingredients of the *tfina*, the Eastern Algerian and Tunisia version of the Moroccan *dafina*, made a statement about Jewish difference that was physically consumed. It aided religious transmission among communities where women had little access to sacred language or texts, except through daily practices passed on from one generation to the next.

The ingredients included not just kosher meat but beef as well, the pinnacle of the hierarchy of licit animals, and especially the foot of the ox, as if the meal must illustrate and concretize the commandments of Leviticus. To distinguish beef and to devalue lamb, when the majority Muslim population preferred the latter, was also to state difference and affirm identity and otherness in terms of taste.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Bob Oré Abitbol, *Le goût des confitures*, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Valensi, “Multicultural Visions,” 184.

Nevertheless, Jews embraced nearly all of the same ingredients and flavors of their Muslim neighbors. When the French, Spanish, and Italians arrived, their traditions also became integrated. Even if the *dafina/finna* remained particularly adapted to Sabbath and kosher laws, many Muslims even today remember tasting the Jewish other through this dish. The *dafina* features prominently in Jacob Cohen's novel, *Les noces du commissaire*, set in Casablanca in the 1980s. Joseph Sayyag, one of the leaders of the dwindling Jewish community hosts a Muslim government official for Sabbath dinner. The conversation turns to the increasing marginalization of Jews in contemporary Morocco, and their uncertainty about the future. The Muslim official tells Joseph that he would never be able to live without the unique flavor of the *dafina* (146-147). This remark, made half in jest, nevertheless reveals how the *dafina* came to symbolize Jewish difference, but also the vital Jewish role in Moroccan society.

### **Street Vendors as Cosmopolitan Actors**

Jewish autobiographers remember their homes as important venues for the intersection and collision of cultures and cuisines. On an even more radical level, culinary streetscape of colonial Casablanca and Tunis eroded boundaries between rich and poor, among Jews, Muslims and Christians, between southern Europe and North Africa. As noted in the previous chapter, street vendors in Casablanca and Tunis mastered a variety of languages to entice their diverse clienteles. Their calls reconfigured words, expressions, and accents into a cosmopolitan grammar. Symbols of unfettered mobility, crossing from the city center to the beaches, from communal enclave to another, they defied the colonial order of things that attempted to maintain groups in identifiable categories. As such, street vendors are appealing ciphers for authors who wish to convey the multiplicity of their own past and identity. Just as the street vendor freely

strolls, constructing a map of the city all his own, so Jewish writers move through history and memory.

Collette Fellous uses a kind of stream-of-consciousness narration to map her journey through Tunis, with food vendors as the major landmarks along the way. Her impressionistic, poetic register remaps the city through lived experience, corresponding with Michel de Certeau's account of the ways residents of cities defy the urbanist's attempt to create "un espace *propre*" where all activities are regulated and organized from the top down. The vendors' semi-nomadism, their ability to interrupt the rational flow of traffic, to create transitory public spaces outside French control, their polyglot nature all contribute to making them "lieux de mémoire" for a bygone cosmopolitanism.

Among the colorful figures among street life, an Arab nut vendor known as "Ravaillac" makes an appearance in multiple Tunisian Jewish authors' works. His strange nickname came from François Ravaillac, the Catholic nobleman who assassinated Henri IV in 1610. The vendor, though illiterate, claimed secret knowledge of the conspiracy to kill Henri IV and the identity of the King's real assassin. Ravaillac and the other nut vendors circulated between the city center and the beach suburbs (La Goulette, Le Kram, Khéredine, La Marsa) where Tunis residents went to escape the intense summer heat. For Tunisian Jewish writers these vendors were as much a part of the beach experience as swimming. For Maya Nahum's protagonist Malou Saadun, Ravaillac becomes one of the few people she can count on in a world full of unspoken tensions. Malou wants to be able to liberate herself from the constraints placed on her by her family, and identifies with Ravaillac as a symbol of absolute freedom.

## “La fête”: Sumptuary Meals and Openness to the Other

In the same way that Malou identifies with the itinerant street vendor as a possibility for escaping the contradictions of post-colonial Tunisia, Collette Fellous’s short piece “Avenue de Paris, à côté de la synagogue”<sup>30</sup> situates the reader in the author’s *flânerie* through the city, moving from the present back to a spectral past, arriving at a strange reconciliation of historical disjuncture through the smells, sounds and sights of Tunis’ streets. Suffused with melancholy for her youth and the past, she rediscovers “la fête” of street life that characterizes her memories of Tunisia. Rather than looking to the monumental (synagogue) to confirm the indigeneity of Jewishness, Fellous finds its traces in sensory experience.

Ces passants que je croise rejoignent mon être le plus ancien, on dirait qu’ils se préparent toujours pour une fête et en même temps ils sont inquiets, désordonnés, rieurs, magnifiques personnages de la rue, ils se frayent un chemin entre l’arabe, le français et l’italien, au milieu d’odeurs de gingembre et de cannelle qui débordent sur les trottoirs. (ibid)

Fellous’s *flânerie*, spatially localized but temporally unbounded, breaks down the post-colonial evacuation of minority populations. While the different languages would be associated with the different groups that made up urban life in Tunis, the ginger and cinnamon belong to no one group. The movement of aromas through the city shows how Fellous’s writing invests the everyday with the “fête,” one the central themes of her work. Drawn from the constant preparation for one religion’s holiday or another, the commotion of people shopping, cooking, and sharing foods for holidays is at the heart of her memories of the past.

Nous ne nous posons pas de questions directes sur nos différences, nous les sentions et nous les reconnaissons en silence c’est tout. Sans avoir besoin ni envie d’en parler. Avec les Ladjimi, les Sroussi, les Kritikos et les Spiteri nous nous échangeons des assiettes de gâteaux, à Pâques, à Noël, pendant le Ramadan, pour la fête des cabanes ou celle de la Madone, on ne sait même plus ce que nous fêtions, nous aimions simplement saluer les saisons avec des goûts différents, c’est ce qui nous unissait. (*Aujourd’hui* 84).

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<sup>30</sup> Colette Fellous, “Avenue de Paris, à côté de la synagogue” *Les Cahiers du Judaïsme* 25 (2009): 64-67.

Indeed, the insoluble dilemma of the post-colonial period, which Jewish life-writing struggles against, is that the diverse populations of the Maghreb had to “name” their differences definitively and cut ties with other places and ways of life that were constitutive of their multiform identity. Besides changing the meaning “fête” from a specifically Jewish act to a Tunisian act that everyone participated in, Fellous also destabilizes and desacralizes holidays by showing practical importance of holidays over their orthodox religious interpretations. In *Le Petit Casino*, Colette’s mother has the children fetch their cat Bambino for the Passover *Haggadah*, where he becomes the fourth child, who remains silent because he does not know how to ask the ritual questions.

Le chat se laissait faire, il était habitué. Il nous regardait croquer une herbe amère, nous passer de main en main le bras de l’agneau, faire la grimace en goûtant ce mélange bizarre de dattes, de raifort, de grenades, de noix et d’écorces d’oranges, avaler une gorgée d’eau salée ou réciter en chœur la liste des plaies d’Égypte (21).

The children would hold Bambino’s paw over the bread and close to the light of the candles so he would be included in ritual gestures that bound them to the exodus, the fundamental act of leaving exile for homeland. Yet Fellous’s description insists on the gustatory aspects of the celebration, in which the sheer number of contrasting ingredients and tastes leave an indelible memory. Just as with the *dafina*, Passover’s edible allegories were understood instinctively, rather than intellectually. The silent animal witnessing the acts adds to the incomprehension of the spectacle. Fellous, her brothers, and her parents, are they not also ineffective in describing their differences, repeating sacred gestures that will be only understood after exile? The figure for the other in Fellous’s Passover anecdote is her family’s cat, not Muslim or Christian neighbors. Nevertheless these too were directly implicated in the Jewish holiday cycle.

Holidays, both Jewish and non-Jewish, created special structured periods and spaces in which the normal boundaries that separated different colonized groups were transgressed.

Moroccan Judaism includes one holiday practiced nowhere else in the Jewish world: the *mimouna*, celebrated the day after Passover ends. The origins of the practice are not entirely clear, though Yigal Bin-Nun, a French-Israeli historian of Moroccan descent, makes a convincing case that it derives more from Arab-Berber and Sub-Saharan African tradition than from the Exodus narrative as one might assume.<sup>31</sup> Rather than being etymologically related to Maimonides, Bin-Nun notes that one of the terms for luck in Arabic is in fact “mimoun.” Examining the foods served at the table and the songs chanted, Bin-Nun argues that the ceremony is designed to appease and entice “Lady Luck,” embodied by a pair of spirits named *Mimoun* and *Mimouna*, attested to in medieval Spanish texts as well as by Jewish travelers in Morocco in the pre-colonial period.

In a typical *Mimouna* dinner table one finds: “live fish swimming in a bowl of water, five green fava beans wrapped in dough, five dates, five gold bracelets in a pastry bowl, dough pitted with five deep fingerprints, five silver coins, five pieces of gold or silver jewelry” all of which are symbolic of luck throughout the Maghreb. Besides the *khamisa*, the number five, and fish which would ward off the evil eye and ensure prosperity, the *Mimouna* dinner marked the return of *hametz*, those items that had been removed from the house during Passover. Muslim neighbors and friends, either symbolically purchased these items from Jews before the holidays and then returned them, or in other cases spontaneously brought *hametz* to Jewish homes. Jews in turn would leave their doors open for Muslims to come in, opening the “private” sphere of the home up to the “public”: the neighborhood and the city.

Salomon Benbaruk remembers in Casablanca, on the morning of the *Mimouna*, Muslims brought not only *hametz*, “de la farine, de la levure, du pain, du petit lait, du miel, du beurre” but also elements that represented the rebirth of the natural world through spring: “fleurs des

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<sup>31</sup> Yigal Bin-Nun, “Lady Luck”, *Ha'aretz*, April 8, 2007.

champs, des épis de blé, de la menthe, des mimosas, du romarin, des coquelicots, des fèves vertes.” These beautiful and fragrant gifts were offered by Muslims “avec beaucoup d’affection, à leurs amis juifs... en présentant leurs vœux de bonne fête.”<sup>32</sup> He also remembers that the working-class Spanish women who lived in and around predominantly Jewish neighborhoods sold handcrafted paper flowers in the streets and wished Jews good luck using the Judeo-Arabic expression “trebho” (“may you prosper”) customary on the Mimouna.<sup>33</sup>

Through “un accueil sans restriction” as Armand Lévy describes it, the *Mimouna* temporarily upset boundaries even as it reaffirmed them.<sup>34</sup> While Muslims openly came into the Jewish home, the fact that they brought the prohibited *hametz* back into Jewish homes symbolically confirmed their difference. Even though the articles were no longer impure, it is significant that Muslims became one of the primary vectors for their return into the home. This practice shows the broader role that Muslims played in the Jewish imaginary, their symbiotic relationship confirmed interdependence based on differentiation.

Cakes and desserts, prominently featured in religious holidays and some of the most memorable markers of the celebration for children, do not serve a primarily nutritional function. As sumptuary foods, they represent indulgence and luxury. Their sweetness also comes to represent the nostalgia for the lost homeland. As mentioned earlier, the main website representing Algerian Jews, <zlabia.net> takes its name from the one of the country’s most well-known desserts. Tunisian-Israeli painter Raphael Uzan’s oral history of his Nabeul childhood, edited by Irene Awret, entitled *Days of Honey*. This choice inverts the Biblical verse where God describes the Promised Land as a “land of milk and honey.” (Exodus 3:8) The sweetness of life on the Tunisian coast serves as metonymy for the paradise of youth and Jewish-Arab coexistence

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<sup>32</sup> Salomon Benbaruk, *Trois-quarts de siècle pêle-mêle*, 27-28.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Armand Lévy, *Il était une fois*, 69.

lost after the Second World War and Israeli independence destroyed the precarious balance between communities. Across the Maghreb, desserts prepared for ritual occasions took on the quality of amulets, representing not only the individual who made them, but the community that individual hailed from. Albert Naccache notes how “les chrétiens suspendaient bien dans leurs maisons des galettes de Pâque offertes par leurs voisins juifs et qui leur portaient bonheur!” (*Les roses de l’Ariana* 112). Easter and Passover celebrations were crucial moments for affirmation of Jewish-Christian difference. The exchange of desserts did not fully mollify the structural tensions contained in the liturgy, yet it added another layer of ritual that emphasized harmony rather than conflict.

Celebrated annually on August 15 with a parade of the statue of *Maria Santissima Annunziata* (more commonly known as the *Madonna di Trapani*) in the streets of La Goulette, the Festival of the Assumption was the most distinctive public holiday for immigrants from Italy and Sicily.<sup>35</sup> Along with the thousands who migrated to Tunisia in the nineteenth century, the Madonna symbolically made the voyage from Trapani on the west coast of Sicily, to La Goulette, which flourished as a fishing village with the new arrivals. Specifically known as the patron saint of fishermen, the procession ensured a good catch for the next year. Jewish and Muslim onlookers followed the procession as it wound its way through the port town, “dans une atmosphère bon enfant en criant à qui mieux mieux: ‘Viva la Madonna!’”.<sup>36</sup> The procession appeared another of the elements uniting Jews, Muslims, and Christians, such that Férid

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<sup>35</sup> Pierre Soumille, *Processions catholiques en butte à l’anti-cléricalisme européen dans la Tunisie des années 1905-1910*” *L’Eglise dans la rue: Les cérémonies extérieures du culte en France au XIXe siècle*, Ed. Paul D’Hollander (Limoges: Presse universitaire de Limoges, 2001), 169-185 (171-172).

<sup>36</sup> Corine Scemama-Ammar, *Les Derniers Magnifiques* 34.



Boughedir restaged the procession for *Un été à la Goulette*, his tribute to the cosmopolitanism of the past.<sup>37</sup>

### **Music and Dance, or Jews as Africans**

The Judeo-Arabic synthesis in and of itself represents a fascinating model of exchange and hybridity, but cosmopolitanism implies more than just an identification with two different cultures, it implies an openness to *multiple* others, an ability to be at home in *multiple* spaces. One of the more neglected dimensions in Maghrebi Jewish histories, and Maghrebi histories more generally, is the profound sub-Saharan influence on all aspects of North African life. As Hélène Tissières shows in her groundbreaking *Écritures en Transhumance*, the Sahara should not be understood as an impenetrable barrier between different African regions. Rather the caravan trade and the movement of people, both voluntary and forced, resemble Braudel's discovery of the Mediterranean, as a space for the circulation of ideas and traditions.<sup>38</sup>

One remarkable way in which Maghrebi Jews remember the “Africanness” of the late colonial Casablanca and Tunis is through the presence of musicians of sub-Saharan Africa. In Tunisia, the *Bousaadia* and *Rebaybia* were all elements of sub-Saharan culture that had been internalized. In Morocco, the *Gnaoua* musicians performed similar functions within the community. Jewish memories of these practices demonstrate the Black African elements in their own culture, as well as the internalization of European racism. While previous generations did not conceptualize the presence of people descended from slaves through a racial lens, the last generation of Jews born in the Maghreb before the great exile received notions of racial hierarchy from schools, the press, and most importantly, European and American cinema.

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<sup>37</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of Boughedir's film, see chapter five.

<sup>38</sup> Hélène Tissières, *Écritures en transhumance entre Maghreb et Afrique subsaharienne (littérature, oralité, arts visuels)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007).

Anxious to prove their Frenchness, the youngest Jews experienced African sounds and rhythms with a *jouissance* brought about from the simultaneous attraction and repulsion. They intuitively understood that their parents and grandparents were in fact part and parcel of this other “primitive” world. The anxiety over their own “Africanness” clearly manifests itself in these ambivalent memories.

The *Bousaadia* were itinerant street performers, identified as Black, whose name probably derives from their city of origin, Bou Saâda in Algeria. Located at the edge of the Sahara, the city functioned as an oasis, attracting caravan trade, during the colonial period, European travelers such as Isabelle Eberhardt.<sup>39</sup> Young men from Bou Saâda made their way to Tunisian towns and cities where they moved from neighborhood to neighborhood chanting, dancing with castanets, while drumming. The multiple representations of the Bousaadia show the Jewish familiarity with Black African music and dance, but also the way that the younger generations were coming to think of themselves as “white.”

In the Ariana, a streetcar suburb of Tunis, Georges Cohen remembers the performances taking place on Sunday mornings when all the children would be at home. Bousaadia would arrive “avec sa tenue extraordinaire, ses peaux de bêtes, ses colliers de dents, de bracelets et ses bagues serties de pierres multicolores ; coiffés de lamelles blanches et dorées et de petits miroirs qui scintillaient au soleil, de queues de renard, de brin de laine colorés et d’autres objets encore.” Every author who describes the Bousaadia notes the mixture of fascination and fear that drew children out of their homes, forming a circle around the performer as he danced. From time to time, he would leap at one of the children, who would jump back and then return as the circle

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<sup>39</sup> Born in Switzerland, Eberhardt converted to Islam in Algeria and traveled extensively through the deserts dressed as a man. She became involved with Sufi brotherhood dedicated to helping the poor and sick, and would write about her travels. She died in 1904. See Annette Kobak’s biography *Isabelle: the Life of Isabelle Eberhardt* (London: Virago, 1998).

tightened again. Jewish parents were especially generous with *Bousaadia* since his spectral presence could be invoked to make children behave: “Quand nous refusions d’obéir, la menace faisait: ‘je t’appelle le *Bouchadia*’ et la mère d’ouvrir la porte ou la fenêtre: ‘*Bouchadia, Bouchadia*’.”<sup>40</sup> Children were especially shocked to see their parents giving the Bousaadia money for his services, conversing amicably and joking with him. They were left to wonder why their parents would be in league with such a frightening figure.

Bousaadia could also represent the Sahara or “Black Africa.” As Jews were increasingly exposed to American cinema, their views of “Africa” were racialized along European lines. Josephine Baker’s film *Princesse Tam-Tam* was shot on location in Tunisia, and enjoyed wide success. The Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Tarzan franchise starring Johnny Weissmuller is a remarkably persistent cultural artifact mentioned throughout Maghrebi Jewish life-writing.<sup>41</sup> Georges Cohen claims that the Bousaadia’s drumming “rappelait le tam-tam des tribus africaines, celles qui nous faisaient trembler dans les films de Tarzan.” He further describes him as “un sauvage sorti tout droit de la jungle pour faire peur aux petits enfants.” (25). Despite the fact that Bou Saâda was a desert town, the children imagined itinerant Black performers along the lines of Tarzan of the jungle. This displacement of Black out of a recognizable origin in recent history onto a timeless, tropical Africa shows the disavowal of non-European origins. The disjunction between cinema, which projected viewers into the heart of the Western imaginary, and what one encountered on the streets, made Maghrebi Jews keenly aware of their multiple identities.

In a more positive valence, Bousaadia enters into Colette Fellous’ dreamlike evocation of her memories of Tunis in *Avenue de France*. Here he represents the eternal Desert: “Le

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<sup>40</sup> Cohen, *De l’Ariana à Galata*, 25.

<sup>41</sup> For Algeria, see Attica Guedj, *Ma mère avait trois filles: 1945-1962, une enfance algérienne* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009), 11-14.

rémouleur et le Bou Saadia dansent ensemble dans la mémoire, une danse très lente, qui ourle le jour et la nuit, inlassablement. Une danse très ancienne, qui vient du désert, avec ses drapés, ses cornemuses, ses yeux magiques.”<sup>42</sup> The influence of Sub-Saharan African traditions formed another non-European component of Maghrebi Jewish life, part of the desert that serves as such an important symbol in the Hebrew Bible and Arab identity.

While the Bousaadia danced for the pleasure and terror of children, Jewish women in Tunisia maintained a strong relationship with musicians of African descent through ceremonies known as *rebaybia*. These sessions would be held inside Jewish houses with female attendees comprising family, friends and neighbors. The only men at such ceremonies were the troops of musicians, many of whom were descendants of Black slaves who had been living in the Maghreb for centuries. The object of the ceremony was to drive out evil spirits that had taken up residence in a woman. *Rebaybia* ceremonies created a distinctively female collective space, where women gathered for hours in each other’s houses. Women discussed their family troubles, economic difficulties and physical ailments, finding liberation through the music. “Cette danse avait la vertu de chasser les maladies mentales. Les musiciens noirs enchaînaient les noubas dont les rythmes musicaux de plus en plus rapides et les chants répétitifs entraînaient les femmes à danser jusqu’à la transe.”<sup>43</sup> While the rabbinical establishment frowned on such practices because of their pagan element and the Alliance disdained them as barbaric superstition, they formed an integral part of the average Jewish woman’s life in Tunisia. The importance of such traditions has ensured their survival in contemporary Paris.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Fellous, *Avenue de France*, 192.

<sup>43</sup> Albert Naccache, *Les roses de l’Ariana* 78.

<sup>44</sup> Sylvaine Conord, "Sociabilités de femmes juives tunisiennes. Approche photo-ethnographique" *Belleville, un quartier populaire?*, ed. Roselyne de Villanove and Agnès Deboulet (Paris: Editions Créaphis), 174-183.

In the first half of the chapter, we saw how Jews remember the self through in the other through practices of the everyday. Cooking, celebration of holidays, and music reflect the interwoven cultures of the Maghreb, in which Jews occupied a distinct, but integral role. In the next section, I move to an analysis of a sub-section of Maghrebi Jewish life-writing that also addresses the question of cosmopolitanism through practice, but in this case through associational and political organizations. Here we see the remarkable possibilities as well as the limits of how different communities could envisage the other in their collective future. Caught between the rising tide of Moroccan and Tunisian nationalisms, the flourishing Zionist movement, and Franco-Jewish assimilationism, leftist political parties provided an utopian, but ultimately doomed space through which the overcoming of communal difference could be imagined.

## **Part II: Socialism, Communism, and Freemasonry at the Limits of Cosmopolitanism in the Maghreb**

The associational sector played an important role in the modernization of the Maghrebi protectorates, providing an outlet for sociability beyond ethno-religious communal activities. The Moroccan and Tunisian Communist parties and the various Freemason lodges in Morocco and Tunisia were particularly active in fostering relations between petit bourgeois and middle class elements of the Jewish, Muslim, Italian and French populations. These organizations provided discursive space for some of the more progressive actors who attempted to articulate a more just vision of relations between France and its protégés. Their internationalism and anti-racism were particularly attractive to Jews and Italians, who were unable to find their place with the colonial regime or Arab nationalists.

The Moroccan and Tunisian Communist parties were not only founded by largely Jewish members, but also had prominent Jewish involvement until their dissolution and reformation after independence. Colonial Communist Parties, though not free from Moscow's influence, were able to deploy a kind of "Popular Front" version of Marxism which could appeal to wide variety of people on the left, without having the self-destructive exclusionary ideological specificity of the *Parti Communiste Français* under the leadership of Maurice Thorez. An Algerian Jewish lawyer working in Casablanca, Léon Sultan was an early clandestine organizer of the left tendencies in the Moroccan branch of the SFIO. After the American liberation of Morocco in 1942, he became the organizer of the founding meeting for *Parti Communiste Marocain* (PCM) on November 13, 1943.<sup>45</sup> Advocating the end of colonial repression of the nascent nationalist movement, the party nevertheless supported the maintenance of union with France well into the 1950s. The party also attracted many Spanish migrants, many of whom were Republicans who had fled Spain after Franco's triumph, as well a small, but significant number of bourgeois Muslims.

Albert Memmi also took part in the nascent *Hashomer Hatzair* Socialist-Zionist club in Tunis and later actively gave support to the Tunisian nationalist movement through his role as a founding literary editor for the French-language Tunisian daily, *L'Action* (present-day *Jeune Afrique*). Serge Moati (père) worked for decades as a journalist in various Tunisian newspapers, most notably *Tunis Socialiste*, an anti-fascist French-language daily that roundly criticized the Residency's exploitation of the Muslim population. Edmond El Maleh and Abraham Serfaty both went on to play important roles in developing the party's infrastructure and influence during the 1950s and Serfaty later assumed governmental responsibilities, before becoming a virulent

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<sup>45</sup> "Michel Mazella," *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier: Maghreb. MAROC: des origines à nos jours*. Ed., René Gallissot (Paris: L'Atelier, 1998).

critic of Hassan II's repressive policies toward the left opposition. Younger Jewish figures such as Jacob Cohen and Sion Assidon in Morocco, born in 1944 and 1948 respectively, and Gilbert Naccache, born in Tunisia in 1939, stayed after independence to fight for more progressive postcolonial states. All these Jewish figures shared a resistance to Israel's efforts to get Maghrebi Jews to make *alya*, born out of their commitment to Jewish-Arab coexistence. They also faced persecution because of their political positions by post-independence regimes that established different forms of autocratic rule around cults of personality.

In fact one of the most distinctive features of all these organizations was that one could be a member of the Socialist Party, while also being a Freemason and even support some form of cultural Zionism, all without endorsing actual settlement in mandatory Palestine or even post-independence Israel. Indeed, the division of political elites into "Alliancistes," those that favored greater assimilation and French citizenship, against the Zionists, who favored Hebraicization and emigration to Israel, overlooks the third space offered by political parties.

### **The Strange Case of Abraham Serfaty**

More than any other Maghrebi Jew, Abraham Serfaty became an international symbol of political conviction and anti-authoritarianism. Propelled to international celebrity as one the main informants for Gilles Perrault's muckracking bestseller *Notre ami, le Roi* (1990) Serfaty helped expose Hassan II's widespread abuses of human rights against political prisoners in the Tazmamart and Kenitra prisons along with France's unquestioning support for these policies.<sup>46</sup> For all Serfaty's international notoriety as a political activist, his story mirrors that of many Moroccan Jews. Cosmopolitanism was a fact of his upbringing and his family story, not

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<sup>46</sup> Gilles Perrault, *Notre ami, le roi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990). Serfaty's wife, Christine Daure, functioned as the relay between Serfaty, the other prisoners, and Perrault. The book has

something he discovered during his university studies in France. Born in 1926 in Casablanca, Serfaty came from a Tangerine merchant family. His father was educated in a private Spanish language school, and worked across the strait in Gibraltar. As with many Jewish men from Tangier and Tetuan born at the end of the nineteenth century, lack of opportunity pushed Serfaty's father across the Atlantic. He migrated to Brazil as an agent for a latex harvesting operation, returning with the capital to start an importing/exporting firm.

Supporting his parents with remittances, he stayed in Brazil for fifteen years, becoming initiated into the Masonic league that Tangerine Jews had established there. An international zone from 1923-1940, it functioned as the center of masonry in Morocco, even as the movement expanded to the imperial cities (Fez, Meknes, Rabat, Marrakech) and coastal commercial centers (Casablanca, Mogador, Safi).<sup>47</sup> Masons throughout French North Africa found themselves in a fundamentally ambivalent position. They supported Enlightenment ideals of spreading progress that justified European expansionism, yet they also opposed the racist mentality that structured segregationist policies in education and urbanism.

Serfaty remembers his father as a great admirer of Enlightenment ideals and the French Revolution, but against the abuses of European colonialism in the Maghreb. Having joined the protests against French and Spanish predation that accompanied Kaiser Wilhelm's spectacular visit to Tangier in 1905, Serfaty's father became involved with the SFIO upon his return to Morocco and the family's move to Casablanca. Two other formative political moments in Serfaty's youth also attest to the cosmopolitan outlook among a certain portion of the Moroccan Jewish population. First, his father and other Socialists marched in Casablanca to protest the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927, the year after Abraham was born. His father recounted

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<sup>47</sup> David Bensoussan, *Il était une fois le Maroc: Témoignages du passé judéo-arabe* (Montréal: Editions du Lys, 2010) 222-224.



the tragic story as a key moment in international socialist history. Serfaty attributed his politicization to the Spanish Civil War, which reverberated throughout French Morocco, but especially in Casablanca, home to a large Spanish community. Concentrated in the Maarif quarter, the community received many Republican families escaping Francisco Franco's fascist forces from 1936-1939. After joining the party in 1945, Abraham received his education in activism and organization from his young Spanish counterparts in the Maarif. Together they organized French-language literacy classes that served both Spaniards and proletarianized Muslims from the nearby *bidonville* of Derb Ghalef.

Beyond the Spanish Communists, Serfaty also encountered the struggles for equality taking place on the other side of the Atlantic after the American liberation of Morocco in 1942. After finishing the baccalaureate in 1943, Serfaty went to work in the Casablanca port, which had been taken over by the American military. On the night shifts, waiting for shipments to arrive, Serfaty spent time with the dozens of Black American soldiers working at the depots. Seeing firsthand the racism they faced, Serfaty became friends with a young Black officer who admired French culture and Baudelaire in particular. Through their conversations, Serfaty learned about the Black struggle. He eventually invited his friend to a dance organized by Casablanca's bourgeois Jewish women, where girls were encouraged to bring Jewish American officers. Needless to say, Serfaty's provocative gesture represented a desire to transgress the community's exclusionism. His identification with other social or ethnic minorities including Spanish Republicans, Moroccan students, striking miners, Berbers and Sahrawis lead to a direct conflict with the police state Hassan II established in the mid-1960s. In fact Salomon Benbaruk in his capacity as part of the Casablanca Jewish community leadership described an audience

with Hassan II demanding an end to police harassment of visiting Jews as “Zionist agents,” where Serfaty was the object of much discussion.

For the monarch, Jews like Léon Benzaquen, a famed medical specialist who served as Minister from 1958-1959 merited the state’s protection. When Marc Sabbah, a left-wing Jewish sympathizer of Medhi Ben Barka’s faction which had fallen out with the palace, attempted to intervene, he was sternly reprimanded for supporting the “enemies of the country.” Jewish Communists like Serfaty and El Maleh, who had literally fought for Moroccan independence, were now considered dangerous enemies.<sup>48</sup> This rupture with the *makhzen* only amplified March 1965 when Moroccan students protesting against educational inequalities were brutally repressed. The 1967 Arab-Israeli war further aggravated tensions, and Serfaty himself was shocked by the anti-Jewish tone of left-wing discourse during the crisis. In 1968 when Serfaty took the side of striking miners, he was arrested and stripped of his post. Imprisoned and brutally tortured in the early 1970s, Serfaty eventually became wheelchair bound as a result of his declining health. He later moderated his anti-Zionism, declaring himself open to the possibility of a two-state solution in the late 1990s. After Mohammed VI’s accession to the throne, Serfaty finally returned to Morocco as part of the new monarch’s (mostly symbolic) steps toward democratization.

### **Women’s Struggles: Gisèle Halimi as Tunisian Jew and French Feminist**

Maghrebi Jewish women’s accounts of growing up in colonial North Africa offer a whole other narrative dimension, related to women’s struggles against French discrimination, but also

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<sup>48</sup> “Pendant que le roi s’informait des nouvelles générales de ‘ses sujets juifs’, il rappelait les hautes positions de plusieurs. M. Benzaquen, ministre, M. Sam Nahon, directeur de cabinet du ministre Cherkaoui, M. Benarrosh, jeune technicien de Fès au bureau de l’Etat-Major de la Défense, Meyer Tolédano, avocat attaché à l’ambassade aux U.S.A., etc. Il déplorait l’activité néfaste des communistes, genre Serfaty, qui avait pourtant combattu clandestinement pour l’indépendance.” Benbaruk, *Trois-quarts de siècle* 47.

against the patriarchy of their own families. Spatially marginalized when not altogether excluded from the synagogue, Maghrebi women's Jewish practice took place in homes, courtyards, marketplaces. While new forums of socialization like Freemasonry and political parties tended to be closed to women, in the late colonial period, the scholarization of Tunisian Jewish girls in urban area resulted in more significant participation in new spheres of public sociability.

Gisèle Halimi cuts an striking figure as one of the first women admitted to the bar in Paris, the defense attorney for many FLN fighters during the Algerian War of Independence, and one of France's most prominent advocates for women's rights. Yet her early years mirror those of many Tunisian Jews of her generation. She has devoted two autobiographical works to her childhood, the luminous *Le lait de l'oranger* remembering her father Edouard and *Fritna*, a conflicted portrait of her mother Fortunée. For her mother, descended from an upper-crust *Grana* family, Edouard's *Twansa* origins made him a "Bedouin." Edouard represented the "real" Tunisia for Gisèle, one formed by a synthesis of Berbers, Arabs and Jews. Her imagination was riveted by the occasional visits to her paternal grandfather's shop in the souks, through which she discovered the medina and *kasbah* (where the Beylical government buildings were concentrated). Despite the relative openness to formally educating girls through the Alliance (more so in Tunisia, less in Morocco), women could only participate in the more "public" cosmopolitan spaces toward in the last decades of French rule, particularly after the outbreak of World War II.

Halimi remembers her early political career distributing tracts for the Communist Party ending abruptly when her shocked father saw her on the street corner. After cuffing her and dragging her home, Edouard bemoaned his daughter's exposure in public, which he considered tantamount to prostitution. Though young Jewish girls could enter public space through scouting and to a lesser extent through political youth organizations, there were clear limits placed on

their autonomy. Without a recognized Jewish framework to put its stamp on their attendance, their mobility quickly turned into an object of suspicion.

### **Disillusioned Dissidence: Gilbert Naccache, the failure of Tunisian Communism**

Gilbert Naccache recounts a narrative of left-wing activism, dissent against the authoritarianism of the post-colonial state, imprisonment and torture in his novelized memoir *Cristal* (1983) and his more recent non-fiction memoir, *Qu'as-tu fait de ta jeunesse: Itinéraire d'un opposant au régime de Bourguiba* (2009). In both works Naccache describes Tunisian Jewry's liminal position in the late colonial period. "Ballottés entre leur tunisianité, les tentatives d'assimilation à la France et l'intense propagande sioniste, trouver un moyen de se définir une fois pour toutes" was increasingly imperative but ultimately impossible.<sup>49</sup> Given the community's awkward position, joining the Communist party in the last years of the Protectorate proved one of the only viable outlets for a young person of Naccache's generation. Of the many dimensions of the Communist attraction for Jews, the recent victory of the Soviet army over the Nazis weighed heavily. Tunisian Jews could also participate alongside French militants, Muslim, Sicilian and Maltese workers, and members of the Francophone Muslim bourgeoisie.

No other association or organization in the protectorate had succeeded in bringing together such people of such diverse backgrounds. On a more personal level, Naccache's older sister assisted the party as a fellow traveler and his first cousin Albert Lumbroso joined the Communist Youth around the same time. Tunisian Jewish intellectuals such as Georges Adda, Georges Valensi and Paul Sebag comprised a majority of the party's leadership. Beyond providing an outlet for young educated Jews to enter into political discourse, the PCT (more so

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<sup>49</sup> Gilbert Naccache, *Qu'as-tu fait de ta jeunesse? Itinéraire d'un opposant au régime de Bourguiba, 1954-1979 : suivi de récits de prison* (Tunis: Editions Les Mots Passants, 2009), 21.

than its Moroccan counterpart), provided unheard of leadership opportunities for Tunisian women. The leader of Naccache's section, Lucette Chemla was one of the first generation of girls to attend the *Lycée Carnot*, an institution that supplied the PCT's youth section with the bulk of its members.

Yet Naccache also witnessed the gradual departure of the Jewish community after independence as the benefits of state-building were diverted to Bourguiba and Salah Ben Youssef's associates from Monastir and the Sahara respectively. The old Destouriens, original members of the independence struggle, many hailing from the Bizerte region, wanted the choice positions in the civil service. What all these groups could agree on was the desire to push French and Jewish *cadres* out of the way. In accordance with Bourguiba's incrementalist strategy, the process took place in progressive stages. "Il s'efforça de reprendre ce qui existait et de le transformer progressivement, d'abord en remplaçant des fonctionnaires français partis par des Tunisiens – beaucoup de ces derniers étaient juifs – et en préparant la relève de ceux qui étaient restés, et des Juifs dont les destouriens doutaient qu'ils demeurent longtemps dans le pays. »<sup>50</sup> The same went for Jewish intellectuals like Paul Sebag (historian), Claude Tapia (sociologist) and André Nahum (physician), all of whom felt forced to leave after putting with years of petty harassment and bureaucratic obstacles, despite their belief that Tunisia was their home.

Nevertheless, Naccache argues that their struggle and that of the Jewish communists more generally represented the only authentic refusal of the colonial situation. Given the choice between "fight or flight," Naccache continued to struggle:

Ceci est mon pays, pensais-je, et si les conditions de vie ne me plaisent pas, ce n'est pas en le quittant que je résoudrai quoi que ce soit. Ces conditions proviennent de ce que le colonialisme a laissé comme héritage, et tiennent aux choix politiques du pouvoir. Ces choix peuvent être contestés par beaucoup de tunisiens, et surtout des arabes, et je

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<sup>50</sup> Naccache, *Qu'as-tu fait*, 33.

pourrais – et donc dois – lutter à leurs côtés pour faire de notre pays commun un endroit où nous pourrions tous vivre.<sup>51</sup>

The Trotskyist group, known as *Perspectives*, he helped form after the split from the *PCT* in the 1960s. They were among the only political parties to actively resist the spillover of the June 1967 protests from the embassies to the *Lafayette* and *Passage* quarters in the center of Tunis where Jews still constituted a majority a decade after independence. After having protested against the American and British support for Israeli expansionism on the first day of protests, on Monday, June 5, the crowds sacked Jewish shops and the *Grande Synagogue* on the *Avenue de la Liberté* in the *Quartier Lafayette*, a mainly Jewish neighborhood.

Naccache claims that the members of the contestatory *Union des Etudiants Tunisiens* attempted to form a human chain to prevent the synagogue, but were trampled by the sheer size of the crowd. No other Tunisian Jewish writer or historian registers this act of solidarity, which proves if nothing else, that most Jews felt abandoned by the forces of public order and Muslim Tunisians.<sup>52</sup> The students issued a tract on June 6 denouncing Israel's pre-emptive strike along with the anti-Jewish riots, but the damage had been done. Naccache increasingly found himself as the only Jew in the movement against Bourguiba's authoritarianism.

### **When the Political Unodes the Everyday: Elio Cohen-Boulakia**

Elio Cohen-Boulakia acquired French citizenship in 1964, the result of disillusionment with the increasing sectarianism of the post-colonial climate. Another Jewish Communist activist he divides his experience between his ongoing affirmation of Jewish "indigeneity" in Tunisia, and the divergence with an increasingly jingoistic nationalism. Returning to foodways as the distinctive marker of Judeo-Tunisian identity, Cohen Boulakia underscores the

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<sup>51</sup> Naccache, *Cristal*, 144.

<sup>52</sup> Naccache, *Qu'as-tu fait* 84-86

remarquable synthèse des multiples apports venus enrichir, au fil des siècles, le fond arabo-berbère, la place de choix revenant au couscous. Les influences italiennes, espagnoles, égyptiennes, grecques ont donné des mets, des saveurs qui restent présents dans la cuisine traditionnelle juive de Tunisie et qui en font toute la richesse.<sup>53</sup>

Here we see how foodways provide a relatively stable store of inclusive memories even when political action led to a confrontation between the different groups involved in decolonization. In the late 1950s, Cohen Boulakia faced increasing pressure from his own party members to conform to a superficial Islamic piety by fasting during Ramadan. As opposed to the earlier testimonies describing the holidays as equal in public importance (Ramadan, Passover, and the Assumption for example), after the departure of such a large percentage of the Jewish and European populations, the Muslim holidays became oppressively universalized.

During the beginnings of the state crackdown on left-wing opposition, he remembers being arrested by a policeman startled to discover a Jewish Communist “fighting against” the Bourguiba government.<sup>54</sup> The result of this treatment does not deter Cohen Boulakia from affirming both his Tunisianess and Jewishness while living in France. Could the affirmation of these two particular poles of identity be understood as anything but the continuation of Maghrebi Jewish Communists’ oppositional standpoint? Could it not also be understood as their refusal to abandon their belonging to Tunisia and Morocco, even choosing or being forced to choose exile? Here Maghrebi Jewish Communists resemble their “non-politicized” coreligionists; by writing their stories and affirming their multiple identities against the pressures of assimilation in France, they simultaneously affirm their rootedness and their diasporic history.

### **From Grief to Critical Reflection: Remembering Maghrebi Cosmopolitanism**

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<sup>53</sup> Elio Cohen Boulakia, “Etre et avoir été un juif tunisien” in Paul Balta, Régine Dhoquois-Cohen and Catherine Dana, eds. *La Méditerranée des Juifs: Exodes et enracinement* (Paris: Harmattan, 2003): 255-266 (260).

<sup>54</sup> Cohen Boulakia, 261.

Having examined two vectors of cosmopolitan memory in Maghrebi Jewish life-writing, the practice of everyday on the one hand and utopian political organizations on the other, we must now address the inevitable critique of such nostalgia for the past. Does such a focus ignore the diversity of the places in which Jews find themselves? Does it romanticize past generations as being closer to some kind of authentic relationship with the other that never existed as such? More specifically, do Maghrebi Jewish memories of French colonial rule necessarily entail the adoption of retrograde, Islamophobic or anti-Arab discourse?

By refocusing our attention away from elites, we discover that life-writing provide with stories, memories, and experiences that do not fit the traditional picture of grieving cosmopolitanism. Rather they show that while the political impacts and disrupts the everyday, the everyday also provides resources for all kinds of interactions with the other that the political cannot produce or create ex nihilo. Remembering the interdependences of the past also has importance for those Maghrebi Muslims attempting to understand what the other (European or Jewish) has to do with their own identity.

What of the many Muslim intellectuals from Morocco (Tahar Ben Jelloun, Abdellatif Laabi), Tunisia (Hélé Beji, Fehti Benslama) and Algeria (Mohammed Harbi, Boualem Sansal), who convincingly argue that part of the lack of democracy in post-colonial nation-building projects in their respective countries is connected with the same quest for ideological conformity that helped push non-Muslim minorities out? What of the ordinary Moroccans and Tunisians who genuinely grieve for the loss of Jewish friends, neighbors and colleagues (as well as the working-class Maltese, Spanish and Sicilian immigrants who were often viewed as quasi-“indigenous” by the French)? To see the departure of non-Muslim populations as a blow to the tentative democratic projects that never fully took root after independence, not to mention to the



economic prospects of their countries, does not mean papering over the injustice of French colonial rule.

These critiques of current Maghrebi politics do not pass over the tangled violence and brutality of colonial occupation, rather they focus on the shared aspects of everyday life among the colonized, placing an emphasis on the small acts of solidarity and coexistence that existed in spite of colonial domination. Maghrebi Jewish writers mourn the loss of their homeland as well as the manner in which they left. Indeed mourning in first-person plural autobiography adds a public and political dimension in addition to the more private, personal side. Imagining what might have been in the post-independence Maghreb. It also leaves a legacy for future generations who find possibilities of coexistence in the past whose recovery enables a critical investment in transforming the present. Rethinking the possibilities of a rooted cosmopolitanism that takes into account the way that people outside of Europe were able “out of their own daily lives” to incorporate and interact with others they encountered.

## CHAPTER III

### THE WRITER BEFORE THE LAW DECOLONIZATION AND QUESTIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

If life-writing allows for authors to call themselves “juif tunisiens,” “juifs marocains,” or in the case of left-wing militants “marocains juifs” or “tunisiens de confession juive,” we must remember that these labels are directly confronted by and in some cases contradicted by state policy. While belonging to three or more places appeals to the popular understanding of life in a globalized world, multiple nationalities also make writers suspect in the eyes of the nation-state attempting control migration. In the previous chapters, we saw how Maghrebi Jewish life-writing and reclaim the multilingual and multicultural nature of the colonial past as an ideal that can be used to critique the present-day entrenchment of national identities. In this chapter, we move to Maghrebi Jewish writers’ reevaluations of the less idyllic elements of the past, particularly the writer’s difficulties before the law. In addition to addressing how writers explain and justify their departure from the Maghreb, we also see how the French state, in its colonial and metropolitan forms, as well as the nascent Moroccan and Tunisian states developed concepts of identity and belonging that were fundamentally incompatible with Jews’ liminal status.

First, we see how Jews were courted leading up to establishment of the Protectorates, then disavowed during the protectorate itself, especially during Second World War and the Vichy interregnum. Despite the deep French ambivalence toward Maghrebi Jews, the schooling of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* and the promise of emancipation helped shift Jewish orientation toward France as a promised land of modernity and equality. French-Jewish

education conditioned Moroccan and Tunisian Jews' ideas about France, pushing them toward migration while stubbornly refusing to change their legal status.

Third, in the context of the abrupt transition after Moroccan and Tunisian independences in 1956, Jews sought to find their place in nation-building projects built on the recuperation of an idealized Arab-Islamic culture that structurally excluded Jews. Despite their centuries-long presence in the Maghreb and their deep cultural connections with Muslims, Jewish difference could not be accommodated by the narrow definition of the nation that emerged. In a climate of anxiety created by economic crisis, the spillover of the violence of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the form of street protests, and Arabization campaigns that hastened the departure of most of the European population, many Jews left for France or Israel.

Finally, Maghrebi Jewish life-writing shows the emigration and integration process in the new homelands of France and Québec to be far more problematic than the “homecoming” they imagined (the same goes for Israel). The process of naturalization traumatized Jews since it called into question their Frenchness and associated them from a popular point of view with Muslim Arab immigrants. Finding reception by their host countries less than welcoming, many Moroccan and Tunisian Jews went through an intense period of reflection on their lives in the Maghreb. Considered foreign by the law and as “Arab” or “African” by the Ashkenazi establishments in France and Canada, writers began a complex process of re-identification as “Sephardi,” as well as “Moroccan” and “Tunisian.”

The contemporary debate over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in which Maghrebi Jews have been assigned a new identity as “refugees” of a global Arab-Jewish struggle. I contend that the complexity and multiplicity of identification in life-writing belies this reductive, politicized narrative, particularly given the connections between Jewish writers to Morocco and Tunisia

maintained to their birthplaces through the autobiographical text. Once again, Maghrebi Jews find their historical narrative and national identity mobilized for a political project that obfuscates their multivalent self-perception.

Across these four historical transformations, the inadequacy of citizenship and nationality to account for difference and multiplicity of origins emerges as an unresolved predicament within modern French political discourse and practice. Judeo-Moroccan and Judeo-Tunisian autobiographies fight against the reductive violence of political nationalism, while demonstrating the way that multiple origins can complement a profound identification with one's country of residence. I argue that Maghrebi Jewish writers' interrogation of identity and reassertion of their multiple origins through the autobiographical text offer a useful model of cosmopolitan citizenship for the present political moment.

### **Genealogies of French-Jewish Citizenship**

Whereas the major revolutions in the development of citizenship in France date back to the Revolution of 1789-1794, which established a nation of equal citizens, the history of citizenship as it plays out in the colonial context would be a rather murkier affair than. The tenuous differences between "man" and "citizen" as employed by French philosophers and statesmen in the *Déclarations des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* became a practical legal problem when applied to the question of emancipation for Jews, women and people of color, both enslaved and free.<sup>1</sup> To what extent could the rights and obligations of citizenship apply to these groups who constituted, in different ways, "nations" within the ideal nation that most revolutionaries, from moderate constitutionalists behind the Girondins to the much more radical

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<sup>1</sup> See Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolutions & Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004)

Republicans led by the Jacobins, aspired to create? Could *égalité* and *fraternité* be obtained without radically leveling or homogenizing the body politic?

Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre's famous declaration "Il faut tout refuser aux Juifs comme nation et tout accorder aux Juifs comme individus"<sup>2</sup> during the August 4, 1789 debate over Jewish emancipation in the Constituent Assembly became emblematic of the approach France would take toward social minorities as well as recalcitrant Catholic peasants in the provinces.<sup>3</sup> To be transformed into French citizens, Jews had to be stripped of the communal autonomy and identity that separated them from fusion with the nation.<sup>4</sup> The discourse of "regeneration" employed by Revolutionaries such as the Abbé Grégoire<sup>5</sup> and *Maskilim* (Jewish enlighteners) meant that Jews, like other sectors of corporatist *ancien régime* France, had to sacrifice their communal solidarity in the name of a greater attachment to their (theoretically) equal fellow citizens and brothers.

In exchange for the rights of citizenships, Jewish communities across France were made to sacrifice the binding communal structure (*kehila*) in which rabbinic instruction and jurisprudence constituted had the force of law. Religion came to be defined as private individual practice or *culte* (sect) rather than the traditional Jewish notion of *din* (Hebrew for "law"). In other words, Judaism becoming a religion entailed communities no longer being allowed to exercise authority over their own members. This also entailed abandoning Yiddish and Hebrew

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Ayoun, *Les Juifs de France, de l'émancipation à l'intégration (1787-1812)* Paris : L'Harmattan, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> See Eugen Weber's seminal study, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

<sup>4</sup> See Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715-1815* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> This radical priest who advocated the unification of the nation through French-language instruction, and took up the cause of enslaved peoples and the Jewish community later became the figurehead of emancipation for Jews in North Africa. For an excellent intellectual history, see Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall's *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005). On the relationship between the Jewish *maskilim* and Grégoire, see Goldstein Sepinwall, "Strategic friendships: Jewish intellectuals, the French Revolution, and the Abbé Grégoire" in *Renewing the past, Reconfiguring Jewish culture: from al-Andalus to the Haskalah*, eds. Ross Brann and Adam Sutcliffe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

as languages of commerce and law in favor of French. Zvi Jonathan Kaplan pithily summarizes the implications of Revolutionary doctrine toward minority identities: “The new French state was religiously tolerant, but ethnically, nationally, and culturally intolerant.”<sup>6</sup> Napoleon went a step further, convening Jewish religious and lay leaders in the Sanhedrin of 1807 to define the place of Judaism within the nation. The result was a system of Consistories, government-funded bodies that regulated Jewish practice in the name of integration, all under the authority of the Central Consistory based in Paris.<sup>7</sup> Ironically, this “religious” system replicated the parallel actions of the centralist state, eliminating decentralized power centers, such as privately owned synagogues and communal Jewish law courts, in order to establish central sovereignty.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the articulation of French sovereignty over the Jewish community and integration of Jews into political life proved successful enough that at certain liberal moments, under the fledgling Second Republic (1848-1851), the provisional Government of National Defense (1870-1871) and most of all under the Third Republic (1871-1939), some Jews were able to high levels of economic and political power. In 1846, Adolphe Crémieux, a famous Jewish lawyer and President of the Consistory successfully persuaded the French Supreme Court to abolish one of the most blatant forms of discriminatory treatment of Jews in metropolitan France, the *more judaïco*, a humiliating oath Jews had to swear when giving testimony.<sup>8</sup> After becoming a deputy under the July Monarchy, Crémieux ultimately rose to the position of Minister of Justice in 1848 and 1870 pushing through the mass naturalization of Algerian Jewry as part of the Delegation of Tours in 1870. Crémieux also was one of the

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<sup>6</sup> Zvi Jonathan Kaplan, *Between the devil and the deep blue sea? French Jewry and the problem of church and state*. Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 2009, 16.

<sup>7</sup> See Phyllis Cohen Albert, *The Jewish Consistory of France: a study in social history, 1830-1870* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1976).

<sup>8</sup> For a general biography see Daniel Amson, *Adolphe Crémieux: l'oublié de la gloire*. Paris: Seuil, 1988; on the *more judaïco*, Phyllis Albert Cohen, *The Jewish Oath in nineteenth-century France*. Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 1982.

founders of the Alliance, and his role in the colonial transformation of North African Jews cannot be underestimated. His impact was legal (through the naturalization laws), educational (through the Alliance), and religious (through the Consistories). Crémieux's interventions aimed at nothing less than the total "regeneration" of Algerian Jews in the image of assimilated French Jews.

The controversial *Decret Crémieux* automatically naturalized all Jews in Algeria by ending Jewish personal status, meaning the internal juridical autonomy of Jewish communities to regulate matters such as inheritance, divorce, and family disputes. Through readings of mid and late nineteenth century colonial press and Consistorial archives, Joshua Schreier convincingly demonstrates in *Arabs of the Jewish Faith* that Algerian Jews offered widespread opposition on the part of both to the imposition of the Consistories in Algeria in 1848 as well as the patronizing and colonialist mentality behind the naturalization laws. Algerian Jews continued to maintain private synagogues and refer to indigenous rabbis for mediation and adjudication involving disputes within the local *kehila*, demonstrating that French designs to divide religious practice from binding notions of communal identity had partially foundered in the face of a robust model of Jewish social organization.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), especially Chapter 5, "From Napoleon's Sanhedrin to the Crémieux Decree: Sex, Marriage and the Boundaries of Civilization." Algerian Jewish writers and historians have recently begun to challenge the stereotype of a completely assimilated, Europeanized community, pointing to the persistence of ties with Algerian Muslims, the lasting impact of Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Spanish, and the very real shock these Jews experienced upon arrival in France. The conference "Le faux procès du judaïsme algérien" organized by MORIAL, a diasporic organization devoted to preserving the memory of Algerian Jews, offered several sessions with this revisionist perspective. Prolific novelist and translator Albert Bensoussan's *L'échelle de Mesrod, ou Parcours algérien de mémoire juive* (1984), *L'échelle algérienne: voies juives* (2001), *Voyage en recouvrance* (2008) reanimates the Algerian community in its fervent religious practice, its concern for Israel, and its cultural proximity to Algerian Muslims.

## **French Instrumentalization of Citizenship in the Precolonial Maghreb**

Nevertheless Algeria remained the exception and France's policies toward citizens in areas of colonial influence were much more instrumental and took on a more ideological dimension only when Jewish populations came under direct French governance. Leading up to the establishment of protectorates and colonies throughout North Africa and the Middle East, nearly every major European power used nationality and citizenship as leverage in their bids to weaken Ottoman power over Jewish and Christian minorities. In Morocco and Tunisia, wealthy Jews, especially those Sephardim who had settled in Livorno for some time before settling in North Africa, were able to parley their commercial connections for the privileges of European nationality. In these cases, France was not interested in shaping citizens, but rather in weakening indigenous sovereignty and expanding its access to markets and monopolies.

In North Africa, the imperative of French control played out very differently in each its possessions, with two markedly different politico-legal mechanisms of control. Algeria, by virtue of its early conquest and settlement, had by far the largest European population of any French colony, including significant numbers of naturalized Mediterranean immigrants. Tunisia and Morocco, by contrast, offered a particular challenge to France's desire for hegemony. Italy, which had serious colonial designs on Tunisia, had a much larger and more established settler population for the first decades of the French protectorate and the Italian peril was always on the mind of colonial authorities.

Twenty years after the Treaty of Bardo established the French Protectorate in Tunisia, Italians still comprised "seven-eighths of the colony's European population of 80,000."<sup>10</sup> Even more alarming for French authorities was the well developed Italian infrastructure in Tunisia:

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<sup>10</sup> Mark I. Choate, "Identity Politics and Political Perception in the European Settlement of Tunisia: The French Colony versus the Italian Colony" *French Colonial History* 8 (2007), pp. 97-109.



schools, hospitals, social clubs, press that all existed autonomously of what France was (slowly) building from the ground up. Colonial authorities in Tunisia became particularly anxious about the decade of Italian nationalist ferment that took place between 1911, marking the colonization of Libya on to Mussolini's accession to power in 1922. The appeal of Italo-Tunisian irredentism extended to the *Grâna*, Italian-speaking Sephardi Jews who migrated to Tunis from Livorno and other cities in Tuscany beginning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Though they had become Arabized to a certain extent, most retained Tuscan dialect as their first language, and they were notoriously proud of their Italian culture. France had great difficulty competing with Italy for consular protection during the precolonial period.

European influence in Morocco, the last state in North Africa remaining officially independent, was coveted by the "Great Powers", chief among them Great Britain, Spain, Italy and Germany, at the turn of the nineteenth century. Heavily indebted to European creditors, the *makhzen* (central government under the Sultan) simultaneously fought off internal tribal rebellions and French-armed incursions from Algeria. In 1906, the conference of Algésiras placed the country under the "protection" of the powers, and French troops occupied key positions near Fes and Casablanca in 1907.

The country officially remained free of external interference until 1912, when it was divided into two protectorates. France controlled the larger of the two, covering most of the country including the imperial cities of Fez, Meknes, Marrakech and Rabat, with Spain occupying a small, but strategically significant part of the north, including the coastal cities of Tetuan, Ceuta, Melilla, Larache and Arzila. Tangier became a "free city" under administration of European and American consuls with collaboration of local elites. French paranoia about

Spanish designs on the rest of Morocco mirrored the concern about Italy's influence in Tunisia, though numerically Spanish residents in the French protectorate were a tiny minority.

Britain also had designs on Morocco and in the southern port of Essaouira (also known as Mogador) many Jewish families received British nationality in the nineteenth century, due to family and commercial ties with the "Spanish and Portuguese" Jewish community in London. Daniel Schroeter and Joseph Chetrit argue that up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, "Jewish merchants were still part of a Sephardi world order which transcended national boundaries."<sup>11</sup> Individual Jews whether of Iberian descent, known as the *megorashim*, and to lesser extent the *toshavim* or indigenous, Arabophone Jews could align themselves with one or European power or another to obtain the legal and economic benefits that citizenship conferred. Regardless their belonging to the Jewish community in their city of origin (sometimes itself based on another site origin) remained an important bond.

One could not overstate France's demographic disability at the beginning of the Tunisian protectorate. According to best estimates, 700 French settlers cohabited with "40,000 Jews, 10,000 Italians, around 7,000 Maltese and a few hundred Greeks" in the early 1880s.<sup>12</sup> In the 1920s, thousand of stateless White Russians along with various other refugee groups, Armenians, Poles, and Spanish Republicans began arriving, adding to the heterogeneity of the European population. Despite the tremendous incentives offered by the French government to its own citizens to settle in the protectorates and the optional naturalization offered to Europeans in residence, the French continued to be dwarfed by the Italians in Tunisia for decades.

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel Schroeter and Joseph Chetrit, "The Transformation of the Jewish Community of Essaouira (Mogador) in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" in Harvey E. Goldberg, ed. *Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996): 99-116 (103).

<sup>12</sup> Guy Dugas, « Préface » in *Tunisie, rêve de partage* (Paris : Presses de la cité, 2005), X.

The French government responded with an improvised *lex soli*, known as the *Loi Morinaud* voted on December 20, 1923, automatically naturalizing any “European” (mainly peninsular Italians, Sicilians, Sardinians, Maltese) children born in Tunisia who themselves had at least one parent born in Tunisia.<sup>13</sup> For Tunisian subjects (most Jews and Muslims), the path to citizenship went through meeting any one of a number of criteria: service in the French army, obtaining the baccalaureate or a university diploma, marrying a French citizen or rendering important services to France (arbitrarily defined, depending on the Resident General).<sup>14</sup>

Another logical solution to what was then referred to as the “Italian question” would have been to encourage Jewish naturalization (as had been done in Algeria in 1870 with the Crémieux law). Many were explicitly European in their cultural orientation and comprised an ideal group of cultural and economic mediators (with their connection to broader Mediterranean and Saharan trading and distribution networks). Given the structure of the protectorate, which theoretically maintained Tunisian sovereignty, Jews could not be collectively alienated from their Tunisian nationality according to the 1857 Fundamental Charter and the Tunisian Constitution promulgated in 1861.<sup>15</sup> The colonial administration would have completely disavowed any respect for local authority by abolishing this provision, and circumvented the problem through individual naturalization.

Another argument against naturalization of the Jews related to the access citizenship would give Jews to educational institutions, the liberal professions and the civil service. Jewish mobility would only be further increased. This would also antagonize the ferociously anti-

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<sup>13</sup> Henri de Montety, “Les Italiens en Tunisie” *Politique étrangère* 5 (1937) : 409-425 (414).

<sup>14</sup> Doris Bensimon and Sergio DellaPergola, “Structures socio-démographiques de la population juive originaire d’Afrique du Nord” in Claude Taïeb and Jean-Claude Lasry, eds. 179-206 (185).

<sup>15</sup> Bensimon and DellaPergola, 184. See Victor Silvera for a history of the various iterations of Tunisian constitutions in nineteenth and twentieth centuries, “Le Régime constitutionnel de la Tunisie: La constitution du 1<sup>er</sup> juin 1959” *Revue française de science politique* 10.2 (1960) : 366-394.

Jewish settler communities across the Maghreb and their allies in Metropolitan France who still resented the Crémieux decree's role in advancing Jewish social, political and economic status in Algeria. Refusing Jews citizenship *en masse* also was justified by pointing out how crucial they were to the economic flourishing of the Maghrebi colonies. France wanted to supplant them with French colonists.

In the Moroccan context, Sultan Hassan I (1873-1894) fought to maintain, on paper at least, the inalienability of Moroccan nationality in the context of the 1880 Madrid Conference, through the traditional concept of perpetual allegiance. Against the will of European powers, who continued offering consular protection to Jews to weaken the Sultanate's grip on power, Hassan made sure that the text of the agreement required his consent for any alienation of a Moroccan subject. When France official Moroccan Jews comprised a significant part of the population of the old imperial capitals, the largest community in Marrakech, with smaller grouping in Fes and Meknes, and the major ports, Essaouira and especially Casablanca, which came to have one of the largest concentrations of Jews in the Mediterranean basin.<sup>16</sup>

As with Tunisia, Jews were an ideal group to act as intermediaries for the French administration because of their existing connections to Europe and their important role in the Moroccan economy. Yet because of the governing philosophy of Marshal Lyautey, the conqueror of Morocco and "father" of the Protectorate, the colonial administration never took serious steps to alter the existing principle of "perpetual allegiance" to Sharifian dynasty. Lyautey famously championed the idea of "association", meaning that France would work with and even strengthen local power structures in a bid to control conquered territory. Lyautey's treatment of Morocco's other principal minority group, the Berbers differed considerably.

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<sup>16</sup> Doris Bensimon, « La Judaïcité marocaine dans la seconde moitié du 20e siècle: Evolution démographique et sociale; émigration » in *Identité et dialogue*, 233-246 (236).

Encouraging autonomist tendencies within historically rebellious Berber tribes directly threatened the Sultan's grip on power over united Morocco, whereas allowing Jews to be naturalized offered no similar political benefits.

The reluctance and refusal to grant citizenship to Moroccan and Tunisian Jews, given their French-speaking abilities and general Francophilia, revealed the common French belief that Jews could never be truly French and would always act in the interests of the Jewish community to the detriment of non-Jewish citizens. In the 1890s, when the "Italian question" was a burning issue in Tunisia, resident general Millet openly stated why the government did not want to naturalize Jews. "Si jamais une assimilation, même partielle, était consentie, le petit noyau français serait complètement noyé dans l'élément juif."<sup>17</sup> As a result of the state's opposition to mass naturalization, many Tunisian Jews would not or could not be naturalized for different reasons: a lack of qualifications, the difficulty involved with paperwork (especially since most Jewish births in the early twentieth century were undocumented by the administration), the pressure from rabbis and religious conservatives against assimilation, the trauma of the Second World War when naturalized Jews tended to suffer an even worse fate than Jews with Tunisian nationality. Jews in both Morocco and Tunisia correspond to Albert Memmi's description as "éternels candidats hésitants et refusés de l'assimilation." France gave them a small degree of hope, through individual naturalization offered by the conditions of the Morinaud Law in Tunisia, but never considered anything like the Crémieux Decree for either protectorate.

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Claude Hagège and Bernard Zarka, "Les Juifs en France et la Tunisie: Les bénéfices d'une relation triangulaire » *Le Mouvement social* 197.4 (2001) : 9-28 (17).

## Transforming Maghrebi Jews into Candidates for Citizenship

For the vast majority of Jews who retained “indigenous” nationality until the end of the protectorates, a legal limbo shrouded them. In a colonial situation where neither of the traditional regimes, the Sharifian Sultans in Morocco and Husainid Beys in Tunisia, could truly exercise authority without French consent, Jews occupied an undefined space. *De facto*, Jews were under total French control, *de jure* they remained under the absolute control of the Sultan or Bey. This split created numerous hardships for Jews economically: they could not occupy many of the governmental posts in the colonial administration unless they were citizens, and the bureaucracy constituted a large portion of the colonial economy. After the Second World War, Jews were allowed to become part of the civil service, and did so in large numbers.

Though the economic and social handicaps were not entirely removed until the acquisition of citizenship, those living without such privilege could nevertheless continue to conduct commerce and educate their children in the *Alliance* schools. Jews’ adaptation to this unique status was such that they preferred legal ambiguity over more robust notions of national citizenship that forced them to renounce their difference. George Cohen notes that contrary to Europe during the Second World War, the ambiguity of legal status in Tunisia (and Morocco) was “un désagrément dont personne n’était mort.”<sup>18</sup>

For those Jews who could and did opt for French naturalization under the terms spelled out in the *Loi Morinaud*, citizenship became a mark of class and cultural distinction. André Nahum recalls how the residents of the Jewish quarter in Tunis resented those who put on airs after becoming “French.” One well-known figure “était naturalisé français et clamait à qui voulait l’entendre son amour pour sa nouvelle patrie, affectant de ne parler que la langue de Molière, laissant le judéo-arabe aux ‘Juifs de la Hara’, qu’il affectait de mépriser

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<sup>18</sup> Georges Cohen, 163-164.

profondément."<sup>19</sup> His coreligionists designated him with the scornful sobriquet “Joseph ‘Citoyen,’” making light of his pretensions to have gone beyond his humble origins.

One of the main factors that lead to the *francisation* of Moroccan and Tunisian Jews was the schooling offered by the *Alliance Israélite* beginning in the mid-nineteenth century (the first school opened in the northern Moroccan city of Tetuan in 1862). The Alliance saw its mission as the “regeneration” of Jews outside of Western Europe, particularly in the Mediterranean basin. The Alliance’s intervention also dovetailed with French commercial and territorial interests. Through diplomatic lobbying for the abolition of anti-Jewish legislation and more importantly through its network of mission-like schools, the *Alliance* sought nothing less than the transformation of Jews in the Maghreb, the Levant and the Balkans into candidates for citizenship, along French Jewish lines.

The use of French as the primary and, in the vast majority of cases, the only language of instruction left an indelible mark on Jews under the political control of Morocco, the regencies in Libya and Tunisia, and the Ottoman Empire. Not all Jews in Morocco and Tunisia attend French schools until late in the colonial period, and so for the first generation of Jews under the protectorate the Alliance was the only school they would ever know. While the Alliance lobbied for mass naturalization of Moroccan and Tunisian Jewry along the lines of the Crémieux Decree, they were never able to persuade successive French governments to comply.

Virtually every Moroccan and Tunisian memoir written this dissertation makes reference evoked the power of the Alliance in fundamentally shifting children’s cultural orientation and aspirations away from the traditional Judeo-Arabic milieu toward an idealized vision of metropolitan France. In the same way that France’s educational system under the Third Republic and its derivatives in the colonies taught students about “nos ancêtres les Gaulois,” the *Alliance*

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<sup>19</sup> André Nahum, *Tunis-la-Juive raconte* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1999) 63.

replaced Maghrebi Jewish history with that of French Jewry. Armand Abécassis reflects on this erasure of his community's past in his memoir *Rue des synagogues*:

Les couches populaires juives auraient découvert la culture occidentale sous sa forme française en même temps que la culture arabo-musulmane dans les écoles de l'Alliance. Mais tel n'était pas du tout le projet des notables de cette institution... Telle était la première déviation grave subie par les Juifs marocains qui payèrent l'ouverture nécessaire à la culture occidentale de leur croyance et de leur tradition. Et telle est la seconde déviation qu'on peut même appeler 'détournement', de leur appartenance marocaine. (66-67)

The combined goals of secularization and Europeanization dominated the *Alliance's* agenda, initiating Jews in the founding myths of the French Republic (the revolution of 1789, the first emancipation of Jews in Europe, the elaboration of human rights) as well as constituting "Judaism" as formal religious practice rather than a coherent way of life.

Since imagining France and French culture played such an important role in Jewish education in Morocco and Tunisia, it comes as no surprise that thoughts of departure dominated young Jewish minds from the interwar period onward. Historian Frances Malino analyses the operation of this impulse in essays written by female Alliance pupils in the 1930s as part of entrance exams for admission *École Normal Hébraïque* in Paris. There the girls would become certified as teachers in the Alliance system and afterward posted to a school (almost certainly far away from their home given the Alliance's policy). The essay prompt entitled "*Adieu, ma maison*" asked girls to "Assume that before leaving your country for a number of years, you contemplate your dwelling one last time and note your impressions."<sup>20</sup> Thus, these Jewish children around the Mediterranean were encouraged to imagine a perhaps permanent separation from their homes *before* they had ever left. Moreover, the question made such a departure seem part and parcel of the natural order. Leaving home for Paris was equated with growing up; as one became a mature, responsible adult, one "naturally" looked toward Europe.

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<sup>20</sup> Frances Malino, "Adieu Ma Maison" *Jewish Social Studies* 15.1, p. 132



While the Moroccan and Tunisian rabbinical establishments put up a stout and persistent resistance against the *Alliance* and most male children continued to attend Hebrew school (known as *heder* in Hebrew, or *koteb* from Arabic) up until the age of *bar mitzvah*, the rift between Judeo-Moroccan and Judeo-Tunisian culture on the one hand, and “French” culture was in some ways insoluble. The Alliance’s insistence on Judaism as religious practice submitted to the exigencies of French concepts of citizenship went against centuries of socio-political organization in the Maghreb and the Ottoman Empire. If migration seemed to confirm the “success” of their project, the trauma of integration ultimately refocused Maghrebi Jewish memory on what was left behind.

In Tunisia, the opening of French public schools proved a tremendous boon, and Jewish children flocked to the *Lycée Carnot* in Tunis. Writers such as Albert Memmi, Georges Cohen, and Colette Fellous all attended the school, one of the few institutional spaces in the protectorate that favored intercommunal mixing. “On trouvait, dans les classes, des Français, fils de petits fonctionnaires, de membres de professions libérales ou de riches colons, des Juifs, des Italiens, des Arabes (relativement peu, et souvent d’origine sociale élevée), des Maltais... Tout ce monde vivait dans sa communauté ethnique mais, au sein de la classe, la communauté était oubliée ; la classe elle-même devenait communauté (*De l’Ariana à Galata* 81-82). The curriculum however, was strictly European. Very few students learned Arabic despite the fact that it was the most widely spoken language in Morocco and Tunisia. In *Le monolingualisme de l’autre*, Jacques Derrida described the history and geography curriculum in French Algerian schools as “une discipline incroyable, une fable et une bible mais une doctrine d’endoctrinement quasiment ineffaçable pour des enfants de ma génération. (76) The French model of citizenship meant the

elimination of difference through the reconfiguration of students along the lines of ideal Frenchness.

In *Aujourd'hui*, Colette Fellous evokes the French culture she aspired to possess through her knowledge of European culture, constructed as a seamless progression. Philosophy as the students learned it began with Plato, St. Augustine (stripped of his Africanness) and went through Spinoza and Nietzsche. On her walls Fellous inscribes quotes from these philosophers along with French poets, Ronsard and Paul Valéry (67-68). All the historical and geographical distance between these various writers is collapsed into an ideal Europe with France as its crown. While Moroccan and Tunisian Jews will evoke their attachment to the French of the Revolution and human rights, this is not Molière's France. Hence the educational system managed to create a France of letters that young Jews could identify with regardless of France's policies. This became particularly important during the Vichy régime when Maghrebi Jews were able to make the distinction between what de Gaulle would call "la seule France, la vraie France, la France éternelle"<sup>21</sup> and its distorted collaborationist incarnation.

Yet schooling was not merely reformatting the intellectual schemas of students. For young people like Fellous, finishing lycée studies often meant going to France for university studies, since higher education opportunities in the colonies were extremely limited. French school, like the Alliance, prepared students to leave their home. "Je suis la dernière de la famille à partir et c'est tellement grisant. Je saluerai cette chambre pour la dernière fois... mais je ne serai pas triste du tout puisque la vraie vie est en France, tout le monde le dit, allez, au revoir petite maison, ciao Tunis, tu n'étais qu'une répétition." (*Aujourd'hui* 67) Tunis itself and the

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<sup>21</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Discours de l'Hôtel de Ville de Paris*, le 25 août 1944. <<http://www.ina.fr/fresques/jalons/fiche-media/InaEdu00004/la-liberation-de-paris-4-le-discours-du-general-de-gaulle-a-l-hotel-de-ville.html>>.

*Lycée Carnot* are mere warm-ups for Paris in Colette's mind. Yet her dream of being a liberated young woman in Paris is shattered by the anti-Jewish riots on June 5, 1967.

### **“Diviser pour mieux régner”: Citizenship as a Weapon of Government Repression**

As we saw in the previous chapter, many Maghrebi Jews identified with an idealized, progressive version of French history, a small but significant minority joined in Moroccan and Tunisian nationalist movements, affirming the Jewish presence in the Maghreb part of a deeply rooted indigenous reality. Nevertheless activists such as Edmond El Maleh, Abraham Serfaty, and Paul Sebag were often seen troublemakers by their own communities, desirous of retaining the few privileges the colonial regime had given them. Terrified that France would identify them even more closely with the Arab masses, they put pressure on dissidents to avoid opposing the colonial regime outright.

In cases of opposition to French colonial policy from Jewish “subalterns”, the administration could always resort to the vague jurisprudence concerning citizenship and naturalization overseas. Established in the seventeenth century, the old colonies of in the Antilles predated the juridical concept of citizenship in France, depending economically on plantation slave labor. Since newer colonies in the Maghreb, West Africa and East Asia were established under different regimes and different governments throughout the nineteenth century, the conditions for citizenship acquisition outside metropolitan France fell under conflicting (and in many cases undefined, unarticulated) jurisprudence.

The civil and military authorities in colonial administrations used this lack of definition to their advantage, ruthlessly suppressing any Jewish dissidence to colonial rule with all “legal” means at their disposition. They used the cosmopolitan history of Maghrebi Jewish communities

against them, focusing on the diverse origins of recently “naturalized” Jews in ways that made them seem unnatural Frenchmen. For example, Abraham Serfaty and his sister Évelyne were arrested and expelled from Morocco in 1951 because of their anti-colonial activism in the cadre of the Moroccan Communist Party (PCM).<sup>22</sup> Using the pretext of his grandfather’s acquisition of Brazilian nationality to facilitate his commercial activities there during the protectorate, the colonial government had him expelled as a foreign agitator.<sup>23</sup> Serge Moati, a Tunisian Jewish activist in the local section of the Socialist Party (SFIO) and journalist writing for *Tunis Socialiste* was expelled from Tunisia during the tumultuous administration of Governor-General Marcel Peyrouton (1933-1936), a hard-line conservative and fascist sympathizer.

Both cases are remarkable in demonstrating the French state’s ability to enforce policy through the manipulation of citizenship and nationality. These decisions also show the ties between the legal foundations of the colonial government and the deposed monarchy. While the very essence of the Jewish attraction to France was the guarantee of indissoluble Republican citizenship not based on religion or ethnic identity, the colonial governments were able to have recourse to authoritarian procedures that made citizenship an arbitrary privilege that could be granted or taken away at will.

After the Peyrouton administration shut *Tunis Socialiste* down, Serge Moati took on work at *Tunis Soir*, a French-language newspaper, published by Max Smadja, catering to a Jewish audience. In 1935, while the average Tunisian *fellah* (Arabic for peasant farmer) was languishing in poverty and hunger, Moati wrote an article that inflamed Peyrouton, highlighting the extravagant expenditures for the opening ceremonies for the *Maison des Agriculteurs*. “Early the next day, the police came to arrest Serge, and threw him on a seaplane bound for Marseille.

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<sup>22</sup> Abraham Serfaty, *Le Maroc du noir au gris* (Paris : Editions Syllepse, 1998).

<sup>23</sup> The great irony is that Driss Basri, the dreaded Minister of Interior under Hassan II, used the same charges to have Serfaty expelled from Morocco in 1991.

He was thus expelled on the basis of a strange and ancient royal edict of 1778.<sup>24</sup> While the colonial administration invalidated Serfaty's French nationality on the pretext of his grandfather and father's possession of Brazilian passports, in Moati's case, the government found a byzantine solution to use his French citizenship against him.

The bizarre procedure employed in his expulsion dated back to the reign of Louis XVI and took advantage of the fact that he was the grandson of a Livornese Jew who had acquired Consular protection in the form of French nationality before the establishment of the protectorate in 1881. The authorities used Article 82 of the royal edict of 1778, which stated "Dans tous les cas qui intéressent la police ou la sûreté du commerce de nos sujets dans des pays étrangers, pourront nos Consuls faire arrêter et renvoyer en France par le premier navire de la nation tout Français qui, par sa mauvaise conduite et ses intrigues pourra être nuisible au bien général."<sup>25</sup> By recognizing Moati's citizenship as a Frenchman in a "foreign country" he could then be expelled. All the fundamental contradictions of the French Imperial Republic appear in these two cases: Tunisia is considered a "foreign country" despite total French dominance and the de facto absence of indigenous sovereignty, Moati a French citizen for the purposes of expulsion, though the majority of Tunisian Jews would never be naturalized as French citizens, the Serfatys, whose ancestors lived in Morocco since the expulsion of Spanish Jewry at the end of the fifteenth century and had been French citizens for generations, were deemed "Brazilian".

Serge's continued refrain "Je suis français depuis trois générations" is unable to save him in either case. His protestations of Frenchness, his idealization of France and its historical mission are not enough. Once in metropolitan France, he fails to persuade his anti-Semitic Parisian neighbors that he is one of them. "Toute ma vie, j'ai aimé la France. Ses poètes et ses

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<sup>24</sup> Serge Moati, *Villa Jasmin*, 97.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Luc Muracciole, "Jurisprudence française relative au droit international public," *Annuaire français de droit international*, 3.3 (1957): 686-722 (698).

chanteurs, sa géographie, ses fleuves et ses départements... toute ma vie, j'ai rêvé de tous ceux qui ont su donner à ce pays son universalité, son génie qui fait que la France est elle-même lorsqu'elle est généreuse et fraternelle" (*Villa Jasmin* 98). Peyrouton came back to power after the armistice in 1940, and in 1942, Moati again was deported from Tunisia, by the Vichy administration backed by Nazi *Afrikakorps* troops. His ordeal had just begun in 1935. As became evident during the Second World War and the later Maghrebi Jewish migrations, the community's Francophilic cultural orientation and its self-perception as French were by no means sufficient insure a smooth "integration" into a decolonizing France.

### **Violence of Postcolonial Nation Building in Morocco and Tunisia**

Many Moroccan and Tunisian politicians, historians and writers claim that Jews born in their respective countries have been and will always be integral to the nation. Yet in the light of the near disappearance of Jews from both countries, this claim requires significant unpacking. In examining the discourse of Moroccan and Tunisian nation-building in the immediate aftermath of the French departure, Jews would be gradually marginalized by exclusionary legal definitions and administrative praxis, mirroring European ideologies of nationhood violently imposed in North Africa during the colonial period. One of the fundamental problems with imposing the order of the nation-state in postwar Maghreb, as Susan Gilson Miller aptly remarks, is that "Jews, like Muslims, often conceive of themselves as members of a global community with no one focus; often they are inclined to multiple points of reference that defy the pull of single center."<sup>26</sup> For many Maghrebi Jews, "the community imagined broadly across space and time was always the most meaningful idea of home."<sup>27</sup> Thus they had a doubly complicated

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<sup>26</sup> Susan Gilson Miller, "Kippur on the Amazon" 206.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

relationship to Moroccan and Tunisian nationalist movements often based on reassertions of Arab-Islamic identity. Judaism, the most constant point of reference for the community, was by definition excluded from at least one, if not both of these poles. Whether or not Jews could be considered “Arab” and the implications of such a distinction were unclear. The fact that many Jewish autobiographies of the period use the labels “Juif” and “Arabe” in French, amply reveals the difficulties posed by intercommunal divisions in constructing coherent Moroccan and Tunisian identities.

The promulgation of the young Tunisian Republic’s Constitution with its first article defining Arabic as the nation’s official language and Islam as its official religion seemed for some to be a signal that freed the Jewish community from their identity confusion. If they had not already distanced themselves from their fellow Tunisians during the protectorate, now the line had been drawn for them by the emerging political structure of the postcolonial Tunisian nation-state. “L’article premier de la future Constitution – qui fait de la Tunisie une nation souveraine dont la religion est l’Islam et la langue l’Arabe, et donc des Juifs, ni musulmans ni arabophones, des marginaux dans leur pays” only increased the sense of isolation in the community.<sup>28</sup> Cohen elaborates on his feelings as a Jewish student in the Tunisian residence hall in Paris on the eve of independence, surrounded by French students loudly asserting France’s role as “protector” of Tunisia and Muslim students demanding their right to self-determination.

Les Juifs se trouvaient dans une position ambiguë. De cœur et de culture ils se sentaient française. Ils étaient reconnaissants à la France de leur avoir ouvert les portes du savoir, de la modernité et aussi d’avoir établi un Etat de droit en Tunisie. Par ailleurs bien des traditions, des modes de comportements similaires, une communauté de vie et de pensée les rattachaient aux Arabes. Prendre position, c’était à la limite, trahir quelqu’un. Et personne ne le souhaitait. Le statu quo nous aurait bien convenu.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Cohen, *De l’Ariana à Galata*, 158.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 152.

Cohen's statement shows the practical rapprochement between Jewish and French positions, both wanted things to continue more or less as they were, but for very different reasons. Jews has been solidly behind the Blum and Mendes-France governments, both of which wanted to bring major reforms to the colonial system. Nevertheless, many Tunisian nationalists only saw Jews' lack of enthusiasm at the French departure.

In addition to the constitutional definition of the Arab and Muslim character of the Tunisian nation that marginalized Jews, the Bourguiba government abolished the Council of Jewish Communities, Tunisian Jewry's most significant national representative body, since now Jews were supposed to be completely equal in the eyes of the law. Along with these two legal changes, the "Arabization" campaign (designed to supplant French as the language of commerce and administration) and legislation that forced many Jewish businesses to have Muslim co-owners or co-managers, contributed to a mounting sense of anxiety about the future.

From then on Jews were supposed to have the same obligations and rights as all other Tunisian citizens, but the elimination of Jewish communal autonomy was never accompanied by social and political accommodation for Jewish difference. The nomination of Jewish notable, Albert Bessis, as Minister of Housing as a minister in the first Tunisian government unofficially provided representation for the community at the national level. Bessis lasted only eight months as minister and was replaced in 1956 by another Jew, André Barouch, which was appreciated by the Jewish community without fundamentally appeasing its anxiety.<sup>30</sup> After Barouch's exit from government, a Jewish minister was never nominated afterward (though Jewish deputies and senators have since intermittently been elected or appointed to the Tunisian parliament). In Morocco, Léon Benzaquen's participation as minister of the Post Office and Telegraph service lasted from 1956-1958; after him, there would not be another Jewish minister until 1993, long

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 159.



after most Moroccan Jews had left. In both cases, the Jewish minister served half as a member of the government, half as a token of Jews' official inclusion as (barely) tolerated minority.

Just as would be the case in France or Israel, Moroccan and Tunisian Jews were forced to adhere to a monolithic national project that did not allow for the multiplicity of their identity, especially their visceral connection to the French language and the State of Israel's survival. Albert Naccache who came of age just as Tunisia gained its independence also remembers the difficulty his generation experienced in situating themselves in an unknown universe. The new political establishment saw its Jewish citizens as "des handicapés culturels, incapables de parler leur langue, coupables d'avoir 'choisi' la culture du colonisateur et d'être solidaires de l'Etat d'Israël. Elle nous reprochait d'avoir 'le cœur ailleurs'... En fait, notre véritable culture était plurielle : à la fois arabe, berbère, française, israélienne, italienne et juive ; mais le concept de 'la mixité des cultures' n'était pas encore d'actualité."<sup>31</sup> In order to affirm their national character, the Moroccan and Tunisian states under construction needed to eliminate what they considered as heterogeneous, "foreign" elements.

Even among those who wished to remain and participate in the building of a new Tunisia, the bureaucratic annoyances could be significant enough to dissuade them from doing so. Sophie Bessis had finished her university studies in Paris and wanted to return to Tunis to teach in the newly created Université de Tunis. She later learned of "la bataille qui eut lieu à l'université pour savoir si devais y être admise. Je n'étais pas une étrangère. Étais-je vraiment bien nationale ? La discussion, paraît-il, fut rude. Je ne fus pas recrutée" (*Dedans, dehors* 16). Even for Bessis who had a Tunisian passport, informal obstacles to finding work could be formidable. If a Jewish person's potential employers and colleagues did not consider them adequately Moroccan or Tunisian, there were few ways to seek redress.

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<sup>31</sup> Albert Naccache, *Les Roses de l'Ariana*, 140

Jews left in large part in response to their increasing marginalization in these national projects, but also because of intermittent crises that forced them to choose over and over again between the different poles of their identity, either French or Tunisian in the Bizerte Crisis of July 1961 and Tunisian or Israeli/Jewish during the Arab-Israeli War in June 1967. Maya Nahum illustrates the fallout from the first in her novel *Les Gestes*, which focuses on her family's decision to leave for France. Malou Saadoun, the principal protagonist and narrator, is the daughter of Victor, a Tunisian Jew who did his pharmacy studies in Paris and Blanche, a French nurse who he married, convinced to convert to Judaism and move back to Tunisia with him. Though Victor sympathizes with nationalist movements across the Maghreb and faults France for the recent conflict, he decides to take the family to France to give his children better educational and economic opportunities. The family's strange citizenship history complicates matters.

Malou's older brothers Daniel and Samuel are officially French citizens, having been born in Paris, "L'ainé pendant les études de Victor, l'autre pendant un congrès, en avance et par accident. Français à toute vitesse. Mais pour Malou, il n'y a rien eu, rien du tout. Ni études, ni congrès. Elle est née ici, tunisienne, un point c'est tout. C'est ce que Victor dit." (65) When Malou consults her brothers about what it means to be truly French, the resulting distinction based on male sexuality, does not clear up her confusion very much. Samuel's only French friend "s'appelle Thiery Méchard, dont il affirme qu'il n'a pas la même quiquette que lui. Il l'a vue. Samuel en a ainsi déduit que les catholiques sont différents des Juifs et Arabes... parce qu'ils sont pas circoncis. Les garçons ont l'air préoccupé de cette histoire." (66) Despite having been born in France, they brothers know as much about it as Malou. Later on the deck of the

*Gouverneur General Chanzy*<sup>32</sup> transporting the family to Marseille, Malou is overcome by a combination of seasickness and homesickness. She realizes that the journey means a definitive rupture with her home, and worries that “elle ne saura jamais être française.” (151) Malou’s perplexity about their journey to France highlights the way that “Frenchness” for Moroccan and Tunisian Jews existed alongside their daily life within the bounds of the Jewish community. When confronted with the object of desire, the immediate response is to remain on the “frontière” between the world she is leaving and the one she has only dreamed of. “Surtout, bien rester sur la frontière... Ne pas bouger d’un pouce... Seule la frontière protège d’un choix forcément traître pour l’une ou l’autre de ses terres génitrices.” (152-153) While this proved impossible in legal terms, life-writing allows the author not only to return to this no man’s land, but to bring the reader into it.

### **Maghrebi Independences and the Impossible Choice**

After Moroccan independence, a series of political transformations exacerbated Jewish anxiety about the future, in particular the suspension of Jewish emigration and postal relations with Israel from 1958-1960, the country’s joining the Arab League (whose charter called for the destruction of Israel), Egyptian leader Gamal Adbel Nasser’s visit to Morocco in 1960, and the promulgation of the Moroccan constitution in 1962, stating in the same terms as Tunisia, that the official religion language would be Arabic and the official religion, Islam. Salomon Benbaruk notes that the pace of these changes prevented the Jewish community from having any idea what would come next, and how they should position themselves.

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<sup>32</sup> The ship corresponds to real one owned by the *Compagnie Générale Transatlantique*, named for Alfred Chanzy, a distinguished military officer who earned his stripes fighting in Algeria and came to prominence during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870-1871. It was retired in December 1962, after having transported many of the *pieds-noirs* returning to from Algiers. See, <[http://www.frenchlines.com/ship\\_fr\\_187.php](http://www.frenchlines.com/ship_fr_187.php)>.

À partir de ce moment, les affaires communautaires, les affaires tout court, le sionisme, la politique, les questions religieuses, tout se mêle et s'entrecroise, se confronte, se complète ou se heurte. D'un côté, il y avait les autorités marocaines, tiraillées entre leur tolérance habituelle et les exigences de la politique de la Ligue arabe, et de l'autre, une communauté juive porteuse de problèmes complexes et insolubles. (46)

Bit by bit, the departures for Israel, France and Canada unsettled those who remained, causing them to leave to rejoin family members abroad. Clandestine Israeli agents in Morocco also worked to alternatively frighten and encourage Jews to leave for Israel. Their discourse was a classic carrot-and-stick: in Israel, Jews would be truly at home in the land of their Biblical ancestors, they would have houses, jobs, education, and healthcare. If they stayed in Morocco, their future would be grim. Victor Malka notes that for the reticent, the Zionist organizations could also count on fear. "Ils ont eux aussi recours à tous les moyens et tous les subterfuges. Il leur est arrivé une fois de distribuer, dans des boîtes aux lettres repérées à l'avance, des tracts violemment antisémites avec l'espoir de susciter un mouvement de panique." (*Avons-nous assez divagués*, 68).

Organizers particularly focused their efforts on parents, hoping to persuade them to give their children to make *aliya*. Bob Abitbol remembers "des jeunes hommes venaient mystérieusement dans les immeubles et repartaient avec de jeunes enfants qu'on ne revoyait plus. J'appris plus tard que c'étaient des sionistes quand j'ai failli y passer moi-même mais ma mère avait changé d'avis au dernier moment."<sup>33</sup> Whatever public displays of antisemitism occurred in the press or in street protests, Jews often maintained close relationships with their Muslim neighbors who encouraged them to stay. Abitbol's writing registers both the sadness felt by neighbors and his mother's own difficulty explaining to them the diffuse threat that Jews felt as Morocco moved politically toward the rest of the Arab world.

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<sup>33</sup> Bob Oré Abitbol, "Premier Amour" *Le Goût des confitures*, 21-28 (26).

Ici, les gens ne comprennent pas pourquoi nous partons. – Allache, Allache ? Pourquoi ? Vous n’êtes pas bien ici ? Qu’est-ce qui vous manque ? Vous n’êtes pas bien ici ? Est-ce qu’on vous a fait du mal ? Le Roi est bon pour nous, il nous protège comme son père l’avait fait avant lui. – Mais s’il arrivait quelque chose ? C’est toujours nous qui prenons, voilà la vérité. C’est ce qui nous inquiète.<sup>34</sup>

Jews understandably looked back at the precolonial period when imagining what Muslim rule might bring. They drew on oral history and collective memories that told of intimate, but dangerous relations, in which any fluctuation in central power left them at the mercy of the poor masses. As Bob Abitbol’s mother expressed, if Bourguiba or Mohammed V/Hassan II were to be overthrown, it might be Jews who would “get it.”<sup>35</sup>

In addition to concerns about their place in fragile postcolonial states in the midst of nation building, the economic situation of the postcolonial Maghreb worked against Jews. France’s departure functioned like a vacuum, depriving the young countries of the trained personnel, technological expertise, and capital they desperately needed. French discrimination meant that the Muslim literacy rate in both countries ranged from 10 to 15%. Jews on the other hand, had reaped the benefits of *Alliance* schooling, with a significant literacy rate among Jewish males. Some Jews had also benefited from higher education in France, making them natural candidates for many of the best jobs vacated by the French. The comparative advantage related to Jews’ cultural capital created resentment among Muslims, who wanted the fruits of decolonization fall first and foremost to themselves.

Daniel Sibony aptly summarizes the economic equation implied by decolonization in *Marrakech, le départ*: “Imaginez, après l’indépendance, les places laissées libres par les Français reviennent aux plus compétents. Mais ce sont des *dhimmis*, alors on les écarte, et c’est gênant; si on les laisse, c’est gênant aussi. Donc, ils doivent partir.” (140) Given the superior percentage of

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<sup>34</sup> Abitbol, *Le Goût des confitures*, 73-80 (74-75).

<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the unexpected death of Mohammed V threw Moroccan Jewry into panic, and by the time Hassan II was able to establish a modicum of calm, much of the psychological damage had been done. When Hassan II underwent assassination attempts and failed coup d’états this also unnerved the diminishing community still in Morocco.

Jews who had secondary and post-secondary French education, they would naturally occupy the upper levels of the administrative, commercial and professional classes. The young Moroccan and Tunisian Muslim cohorts, who fought against the Protectorate, had done so with the understanding that these jobs would be opened up to them. For Muslims, the education gap also served as visible reminder of the ways that the French had favored Jews, reinforcing the image of Jews complicit in colonial oppression.

When Jewish nationalist militants began to protest about the lack of democracy in postcolonial Morocco and Tunisia, citizenship again served to repress dissent. In an ironic, but perhaps unsurprising turn of events, Moroccan officials used similar proceedings to those employed by French colonial authorities in imprisoning, torturing eventually expelling Abraham Serfaty for his denunciation of authoritarianism. The legal “basis” for this treatment was, once again, Serfaty’s supposedly Brazilian origins.<sup>36</sup> When Jews dissented against government policies, Moroccan and Tunisian governments treated them as foreigners, regardless of legal precedent and governmental rhetoric that contradicted such policy. After having aspired to “Europeanness” and more specifically “Frenchness” for two to three generations (four in some upper class families who received protection from European consuls), Jews now had to return to the Judeo-Arabic language and culture they had considered as an obstacle to full emancipation. If leaving for France (or Israel) seemed the next logical step for many, migration as a solution to issues of belonging proved to be far more complicated than anticipated.

For many Moroccan and Tunisian Jews this new exile became inscribed on palimpsest of previous forced migrations. Victor Malka sums up this historical paradox: “C’est une nouvelle errance qui commencent pour nous. L’histoire qui se répète. Nous savons cependant que nous ne sommes attendus nulle part, pas même en Israël... Notre histoire regorge, depuis ses origines, de

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<sup>36</sup> Abraham Serfaty, “Déclaration” *Le Maroc du noir au gris* (Paris: Editions Syllepse, 1998), 127-128.

promesses qu'on nous a faites, qu'on nous a jamais tenues" (*Avons-nous assez divagués* 72-74). Malka's sobering assessment would be borne out by the experiences of countless other Jewish migrants in France. Far from being welcomed with open arms in the place they imagined to be their home, they found themselves viewed as guest workers, like their Muslim counterparts.

### **Naturalization and Its Discontents in France**

For those thousands of Tunisian and Moroccan Jews, who like Serge Moati, thought France would open its arms to its Jewish protégés as though they were prodigal children returning home, a rather brutal realization awaited. One of these Tunisian Jews was Georges Memmi, younger brother to Albert, the well-known writer who helped found the journal *Jeune Afrique* and dissected colonial relations and predicted the violent end of French empire in the now classic *Portrait du colonisé, Portrait du colonisateur*. Georges revisits the trajectory of Tunisian Jewry's acculturation and migration through his own struggle for naturalization in *Ma France*.

Georges, like Albert, attended the *Lycée Carnot* and developed a deep love for French language and literature. Yet when Georges decided to leave Tunis to search for work in France, he immediately discovered how little his devotion to France meant in legal terms. "Au chapitre de mes naïvetés, je livre encore celle-ci: je croyais que lire me rapprochait de ma future citoyenneté, tant j'étais convaincu qu'un Français est forcément un lecteur assidu de Corneille, Proust et Valéry Larbaud." (*Ma France* 90) As a Tunisian national, Memmi became eligible for naturalization only after a complicated and lengthy bureaucratic procedure. The transformation from being an unreflective Tunisian Jew who admired French culture to alien in France destabilized Memmi's sense of self:

La veille, j'avais quitté ma terre natale accompagné par les bénédictions de mes parents. A peine avais-je posé le pied sur la terre française que j'étais devenu un *émigré* et, aux yeux de ceux dont j'étais venu chercher l'amitié, un *travailleur immigré*. Pour tout dire : un *étranger*. Sur le grand livre de l'état-civil français, je figurais dorénavant à la page Étrangers, là où étaient inscrits des hommes qui étaient prêts, le jour venu à perdre leur première identité dans une démarche poignante et pitoyable. (ibid)

The difficulties of “integration” naturally caused many to look back at the Maghreb with nostalgia, in particular that different ethnic and religious communities could simultaneously exist in religious and cultural autonomy and nevertheless remain profoundly interconnected on the level of day-to-day economic exchange. In addition to acquiring citizenship, and trying to find the same kind of job they had in Tunisia or Morocco, Jews experienced a tremendous culture shock upon arrival.

Describing the Jews who migrated from Casablanca to France and Israel, Annie Dayan-Rosenman asserts “souvent, ils ont perçu en eu eux et autour d’eux un vide immense qui se creusait à une vitesse vertigineuse et qu’ils ne pouvaient combler ni avec les diplômes de leurs enfants, ni avec les exploits du général Rabin, ni par un amour passionné et peut-être excessif pour l’abbé Grégoire.” (“Ciné-Casa” 220) Soon after having arrived in France and Israel, many Sephardi Jews became dissatisfied with their reduced socio-economic position and the discriminatory models of assimilation that required them to adhere absolutely to an ideal that made no room for their own specificity.

Becoming French did not merely entail naturalization (as grueling and difficult as it was). Passing as French involved a much deeper internal transformation, one that required a humiliating self-abnegation as a prelude to a deferred integration. Memmi writes that his success in obtaining naturalization only accentuated his perception of this gap between him and fellow citizens. “Il me fallait parfaitement connaître la géographie, l’histoire et les subtilités des mœurs françaises, m’incliner devant l’idée que la Français est supérieur à tous les étrangers, que sa



littérature, sa cuisine, ses vins, ses monuments sont incomparables, ses femmes les plus belles et ses hommes, les plus spirituels et les meilleurs amants du monde. On ne me pardonnait aucune erreur, aucune confusion, aucune approximation” (*Ma France* 96-97) Maghrebi Jews’ self-assured embodiment of Frenchness in the colonies became a source of physical and psychological anxiety in France. Before the Law, their imaginary relationship with France was put to the test.

### **Improbable Homeland: Reconstituting the Community in Montréal**

Canada’s image as an open country that needed entrepreneurial settlers represented an attractive alternative to an Israel where Maghrebi immigrants were treated as “Arabs” and France, where immigrants’ economic insertion remained difficult. Esther Benaïm-Ouaknine recalls most Jews in 1950s Morocco knew very little about Québec: “qu’il y faisait froid et, à la rigueur, qu’on y parlait français. Ce que tout le monde savait, en revanche, c’est que le Québec se trouvait au Canada et que le Canada c’était déjà l’Amérique: immense, généreuse, et opulente, où richesse et liberté sont le lot de tous et de chacun.”<sup>37</sup> Some 5,000 Moroccan Jews arrived directly from Morocco as well as from Israel in the decade leading up to Pierre Trudeau’s election as prime minister in 1968.

In contrast to the United States, the country’s immigration policy proved remarkably open throughout from the mid 1950s onward for two reasons: first because Canada’s postwar economic boom necessitated cheap labor and later in 1962 because human rights and diplomatic concerns began to have an impact on immigration policy. The government agreed to eliminate some of the racial and ethnic restraints on immigration in large part to “enhance

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<sup>37</sup> Esther Benaïm Ouaknine, “La judaïcité québécoise,” 359.

Canada's economic profile among the new states of Africa and Asia" as Harold Troper notes.<sup>38</sup> Beyond public relations, the open door immigration policy furthered Trudeau's discourse of a multicultural Canada. Trudeau pointed to the diversity in Montreal as evidence that the Anglophone/Francophone distinction, and those who continued to use it such as the Québécois separatists, were living in the past.

As a result, some 25,000-30,000 Jews from Muslim countries, most of them Moroccan, with smaller numbers from Iraq, Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia, settled in the 1960s and 1970s. In 2001, the Montreal Jewish community's official census identified 21,215 Jews of North African and Middle Eastern origin, comprising 23% of the city's overall Jewish population.<sup>39</sup> Maghrebi Jews, regardless of their origins, tended to settle in Montreal over any other city in Québec, where they hoped to seamlessly integrate given their mastery of the French language and appreciation of French culture. Born in Casablanca in the early 1930s, Elie Malka affirms that for young Moroccan Jews who became adults in the postwar period, Canada also represented unbounded economic and social freedom.

Et nous avons choisi l'Amérique parce que l'Amérique incarnait pour nous la réussite, incarnait la liberté ! La liberté d'être Juif, parce qu'il ne faut pas oublier que nous avons connu le colonialisme qui nous a fait sentir à quel point nous n'étions pas des hommes qui avaient la même stature... que les Européens. Quand maman a vu pour la première fois un Juif médecin, elle lui a dit : //Elie Malka parle en judéo-arabe// 'Non, non ! Ce n'est pas vous le médecin ! Vous, vous n'êtes que l'infirmier !'<sup>40</sup>

Malka's mother's inability to imagine a Maghrebi coreligionist becoming a doctor reveals the inferiority complex that accompanied admiration for French power. Expecting to arrive in a "New World" full of economic opportunity and devoid of history, they instead discovered a Québec that was in the midst of quietly reaffirming its identity over and against Anglophone

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<sup>38</sup> Harold Troper, "Canadian Immigration Policy Since 1945" *International Journal* 48 (1993): 255-281 (266).

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.federationcja.org/fr/montreal-juif/donnees-demographiques/>

<sup>40</sup> Elie Malka, interviewed by André Elbaz, *Sephardim d'hier et de demain: trois autobiographies d'immigrants juifs marocains au Canada* (Hull, QC: Musée canadien de civilisations, 1988), 172-173.

Canada. The nascent Québécois identity depended heavily on its French Catholic past and a history of resistance to nineteenth-century English Canadian oppression.<sup>41</sup> How could Maghrebi Jews find their place in a society where speaking French meant being Catholic? Newly arriving Jews had very little in common, historically or linguistically, with the highly acculturated, mostly English speaking Ashkenazi establishment that dominated Montreal's Jewish landscape. Instead, Maghrebi Jews arrived in Canada and were once again caught up in divisive politics of identity that accompanied Québec's own "decolonization".

In the eyes of the Ashkenazi establishment, they were anomalous (being of mixed French, Arab and Jewish culture), and in their own turn adopted the term "Sephardi", derived from *Sefarad*, the Hebrew word for the Iberian Peninsula, to distinguish themselves. Elie Malka, one of the earliest arrivals and first presidents of the Sephardi community in Québec, points out it was another reductive label which did not accurately take into account their experience of their own history. Many Jews of the Mediterranean Basin and Middle East never passed through or settled in Medieval Spain. They did experience a kind of "sephardization" after Jews were pushed out of Iberia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and sought refuge in the regencies of North Africa and Ottoman territory.

Malka notes "le mot 'sépharade', c'est quelque chose que nous avons toujours ignoré jusqu'à ce qu'on soit venu au Canada. C'est là où ça a pris un sens beaucoup plus aigu que le sens qu'on lui donnait au Maroc... est-ce que c'est une fabrication ? Est-ce que c'est une connotation de prestige ?"<sup>42</sup> Although it seems impossible to trace the origin of this trend, most

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<sup>41</sup> One of the best examples being "Je me souviens," the province's motto appearing on the coat of arms and since 1978, provincial license plates. Though its exact origins are debated, it enjoins Québécois to remember the loss of Nouvelle-France and the oppression they endured afterward. For a Maghrebi Jew, a Lebanese Christian, or a Haitian living in Montréal, "je me souviens" means something rather different, enjoining them to remember their places of origin and the conflicts that drove them out.

<sup>42</sup> Elie Malka, 158.

scholars and members of the community agree on two things: first, that they called themselves “Sephardi” in large part to counter the Ashkenazi perception that they were primitive, uncultured “Arabs,” and second that the label is useful in designating their shared Mediterranean origins, but fails to fully capture their sense of self-identity. Some scholars of Maghrebi Jewish origin in Québec have nevertheless adopted “Sepahardi” for political and cultural reasons. First and foremost, as Jean-Claude Lasry, one of the prominent members of Montreal’s Jewish community, notes, “Séfarade” was used to “contrer l’emploi de l’expression manichéenne ‘d’Asie et d’Afrique,’ conçue par l’oligarchie israélienne qui, elle, s’attribue l’association à ‘l’Europe et l’Amérique,’ berceaux de la civilisation occidentale.”<sup>43</sup> Lasry’s position demonstrates a “strategic essentialism” adopted by Jews from Muslim lands who rebranded themselves as “Sephardim.”

Maghrebi Jews immigrating Canada specifically hoped to avoid these thorny questions of identity, which had been one of the major factors of their departure Morocco and Tunisia in the first decade after independence. After 1966, an increasing percentage of Maghrebi Jews arrived in Québec as a result of indirect immigration, meaning that upon their original departure from North Africa they had settled in France or Israel.<sup>44</sup> In both countries, they had faced significant discrimination from the Ashkenazi-dominated Jewish establishments on the basis of their Arab culture. For Maghrebi Jews, the Americas were thought of as a place where a laissez-faire approach to culture and economy reigned.

Of course, the reality was more complicated. In his novel *Que Dieu vous garde de l’homme silencieux quand il se met soudain à parler* (the title derived from a Judeo-Arabic proverb) Victor Téboul describes the ironies of a group of Mahgrebi immigrants, some Jewish,

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<sup>43</sup> Jean-Claude Lasry, “Essor et tradition: la communauté juive nord-africaine au Québec” in *Les Juifs du Maghreb* 17-54 (20).

<sup>44</sup> Lasry (27).

some Muslim at a naturalization ceremony in Montreal during the 1960s. The presiding French-speaking judge asks Alexandrian-born Haïm Ben Haïm (modeled on Teboul's father), what he and his wife Marie know about Canada's history. The implications of the question unnerve the citizens-to-be: "Aurait-on osé lui avouer qu'on avait choisi le Canada parce que, justement, c'était un pays sans histoire? Se serait-il fâché, aurait-il été insulté?" (*Que Dieu vous garde* 208). Later, during the singing of the national anthem, the Muslim and Jewish candidates are further alarmed by the lyrics of the French version of *O Canada!* (this stanza is still sung today). "O Canada! Terre de nos aïeux / Ton front est ceint de fleurons glorieux! / Car ton bras sait porter l'épée, / Il sait porter la croix."<sup>45</sup> The final stanza, phased out by the Federal government in 1980 after most Maghrebi Jews had arrived, proved even more shocking. "Parmi les races étrangères / Notre guide est la loi; / Sachons être un peuple de frères / Sous la joug de la Foi; / Et répétons, comme nos pères, / Le cri vainqueur: Pour le Christ et nos droits." Little wonder that "les candidats juifs et musulmans qui avaient choisi de prêter serment en français tournaient la feuille en se demandant s'ils avaient la bonne version." (210). Despite the comic register that Tébooul uses to describe the courtroom scene, the words of Québécois version of the anthem foreshadowed the complication of Jewish integration in Montreal. Jewish parents wishing to send their children to French-language schools find that most of these institutions are only open to Catholics and often run by the Church itself. Newly arrived Jewish immigrants soon earned the absurd sobriquet "Juifs Catholiques" so total was the association between linguistic and religious identity in Québec.

Doomed to the "loss of their religion if they attended French (Catholic) schools or the loss of their language and their culture if they attended (Anglophone) Jewish or (Anglophone)

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<sup>45</sup> See the Canadian government's "Canadian Heritage – National Anthem: O Canada" webpage for the various renditions of the national anthem: <<http://www.pch.gc.ca/pgm/ceem-cced/symbbl/anthem-eng.cfm>>

Protestant schools,” the *Association Sépharade Francophone* lobbied the Minister of Education in 1968-1969 for the creation of French-language Jewish schools. They later worked out an agreement with Montreal Commission of Catholic Schools to help fund the creation of the autonomously run *Ecole Maïmonide*.<sup>46</sup> Jews were remarkably flexible in their arrangements with the Catholic-run education system, prioritizing community control over any abstract notion of *laïcité*. Coinciding with the Sephardi arrivals in Morocco, the “Quiet Revolution” marked the economic and cultural modernization of Québec. Increasing calls for cultural autonomy among the French-speaking populace were echoed in the Sephardi community’s desire to remain autonomous from the larger, Anglophone Ashkenazi community. Yet most Sephardim, while preferring French as the official language, did not wish to see the province secede from the rest of Canada. They thus felt alienated first and foremost from the Ashkenazim, but also uneasy with Québécois nationalists, whose fervent adherence to an exclusionary political movement mirrored that of Maghrebi populations during decolonization.

As a result, Jews turned back toward the Maghreb, realizing that in most cases the group with whom they had the most in common was the Muslim population of their former countries. Najib Redouane puts it this way: “Neither the diversity of religious rites, nor language linked [the immigrants with the Ashkenazim], and thus they found themselves French-speaking, Sephardi Jews. As such, on Canadian soil many Jews, especially those from Morocco, were confronted with a brutal realization: they were not only Jews from a Muslim land as they had always thought, they were profoundly Moroccan.”<sup>47</sup> The process of re-nationalization in exile nevertheless confronted the growing Jewish-Muslim tensions around Middle East conflict. If

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<sup>46</sup> Jean-Claude Lasry, “Essor et tradition” 46.

<sup>47</sup> Najib Redouane, “L’aventure collective des voix littéraires sépharades au Canada” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 7.1 (2004): 51-65 (52).

Jews would come to think of themselves as Moroccan in Canada, others increasingly linked them with Israel.

### **Silent Refugees or Diasporic Citizens**

In the wake of the Palestinian refugee crisis and Jewish migration from Arab lands, many Israeli statesmen and diplomats began to argue that a “population exchange” had occurred between Israel and the Arab world, albeit a non-negotiated one. Israelis saw these Arab-Jewish refugees as human capital that could be politically wielded to blunt the moral and legal arguments made by Palestinians. Some Zionist, Francophone Jewish intellectuals have also adopted this position, claiming a rough sort of “equality” between by the migrations that canceled out Palestinian claims. Jewish philosopher Shmuel Trigano, born in Blida, Algeria, made the rather violent comparison in an interview about his work *La fin des Juifs en terre d’Islam*:

Il s’est produit un échange de population comme entre la Turquie et la Grèce, l’Inde et le Pakistan et entre des pays européens après la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. On nous rabat les oreilles avec les Palestiniens qui ont la clé de leur maison et vont la voir de loin. Mais les sépharades aussi ont la clé de leur maison! Ils sont partis en fermant la porte, en s’enfuyant, en abandonnant tout quand ils n’ont pas été spoliés et dépouillés... L’État juif n’a pas été créé en chassant la population palestinienne car les Juifs aussi, devenus des Israéliens, ont été chassés de chez eux. C’est ce qu’il faut rappeler avec force aujourd’hui. Les Juifs n’ont aucune dette envers les Palestiniens.<sup>48</sup>

Trigano’s inflammatory rhetoric and contradictory logic flattens and homogenizes the diversity of Jewish experience in the Muslim world. In fact, both Jews in the Muslim world and the Palestinians left their homelands under traumatic circumstances, but not all at the same time and under similar circumstances. One’s victimization does not justify another’s. The vast differences between the cases of Maghrebi Jewish communities and those of the Middle East are negated,

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<sup>48</sup> Shmuel Trigano, “La fin du judaïsme en terres d’Islam: Entretien avec Elias Levy,” *Canadian Jewish News*, 28 May 2009.

with the highly charged words “spoliés” and “dépouillés” (spoiled and robbed) trumping Palestinian refugee claims.

Libyan Jewish writer Maurice Roumani and Tunisian Jewish writer Jean-Pierre Allali have contributed to the refugee discourse of “expulsion” and “deportation” about all the Jews from Muslim lands, despite the fact that the term is practically impossible to apply to the Tunisian and Moroccan cases (and highly contestable as applied to Algerian Jewry<sup>49</sup>). Allali’s book *Les réfugiés échangés: Séfarades-Palestiniens* (2007) argues that the Middle East peace process should be founded on the international legal recognition of a “population exchange” between Palestinians on the one hand and Jews from Arab countries. I would argue that Allali and Roumani are also seeking redress for Maghrebi Jews’ trauma not only in their countries of origin, but more importantly, from Ashkenazi Jews whose monopolization of the Shoah leaves many other narratives out. Just as Israelis who did not experience the Shoah came to make it a central part of their identity<sup>50</sup>, so Moroccan and Tunisian Jews who did not experience the expulsion their Egyptian and Libyan co-religionists faced, graft their narrative onto others.

Despite the dramatic transformations that took place in Morocco and Tunisia during the early years of independence and the difficulties posed for Jews by the Arabizing tendencies among the leadership of both countries’ early administrations, the plight of Jews there is not identical or even assimilable to that of Libyan or Egyptian Jews, much less Yemeni or Iraqi Jews. Historian and legal scholar Michael Fischbach argues that it is impossible to create one

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<sup>49</sup> Two recent works have shed light on a previously ignored subject: the Europeans that remained and even left France to settle in Algeria after its independence. Pierre Daum’s groundbreaking *Ni valise, ni cerceuil : Les pieds-noirs restés en Algérie après l’indépendance* Arles: Actes Sud, 2012, documents the significant numbers of Europeans who believed that they were Algerian and refused to leave in the midst of the hysteria that took hold after the Evian Accords. Catherine Simon’s *Algérie, les années pieds-rouges: des rêves de l’indépendance au désenchantement, 1962-1969*. Paris: La Découverte, 2011, examines the trajectories of those French who moved to Algeria out of a sense of political and humanitarian duty to participate in what they believed to be the most important revolution of their time.

<sup>50</sup> See Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).



coherent narrative of emigration “by lumping together the diverse experience of different types and social classes of Jewish emigrants from so many different Arab countries, some of which were not even fully independent states at the time of the Jewish exodus.”<sup>51</sup> Just as we have seen in post-independence Morocco and Tunisia, France and Québec, the dominant pro-Israeli and political Zionist narrative (in this case, centered on the claim that Jews of Muslim lands were as oppressed, if not more so, than Jews in Christian Europe and were brutally expelled during decolonization) hijacks Moroccan and Tunisian Jewish history from the community for political purposes, forcing them to adhere to an externally imposed notion of identity that does not square with their own self-perception.

To conflate these unique histories does a tremendous disservice to specificities of each, ignoring the vast majority of Moroccan and Tunisian Jewish writers’ nuanced and diverse accounts of their reasons for departure (especially those who regret leaving or have since returned). It also places on blame on stateless Palestinian refugees who can in no way be considered legally responsible for what took place in the Maghreb. Fischbach asks, “can justice therefore truly be served, can recognition truly be obtained, can healing and renewal truly be achieved, if Jewish claims for dispossession in the Middle East and North Africa are not laid at the doorstep of the responsible parties but rather used to deflect the claims and narratives of a third party? Can the healing take place if the aggrieved Jews themselves are not the one presenting their own narrative?”<sup>52</sup> Of course, the problem is that no one narrative will fit all the different Jewish communities, and that Maghrebi Jews often do “blame” Palestinians out of displaced anger as well as to assimilate in Israeli society.<sup>53</sup> Even within one autobiographical

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<sup>51</sup> Fischbach, *Jewish Property Claims Against Arab Countries*, 265

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 270.

<sup>53</sup> In “The Great Chain of Orientalism:”, Aziza Khazoom shows how Sephardi/Mizrahi Jews in Israel adapt anti-Palestinian discourse in part out of their insecurity and anxiety about being identified as Arab themselves.

text, the reasons for leaving are more complicated than simply being driven out. Can all of these Jewish émigrés even be considered refugees? The 1951 UN Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone who,

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality or membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside of the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.<sup>54</sup>

In whatever ways Jews from other parts of the Mediterranean especially Syria, Egypt and Libya should qualify for refugee status under these terms, the definition corresponds more awkwardly to the Moroccan and Tunisian cases, where reasons for departure included lack of educational or economic opportunities, Zionist fervor and propaganda, and in fewer cases, isolated public manifestations of anti-Jewish sentiment, and in a smaller number of cases, direct government discrimination or intervention against Jews (usually relating to their legal or political affiliation with France or Israel). Sophie Bessis describes the comparative ease with which many Moroccan and Tunisian Jews are able to slip back into daily life in their countries of origin: *Je ne me plains pas. L'exil n'est pas si radical, il n'empêche pas de savoir d'où je viens... je cultive la routine des fréquents allers-retours. Chez moi, dans ma maison, tout près de la mer familiale m'attendent des fleurs ardentes.*" (*Dedans, dehors* 16) Especially for those naturalized in France or Canada, who could then keep their Moroccan and Tunisian passports, the legal barriers to return are relatively insignificant.

No one reason can explain the departure of Tunisian Jewry, as Albert Naccache points out. The complex mix of push and pull factors included: "les mesures hostiles prises contre notre communauté en pleine fièvre nationaliste pendant l'indépendance tunisienne, l'affaire de Bizerte en 1961, les émeutes à la suite de la guerre de Six Jours en 1967, notre méconnaissance de

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<sup>54</sup> Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, Chapter 1, Art. 1. Subarticle A(2).

l'arabe littéraire et l'absence d'avenir... notre rêve de vivre en Israël ou en France.”<sup>55</sup> Jewish authors constantly employ the trope of leaving the Maghreb with an instinctive feeling that it had to be done, without knowing why and regretting the decision all the while. Since Bob Abitbol was only 15 years old when his family sent him to Montréal to continue his studies, he creates a text within a text to give voice to the tormented conscience of those who had to make the decision as adults. Using a letter that his mother wrote to him from Casablanca, after she had finally decided to leave, Abitbol effectively dramatizes her generation's predicament.

Et j'aime ce pays chaleureux, hospitalier, qui est celui de mes parents et des parentes de mes parents. J'aime les gens d'ici, musulmans et Juifs mêlés à une même recherche de bonheur et de fraternité, cette vie tranquille pleine de soleil et d'amitié.

Et je me pose la question sérieusement. Pourquoi sommes-nous partis ? Qui a commencé cet exode qui nous a éparpillés aux quatre coins de la terre ? Qui a décidé le premier que ce pays n'était plus pour nous, n'était plus sûr ? Qui a senti le premier le danger ? (*Le goût des confitures* 74).

The continuing presence of small Jewish communities in Morocco and Tunisia up to the present day, and the large numbers of Jewish tourists of Moroccan and Tunisia origin who spend summer vacations there amply reveals the ambiguity of the situation. Moroccan Jews in Québec have maintained other links with Morocco, including through political lobbying for their homeland. Moroccan Jewish community leaders helped bring about the opening of a Moroccan consulate in Montreal. Yet this same community ardently lobbies on behalf of Israel, regarding these activities as concomitant rather than contradictory.

Hassan II made a significant overture toward the Moroccan Jewish Diaspora in the mid-1970s by receiving high-level Israeli officials including Shimon Peres, the then Prime Minister of Israel, and reaffirming the inalienability of Moroccan nationality: “Moroccan Jews currently living abroad may return to their country at any moment.” According to the 1976 communiqué,

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<sup>55</sup> Albert Naccache, *Les Roses* 148

this Moroccan version of the “law of return” included those who lacked Moroccan passports, as long they could prove both parents were born in Morocco.<sup>56</sup> Yet the pronouncement could not undo the damage of “Moroccanisation” that had relegated Jews to the margins of the postcolonial state.

Daniel Sibony’s *Marrakech, le départ* brilliantly dramatizes the strangeness of such a diasporic identity. The largely autobiographical protagonist Haïm Bouzaglo has returned to his native Marrakech to finish the manuscript for his next crime novel. While staying at the *Grand Hôtel*, he encounters a group of Tunisian Jews he knows from Paris who have come to Morocco for summer vacation. His conversation with the *Tunes* (as they are known in today’s French parlance) reveals the irony both groups’ departure even as they have decided to return. When one *Tune* insists that differences in religious practice between Judaism and Islam “ne dit pas pourquoi les nôtres sont tous partis sans que personne les ait chassés,” Haïm responds with a comment on the psychological and practical bases for exile. “Le départ, vous savez... Ce sont des gestes, des attitudes, plutôt que des théories.” (140)

As we see in this discussion taking place beside a sunlit pool in a posh Marrakech *riad*, nostalgia too is not just a state of mind, but a practice that invests certain places from the past with meaning over and against those in the present. Nourished by endless conversations about why one left and what was life was like before, nostalgia (as did dreaming about France or Israel) privileges an imagined elsewhere over the here and now. Most of the *Tunes*, “n’ont même pas à déchiffrer cet arrachement—qui les a mis en porte à faux: glorifier un mode de vie qu’ils quittent, de leur plein gré, mais sans pouvoir faire autrement... là-bas, c’était le kif, le paradis, et

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<sup>56</sup> Cited in Simon Lévy, “La communauté juive dans l’histoire du Maroc” *Juifs du Maroc*, 146.

en France c'est la jungle, c'est dur."<sup>57</sup> Once again, returning to the Maghreb as French or Canadian citizens does not solve the fact that they left feeling as though they no longer belonged.

Bob Oré Abitbol's journey from Casablanca to Paris to Montreal, so typical of the "unfinished migrations" of Maghrebi Jews, led him to the conclusion that "en moi et moi seul, j'ai compris que j'appartiens à mon pays et à tous les pays."<sup>58</sup> What remains to be is how these identities will be able to accommodate the demands of citizenship, or if how they will be able to perhaps transform the notion of citizenship to better coincide with the multi-ethnic, diasporic reality of ex-colonial powers in the twenty-first century. Here the Maghrebi Jewish story rejoins that countless other immigrant groups of diverse origins attempting to find their place within the increasingly antiquated political framework of the modern nation-state.

In the next chapter, we move to the ways that Maghrebi Jews write about their returns to Morocco and Tunisia in the 1990s and 2000s, decades after they left their homelands. Returning to the homeland and writing about return might at first glance appear as acts of diasporic fidelity. What Maghrebi Jewish authors describe is rather the ways that writing return functions to exorcise the grip of the family and the past over the present. The closer the writer to the places representing his or her past, the more that image recedes in the light of a rather different present.

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<sup>57</sup> Simon Lévy (136).

<sup>58</sup> Bob Abitbol, *Le Goût des confitures* 201.

## CHAPTER IV

### SECOND-HAND MEMORIES: WRITING / RETURN / HOME

For writers looking back from Paris or Montreal, their childhoods and adolescences in the Maghreb constitute a shattered universe in of and itself, much like the Jewish neighborhoods and houses they left behind. In chapters one and two, we saw how they reconstruct the world of childhood through language and place-memories. Chapter three examined the denationalization and renationalization undergone by Maghrebi Jewish authors during decolonization. Reflecting on these transformations in life-writing already constitutes a literary form of return to the past. But happens if authors return to their “real” birthplaces decades later? How does the creative reconstruction of home confront the realities of a new Maghreb? For younger writers whose childhoods and adolescences in Morocco and Tunisia were interrupted by exile, does one remember one’s own memories or fill in the gaps with the more fully fleshed out reminiscences of elders? Last but not least, if return in the present reveals the increasing distance and fragility of the Maghrebi Jewish past, why does it draw so many authors back? Why does writing continue to open the wound rather than let it heal?

To answer these questions, I examine several autobiographical accounts of Maghrebi Jewish returns to Casablanca and Tunis, from authors born in the late 1940s and early 1950s, not long before the official end of the protectorates. These are among the last born in the Maghreb, and their family’s traumatic uprooting often left them with

few material vestiges.<sup>1</sup> First, I look at how returns describe the search for their homes, neighborhoods and the other landmarks of their former lives and those of their parents. Second, I analyze the actual encounters with the new residents occupying their homes, and how the confrontation between past memories and present realities is mediated through the text. In both cases, I argue that writers negotiate the multiple levels of forgetting through a poetics of memory that deals with temporal and spatial distance. They ultimately displace an objective encounter with the present realities in favor of a fluid narrative that allows them to maintain their ties with life before exile. The incorporation of family members' memories into the writing of one's story brings us back to the notion of first-person plural autobiography. Even the writer who only knew the Maghreb as a child gains some insight into her identity by revisiting her elders' memories. By honoring the chain of tradition they create a space for themselves even as they appear to defer to others.

For those old enough to have their own private nostalgia, return awakens a complex set of emotions that are ultimately dealt with through a narrative escape to other stories from the past. Colette Fellous's potentially upsetting return trips to her family's apartment across from the main synagogue and summer home in La Marsa in *Plein été* are defused by her humorous, whimsical framing of the encounters with the new residents. She seems to prefer her *lieux de mémoire* as objects of the past, which are too strange, too dissimilar and too remote in their physical present. Bob Oré Abitbol's short stories "Le Retour" and "Hanania" show his anxieties on a trip to Casablanca decades

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<sup>1</sup> Though Jews were generally legally permitted to take most of their belongings, the climate of fear that reigned around each anti-Jewish action or crisis such as Bizerte meant that families left as soon as they could. Having the resources to buy places on the ferry and resettle in France or Canada necessitated the liquidation of a large part of the family's goods and property.

after he left.<sup>2</sup> While he is disappointed by the widespread physical and human transformations that render the city less recognizable, he finds solace in faces and moments that send him back to the past. For both Fellous and Abitbol, the discontinuities between past and present resolve themselves in the escape to memory. In *Plein été*, Colette Fellous describes multiple returns to the places that bound her to her mother. In addition to visiting the summer house where her mother had the first of many nervous collapses, the house also turns out to be a site where Colette was molested by her playmate, an older Arab boy named Amor. Both these events take place in 1958, when Colette was eight and become mixed up with Colette's mother's childhood trauma (who it turns out witnessed her own mother's death at a young age).

Corine Scemama-Ammar's *Les derniers magnifiques* was born out of an oral history project in which the author spent years interviewing patients at a Jewish nursing home in La Goulette, a part of Tunisia she barely knew in her scant seven years in the country, to interview some of the last Tunisian Jews remaining. She recovers her own childhood memories through sessions with residents, discovering herself both as analyst and patient around conversations about the past. While she describes the residents as patients in need of therapy to help deal with being left behind by the departure of their coreligionists, Scemama-Ammar's lack of knowledge about her past represents a psychological wound that has yet to heal. In "Le château de ma mère," Catherine Dana "returns" for herself and for her mother to wealthy *Belvédère* neighborhood of Tunis, where the family's villa was located. The first of her family to be born in France, much of Dana's childhood was spent with her mother's memories of the house, its rooms, its

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<sup>2</sup> Both were published in the collection, *Les faucons de Mogador* (Montréal: Editions Balzac, 1994).



garden, and the family that occupied it. Though she herself never knew it firsthand, what she finds is a reality that does and does not correspond to her mother's stories.<sup>3</sup>

While Dana and Scemama-Ammar find ways of dealing with their own tragedy by working through their elders' (what we might call "maternal memory"), Brigitte Smadja's sibling protagonists in *Mausolée* fail to deal with their shared trauma of leaving Tunis as children. While older brother Sylvain eternally looks back on a happy childhood in Tunisia, his younger sister Magda has literally forgotten everything about the country, and does not want to think about it. Their story doubles Smadja's own; she left Tunisia in 1963, only eight years old. Smadja's dark assessment of the simultaneous compulsion to return and the impossibility of finding what one remembers stands in stark contrast to the older generations' nostalgia.

The psychological trauma experienced by Fellous, Smadja, Dana, Scemama-Ammar, and Abitbol transfers over to their "subjects." All are caught between their mother's memories, their own, and present reality. In each case, the initial project of returning to remember (for) the other flips around to reveal the author's search for interrupted pasts. Through writing cannot overcome all these difficulties, it provides another space for their mediation. Samia Kassab-Charfi identifies this essential trait as "tripolarité": "connectant la terre d'origine, celle d'accueil, et un autre monde locatif, rêvé, ou s'accomplit la possible jointure des deux autres."<sup>4</sup> For the last generation of

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<sup>3</sup> For an interesting parallel, see Algerian Jewish anthropologist Joëlle Bahloul's *La maison de mémoire: ethnologie d'une demeure judéo-arabe en Algérie, 1937-1961* (Paris: Métailié, 1992). Bahloul returns to her family's home in Sétif, known as the Dar-Refayil, a large house with different apartments for Jewish and Muslim families who shared the courtyard. Through her interviews with former residents of the house, Bahloul melds academic ethnography with autobiography, telling the story of her family along with that of Algerian Jews and Muslims in the late colonial period. See also Catherine Dana's "Française par omission" 141.

<sup>4</sup> Samia Kassab-Charfi, "Architecture et histoire chez Colette Fellous" *Revue de littérature comparée* 82.327 (2008): 397-406 (401).

Maghrebi Jewish authors, the “dreamed” world of writing necessarily passes through reckoning with proximate others’ memories, especially elders and siblings. The doubling of traumatic experiences proves necessary for diasporic identification.

Several anthologies and studies on contemporary Jewish writing in France have been published in recent years, but some of the best studies neglect the peculiar place of return in the works of Jewish writers born in the Maghreb. In Thomas Nolden’s monograph *In Lieu of Memory: Contemporary Jewish Writing in French* (2005), return does not feature as one of the main themes or chapter headings. Nolden and Frances Malino’s edited anthology *Voices of the Diaspora: Jewish Women Writing in Contemporary Europe* (2006) structures its contributions using familiar psychoanalytic categories of “displacement,” “reemergence,” and “reinvention,” but curiously leaves out “return.” This crucial component of diasporic identity does not mean that the person will always go back to the homeland and settle if possible. Kim Butler has contended that diasporic subjects, while constantly confronting the “issue of return,” more often maintain the centrality of their place of origin through metaphorical forms. “*Diasporan representations of the homeland*” she writes, “*are part of the project of constructing diasporan identity rather than homeland actuality.*”<sup>5</sup> Making reference to boyhood camaraderie in Casablanca’s streets, or the three generations under one roof tradition in Tunis does not merely remember those places, it also touches on social practices no longer existing. While drawing attention to the disappearance of such practices, it makes a memorial space for them in the present.

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<sup>5</sup> Kim Butler, “Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse,” 205. The italics are from the original text.

In Judeo-Maghrebi life-writing, return to the past takes place in the difficult construction of a dispersed multi-generational memory. Individual physical return becomes subject to the narrative devices of fiction, and writing about return reorients the author back toward her homeland, no longer her “home.” This combination of familiar and the strange in memory formation lead us back to Freud’s essays “Screen Memories” and “The Uncanny”. In the first, Freud explores the tendency of adults to rework important childhood memories through a repression of the original traumatic content and its later displacement onto less-threatening details surrounding the trauma. Freud goes as far as asserting that most memories of childhood are “second-hand,” a product of unconscious displacement and projection. The adult can remember by reinserting him or herself in a past that resembles a scene from the stage or a tableau, hence Freud’s conclusion that “it is altogether questionable whether we have any conscious memories *from* childhood, perhaps we only have memories *of* childhood” (21). In their case, Maghrebi Jews have taken up the ambiguous opportunity of returning in person and in writing to places they have been separated from at a fragile, formative moment in their development as subject of a coherent memory narrative (3). Return and its literary inscription do not simplify the ambivalences of diasporic consciousness; rather, these processes add another layer to already disjointed identities.

They return with the burden of others’ memories (both their prior selves and “other others”), making any search for “objective”, historical reality or “subjective” family memories even more problematic. Following Freud, we might say that these memories of Morocco and Tunisia do not “*emerge*, as one is accustomed to saying, but *were formed*, and a number of motives that were far removed from historical fidelity had

a hand influencing both the formation and the selection of the memories” (21). Yet Freud considers the individual’s memory formation process outside of any political or historical contingencies. In Judeo-Maghrebi works about return, the question of group identity constantly impinges on the individual’s own recollections. This group pressure might be personified through family members, but has much larger diasporic implications.

In the “Uncanny”, Freud explores the register of negative emotions related to aesthetic experiences, especially “repulsion and distress” normally overlooked (123). He comes to the conclusion that “the uncanny is the species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (124) but has since been estranged. Though once again Freud’s interpretation leans on personal experiences and traumas, his notion can easily be applied to experience of exilic return, which is both personal (going to the site of one’s family origins, the “home”) and collective (going back to the site of one’s communal origins, the “homeland”). As such, I argue that diasporic writing, especially when it deals with the issue of return, is by nature bound to produce an uncanny effect on the author, particularly the author who left during childhood. Through a brief examination of the major plot points and then close readings of the individual texts, I will show the process of secondhand memory construction at work, comprising displacement (“screening”) and defamiliarization (“uncanny”) both at the individual and collective levels.

### **“Vous voyez, j’habitais là”<sup>6</sup>: Entangled Returns in *Plein été***

Colette Fellous’s sprawling, intertextual body of life-writing stages multiple returns to her native Tunis in a variety of forms. In *Avenue de France*, she is a spectral

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<sup>6</sup> Colette Fellous, *Plein été*, 31.

*voyeuse*, visiting her grandfather and parents years before her own birth. Yet her accounts of return can be much more literal. In *Plein été* (2007), Fellous describes a magnetic pull, what she calls “la mémoire aimantée” that draws her irresistibly towards her family’s various houses (including her parents’ childhood homes). In “Avenue de Paris, à côté de la synagogue,” she describes a strange encounter with a mobile phone vendor whose shop stands across from her family’s main apartment in the center of Tunis. The idea of buying an object sold in the street level of the building she lived in does not give her the past, but creates a new association.

In both of the cases of return, there is no magic of finding things exactly as they were or being brought to tears by the sight of her former haunts. Instead, Fellous describes humorous, awkward, but seemingly harmless encounters with the new occupants. Fellous deliberately defuses the potential tensions with frivolous conversations with the new residents of her former haunts. Nevertheless, once the connection has been reawakened through physical return, any gesture or object no matter how innocuous can open onto other, more painful memories. If no physical harm ever comes from return, Fellous cannot help being caught in intense “nœuds de mémoire,”<sup>7</sup> at times banal and at others devastating. Moreover, her continual evocation of her multiple returns to Tunisia as subject material for her books should also make it clear that the prospect of going back home does not solve the problem of homecoming.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Michael Rothberg, Debarati Sanyal, and Max Silverman, “Between Memory and Memory: From *Lieux de mémoire* to *Noeuds de mémoire*.” *Yale French Studies* 118-119 (2010): 3-12.

<sup>8</sup> Though taking place in a radically different context, Saidiya Hartman’s *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2008) raises many of the same issues. For Hartman the connection to the homeland is even more distant in time and space, so many of the traces that she could follow having been erased by slavery. The protagonist of Claire Denis’s film *Chocolat* (1988) returns to Cameroon, where her father was a colonial administrator. She encounters William “Mungo” Park, an African-American man who came to rediscover his roots, only to find that Cameroonians were indifferent to his plight.

In *Plein été* and “Avenue de Paris,” return can be conceptualized on three narrative levels: first, the writer’s actual return to their former home and neighborhood, second the literary description of that return, and third the choice of autobiography as genre and their former lives as subject material. On all these levels there is a “retour aux sources” taking place. Yet on each level the aim of return, to get back to a more or less intact past, is textually mediated. Beginning with *Plein été*, Fellous writes of the “secret” of summer, and the summer of 1958 in particular. While her mother suffered a nervous collapse leading to a debilitating depression, Colette was taken advantage of by an older Arab boy (her summer playmate and neighbor Amor). The circuitous route to narrative disclosure passes through return visits (both physical and spectral) to her mother’s birthplace in La Marsa, the family’s summer house in Khérédine and the demolished Jewish cemetery on the Avenue de Londres, to Amor’s house, not to mention the house in Sidi Bou Saïd she rented to write the book itself (2007, 64). To wit—she returns to Tunisia where she then writes about returning to Tunisia, and writes about writing about returning to Tunisia.

This *mise-en-abîme* is emblematic of Maghrebi Jewish life-writing in which the “narrator constantly intervenes to remind the reader how the events and memories came to be told. “He questions his own narrative and even his motivations,” tending to “reinforce the concept that the process of reconstructing memories is polyvocal (even if it is only one person’s recollection).”<sup>9</sup> Fellous’s multiple autobiographical works share similar stories and nearly identical wording in some passages. Her writing starts with a knot or nexus of several memories and picks one up, examines its path, only to notice

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<sup>9</sup> Mary B. Vogl, “It was and was not so: It was and it was not so: Edmond Amran El Maleh remembers Morocco” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 6.2 (2003): 71-85 (73-74).

another strand leading back to the knot. Similarly, each return to each place evokes multiples others. I will look in depth at two scenes in *Plein été* where the act of return, banal at first glance, branches off into deep memories that define Fellous's identity: first, her 2005 return to her mother's house in La Marsa (56-66) and second her return trips to her family's apartment next to the synagogue described in *Aujourd'hui, Plein été* and "Avenue de Paris."

Throughout Maghrebi Jewish literature, the mother looms large as a figure of familial cohesion, religious transmission, and as the most "Arab" or "Oriental" element encountering modernity. For male authors such as Albert Naccache, Georges Cohen, Georges Memmi, Bob Oré Abitbol, the mother is most often a saintly figure of vitality, strength, and tradition, whereas for many female authors such as Gisèle Halimi, Catherine Dana, and Colette Fellous, the mother appears more ambivalently in her refusal to make a place for the next generation of women inside the tradition. In *Plein été* and "Le château de ma mère," Fellous and Dana return to their mothers' houses and stories, partly of their own accord but also proxies on their mothers' behalf. They return to re-establish a connection with their mothers' pasts, but also seek to undo the hold the past exercises on them.

In Fellous's work, her mother Beatrice's depression recurs as a major theme. As an adult, Colette's frequent return visits to Tunis help her make sense of her mother's own difficult childhood. The temporal and generational doubling Fellous often employs enables her to identify with her mother. Just as Colette felt she lost her mother after the depression (in 1958, at age eight), eight year-old Beatrice discovered her mother Fortuna's dead body in 1919. The experience of being orphaned is passed down, with

each woman having to find her own way. During her annual trips by her mother's house in La Marsa, Colette speaks of "un coeur qui bat encore, tres loin, et c'est celui de ma mere enfant" (56). This beating symbolizes the magnetic force drawing her back to the scene.

Colette's goal is not to find something she knows to be lost, rather, she hopes to "le respirer à nouveau" (59). When she went back in June 2006, she decided on the spur of the moment, to peek inside the hallway, something she had never done before. Even as she feels "exaltation" at seeing the floor her mother's footsteps left their imprint on, her face is struck by soapy water thrown by a woman mopping the entry. The woman, who turns out to be the current occupant of the house, calls to her maid to fetch some water so Colette can wash her face.

Overwhelmed by this "comic" situation, Colette attempts to marshal her words to explain to the woman her presence, leading to a four page long stream of memories of the different places in La Marsa (the apartment, the Saf-Saf Café, the Beylical Palace) and her family's connection to them. Yet we are told that all this is what Colette "avait envie de dire à la femme" (61). What she actually says is much more mundane: "Ma mère habitait dans cet immeuble il y a très longtemps, c'est pour ca que je suis entrée, c'était l'immeuble de mon grand-père" (65). Beyond the fact that her punctuation-less sentences would be hard to speak, why does she give the reader the whole story and the current occupant of the house such an abrupt description?

The woman's response helps make sense of the tremendous disjuncture between past and present, between the Tunisia that Fellous left in 1967 and the country today. "Elle avait entendu, oui, oui, mais qu'elle s'en fichait complètement de ma mère et mon



grand-père et de toutes ces vieilleries du passé.” Rather than being unspeakable, Fellous’s trauma was inaudible for a woman dealing with the difficulties of daily life in Ben Ali’s Tunisia, a country founded on a double forgetting (of the colonial period and of Bourguiba’s reign). Meanwhile, Fellous manages to glance at the room where she imagines her mother as a child and asks the essential question at the heart of her works and the writing of return more generally. “Le seul fait d’être présent à un endroit et de porter silencieusement en soi l’histoire de ce lieu suffirait à faire trembler et scintiller le présent?” (66). The overlap of women’s experience finds its expression in physical return, but one that only finds its full expression in written space. Fellous also remains disconnected from the women’s work of washing and cleaning the floors, a domestic task and practice of the possession and maintenance of a place. Furthermore in Tunisian folklore, throwing a glass of water behind someone’s back as they were leaving would ensure their safe return. Here Fellous is literally turned around and tongue-tied. The water goes the wrong direction and one is left to wonder if she will ever return to the stairwell or remain outside the building on her next pilgrimage.

If the simple fact of entering the house and peering inside the rooms reunites mother and daughter beyond the limits of linear time, Fellous’s experience nevertheless testifies to the difficulty of dealing with the new realities encountered upon return. The current occupant’s complete lack of interest in her story and the “slap” of soapy water can also be read as indicators of the indifference and hostility of the present to the past. If the woman gives Fellous water, she does not necessarily acknowledge the connection to the house, nor does she invite Fellous in. The magnetic attraction of liminal spaces constantly pulls on Fellous during her returns. As she waits in the hallway, standing

across the street from her apartment at the entrance to the synagogue, or in the front garden in Khéredine also serve as metaphors for the impossibility of complete return. Autobiography serves as a threshold looking back to the past and to the present, with the author beholden to dwell on that transitional space.

### **Returning to the Jewish City**

In “Avenue de Paris,” a return visit to Fellous’s family’s apartment next to the *Grande Synagogue* awakens a whole series of reflections on the important place Jewish holidays and ritual meals occupied in her memories of the city itself. As usual, the path from the banal and ridiculous to the heart of things is a circuitous one. Describing the “allégresse qui me déborde à chaque fois que je reviens dans la ville” Fellous searches for an object that will in some way mark her connection to the place, both in the past and present (“Avenue de Paris” 64). She settles on shiny new mobile phone in a shop just beneath her family’s old apartment. While the vendor is perfectly amicable with her, she cannot help but notice the curb outside the shop was where her father’s delivery truck was burned in the anti-Jewish riots of 1967, described at length in *Aujourd’hui* (2007).

In what seems a whimsical statement, she sees her purchase as a testimony of her fidelity, not to the house itself, but to the balcony, which became a feminine space as Jews moved into European buildings without traditional courtyards and rooftop terraces.<sup>10</sup> In fact this balcony looked out over the street to the synagogue across the way. Her relationship with the synagogue mirrors her relationship to Judaism itself; she

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<sup>10</sup> For an interesting contemporary parallel, see Leïla Sebbar’s *La jeune fille au balcon* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), in which the young protagonist attempts to maintain a space of her own on the balcony, amidst the violence between Islamists and government forces during the Algerian Civil War (begun in 1991 and continuing intermittently until the early 2000s).

watched everything that went on from the balcony, but only entered the building itself once a year, on *Yom Kippour*. Whereas she saw boys her age entering for religious school in preparation for their bar-mitzvahs, Fellous could only imagine what went on inside. She remembers all the holidays, even though she only knew their French names as a child (“la fête du printemps” for *Pessah*, “la fête des Cabanes” for *Sukkot*) (“Avenue de Paris” 65). Yet these holidays constitute an intimate visual connection to the past and to the streets in particular.

In her melancholy in front of the present-day synagogue, which she sees as doomed to museumification or destruction, Colette turns away toward the streets where her sensory perception takes her back to the “fête”: an omnipresent synecdoche in her works for her enchanted childhood in Tunis before exile. While she remembers all the others who inhabited the city and their overlapping celebrations, it is Jewish holidays that help her come to understand the dilemma of rootedness and exile. Fellous has since come to understand that being Jewish meant celebrating the tension between the absent and present: “On fermait les yeux, on se disait que dans d’autres pays, il y avait aussi de mêmes yeux qui se fermaient et qui pensaient a nous, au même moment. On ne pouvait jamais être tous ensemble dans la rue puisque nous avons été éparpillés... voila: là ou on avait atterri, c’était notre terre de hasard et d’amour” (66). While speaking of Tunisia itself, Fellous’s comments are equally applicable to her house itself. Once again, the superposition of house and homeland helps reconcile the individual with the multiple communities he or she feels a connection to. The object or end point of return in this case proves to be an intangible feeling of diasporic connectedness. As with Abitbol’s works, the lack of the present leads the author inward toward childhood memories and outward

toward the diaspora. The reality of dispersion becomes a central part of the writer's identity

### **We'll Always Have Casablanca: Affirming Memory through Return**

Bob Oré Abitbol's writing of return also uses brief sketches of his trip back home after exile to reflect on the meaning of diasporic identity, and ultimately centers his sense of belonging in memory, rather than in place. Even as he revisits all his former haunts, he often slips from the present back to the past. As he walks past familiar shops, whose signage now appears in Arabic, he asks if "tout est pareil, qu'est-ce qui fait donc que tout est différent?" ("Le retour," 16). His visit to the coastline and the beach clubs makes him wonder if Jews had to leave Morocco at all. He answers in the affirmative, considering like Fellous that what it means to be Jewish is to remain apart.

While he does not question the right of the new Moroccan state to ask that Jews downplay their differences in favor of integration, Abitbol believes that the community could not accept because of its own duty to memory. "Qu'on me donne une terre où je retrouverai mes racines, qui sera la mienne, où je me sentirai enfin chez moi. Et ce n'est pas tout à fait Israël, et ce n'est plus là-bas, et ce n'est pas encore ici" (17). As his peregrinations through Casablanca and his past continue, he has two encounters one in memory and one on near his former home that seem to caution against attachment to place.

He passes by his grandmother's house, bringing her to mind. In her twenty years in Montreal, she never managed to leave Morocco behind. Besides, the sun and sea, she missed all the spaces that constituted the fabric of daily life for Jews and Muslims: the

*hammam*, her house, the grocer, and the communal oven. “Ainsi malgré le confort relatif dans lequel elle vivait, tout lui paraissait futile? Tout le reste de son existence se passerait à regretter quelque chose qu’elle savait ne jamais pouvoir retrouver” (19). Abitbol’s only solution seems to be holding on to his memories, but to keep walking. This movement throughout the city upon return mirrors his own journeys after leaving Casablanca (from Paris to Montreal, and most recently to Los Angeles<sup>11</sup>).

Finally arriving on the rue Lusitania where his family lived, Abitbol, calls on the Dayan family’s house, eager to find a coreligionist. After the death of their father, the daughters all stayed behind without husbands or brothers to provide for them. He finds a withered and sad old woman, who he cannot place. Inquiring about Suzanne, the youngest of the daughters, only a few years older than himself, he realizes that she is the one standing in front of him. He measures the distance between the two of them. “Elle me posa encore quelques questions, tenta d’évoquer avec moi le passé, mais elle était d’une autre génération, d’un autre siècle: ses souvenirs étaient bloqués, car elle n’avait pas pu, comme nous, changer de pays, trouver autres références, les embellir” (30).<sup>12</sup> Abitbol’s stance toward memory is quintessentially literary. The process of sifting through memories, embellishing and retelling them in a new context precisely mirrors the autobiographical process. “Trouver autres références” and embellishing the past with them are not only part of the writer’s craft, in Abitbol’s estimation they are necessary for any diasporic subject to maintain his or her sanity.

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<sup>11</sup> See “Lettre de Californie: Exil sans retour,” in Abitbol reaffirms his belief in movement and displacement over a reconstruction of the past. Los Angeles appears as an unfinished bricolage of all the different cities and communities he has come into contact with over the course of his life.

<sup>12</sup> In a similar episode from “Voyage à Jerusalem” (1994), Abitbol describes an encounter between his mother, still energetic and well-adapted to her new life in Montreal despite her nostalgia, and a friend who has been unable to make the transition from Morocco.

When it comes to looking up the love of his youth, Marika, married with children and still residing in Casablanca, Abitbol decides not to visit her, following his decision to let the past be the past. “Je rentrai à Montréal, heureux de revenir à mes habitudes. Très vite, j’avais fait abstraction de ce voyage et je revenais à mes souvenirs anciens... les visages seraient les visages de mon enfance, et les maisons seraient celles d’autrefois” (32). Rather than seeing the difference between memories of the past and the present as threatening, Abitbol feels freed by the lack of correspondence to remember Casablanca at its best.

If Abitbol and Fellous describe returns to the places of origin where they came of age before leaving, younger writers such as Brigitte Smadja, Catherine Dana and Corine Scemama-Ammar either left as children or did not ever live in Tunisia. These writers channel the memory of older friends and relations who more fully remember life in Tunis. By remembering through the other, the younger generations find a prosthesis standing in for what they never knew. In each work analyzed here Brigitte Smadja’s *Mausolée*, Catherine Dana’s “Le Château de ma mère” and Corine Scemama-Ammar’s *Les derniers magnifiques*, the author-narrators return to Tunisia *on behalf* of someone who knew the country in a more authoritative way. While the other’s memories may be the stated reason or pretext for the return, the author-narrator comes to see the journey as their own.

### **The Returning Writer as Therapist and Patient**

If Fellous describes returns to the places of origin she knew for as a child and adolescent before leaving, younger writers such as Brigitte Smadja, Corine Scemama-

Ammar, and Catherine Dana either left as children or did not ever live in Tunisia. These writers channel the memory of older friends and relations who more fully remember life in Tunis. By remembering through the other, the younger generations find a prosthesis standing in for what they never knew. These author-narrators return to Tunisia *on behalf* of someone who knew the country better than they did. While the other's memories may be the stated reason or pretext for the return, the author-narrator comes to see the journey as their own.

Corine Scemama-Ammar's family left Tunisia in 1967, in the wake of the Six-Day War and subsequent riots that created the last mass wave of Jewish emigration. Only six years old, she describes the departure as "brutal" (16). She became a psychiatrist in France, practicing her profession in Marseille, incidentally the port where many Tunisian Jews arrived by boat and settled. In 1999, she returned with her parents on a trip that awakened her lost memories, giving her images to go with the Tunisian words and foods omnipresent at home. Her parents showing her the places they grew up in gave her a visual vocabulary to accompany the stories she was surrounded by. Scemama-Ammar's initial return trip also put her in the company of other members of younger generations "en quête malgré tout d'infimes perceptions, de détails, d'odeurs qui déclenchaient le souvenir émotionnel, puis le souvenir tout court de leur histoire, de l'histoire de leur famille" (13). Just as "histoire" in French comprises what we would render in English as "story" and "history," Scemama-Ammar shows that the two can never completely dissociated in writing.

Equally significant was her encounter with the Jewish nursing home in the coastal suburb of La Goulette, famous for its large Jewish and Sicilian communities. Her

psychiatric training and practice in Marseille combined with her interest in Tunisian Jewish memory led to her start a mental health project with the residents, some of the last Tunisian Jews remaining in the country. Scemama-Ammar quickly discovered that her intervention had to take a different form if she wanted to be accepted by the local community and the residents themselves. She turned towards oral history as the solution.

Hence, a great deal of the book records her sessions with the residents where storytelling or sharing recipes are the focus. The residents of the home are typically people who were left behind in Tunisia for one reason or another. Most of their family lives abroad in France or Israel and they find themselves caught in the memory of Tunisia before the exodus. If she frames her work as charitable and a service to the elderly, it quickly becomes clear that the residents are catalysts and conduits for memory. In the following passage she describes the distance of her own memories:

L'expression du visage de ces gens avait pour moi une signification oubliée jusqu'alors et de leur regard, d'une profondeur indescriptible, se dégageaient des souvenirs lointains. Leurs visages, leurs sourires ou l'expression d'une tristesse résignée, réveillaient une mémoire enfouie dans un inconscient que je n'avais jusqu'alors jamais soupçonné (14).

Her psychoanalytic techniques ricochet to describe her own unconscious. Note the plethora of distancing nouns “profondeur” and adjectives: “oubliée” “indescriptible” “lointains”, “résignée” and “enfouie.” These terms come directly from Freudian analysis of the uncanny: what first seems strange reveals itself to be much closer than previously thought, and the familiar, through analysis, becomes strange. For Freud, “an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something we have until now considered imaginary” (150). The radical chasm separating her from her brief childhood memories and uprooting is bridged by the gestures, words and memories of these elderly Tunisian Jews. The notion of



timelessness, often used to describe the *hâra*, the old Jewish quarter in Tunis demolished after independence, reappears to describe the residents who are seen as a living link to the ancient past. “Comment ne pas entendre l’appel de nos ancêtres en pénétrant dans cet établissement! Ces gens restés là après notre départ me forcent à renouer avec notre histoire.” (150) The residents themselves are representatives of the Jewish-Arab past, now disavowed after decades of separation and Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Having stayed in Tunisia while the rest of the community moved into ‘modernity’ in France and Israel, the residents are out of time so to speak.

Ironically, Scemama-Ammar herself feels inexplicably drawn to her Tunisian childhood, just as the residents are stuck in the pre-1967 period, when the Jewish community flourished. Both “therapist” and “patients” share an original trauma and a “trouble d’identité”<sup>13</sup>:

Cette existence hors du réel les maintient au monde dans une position presque schizophrène. La coupure de certains d’entre eux à la réalité du quotidien fait miroir à cette faille béante dans leur vie composée de séparations et de coupures.

C’est là pourtant que rejaillit quelque chose de notre mémoire, dans ce lieu anachronique où se mêlent les souvenirs du passé et la réalité existante (47).

The lives composed of “séparations et coupures” remind us of Scemama-Ammar’s own displacement as a young child, and those of countless other Judeo-Maghrebi writers, both women and men.<sup>14</sup> As for the ‘lieu anachronique où se mêlent les souvenirs du passé et la réalité existante’ (‘place out of time where memories of the past and existing reality mingle’) one could not imagine a more apt description of the contemporary Judeo-

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<sup>13</sup> See Régine Robin “Autobiographie et judéité chez Jacques Derrida” (2002).

<sup>14</sup> To cite a few representative cases, Moroccan Jewish writer Bob Oré Abitbol left Casablanca at 15, Attica Guedj left Algiers at 17, siblings Nine and Serge Moati left Tunis at the age of 19 and 12 after the death of their parents. All have written autobiographies dealing with trauma and nostalgia both for North Africa, but also for a time before their families fragmented in exile.

Maghrebi autobiography. Moving feverishly back and forth between past and present, the Maghreb and France, childhood and adulthood, these literary works embody the same symptoms Scemama-Ammar attributes to the “patients.” The metaphor also works to describe the compulsion to write as therapy, or more culturally appropriate to the Maghreb, as a regular ritual of depossession.<sup>15</sup>

While the younger woman writer might devote herself to attending to others’ memories, she feels the imperative to remember for herself. ‘C’était comme si je devais essayer de rattraper cette pièce du puzzle de la mémoire de notre communauté des juifs de Tunisie, mon histoire. Ce lien à rétablir entre eux et nous m’est apparu soudain comme une évidence’ (13). Scemama-Ammar’s vacillation between the first-person singular (“mon histoire”), the first-person plural (“notre communauté”), and the third-person plural for the Jews remaining in Tunisia (“eux”) illustrates this divide and the pact she enters into by telling elders’ stories. The creation of diasporic identity through shared narration creates a collective subject, even though its individual members inhabit different worlds.

### **The Past as Palace of Childhood or Cemetery**

A well-known writer of children’s and young adult literature in France, Brigitte Smadja was born in Tunisia in 1955 and left at the age of eight. This childhood trauma

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<sup>15</sup> In *Villa Jasmin* (2003) and *Du côté des vivants* (2006), Tunisian Jewish author Serge Moati seems to embrace both: the narrative of his childhood in Tunisia advances as he tells his story to his therapist, Dr. Cohen, while he has spectral conversations with his mother and father. Beyond these literary encounters, there is a longstanding cultural tradition among Tunisian Jewish women known as *rebaybiya*; see Sylvaine Conord, “Danses et transes: Les rebaybia juives tunisiennes à Paris” seminar presentation, *Corps, identité(s) et représentations*, École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), 26 June 2002.

finds echoes in her young adult works<sup>16</sup> and two of her novels for adults, *Le jaune est sa couleur* and *Mausolée*. In *Mausolée*, Smadja alternates between the perspectives of older brother Sylvain and his younger sister Magda, displaced from Tunis as children.<sup>17</sup> The narrative moves back and forth between the siblings' perspectives, though Sylvain recounts his story directly to the reader in first person, while Magda's story comes through close third-person narration, with moments of free and direct speech. This difference in narration corresponds to their different responses to leaving Tunisia, but also to Magda's deference to Sylvain's memories on the subject. As we will see she quite literally remembers through him.

The siblings are scarred in different ways by this experience, as Sylvain says: "Près de trente hivers se sont écoulés depuis que mes parents ont décidé d'en finir avec leur racines: cinq siècles liquidés en une semaine, le temps de faire les bagages. J'avais neuf ans. Il y a de quoi à altérer l'humeur" (*Mausolée* 11). While Sylvain has failed to adapt to life in France and sees his uprooting as the cause, Magda, at least from the exterior, seems well-adjusted to life in Paris. Sylvain reminisces endlessly about their childhood and the city, whereas Magda seems to have forgotten everything about her early years. Magda's memory is "vacante" (14). Tunis is a "ville où elle n'était pas retournée depuis le départ définitif et dont elle n'avait aucune image, sinon celles évoquées par Sylvain" (52-53). Hence Sylvain holds onto his direct contact with the past, mirrored by the first person narration, while Magda experiences a barrier between her

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<sup>16</sup> In *La Tarte aux escargots* (1995), the protagonist Lili leaves Tunisia in 1965 and begins secondary school in the working-class neighborhood of La Goutte d'Or in Paris. The work can be read alongside other integration novels, which discuss the difficulty of adapting to a new environment. *Quand papa était mort* (1996) also features Lili as a young Tunisian Jewish girl who faces a move from Tunis to Paris, the death of her father and her mother's remarriage, and the difficulties of being Jewish at a Catholic girls' school.

<sup>17</sup> Sylvain was nine and Magda five (*Mausolée* 17).

adult self and the young child that left. Even when loses herself in reveries, the narration never switches to first person. This complex sibling dynamic is doubled by their parents' relationship. In Sylvain's mind, their mother bullied their father into leaving Tunisia, against his will. After leaving Tunisia, he falls into an almost total silence, echoing Magda's amnesia. Yet Sylvaine's mother has not given either child the information about Tunisia that might help them to have a healthier relationship to their past.

Sylvain finally decides to return to Tunisia after years of drifting unsuccessfully from job to job, and squalid apartment to apartment. His dream of going back is awakened by a chance encounter with Mabrouk, a young Tunisian man who shows Sylvain a photo of the ruined La Goulette Casino, where Jews, Muslims, and Europeans went during the summer to drink and play cards on the shaded, breezy terrace overlooking the Mediterranean, with the Bou Kornine mountain in the distance. The casino remains a major "lieu de mémoire" for Tunis's Jews; it represents the escape from the city centre to the coast during summer time, and the joys of the beach. Once Sylvain saw the photo, he immediately decided to quit squandering his life in France, and wholly devote himself to returning to Tunisia (19). Mabrouk convinces Sylvain that they can buy the building for a low price and restore it. Sylvain imagines himself running the establishment with Magda at his side, free from the nightmare of Parisian winters. Most important, the Casino gives Sylvain something concrete on which to focus his desire to recover the past and his childhood.

Sylvain flies to Tunis with all his savings for this improbable scheme. Magda follows, attempting to find him. They both are confronted with the suffocating, omnipresent police presence and Sylvain's dream of reconciliation with the past quickly

becomes a nightmare. Followed by shadowy police throughout the city for reasons he does not understand, Sylvain seeks refuge on the rooftop terrace of the family's former apartment, at the *Café de Paris*, where his parents met, at the *hammam* where his father used to take him, his maternal grandmother's old apartment, and the *Saf-Saf* in La Marsa (the same café visited by Fellous in *Plein été*).<sup>18</sup> Tracing this affective map through the city, Sylvain constantly is disappointed by the lack of any familiarity upon arrival. All these places, which were suffused with tenderness and wonder in his memories and the stories he told Magda, are now crumbling and fading. When he finally arrives at the *Casino* his disenchantment comes full circle, and he begins to see his own hand at work in rewriting the past.

C'est là que je me rêvais [avec Magda]... heureuse de retrouver intact cet endroit où nous passions nos étés, et dont elle ne se souvenait pas malgré mes multiples descriptions auxquelles je ne sais plus aujourd'hui si je dois accorder foi, si je ne les ai pas inventées pour me persuader qu'il ne fut pas un temps où je n'avais pas peur de l'hiver (114).

Magda's desperate search for her brother takes her through the places of their childhood, though she has nothing except Sylvain's description to measure them against. She visits the family's apartment, without realizing that Sylvain slept their only days before. When she manages to persuade the women living on the floor above to let her inside, her memories fail to reappear. "Elle ne reconnut rien. Ni l'entrée, ni la cuisine minuscule, un couloir insalubre dont elle ne franchit pas le seuil... Les portes des chambres étaient fermées" (91). Contrary to Sylvain's memories—"si vives, si colorées qu'elle avait fini par les faire siennes" (53)—present-day Tunis seems opaque, dilapidated, and hostile to Magda.

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<sup>18</sup> The *Saf-Saf* also was the site of outdoor cinema projections, see Naccache, *Les roses*,

When Sylvain and then Magda finally arrive at the *Casino*, their responses to it are diametrically opposed. Sylvain's disillusionment is complete: "Ce n'est pas un palais à reconstruire mais un caveau en attente de démolition. Jamais je ne pourrai envisager sa reconstruction, ni en être le propriétaire ; je n'ai aucune place ici" (114). Sylvain's continually rewritten memories begin to evaporate in the face of the implacable passage of time and the disappearance of Tunis's European and Jewish populations. The dramatic post-independence upheavals cannot be erased by an evocation of the past, no matter how beautifully written. For him, the reality of the place destroys his ability to reimagine it. In an uncanny way, Magda, who has felt no connection to the place during her entire journey, feels overtaken by the ruined beauty of the place.

Magda retrouve le palais d'enfance, survivant au passage de vent, au désastre du sel, à l'abandon de ses propriétaires.

Les blues de ses murs, deux blues différents, craquelés, salis, rongés par le sel baignaient la pièce d'une lumière qui effaçait la misère du lieu et gardait sa beauté intacte. Ce n'était pas un cimetière dévasté mais un vestige échappé au temps (155).

At the very moment and place where nostalgia seems to meet its doom, the amnesiac Magda manages to recover an attachment to place, which has somehow "échappé au temps". Hence her choice of the term "relic" over "cemetery"; and Smadja's title *Mausolée*, a word which never appears in the text. The casino becomes a more than a tomb; it is a shrine to the past, to childhood, to Tunisian Jewry as a whole.

### **Catherine Dana: Finding the key to the Castle of Memory**

Catherine Dana, born in Nice in the early 1960s to a family of Judeo-Tunisian origin, now teaches French literature in the United States and has written two novels with

significant autobiographical elements.<sup>19</sup> One of many Maghrebi Jewish writer-scholars, Dana teaches about Mediterranean Jewish diasporas from a scholarly perspective, and writes about them from her own experience. Her short testimony “Le château de ma mère, le retour” recounts a trip to Tunis to find her maternal family home. While her mother stays behind in France, Dana attempts to match her descriptions with the city as it has evolved. Street names and forms of transportation have changed, and Dana’s discovery of the house is as much an accident as it strategically planned.

Her peregrinations in the city lead to unexpected connections with Dana’s ostensibly French childhood. Where she had been waiting to find strange faces, smells and flavors, she in fact finds echoes of her family everywhere. First, she hears familiar words (267), then see many people with her father’s blue-green eyes (267-268), then the foods and drinks she thought to be the exclusive preserve of her grandmother’s cooking (270). All of this, “comme si de rien n’était”. The uncanny familiarity of the urban landscape reveals the fragility of Dana’s borrowed memories. The fact that “la Tunisie a toujours été pour moi confinée dans la maison de ma mère” (268), compels her to look to others who could fill in the gaps. This lack constitutes a key feature of all memory in the second degree: the *je-scripteur* misses some of the necessary pieces to assume the coherent identity of their elders. Through returning to origin sites, the author hopes to use the connection to the past to reposition herself inside the tradition. Dana’s musings after seeing the Grande Synagogue on the *Avenue de la Liberté* provide an excellent illustration. If only she could meet the Jews still living in Tunis:

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<sup>19</sup> In *En attendant l’Amérique* (2004), Dana describes the difficulty of the transition from living in Europe to living in America. Set in Paris, *Première suée de sel* (2006) recounts the romantic relationship between Gabrielle, a Jewish woman, and Sekou, an African Muslim man.

Ils me raconteraient ce que j'ai envie de savoir, ce qui a changé, ce qui est resté pareil, ce que je devrais ajouter ou ôter du paysage, à la population, à l'habillement, à l'architecture, pour avoir devant les yeux, ne serait-ce que pendant une heure, le Tunis de 1930, puis celui de 1940, et enfin (est-ce trop demander ?) contempler mes parents dans les années 50. (270)

Just as Scemama-Ammar's relationships with elderly Jews, and women in particular, awaken her own sense of belonging to the community, the idea of Jews who have remained in Tunisia leads Dana to think that "sans doute ont-ils connu ma famille. Tous les juifs devaient se connaître." After visiting the house, Dana speaks with her mother again, recounting what she saw. The disjunction is not only between the past (the "château") versus the present (a fairly typical colonial villa that has been substantially remodeled), but also within her mother's narration. During childhood, her mother's love for the past extends to daily life, but not the abstract idea of a Tunisian nation that emerged during independence.

When the thorny subject of departure and the new owners arises, Dana points out that the new owners were hospitable enough to let her see the house without any obstruction and seem to have taken good care of it. Her mother calls them "voleurs" though the story of how the house changed hands has been told to Dana in several different versions, with a host of contradictory details (273). These contradictions go to the heart of Dana's predicament. Being born in France, she depends completely on her elders for information, much of which is incomplete and extremely subjective. Her father refuses to speak about Tunisia at all, claiming that his life there has nothing to do with him ("Française par omission," 142).

Of all the objects left from the house, Dana managed to hold on to her father's coat rack, which she still preserves to this day. By placing her own clothes on it, she connects across space and time to her family. An object "qui a été choisi par je ne sais



quel mystère et qui est arrivé là, un fragment d'une vie disparue. Je le regarde et j'invente des histoires, certaines, que l'on m'a racontées," ("Château de ma mère," 278). Dana's fabrication/retelling of stories "memory," offers an insight to the predicament of the last generation she belongs to. They can still touch the past even if from afar. The stories they have been told and choose to retell are their final inheritance; in one sense there is no return possible. Dana herself asserts that Tunisia is in no way "her country."<sup>20</sup> Yet, on other hand, Dana's novel-in-progress will return to the past she never knew except through her family's stories, telling the story of three generations of Tunisian Jews from the 1930s to the present, tracing the past from her grandmother, to her mother, to herself.<sup>21</sup> Once again, return does not enable one to settle with the past, but rather pushes the author further into a textual reconstruction of the past.

### **Interminable Returns**

As the works analyzed here show, the "last generation" of Maghrebi Jewish writers occupies a peculiar historical and literary space. While Maghrebi Muslims who reside in Europe and America can theoretically return to "their" country, those who have lived in France for many years, or like Catherine Dana were born in France, often do not feel at home where their roots are. Hence the Tunisian Jewish woman's predicament, while unique in its strange combination of advanced education and traditional expectations, sheds light on the situation of all North African women who have left their cities of origin.

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<sup>20</sup> Dana, Catherine, Personal Interview, October 21, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> The novel, provisionally entitled *All Kinds of Jews* does make certain concessions to the present. It will be written in English, and marketed first and foremost to American audiences.

Uprooted from Tunisia before coming of age, they now reside outside the country in a more or less permanent way. Though they return to write, to visit the places of their childhood and their family's past, a definitive rupture has taken place. As Guy Dugas notes, the writer never only writes for herself.

Comme le vieux gardien qui, resté au pays, continue d'y entretenir des tombes abandonnées, des maisons désertées, l'écrivain acquiert, presque malgré lui, un rôle de porte-parole, de témoin privilégié, de héraut. Il est celui par qui la mémoire de la judaïcité peut et doit survivre. Celui qui, par-delà les dispersions, les changements de nom et les oublis, demeure capable de maintenir la cohérence identitaire. (*Littérature judéo-maghrébine* 135)

The popular uprising that led to the overthrow of Tunisia's former authoritarian President, Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011 has created an even greater distance from the colonial past.<sup>22</sup> On a popular level, the young Tunisians that spearheaded the protests never lived under colonial rule and it was not even one of their major points of reference. The Jewish population of Tunisia will most probably continue to age and wane. For Tunisian Jews women returning, the country they find will more than likely bear increasingly little resemblance to that they heard about and have to come to take on as their own.

By way of illustration, Colette Fellous returned to Tunis in March 2011 for a three-part *Carnet Nomade* series on Tunisia after the Jasmine Revolution. Throughout the series, "Tunis: journal d'un printemps solidaire" 'Tunisia: Diary of a Spring of Solidarity' she never once mentions her personal connection to the city, nor, to my

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<sup>22</sup> The declining Jewish community that remains has had to completely reorient itself away from staying out of politics and depending on the Ben Ali regime for protection, to entering into the fractious public debate about Tunisia's future. *An-Nahda*, a moderate Islamist party banned for decades, won a plurality of votes in the 23 October elections for the Constituent Assembly. This seems to indicate that Islamic law, in one way or another, will constitute an even more significant part of Tunisia's new political and juridical framework than it did under Habib Bourguiba and Ben Ali. For more on the Jewish community's response, including signs of renewed participation in Tunisian political life, see: "Elections: La communauté juive se repositionne?" *Tunisie Magazine*, October 28, 2011. <[www.tunisie-mag.com/a-la-une-tunisie/tunisie-elections-la-communaute-juive-se-repositionne](http://www.tunisie-mag.com/a-la-une-tunisie/tunisie-elections-la-communaute-juive-se-repositionne)>

knowledge, makes any reference to the Jewish population.<sup>23</sup> While interviewing writers, artists, activists, businessmen, and political figures, she assumes the posture of a foreigner, a French journalist. It is as though she feels that her story only concerns her. As Catherine Dana wrote about her trip to Tunis, rather than taking a taxi, which would require telling her chauffeur what she was looking for, she would rather walk as an anonymous foreigner. “La moindre notion que j’entreprends un pèlerinage m’énervé ; en fait je ne veux rien dire à personne, donc je marche. La timidité, l’impression de ne vraiment pas être à ma place et un grand besoin de silence m’aurait fait faire des kilomètres” (270). In Fellous and Dana’s cases, their memories must defer to a present-day Tunisia that is simply somewhere else, a different place than the one they search for.

Even so, despite all the distance that history has put between these writers and their past writ large, they continue to return to it. With the unaware devotion akin to the very religious rituals no longer observed, they honor the past while inscribing themselves. Of all the characters most unlikely to renew the chain of tradition, Brigitte Smadja’s Magda ends up doing just that. In a spontaneous visit to *Cimetière Borgel* where her grandparents were buried, she adds her own touch to the past.

Un vieillard en haillons s’approcha avec un seau... Magda lava elle-même la pierre tombale de sa grand-mère, lutta contre la moisissure noire, insista sur les lettres gravées comme pour empêcher leur total effacement. Son travail achevé, elle ressentit une profonde lassitude où se mêlaient la détresse et l’apaisement (111).

The ambivalence she feels marks the entire enterprise of return, in writing and in the flesh. In spite of their private concerns and desire to end the obsession with the past, these women continue to return and rewrite the original rupture of departure.

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<sup>23</sup> The three episodes aired in the spring 2011 on 17 April, 24 April, and 1 May. For archived versions, see <[www.franceculture.fr/emission-carnet-nomade.html-1](http://www.franceculture.fr/emission-carnet-nomade.html-1)>.

Beyond any attempt to palliate nostalgia through return, we have seen that contemporary Judeo-Maghrebi authors are very aware of the other side of the enterprise. Refusing to allow the past to be fully past also has to do with the pleasure and distinction that emerge from exilic consciousness. As Patricia Seed notes in her essay “The Key to the House,” both Jews and Muslims who trace their ancestry back to Spain share a tradition of maintaining the key to the former home. Even if the amount of time that has passed ensures that the key no longer will open a physical door, Seed argues that it becomes a heuristic device for exilic identity formation.

Both the key and its narrative perpetuate traumatic memories: the pain of multiple losses, the lives and friendships ruined, the careers and achievements in science and medicine terminated, the exquisite places of worship smashed, the beautiful skies never to be seen again. Thus, as if by some twisted logic, the key preserves the sweet pain of exile, allowing it to be called up and relived (91).

Though Moroccan and Tunisian Jews focus more on the houses that they left behind rather than the keys to those houses, the parallel seems to carry over. What does the writer who goes back to his or her family home hope to find? Rather than pain, they also find enjoyment from the rekindling of old memories, from the fact that the physical presence of the house (even in modified form) incites remembrance. Just as we understand the importance of pilgrimage to cemeteries and shrines, can we also not see the impulse to revisit a space of passing, from the Maghreb to Europe, from a mythologized past (the notion of a continuous Jewish presence dating back for 2,000 years and predating the Arabization of North Africa) to a disenchanting present (where Maghrebi Jews are compelled to adopt and construct recognizable identities, “pieds-noirs,” “Sephardim” or even just as “immigrants”, that fail to capture their own sense of particularity). Even as Freud saw psychoanalytic therapy as a long-term grappling with defensive mechanisms and disclosure, the “therapy” of return seems to be open-ended by nature.

Return to Morocco and Tunisia involves becoming a tourist, arriving as a foreigner even if one still possesses a Moroccan and Tunisian passport. Reassuming one's local identity takes place on the vision to the former family home, or in prayer services at the synagogues, but does not necessarily reveal one's indigeneity on the streets. André Lévy draws on multiple participant observation stints with Moroccan-Israelis visiting their land of origin, acting as locals, foreign tourists, or religious pilgrims depending on the context.<sup>24</sup> Through pilgrimage Jews (re)inscribe themselves in long traditions of saint veneration, overlapping similar Moroccan Muslim practices. They affirm the symbolic hold that the land of their ancestors has on them.

The act of return makes the Maghreb both lost homeland and foreign country. Certain spaces allow for a temporary reinsertion into Moroccan society, but those who have stayed behind and those returning wish to impress the others with claims of deeper connection to home. Moroccan-Israelis bring objects related to sacred sites in Israel (phials of soil, pictures, postcards) as well as more mundane-seeming objects with the Israeli flag / Magen David that they share with local Jews. Moroccan Jews display these objects of pride within the home, but would never show them publicly.<sup>25</sup> Conversely, Moroccan-Israelis buy *mahia* as well as more typical household items, crockery for making *tagines* and couscous, along with Berber rugs and jewelry to take back with them to Israel.

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<sup>24</sup> André Lévy, "To Morocco and Back: Tourism and Pilgrimage among Moroccan-Born Israelis," *Grasping Land: Space and Place in Contemporary Israeli Discourse and Experience*. Ed. Eyal Ben-Ari and Yoram Bilu (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 25-40.

<sup>25</sup> The diminishing Turkish Jewish community is similar in many respects to the beleaguered Moroccan Jewish community, portraying itself as completely integrated into national life, while expressing ambivalent sentiments in private and eagerly maintaining private connections to Israel. See Marcy Brink-Danan's "Dangerous Cosmopolitanism: Erasing Difference in Istanbul" *Anthropological Quarterly* 84.2 (2011): 439-474.

Such encounters raise as many tensions as they solidify diasporic consciousness. the repeated visits of Moroccan Jews who presently live in the French, Israeli or Canadian “diasporas” provides them with tangible evidence of “Morocco as center”; similarly, even though their numbers are small, the Moroccan Jews who returned from France or Israel to re-establish their home in Morocco strengthen the case for Morocco’s centrality. (Lévy and Weingrod, 697).

Each side leaves with some reassurance of their important role in a diasporic network that has multiple centers, each with their own claims to centrality. Returning and reflecting on return are ultimately ways of negotiating the center-diaspora relationship on a personal and collective level.

## CHAPTER V

### DÉCALAGES D'ÉXIL: SCREENING AND STAGING JEWISH-ARAB NOSTALGIA

I have focused on how all the various components of Moroccan and Tunisian Jewish identity are inscribed in autobiography; through reconstructions of multilingualism (chapter one), popular cosmopolitanism (chapter two), negotiation with law and migration (chapter three) and returns to the contemporary Maghreb in search of the past (chapter four). In this chapter, I look at the cinematic and theatrical creation of Maghrebi Muslims and Jews on both sides of the Mediterranean. As Maghrebi Jewish communities now seem firmly settled in France, Israel and Canada, and the last generation born in North Africa ages, the question of transmission imposes itself. How can such an identity, so multifaceted and fragmented, be passed on to children born in the diaspora? What role do the visual performance arts, especially theatre and cinema, play in transmission?

In this chapter, I will focus on four contemporary representation of Maghrebi Jewish diaspora on stage and screen. First, I examine multiple identities performed in the one-man shows of Gad Elmaleh and Elie Kakou, and what they tell us about the possibilities and limits of diasporic transmission given the highly conflictual state of intercommunal relations in France and Israel. Second, Ferid Boughedir's *Un été à La Goulette* (1996) and Hassan Benjelloun's *Où vas-tu Moshé?* (2007) revisit Jewish-Muslim-Christian relations in the 1960s. By drawing in recognizable actors who are

symbols of cultural diversity and externalizing political conflict, these films reveal an evolving Jewish-Arab nostalgia. These writer-performers and writer-directors explore the temporal and generational disjunctions constitutive of Maghrebi identity through the national and diasporic allegory of family.

Throughout this chapter, I will be using the notion of “*décalage*,” which in French denotes a shift in time or space as well as the resulting difficulties in adjusting to it. Hence the the French equivalent for jet lag is *décalage horaire*. On a symbolic level, *décalage* also refers to a “manque de concordance entre deux choses, deux personnes, deux situations.”<sup>1</sup> Seeing the present from a shifted, slanted perspective resulting movement in space and time, what we could call a “*décalage de l’exil*”<sup>2</sup> is perhaps the central characteristic of Maghrebi Jewish life-writing in French. Pulled between multiple sites of origin, between multiple generational memories, and multiple aspirations, certainly creates a condition and consciousness of *décalage*.

Appropriately enough, Moroccan Jewish comedian Gad Elmaleh used the word in its plural form as the title for his first one-man show. Reenacting his peregrinations from Casablanca, to Montreal, and finally to Paris, Elmaleh exemplifies “*décalage*” not only in his life narrative, but also in the way he incarnates different categories of characters: male and female, young and old, Jewish, Muslim and French, recent immigrants and the assimilated. I argue that the terms is appropriate not only to describe the wrenching experience of exile from a place, a time, and a community to another, but also functions as a visual preoccupation for writers, directors, and performers meditating on the issue.

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<sup>1</sup> “*Décalage*” *Dictionnaire Larousse* <<http://www.larousse.com/fr/dictionnaires/francais/Decalage>>.

<sup>2</sup> Journalist Olivier Barlet used the phrase in an interview with Tunisian filmmaker Khaled Gorbali concerning his film *Un si beau voyage* (2008). The film focuses on Mohammed, a retired immigrant factory worker living in Paris who decides to go back to Tunisia for the first time in years. <[www.afribd.com/article.php?no=8436](http://www.afribd.com/article.php?no=8436)>



In terms of historical shifts, when France colonized Morocco and Tunisia, their forms of entertainment went from circum-Mediterranean to global, from artisanal to industrial. Traditional forms of spectacle and entertainment included Turkish shadow puppet theater (*Karagöz*), women's storytelling in homes and courtyards, the pan-Mediterranean wise fool *Djeha/Ch'ha*<sup>3</sup>, and concerts in cafés for men and in homes for women (*rebaybia*). Major Jewish life cycle events such as circumcisions, bar mitzvahs and marriages also provided crucial performance spaces where budding Judeo-Arab musicians tried out their repertoire earned the money and prestige to launch their recording careers.<sup>4</sup> Gradually supplementing and in some cases supplanting these traditional forms, cinema revolutionized entertainment in colonial North Africa.

European and American cinema were nonetheless subject to a process of vernacular translation.<sup>5</sup> Films were watched and discussed in a distinctively North African way, with the traditions and fissures of colonial society manifesting themselves in and outside the cinema.<sup>6</sup> For instance, when cinema first arrived in Casablanca poor Jewish families unable to afford regular outings often waited until Passover when they could send their children to see a "Biblical" film, such as Cecil B. DeMille's epic *The Ten*

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<sup>3</sup> André Nahum, *Les Contes de Ch'ha* (Paris: Piranhas, 1978) and *Histoires de Ch'ha : ou Jehâ ou Johâ ou Goha, le plus fou d'entre les fous, le plus sage, le plus rusé, le plus naïf, le plus sot et le plus intelligent, l'unique, le seul menteur qui ne dit que la vérité* (Paris: Bibliophane, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Tunisian Jewish singer Raoul Journo who excelled at such events, became the premier Jewish entertainer in the country. See his memoir *Ma vie: raconté par ma fille Flavie* (Paris: Biblieurope, 2002). The legendary singer and percussionist El Kahlaoui Tounsi composed a song "Tahli Bar Mitzva" that he often played and even recorded. See Paul Sebag, *Histoire*, 266.

<sup>5</sup> See Elizabeth F. Thompson, "Scarlett O'Hara in Damascus: Hollywood, Colonial Politics, and Arab Spectatorship during World War II," *Globalizing American Studies*. Ed. Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 184-208.

<sup>6</sup> Moroccan novelist Driss Chraïbi gives a magnificent description of the audience's active interpretation and subversion of film narrative in *La Civilisation, ma Mère!* (1992). Albert Camus's unfinished novel *Le Premier Homme* (2000) gives a humorous description of the protagonist Jacques Cormery going to silent films with his illiterate Spanish grandmother. Both of these texts, written by non-Jews, illustrate the widespread impact of the cinema, not limited to any one ethno-religious or socio-economic group.

*Commandements* (1923).<sup>7</sup> For later generations, cinema detached itself from didactic, religious spectacle to occupy the everyday domestic imaginary. Anny Dayan-Rosenman remembers the cinema's mediating role the Casablanca Jewish community in the years immediately following Moroccan independence, opening up liminal space between the Maghreb and the West

Le cinéma était l'une des cultures de la ville ; il nourrissait l'un de ses imaginaires et les noms d'acteurs y constituaient un lexique qui tenait lieu à la fois de description, de comparaison et d'identification. Ainsi il n'était pas rare, à Casablanca, d'entendre évoquer le mariage de Clark Gable, le dentiste, et de Claudette Colbert, la nièce de M. Anidjar, ou encore le malaise qui avait terrassé Rudolf Valentino au sortir de la synagogue (Ciné-Casa, 216).

Beyond the identification with actors, the Jewish obsession with American, French and Italian cinema reflected a profound cultural disjunction. The love for all things “modern” incited Casablanca's Jews to imagine themselves as others, living elsewhere.

In the same way that identification with cinema transported them to another reality, they began to see their daily routines as scenes from a film that would soon be over. With a constant stream of secret departures as the backdrop, Dayan-Rosenman remembers Jewish parentes and grandparents exclaiming “à chaque bain de mer, à chaque promenade, à chaque mariage... ‘Comme c'était beau, Casablanca!’” (214). Cinema exacerbated the already prevalent tendency for Jews to imagine themselves in Europe or America, but it also gave them a language to speak about their love for their city of origin. Not only did it allow them to imagine exile, it also prefigured the nostalgia they would experience.

In this chapter, I examine theatrical and cinematic representations of the spatial, temporal, and cultural *décalages* constitutive of Maghrebi Jewish diasporic identity.

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<sup>7</sup> Salomon Benbaruk, *Trois-quarts de siècle* 27.

Jewish writer-performers reanimate the experience of exile for the older generations, and embody the past for the younger generations born in the diaspora. As opposed to literary fields of representation, where Jews have more leeway in structuring their identity on their own terms, these new spectacles depend on Maghrebi Muslims in France as a significant part of their audience, and in North Africa, on directors who bring stories of the Jewish past to the screen. This interdependency represents a new stage in collective memory. Some of the questions I will address include: How has cinema been mobilized to look back at a period when Jews were already aware of the disjunction between their everyday lives and their aspirations? Once Jews arrived in France and Canada, how did they use the stage and screen to look back on the Maghreb and explain their own departure? How have these representations confronted, contradicted, or confirmed other visions of recent Maghrebi history produced by members of other communities?

### **Shifting Histories and Interdependent Memories**

Jews become participants in a larger narrative of the “exception tunisienne”<sup>8</sup> or “exception marocaine”<sup>9</sup>, depicting these countries as havens of tolerance against the larger trend of Jewish-Arab conflict. For the defenders of Morocco and Tunisia, Jews and Muslims alike, these countries are supposedly more tolerant and benevolent toward their

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<sup>8</sup> Roger Bismuth, “Oui, il y a une exception tunisienne” *Jeune Afrique*, April 3, 2006.

<<http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/LIN02046rogerenneis0/actualite-afriqueroger-bismuth-oui-il-y-a-une-exception-tunisienne.html>>

<sup>9</sup> For an American perspective, David A. Harris, “For Jews in Arab Countries, Morocco is the Exception” *Washington Post*, February 20, 1988, reprinted in *In the Trenches: Selected Speeches and Writings of an American Jewish Activist, 1979-1999*, Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 2000, 161-163; see also the account of Gideon Lévy, a left-wing Israeli journalist writing for the English version of Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, “The Moroccan Model: A visit to the Jewish community of Morocco reveals surprising coexistence” May 6, 2010. The Moroccan government’s *Conseil de la communauté Marocaine à l'étranger* also publicized a conference hosted by the American Sephardi Federation under the rubric “L’identité juive marocaine, l’exception marocaine”; <<http://www.ccme.org.ma/fr/Presse-et-migrations/Articles-de-mai-2011/L-identit%C3%A9-juive-marocaine-l-exception-marocaine-symposium.html>>

minorities because of traditions of hospitality. Rarely do these writers bring up discrimination or violence against Jews, and if they do, it always is attributed to the work of nefarious outsiders, such as Al Qaida or the Israeli government.<sup>10</sup> The decline in the number of Jews living in the Maghreb, as well as the destruction of patrimony testifying to the diversity of the pre-colonial and colonial periods, have put Jews in a position of increasing dependency. Just as they rely on Muslims to watch over cemeteries and synagogues they left behind and take care of the elderly,<sup>11</sup> they also rely on them to include Jews in public performances of collective identity. While among themselves Maghrebi Jews are freer to speak about tensions and animosities toward Muslims, in public they tend to highlight Maghrebi tolerance. This split or “*décalage*” between public and private discourse increased as Jews in the Maghreb became less self-sufficient in communal life.

Jews also became more dependent on others to tell their story in France. Some of the autobiographies I have examined up in previous chapters were published by the *Editions de l'Harmattan*, known for publishing sub-Saharan and North African writers. Some even were published in the *Écritures arabes* collection. Hence Jewish writers benefit from the general interest in postcolonial Maghrebi writing, even if in their works, they identify with Arab culture and language rather than political identity. Both *pie-d-noirs* and Muslim immigrants suffered from a relatively negative public image upon

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<sup>10</sup> In the case of the 2003 Casablanca bombings that hit a Jewish-owned pizzeria, a community center, and the Jewish cemetery, the bombers were in fact proven to be natives of the *Thomas* slums on the outskirts of the city. Government officials externalized the blame, accusing international terrorist networks. A documentary *De Casa au paradis* (dir. Hind Meddeb) interviewing the friends, family and neighbors of the bombers was released in 2008.

<sup>11</sup> On field research, I visited Jewish nursing homes in Casablanca (Résidence Levine), Tangier (Home Laredo), and La Goulette (, all three of which were funded mostly by donors connected with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and administered by local Jewish communities, but were staffed almost entirely by Muslims. As discussed in chapter 4, Corine Scemama-Ammar’s *Les derniers magnifiques* chronicles her fieldwork in the La Goulette nursing home.

arrival in the 1950s and 1960s. Associated with the turmoil of decolonization, and the disastrous Algerian War, both groups were part of a history that the French government hoped to bury. During François Mitterrand's presidency and Jack Lang's tenure as Minister of Culture during the 1980s, the visibility of minority groups increased dramatically. On the one hand, the children and grandchildren of Maghrebi Muslim immigrants organized and marched for equality. On the other, the *pied-noirs* contested state-sponsored versions of decolonization through memorialization and increasing support for Jean-Marie Le Pen's radical *Front national*. The Algerian War, in all its different aspects, gradually became a cinematic fetish in the 1990s and 2000s, culminating with the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Evian Accords in 2012.<sup>12</sup>

Hence the effort to overcome the historiographical *décalage* corresponded not only to Maghrebi Jews' desire to reconnect with their recently abandoned homelands, but also part of a broader French fixation on the country's visible transformation into a multicultural society. Just as Maghrebi Jewish diasporic identity needed a "there" and "then" to assert its specificity, France needed (and many would argue still needs) to grapple with its image of itself in the light of ongoing "décalage" from decolonization.

### **From Consumers to Producers, Spectators to Creators**

Avid consumers of American and European cinema in North Africa, Jews gradually became performers and producers of their cinema after migration to France. As opposed to Egypt, where Jews participated in a prolific film industry that exported its

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<sup>12</sup> See Guy Austin, "Trauma, Cinema and the Algerian War" *New Readings* 10 (2009): 18-25; Rémi Yacine, "La guerre d'Algérie à l'écran et sur papier: Profusion de livres et de films" *El Watan*, February 21, 2012.

movies throughout the Arab world, Morocco and Tunisia were “colonized” by French filmmakers until the 1950s. The first French-Tunisian coproduction, *Goha le simple* took place in 1958, and drew on participants from all over the Mediterranean. Adapted from an Egyptian compilation of the Djeha/Ch’ha folktales by Lebanese poet Georges Schehadé, the film gave Claudia Cardinale her first significant role in a major international film.

Jews also gained notoriety in French popular theater, but often as “pied-noirs” who were identified more as Spaniards than Jews. Robert Castel (born Robert Moyal to an Algerian Jewish family) participated in some of the earliest pied-noir comedy, *La Famille Hernandez* (1957). These comedy sketches, performed in Paris as the Battle of Algiers raged, represented the anachronistic daily squabbles of a family of Spanish origins in the famous working-class quarter Bab-el-Oued in Algiers. Later, Michel Boujenah’s *Les Magnifiques* (1984) staged a group of three Tunisian Jewish friends, Maxo, Julot, and Guigui, humorously describing the culture and generational shock they experience in their daily lives in Paris.

In this chapter, I look at the most recent generation of Maghrebi Jewish writer-performers in France, and the Muslim filmmakers in North Africa, who have articulated new visions of collective memory on both sides of the Mediterranean. The main representatives of Maghrebi Jewish performance in the form of one-man shows are Elie Kakou and Gad Elmaleh. Their comedy turns immigration and integration into tragicomedy, highlighting the way Maghrebi Jews retell their stories to appeal to a broad audience of Maghrebi immigrants and French Jews. Férid Boughedir, a Tunisian film critic and director, and Hassan Benjelloun and Mohamed Ismail, both Moroccan

directors, reconsidered the context and motivations of Jewish departures from the Maghreb on screen. These representations recapitulate the tropes and themes we saw in previous chapters: the intense linguistic diversity of the Maghreb (Chap 1), the cosmopolitanism between communities at the bottom of colonial hierarchies in everyday social practices (Chap 2), and the increasingly impossible balancing act that Jews maintained between their multiple identities and attachments (Chap 3), as well as writing about return to present-day Tunis and Casablanca (Chap 4).

Yet as opposed to much of the literature we have examined up until now that relies principally on a relatively circumscribed audience. Autobiographies tend to interest *pied-noirs* suffering from “nostalgérie,” Maghrebi Muslims interested in colonial history, French literary circles, and to a more limited extent, Jewish scholars, amateur and professional, around the world. These comedy performances and films go far beyond those groups to appeal to a wide public. Gad Elmaleh and Elie Kakou, while playing off of their foreign origins, both have become mainstream French entertainment figures.

While they assume different titles, including, but not limited to “pied-noir”, “Moroccan” or “Tunisian,” and do not shy away from admitting their Jewish origins and connections to Israel (despite the resulting controversy). Kakou served in the IDF and lived on a kibbutz afterward. For his part, Elmaleh did a well-publicized tour in Israel. Yet they are also regarded by many as typically French comedians. In the sections devoted to each, I will analyze how they manage and deploy these different aspects of their identity. To what extent can they be Jews, Maghrebi, and French at the same time? How do they confront and appropriate the various labels applied to them, such as “pied-noir,” “Sephardic,” or even “Israeli”?

Despite the fact that the films and stand-up shows discussed here are destined above all for a North African Jewish audience, they are equally popular with North African Muslims, French Jews of Ashkenazi origin, other immigrant communities, and even “français de souche.” Jews are able to present themselves as fully fleshed-out human characters, while operating within stereotypical frameworks. These stereotypes certainly contained negative dimensions: an example is the frequent representation of North African Jews as France’s new gangsters (drawing from and adapting the fantastically popular *Godfather* series). Algerian Jewish director Alexandre Arcady became famous for his *Le Grand Pardon* series depicting a clan of Jewish “pied-noirs” fighting against the police and other gangs to remain on top. Hence, North African Jews ended up playing up some of the negative characteristics attributed to them in their new homelands.

French director Thomas Gilou (neither Jewish, nor born in North Africa) has built on Arcady’s success with his hit series of comic films, *La vérité si je mens*, now in its third iteration.<sup>13</sup> The films caricature the world of Maghrebi Jewish businessmen and racketeers in the *Sentier* district Paris, known for its clothing wholesalers and retailers. The protagonist, Eddie Vuibert, is a down and out hustler, who gets mistaken for a Jew and subsequently adopted by a wealthy Jewish clothing manufacturer. Ironically, Richard Anconina an actor of Moroccan Jewish origin born in France, plays Eddie, who tries to pass himself off for an Ashkenazi. Anconina had earlier played Bensoussan, a Jewish-Arab character, in Claude Berri’s hit film *Tchao Pantin* (1983). *La vérité si je mens* also featured Maghrebi Jewish entertainers in a variety of supporting roles, including Vincent

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<sup>13</sup> *La vérité si je mens 3* hit box offices in February 2012 to mixed reviews, but as with the first two films of the series, the audience response was good. The film has already turned a tidy profit and is the most-attended French film of 2012 thus far. See: < [www.jpbox-office.com/fichfilm.php?id=11793](http://www.jpbox-office.com/fichfilm.php?id=11793)>



Elbaz, Gilbert Melki, Elie Kakou, and in its second installment, Gad Elmaleh and Enrico Macias. Yet some of the main roles were cast to non-Jews and Maghrebi Jews appear more as décor that confirms the stereotype and guarantees the authenticity of the representation.

In contrast the stand-up comedy of Elmaleh and Kakou and the films of Benjelloun, Boughedir, present Moroccan and Tunisian Jews in the context of their “national” specificity. Though they draw on nostalgia for the past and play off of stereotypes, their works engage directly with the lived experience of Jews during the Second World War, the birth of the state of Israel, and decolonization. They attempt to destabilize myths of historical inevitability, namely the oft-repeated trope that Jews and Arabs are two totally distinct peoples that have been in conflict since time immemorial.

These stand-up performances and films harken back to a time when Jews, Muslims, and Christians lived side by side in Morocco and Tunisia, with all the accompanying tensions and fusions. More importantly, they are drawn from the reservoir of personal and collective experience of the actors and writers themselves. These works offer a visual, performative incarnation of the first-person plural autobiography I discussed in previous chapters, with the important nuance of weaving together Jewish and Muslim memories at the level of artistic creation and production. They also engage broader audiences than Maghrebi Jewish memoirs are able to.

Reflecting the increasing virtuality of Maghrebi Jewish diasporic identity, their modes of diffusion, circulation, and reception are de-territorialized. Whether on stage and screen, they self-consciously transmit polyvalent sounds and images to multiple publics. Though Maghrebi Jewish writer-performers often conceive of their shows as coming to

terms with personal trajectories in the diaspora, they also universalize their experiences beyond the narrow confines of the group. As Elie Kakou said in an interview, “Je [ne] veux pas me cantonner au humour pied-noir, je veux aussi mêler les deux, le passé et l’avant-garde, l’Orient et l’Occident.”<sup>14</sup> The performer embodies and transmits historical experience in an even more visceral way than the writer, since he or she takes on an accent in French, specific expressions from Judeo-Arabic, and gestural codes.

Gad Elmaleh and Elie Kakou’s performance of Maghrebi Jewish identity is itself diasporic. Elmaleh spent the first 17 years of his life in Casablanca, moved to Montreal for four years of university study, then France, not to mention all the time he spent with friends and family in Israel. Kakou was born in Tunisia, before moving to Marseille where he grew up in a Judeo-Arabic speaking household, spending two years in Israel in the army and living on a kibbutz. He later worked and performed at Club Med resorts around the Mediterranean including Turkey and Morocco, refining his act with multi-confessional audiences.<sup>15</sup> Hence both comedians perform a wide range of characters, varying in age and relationship to the homeland. They act out the generational gap, Elmaleh through “le grand-père” Benssoussan and his grandson David, and Kakou through Madame Sarfati and her granddaughter Fortunée. By portraying these characters they self-reflexively perform identity transmission and work through the anxiety of assimilation and cultural loss.

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<sup>14</sup> Elie Kakou, “L’humour pied-noir,” Interview with André Halimi, <[www.ina.fr](http://www.ina.fr)>.

<sup>15</sup> Brigitte Kakou, *Elie, mon frère*, 57-63.

## Performing for Multiple Publics: Gad Elmaleh and Elie Kakou

Elie Kakou built on Michel Boujenah's early success with even more provocative and inventive sketches. His exceptional character Madame Sarfati represents one of the most important comic creations of Maghrebi Jewish Diaspora. As Guy Dugas noted in *La littérature judéo-maghrebine*, the Sephardic mother and grandmother are every bit as (in)famous as in Ashkenazi tradition. Maghrebi Jewish women often preserved traditional clothing, Judeo-Arabic language, and syncretistic religious practices well into the middle of the twentieth century. For those coming of age during the colonial period seduced by the mirage of European modernity, for example Albert Memmi's protagonists in *Statue de sel* and *Agar*, the mother is part of the asphyxiation of the young Jewish man. For the son wishing to be recognized as European, she represents the stranglehold of communitarianism, and even more fatally, his "barbarous," African origins.

Yet once in exile, the image of the mother and grandmother shift, becoming strong symbols of identity in a destabilizing world. For the last generation born in the Maghreb, the grandmother becomes the truest expression of Judeo-Moroccan and Judeo-Tunisian identity. Even Memmi made a dramatic volte-face, fondly remembering his mother in his volume of poems *Le Mirliton du ciel* (1990).<sup>16</sup> Kakou synthesized these ambivalent feelings in his masterful creation of Mémé Sarfati, based in part on his own grandmother Rosine, who lived most of her life in Tunisia, moved with the family to Marseille, and moved to Israel to spend her final years. Nevertheless Kakou draws from all of the Jewish grandmothers "qui sont les derniers témoins de notre vie en Afrique du

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<sup>16</sup> Memmi's more positive, if still ambivalent view, of his mother is excellently captured in the section "Femmes," 49-69. "Ma mère bien sûr, l'inépuisable (on n'a qu'une mère, mais cela suffit bien!), l'incompréhensible (d'où, peut-être, tant de mystères en moi) ; un peu folle (qu'est-ce que la folie ?), si fantasque, capable de subites pluies, de farouches baisers et de griffures soudaines... dont la passion nous comblait et nous exaspérait," 51-52.

Nord.” The grandmother’s anachronistic perspective allows for the action to be situated in everyday diaspora life in Paris, while constantly referring back to the Maghreb.

Kakou’s sister and costumer Brigitte emphasized “*mère juive par excellence, Madame Sarfati est d’abord un physique, une prestance*” (144). Her gigantic sagging breasts, hanging down past the waist, combine with her headscarf convey the stereotypical appearance of many an elderly Maghrebi woman. In fact, one could just as easily identify her as a Muslim grandmother. Her gestures on stage are highly demonstrative, even violent. Her speech characterizes the stereotype of the Maghrebi Jew, “*gestes libres excessifs... sensualité exubérante, la voix haute*” (El Maleh 2002, 129). Madame Sarfati’s life revolves around domestic tasks, such as grocery shopping, and bemoaning her unmarried 35 year-old grand daughter, the ironically named Fortunée. In Madame Sarfati’s first appearance at the *Point Virgule* in 1991, she complained “*Où ça s’est vu qu’on n’est pas mariée à trente-cinq ans, où ça c’est vu? Moi j’m suis mariée, j’avais 16 ans. On m’a pas demandé mon avis, on m’a dit voilà, c’est celui-là ton mari... euchkeut [shut up] (168).*” Marrying off Fortunée is her grandmother’s constant concern. Mémé Sarfati keeps Fortunée’s weight up in accordance with Tunisian Jewish custom of fattening up girls in advance of their marriages, rejecting the conventions of beauty in Europe.<sup>17</sup>

Madame Sarfati agrees to send Fortunée to Israel to work on a kibboutz despite the exorbitant cost of 500,000 francs, promised by the trip organizer that she will find a Jewish husband. Her voyage gives Kakou the opportunity to act out his own experiences in Israel, and to show the shock experienced by many Maghrebi Jews upon arrival in the

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<sup>17</sup> See Hagar Salamon and Esther Juhasz, “‘Goddesses of Flesh and Metal’: Gazes on the Tradition of Fattening Jewish Brides in Tunisia” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 7.1 (Winter 2011): 1-38.

“promised land.” Madame Sarfati describes the kibbutz with in her typically blunt style: “vous connaissez le kibboutz? Qui vivent en communauté les uns sur les autres!” (192). Here Kakou reverses the stereotype of Jews and Arabs’ tendency to overcrowd their living spaces in the Maghreb and in France.

Upon arrival, Fortunée and the other girls are lined up and assigned different jobs. In front of Fortunée, “y avait une petite blonde, une maigrichonne” named Katia Rosenblum. Upon discovering that her Polish origins, the kibboutz director treats Katia accordingly, “C’est très bien, vous allez travailler dans les bureaux. Vous vous levez à l’heure que vous voulez, vous faites ce que vous pouvez, et vous partez quand vous voulez” (192). Next in line, Fortunée’s appearance immediately gives her away as not-quite-European. The director notices immediately and gives her work that suits the Israeli perception of Oriental Jews: “Oui, toi, la frisée, la poilue, la mate de peau, la dodue...tu vas nettoyer toutes les chiottes du kibboutz, et tu as intérêt que ça brille” (193). Fortunée toils away at domestic tasks for the remainder of her stay. “Ils la faisaient travailler soixante-douze heures par jour,” her grandmother declares.

Madame Sarfati arrives at the airport, unable to recognize the thin waif walking on the tarmac as her granddaughter. “Maintenant ça fait six mois qu’on l’engraisse pour qu’elle retrouve ses formes” (194). Fortunée returns without a husband. She is back where she started. This aborted attempt gently mocks the veritable marriage industry that has sprung up in Israel. Parents from the diaspora send their children either to kibboutz or on Birthright trips, hopeful they will meet another eligible Jew. The kibboutz get a young

and cheap pool of labor, and reinforce the centrality of the Israeli state to Jewish diasporic identity.<sup>18</sup>

After the failure of the kibbutz to find Fortunée a good husband, Madame Sarfati decides to send Fortunée to a ball sponsored by the Women's International Zionist Organization, which becomes "La Viso" in her pronunciation. Once again, Fortunée gets shunted into working in the kitchen "*Lalala* [no, no, no] Fortunée *archouma* [shameful] rentre par la cuisine" (196). Her visible otherness marks her out for manual tasks. She bakes and cooks for hours, with her makeup running all over her face because of the intense heat in the kitchen. By the time she makes it out, the dance has ended. "Tu vois pas qu'y avait plus personne. Ils se sont tous mariés entre eux." (197) Once again, the institutional framework in France and Israel designed to maintain Jewish endogamy fails to work for Maghrebi Jews. Kakou points out that the Ashkenazi hegemony found in Israel also exists in France.

In another sketch, Fortunée brings home a man, who she presents as Jacques Legros. Madame Sarfati immediately jumps on the fact that he is not Tunisian. She then asks if he is from Algeria. He responds that he comes from Pas-de-Calais. Though she imagines in a worst-case scenario that this some city in Morocco she has never heard of, Jacques's insistence that he comes from the north of France shocks her ever more. Madame Sarfati warns that Fortunée will freeze to death and sends the man away. To console her granddaughter, she tells Fortunée that one day a man named Mr. Cohen will come to the house to marry her, take her away and have twelve children with her, just as

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<sup>18</sup> For an American Jewish perspective on these mechanisms, see Shaul Kelner, *Tours that Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010). Israeli director Eytan Fox's short film *Time Off* ([1990] 2006) shows a group of IDF soldiers on their last break before deployment pairing off with American Jewish girls on vacation.

Madame Sarfati had. As she describes this hypothetical Jewish suitor who will fulfill her life-long dream of getting Fortunée off her hands, Madame Sarfati becomes wistful, “Quand est-ce qu’il va venir ce M. Cohen?”.

One of Kakou’s best-known sketches involves Madame Sarfati taking the train to Paris suburb of Sarcelles, where many Tunisian Jews settled after arrival.<sup>19</sup> She eyes the man on the train across from her suspiciously at first, then smiles in a knowing way. She proceeds to ask him repeatedly “vous êtes juif?”, which he denies with increasing vehemence as the conversation goes on. “Peut-être vous êtes juif vous le savez pas? Peut-être votre père ou votre grand-père... ou vos voisins...” (171). Finally, as she leaves the train, Madame Sarfati asks him one last time. Exasperated, the man loses his patience and shouts at the top of his lungs that he is indeed Jewish. As Madame Sarfati steps off the train, she mischievously responds: “Eh ben, on dirait pas, hein?” This echoes a long-running Jewish joke that Freud revisited for his study *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*.<sup>20</sup> Kakou plays off the shock of the encounter between French Jews, whose identity was predicated on not being noticed, and the Maghrebi Jews, whose identity was extremely visible and audible. Ironically, Madame Sarfati’s Jewishness is very Arab. She intersperses her grammatically idiosyncratic French with Arabic curses and apostrophes. Kakou sometimes translates these idiomatic expressions directly, or paraphrases them in French afterwards, but on other occasions simply lets them stand in their unicity. While

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<sup>19</sup> In an interesting variant of the sketch, Élie Sémoun, of Moroccan Jewish origin, played the man on the train next to Kakou’s Madame Sarfati. Sémoun got his start with the Martinican comedian Dieudonné in the 1990s. As partners, the two pushed the boundaries of French humor, particularly with respect to their comedic denunciations of racism and class discrimination in France. Since the dissolution of their partnership in 1997, Dieudonné has increasingly moved to the extreme right, denouncing Jews for their supposed collusion with the slave trade and Israeli oppression of the Palestinians.

<sup>20</sup> See John Murray Cuddihy’s provocative reading of ideology critique evolving out of Jewish response to the assimilationist codes dominating Europe, *The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, and Lévi-Strauss and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity*, New York: Beacon Press, 1987.

Mémé Sarfati shares much with any Jewish grandmother, she also represents Kakou's grandmother and her dyspeptic view of life in France.

Kakou's humor used a host of stereotypes about Maghrebi Jews, and Jews in general, that still managed to attract a wide audience of the *rapatriés d'Afrique du Nord*, who became identified as the "pied-noirs". In a revelatory interview with Franco-Tunisian Jewish television producer André Halimi, Kakou and Halimi only use the term "pied-noir" to discuss his humor. For a comedian who generates so many of his jokes about Jews, this seems strange. Kakou's responses to questions about the success of his routines in France and the survival of "pied-noir" humor once the generations born in North Africa die out are equally significant. Kakou points out that he is a vessel for transmitting the essence of North African identity to new generations, through accent, gesture, and jargon. His appeal extends not only to the youth, who have never been to their places of origin, but also those who left their homes behind. The rebranding of Maghrebi Jews as "pied-noirs" took place in France, just as Kakou and thousands of other were arriving.

The slippage from the specificity of Tunisian Jew in his Madame Sarfati sketch to the all-purpose term "pied-noir," reveals both a loss of identity and a transformation that preserves difference under another name. Kakou jokingly classifies him as one of the pied-noir 'new wave', who left Tunisia too young an age to remember it. In another "décalage", Halimi later seems to forget that Kakou was born in Tunisia at all: *Alors comment vous faites, vous qui êtes né en France, pour émailler vos sketches d'expressions, de gestuel concernant justement l'humour pied-noir ? Où est-ce que vous puisez ça ?*". Kakou seems to miss the slip, but it is indicative the shifting presentation



and reception of his work as French, pied-noir, Sephardic, Tunisian, and even Arab. Kakou then provides a model for those who grew or are growing up all or mostly in the diaspora. The key to transmission and survival involves being able to move between these identities without being pinned by any one of them.

It would be no overstatement to say that Gad Elmaleh is one of France's most immediately recognizable entertainment figures. In December 2009, the *Institut français d'opinion publique* (IFOP) polled a large sample of 15-24 year olds in France on their favorite celebrities. Elmaleh came in first, beating out fellow Franco-Moroccan comedian Jamel Debbouze and soccer star Zinédine Zidane.<sup>21</sup> As a comedian and actor, he has appeared in dozens of films and his sketches are interminably quoted and reenacted by French people of all origins. Elmaleh has become such an essential part of the French entertainment schene, that he was casted as an "Ashkenazi" in Roselyne Bosch's Holocaust melodrama *La Rafle* (2010). Elmaleh portrays Schmuel, a Polish-Jewish immigrant to France, and one of the film's main characters. A bespectacled worker-intellectual, Communist and World War I veteran, Schmuel is helpless to save his family during the deportations of July 1942. That Elmaleh would be sought out for such a role gives an idea of the extent to which he has become a positive face for French Jews of all origins.

Despite such status, Elmaleh built his career on his foreign origins and immigrant story. His first show, *Décalages* (1997) depicted his colorful journey from Morocco to his sojourns in two of the main cities of exile for Mahgrebi Jews, Montreal and Paris. Though Elmaleh invented a character, David Bensoussan, the material was drawn directly from his personal experiences, fears, and imagination. "En tout cas, plus

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<sup>21</sup> *Journal du Dimanche*, January 2, 2010.

autobiographique que ce spectacle, je [ne] pouvais pas faire”, Elmaleh remarked.<sup>22</sup> His alter-ego David stands amazed at the modernity of the Montreal airport compared to Casablanca. He quickly falls afoul with the immigration and customs agents, who see no further than the Arabic script and Moroccan nationality on his passport, and his 160 kilos of luggage. David tries to explain that the enormous boxes are filled with mint (*nânâ*) that he has brought for a cousin of one of his mother’s coworkers in Casablanca.

Unimpressed, the customs agent radios to his superiors “Objet suspect, et passeport écrit en arabe qui s’ouvre l’envers.” The experience of immigration, without diminishing his Jewishness, links him with Morocco and other Maghrebi immigrants who share similar experiences of alienation and longing for home.

Upon arrival in his minuscule apartment, David confronts with cold weather, loneliness, and an overwhelming nostalgia for his life in Morocco. In one sketch, he describes the eerie silence of his neighborhood. He wishes for a car accident, a fight between the couple upstairs, or for a street vendor to pass by his window. All he sees outside are snowdrifts and all he hears is silence, “le walou” (“nothing” in Maghrebi dialect). He jokes about making a cassette with sounds from the streets of Casablanca to make him feel more at home. Hence the arrival in Montreal illuminates his rootedness in Morocco. After four years of studies in Montreal, Elmaleh moved to Paris where he began his theatrical training. He trained at the *Cours Florent*, an illustrious acting school that many other French celebrities passed through on their way to theatrical and cinematic success. Yet when David arrives, he feels rather out of place in this stodgy, formal environment. He walks into the classroom space named for legendary actor Pierre Fresnay, which he mispronounces as “salle Pierre Fresse-naïe” (in an astonishing reversal

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<sup>22</sup> *Décalages revu et presque pas corrigé*, 2002.

of fortune, the Cours Florent has recently rebaptized one of its classrooms the *Salle Gad Elmaleh*.<sup>23</sup> This humorous deformation of French cultural icons continues in the scenes that follow.

The theater teacher appears as a guardian of French classical culture. Just as the *Comédie Française* long insulated itself from France's multicultural realities, classical theater (Molière, Racine, and Corneille) has to come represent French language and high culture in its purest form.<sup>24</sup> For example, Abdellatif Kechiche's *L'esquive* (2004) follows students of Maghrebi origin in the Parisian *banlieue* confronting the problem of assimilation through a performance of Marivaux's *Le jeu de l'amour et du hasard*. Their teacher talks to them about how acting gives them the possibility to "sortir de vous-mêmes," demonstrating the performative tensions around passing. As such, Elmaleh's comedic assault on the supercilious nature of acting school serves to destabilize French notions about culture and immigration. Not only does Elmaleh get his revenge at the teachers who considered him a dunce, he also "debases" French high culture in a manner reminiscent of Rabelais, bringing it down from the abstract, rational level to the visceral burlesque.

A Muslim friend from David's childhood in Casablanca, Abderhazak El Merhawi, also joins the class. He and David both appear as immediate outsiders, reinforcing the notion of Jewish-Muslim solidarity during the immigration process. The theater teacher Frenchifies "Bensoussan" David's family name, pronouncing the "Ben" with a nasal

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<sup>23</sup> Lisa Peretz, "Funny Guy: Actor Gad Elmaleh credits his Moroccan Jewish upbringing for helping make him France's top comedian" *Ha'aretz*, February 18, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> The company's first member of color Jacques Maline, of Martinican origins, was admitted in 1967, only to be severely criticized for his portrayal of Oedipus and resigned in 1972. In 2002, the distinguished Malian actor Bakary Sangaré was recruited into the troupe. His first role was Papa in Marie N'Diaye's play *Papa doit manger*, though he has since played some characters not marked as Black. See Frédéric Lejeal, "Parcours: Bakary Sangaré" *Jeune Afrique*, May 20, 2009.

vowel [ɛ̃] instead of [ɛ], as Moroccan Jews would. She mangles Abderhazak's family name "El Merhawi," to the point of abandoning all efforts at pronouncing it. Their teacher begins by asking David about his origins, "vous avez une espèce de pétillance maghrébine." When she discovers David's Moroccan roots, she launches into an ecstatic description of her love for the country, employing one Orientalist trope after the next. "Ah, c'est merveilleux, je connais le Maroc, je connais bien, avec ces palmiers, ces chameaux, ces indigènes le long de cette région, comment ça s'appelle, ah, ça a changé, ah... mais c'est bien, c'est intéressant". The teacher essentializes David's difference, advising him to use his foreignness to his advantage. "Je dis toujours à ces acteurs étrangers, servez-vous de ce folklore, servez-vous de vos origines... servez-vous en !"

Her view of the Maghreb as fixed in the past and French culture as superior reemerges as repeatedly equates anything foreign with folklore.

David begins by massacring a selection from Corneille's *Le Menteur*. He uses the failed performance to poke fun at the *alexandrin*, the quasi-sacred linguistic-cultural form of seventeenth-century French theatre and literature. David explains the *alexandrin* as "le truc de douze là" and proceeds to ramble through the lines putting over-exaggerated emphasis on the final rhyming syllables. Once again, the idealized beauty of poetic form falls flat through a grotesque rendering that highlights the French obsession with poetic form as cultural authenticity. David's reading completely evacuates the lines of their content, because he wants so desperately to master the form.

This unsuccessful performance corresponds to what Homi Bhaba analyzed as colonial mimicry, in which the colonizer is destabilized by the distorted image of himself through the colonized's imitation. The teacher breaks down: "Bensoussan, c'est

scandaleux, vous avez des problèmes de texte, bien entendu, des problèmes de gestuel, de niveau, de personnage, vous avez surtout des problèmes avec vous-même.” The art of French theater and speaking French comes down to methods of diction and articulation. As the teacher says to Bensoussan, “Vous allez travailler sur votre posture, et votre diction. Il s’agit là d’apporter un ‘ooooo’; une joie, une gaieté, et non pas un ‘wawawa’ folklorique.” The teacher’s insistence on the “o” sound as dignified and the “wa” as “folklorique” stems from an important phonetic difference between French and Arabic. In Arabic, the letter و makes the sound “wāw,” hence the two examples the theater teacher uses. David and Abderhazak represent visible and audible difference.

Given his failure at performing Corneille and Frenchness more generally, she asks Bensoussan to try again. “Fouillez dans votre mémoire sensorielle, dans votre mémoire affective, pensez par exemple à quelque chose de beau, de vrai, d’authentique qui vous est arrivé alors que vous étiez enfant.” Just as he misreads the *alexandrin*, skipping over the meaning of lines, to linger on the final rhyming syllables, David’s response to this new prompt provides a perfect illustration of what Žizek described as “over-identification.”<sup>25</sup> When the subject takes official discourse too seriously, the result is the exposure of its ridiculousness. When the teacher asks him to perform something that represents his truest self, David takes her exactly at her word, creating a “public staging of the obscene fantasmatic kernel of [the] ideological edifice” (Žizek, *Universal Exception* 65). The results are predictably disastrous: his “beautiful and true” memories are of *Goldorak*, a Japanese cartoon from the late 1970s dubbed in Arabic. He acts out a

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<sup>25</sup> Slavoj Žizek, *The Universal Exception: Selected Writings*. Ed. Rex Butler and Scott Stephens (London: Continuum Publishing, 2007). Subsequent references will be made parenthetically, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

brief scene before the teacher cries out in horror. She breaks down in a paroxysm of anguish, considering it “la mort du théâtre francophone.” To make things worse, Abderhazak follows with a disastrous rendering of Alphonse Daudet’s *La chèvre de Monsieur Séguin*, adapted from a Provençal folk tale. Elmaleh highlights the teacher’s implicit racism, calling Abderhazak’s Arabic singing “ces mélopées folkloriques,” while considering Daudet’s work “culture”. Unable to remember the words, Abderhazak acts the story out in his colloquial *banlieue* French, again sending the teacher into a nervous breakdown.

At the end of *Décalages*, we see another token of Bensoussan’s solidarity with Abderhazak. As the two sit down after the theater class, Aderhazak rolls a joint and talks of how they might put together a show based on *La chèvre*. But just as in every scene, David is in constant movement as a diasporic subject, never settling down in one place (Casablanca, Montreal, Paris) or one identity (Moroccan, Jewish, Canadian, or French). All that Abderhazak can ask him is “qu’on garde le contact.” Hence, the last line of *Décalages* symbolizes the diasporic imperative that many Maghrebi Jews take up through writing, web forums, music, and film. Abderhazak suggests something more political though, that Jews and Muslims who share homelands should also keep the lines of communication open.

Reflecting on the creation of the performance, Elmaleh explains his pairing of David and Abderhazak as a way of addressing the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine and the corresponding tensions between Jews and Muslims in France.

Sur la fin du spectacle, comme dans tous mes spectacles, il y a aussi une idée qui est de montrer que David qui est juif, et Abderhazak qui est musulman, c’est vraiment des vrais potes d’enfance, des vrais potes avec une vraie complicité. Je trouve que sur scène, au lieu de faire des grands discours sur le conflit judéo-arabe, ou sur justement l’amitié

judéo-arabe, il y a juste qu'à montrer deux personnages... qui s'entendent très bien ensemble, qui ont les mêmes intérêts, on n'a pas besoin de montrer le reste, si tout va bien, tout va bien, quoi?<sup>26</sup>

Elmaleh situates himself outside a certain theater or sketch comedy that “politicizes” the identities he moves between. Just as Boughedir and Benjelloun push for a reconsideration of national histories through recourse to collective memory, Elmaleh is less concerned with reconstructing or returning to the past, as he is with negotiating the passage from his old homeland to the new homeland.

In 2002, five years after his debut, Elmaleh revisited the show in a short documentary *Décalages revu et presque pas corrigé*. Filmed in his chic, ultra-modern Paris loft apartment, the setting shows his enormous success. Elmaleh watches the show in DVD format with remote in hand, frequently pausing to emphasize a particular point, or fast-forwarding through a scene he does not wish to talk about. The power to retrospectively edit his performance shows his transition from the vulnerable, naïve immigrant David Bensoussan to a French celebrity with the power to influence the reception of his own image and multiple identities (Moroccan, French, Jewish, and so on). He expresses the distance from his past, genuinely surprised at the highly autobiographical nature of the show:

J'ai l'impression d'assumer totalement mes origines, heureusement, mais pour pouvoir s'en débarrasser entre guillemets, il faut les montrer, les célébrer. Je [ne] ferais pas un travail comme ça aujourd'hui, qui colle tellement à la réalité, mais j'avais besoin de le faire, c'est une thérapie, ce spectacle (*Décalages revu*).

As we saw in chapter four, the re-enacting of exile provides a way of understanding what the author has experienced, but also of marking the distance from the past. In *Décalages*,

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<sup>26</sup> *Décalages revu et presque pas corrigé par Gad Elmaleh*, dir. Tafari Tsige-Vidalie (2002).

Elmaleh gently mocks his own naivety as an immigrant in the modern metropolises of Montreal and Paris, but he also uses David's innocent gaze to critique those Moroccan Jews who seem to have forgotten where they come in an effort to blend in.

In terms of his more recent work, Elmaleh continues to expand his repertoire taking on everyday subjects through a more undifferentiated French perspective. When he did go back to addressing his origins in the sketch "I'm a Moroccan" in his show *L'autre, c'est moi* (2003), he distanced himself from the media's expectations about his comedy. In the sketch, Elmaleh describes his interviews in which journalists often prod him about assimilation: "Oui, vous [n']avez pas l'impression dans votre nouveau spectacle de renier un peu vos origines?" Je dis 'non, pourquoi?' 'Parce que vous parlez normalement.'" Smirking, Elmaleh declares in a heavy Moroccan accent, "Tu crois que toute ma vie je parlais [sic] comme ça?". Hence, he refuses the marginal role assigned to minority performers, who are expected to represent a static, knowable, and humorous "otherness" for the pleasure of a French audience.

While moving away from his immigrant journey as raw material, Elmaleh has since made several significant tours that brought him "back" to his roots. First in 2006, he performed multiple shows in Israel to enthusiastic audiences. He sang and spoke in Hebrew during certain segments. This tour raised some controversy among bloggers and web forums based in Morocco. In 2009, he was scheduled to return to the Middle East, for three July performances at the Beiteddine Art Festival in Lebanon. His presence at the festival came under attack by Al Manar, the Hezbollah-subsidized television channel. The channel's evening news program circulated an image supposed to be Elmaleh in an Israeli soldier's uniform and called for a boycott of Elmaleh's performances and the



festival as a whole. Al Manar further claimed that Elmaleh had served in the army for years and had Israeli nationality, despite having no proof to support such accusation.<sup>27</sup> Eventually, Elmaleh's agent decided to cancel the shows, "considérant que ces éléments pourraient mettre en danger la sécurité de l'artiste et entraver le bon déroulement des spectacles."<sup>28</sup>

The incident reveals the limits of Maghrebi Jewish diasporic identity, especially the way that Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become a Jewish-Arab conflict. "Maghrebi" and "Jewish" have become inextricably tied with national identities that pose a problem for diasporic circulation. For performers such as Elmaleh, being Moroccan and Jewish has more to do with ancestral and cultural attachments, but in the blogosphere these adjectives refer exclusively to warring nation-states, who do not formally recognize each other's existence.

Most recently, he and Jamel Debbouze (a parallel of Abderhazak El Merhawi) headlined first-ever *Marrakech du rire* in 2011, designed by the monarchy to become Morocco's premier international comedy festival. Elmaleh and Debbouze represent the part of the North African immigrant community that has gained acceptance in French society, what some journalists and scholars have provocatively called the "beurgoisie."<sup>29</sup> Though their friendship supposedly symbolizes the possibility of Jewish-Muslim understanding, it also does not reflect those unable to transform the stigma of foreign origins into a way of making a living.

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<sup>27</sup> "Gad Elmaleh vu en soldat israélien au Liban" *Le Nouvel Observateur*, July 3, 2009. First published on June 25, 2009 as "Le Liban voit en Gad Elmaleh un soldat israélien" the editorial staff changed the title after a number of readers criticized the way it assumed the unanimity of Lebanese public opinion.

<sup>28</sup> "Gad Elmaleh, menacé par le Hezbollah, annule sa tournée au Liban" *Libération* June 29, 2009; see also Sacha Nokovitch, "Le Hezbollah ne fait pas rire Gad Elmaleh" *L'Express* June 29, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> See Alec G. Hargreaves, "The Beurgoisie: mediation or mirage," *Journal of European Studies* (March-June 1998): 89-102.

Elmaleh made a triumphal return to Casablanca for three performances of a special show designed for his hometown, simply called *Bidaoui*. The word is the *darija* term for a resident of Casablanca; from *dar al baïda*, the city's name in Arabic. Hence, even after acquiring French citizenship, settling his family in Paris, a highly publicized trip to Israel and a starring role as an Ashkenazi Jew caught up in the Holocaust, Elmaleh still can effectively claim his Moroccan-ness. He visits the country “three or four times a year, whether for a private vacation in Marrakech, a visit to my grandmother in Casablanca or a performance tour. They don't consider me a successful French comedian, but rather a Moroccan who made it big abroad. It's intimate and very moving. Morocco is completely alive for me” (Peretz, “Funny Guy”). Just as his comedy has successfully played off his multiple origins without ceding totally to any one, his public performance of Maghrebi Jewish identity shows the remarkable flexibility of this new diasporic formation and the geo-political limits it reveals.

### **Historical Melodrama and the Jewish-Muslim Postcolonial Family Romance**

While film critics are often dismissive of melodramatic films taking on “political” subjects, film studies scholars have argued for decades that melodrama, best exemplified by Douglas Sirk and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, operated on political levels by breaking down distinctions between the public and private in postwar America and West Germany. While ostensibly confined to domestic, familial settings focusing on individuals, melodrama's made for the masses appeal could be used for veiled, subversive social commentary. In the popular and historical debates over inter-communal relations in North

Africa, film such as *Un été à la Goulette* and *Où vas-tu Moshé?* are criticized for treating serious subjects in overly simplistic ways with inappropriate affect.

These much-maligned programmatic and melodramatic elements are fascinating for how clearly they expose dominant paradigms that create fields of representation. They also stage and reconfigure popular tropes, entering into historical debates about how the post-independence governments treat Jewish communities in North Africa, how ordinary Muslims viewed them, why Jews and European minorities (e.g. Spaniards, Italians, Sicilians) firmly rooted in Casablanca and Tunis leave, and if Muslims saw them as fellow citizens or as foreigners. The nostalgia deployed in the historical melodrama also works on another level, to de-familiarize the seeming “mouvement immobile” of the present (where as Fanon said, “la dialectique, petit à petit, s’est muée en logique d’équilibre”<sup>30</sup>) and open it up to substantive re-imagination.

Contemporary Franco-Maghrebi cinema works in an environment dominated by crises of power and authority. The breakdown of regulative ideological systems such as Republican “laïcité”, the obsession with immigration in France, the specter of Islamization of the Maghreb (an even sorer subject after the election of Islamist parties in Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt), and, last but not least, the ever-worsening Israeli-Palestinian conflict haunt these films. In this transformational period where the myths of decolonization and binaries of colonizer and colonized no longer allow cinematic audiences to “read” the political situation, historic melodramas take a different function, reimagining the battered national allegory. In this process, all kinds of taboos, past and present are re-imagined through the seemingly familiar registers of stock characters, stereotypes, and tragicomic situations. Boughedir and Benjelloun assert that Jews were an

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<sup>30</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Œuvres*, 675.

integral part of the Tunisian and Moroccan nation, but the concurrent manifestation of sameness requires transgressing taboos about intermarriage. In both films, young people of different religions are paired off only to fail as couple by the end, foreshadowing emigration.

The recurring failure to couple in Douglas Sirk's 1950s melodramas represents the imagined overcoming of taboos around women's sexuality, race, and class, only to project the reinstatement of social boundaries through accident (*All That Heaven Allows* [1955]), aging (*Magnificent Obsession* [1954]) or tragic deaths (*Imitation of Life* [1959], *Written on the Wind* [1956]). These moments of human frailty cast a tragic pall over the protagonists of Sirk's films and cast social codes as oppressive, implacable forces. In more recent melodramas such as Todd Haynes's *Far from Heaven* (2002), homosexuality and interracial relationships are reinserted back into the historical record through doomed relationships between a middle-class liberal white woman and a black gardener, and her husband, who lives in the closet. Pam Cook notes that the film's "retrospective look at the 1950s imagines a scenario in which the lives of its characters could have been very different, and it is all the more poignant in the light of the knowledge that while some things have changed, many remain the same." ("Rethinking Nostalgia" 15). On a similar level, the emergence of nostalgic melodrama films in Morocco and Tunisia idealize Jewish-Arab coexistence. Nevertheless, the films use this "controversial" subject to address all sorts of other issues related modernization, construction of the nation, and the ways that other others (especially women, but also working-class European colonists) have suffered and been silenced.

While scholars argue about the extent to which this kind of imagined transgression makes for effective critique of discrimination, failed romance between characters of opposing ethnic or religious groups highlights the limit points of social relations and national identity. In a Levantine context, Nadine Labaki's *Et maintenant on va où?* (2011) explores the sectarian rift at the heart of Lebanon's failed national identity through an unsuccessful romance between a Christian woman and Muslim man. That the romance takes place in an unnamed remote village serves to show the contrast between everyday solidarity between Muslims and Christians (especially the women), and the senseless conflict that comes from outside. Similarly in North Africa, where Jews long constituted the most significant indigenous religious minority, the specter of mixed marriages and the problem of inter-communal relations are tied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

For Moroccan and Tunisian nationalists only a Jewish-Arab fusion could be acceptable. When Jews in both countries were threatened with the dissolution of their autonomous communal status and encouraged to cut ties with other parts of the diaspora, they balked. The Bourguiba government's dismantling of Jewish institutions and the reproach to Jewish notables not to have the "corps en Tunisie et le cœur ailleurs" made the fusional logic of the post-independence period clear. Maghrebi Muslim nationalists readily adopted the European trope of Jews as a "nation within the nation." As Gilbert Naccache pointed out, the notion of the "juif arabe" promoted by Maghrebi nationalists evacuated the specificity of Jewish diasporic history and culture.

Pour définir les juifs comme faisant partie de la nation arabe, cela me paraît une forme subtile, mais indiscutable de racisme : elle permet de réduire la différence à une question de religion, et de nier tout l'aspect national-culturel du fait juif. Et pour ceux, juifs ou

arabes, qui ne se reconnaissent pas de religion, originaires de communautés différentes dans une nation unique, posée à priori : la nation arabe. (*Cristal* 136)

If religion then becomes the only form of difference between Morocco and Tunisia's populations, then conversion becomes necessary to break down the barriers. Yet conversion for Jews remained and remains a red line, hence the use of comedy to defuse the tensions around its representation. A comedic and stereotypical treatment of intercommunal romance allows the filmmaker to imagine the unthinkable, only to create distance from it.

Imagining the nation as an idealized couple also raises the issue of gender hierarchies, long a lens through which the French have seen North Africa. If the ideal couple would bear future Tunisian or Moroccan citizens, where does religious mixing fit in? After decolonization, both countries created constitutions where Islam was inscribed at the religion of the state. When intermarriage did take place in the Maghreb, the woman would be expected to convert to her husband's religion. To take the specific example of the Jewish community, the burden fell on women to avoid compromising relationships with Muslim and Christian men. By the 1960s when the films here are set, both the Moroccan and Tunisian Jewish community were in serious demographic constriction.

Hence the intermarriage taboo took on a new collective intensity, not only meaning the betrayal of a spiritual community, but also the disappearance of an historic community and culture. In the films discussed, we will see how intermarriage appears as a hypothetical "solution" to the troubled place of Jews in the decolonized Maghreb. From a Muslim perspective, the fact that Jews could not countenance marrying a Muslim translated to their collective rejection of Arab culture in favor of Europe. Intermarriage functions as a highly charged symbol for all parties producing and consuming these films.

Along with revisiting the possibility of communal fusion, Boughedir and Benjelloun want to rewrite the history of Jewish emigration from their perspective as secular, Maghrebi intellectuals engaged in culture wars. Both favor coexistence and the recognition of their countries' Jewish past as a way of fighting against what they see as the threat of Egyptian and Algerian-style Islamization spilling over into Morocco and Tunisia. They also are anti-Zionist and critical of the legacies of French colonialism and state racism. Yet they want to recover the everyday society of Jews, Muslims, and Christians living together as an antidote to present-day violence and intolerance.

They weave their way through these tangled thickets of memory and history by putting on screen all the possible stereotypes about the period, while foregrounding their own desire to rewrite the past and their appeals to the viewer to participate in this endeavor. In their films, one sees characters representing all the different possibilities, from crude anti-Jewish prejudice imported from the Middle East, to basic decency, to strategic toleration for economic reasons, to Jews' adoption of European attitudes toward Arabs, and so on. At the same time, these revisionist themes are deployed through stock characters and situations. Boughedir and Benjelloun's appropriations of a cinematic tradition of characterization along ethno-religious divides seems strange for two directors who wish to ultimately affirm that "nous sommes tous des Goulettois" or "nous sommes tous des Marocains."

Their use of such melodramatic formal elements to reenact an extremely traumatic history certainly does create comedy, but also strikes many journalists and historians as inadequate and fanciful. *Le Monde* film critic Jacques Mandelbaum asserted

that Benjelloun's film "peine à se porter à la hauteur de l'événement."<sup>31</sup> Such critical reaction fails to take into account the fissures that melodrama might draw attention to in different ways than more "realistic" dramas or documentaries. Their cathartic approach to such controversial history allows all sorts of pent-up emotions and unspoken taboos to be worked out on screen and in the viewer. Any sense of progressive time starting with national independence and going to the present is disrupted. Decolonization and the nation's becoming are thus radically questioned. The clearly typed and staged elements that Boughedir and Benjelloun operate with tap into collective fantasy on both sides of the Mediterranean, allowing cast and crew, in addition to audiences, to affectively rewrite history. For Boughedir, "le cinéma peut tout : il peut rappeler aux hommes la nécessité de la fraternité et du respect de la différence, il peut aussi fixer la magie de nos instants disparus, leur poésie et leur harmonie, mais aussi leurs moments dramatiques ou déchirants" (123). Here is a remarkable definition of the nostalgic melodrama. The cinema's two forms of action, given form by the verbs "rappeler" and "fixer", both harken back to the past and concretize an image outside of time where Jews, Muslims, and Christians could all be part of the same "family."

Boughedir and Benjelloun's reflections take place in a context of Tunisian and Moroccan critiques of failed decolonization and female emancipation. Nouri Gana has asserted that they are part of a whole host film "delv[ing] into the experiences of male characters in order to unravel neopatriarchal modes of production of manhood and to examine its constraining effects on unconventional sexual practices, homosocial spaces and socioeconomic mobility" ("Bourguiba's Sons" 112). To this list we must add

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<sup>31</sup> Jacques Mandelbaum, "'Où vas-tu Moshé?': une comédie douce-amère sur l'exode des juifs marocains" [www.lemonde.fr](http://www.lemonde.fr), June 8, 2010.



linguistic and ethno-religious difference, which were equally problematic in the “climate of fear of cultural contamination – which intensified in the 1950s and in the decolonial period at large” (106). While these films are often seen as “Jewish” (widely screened at Jewish film festivals and dealt with by critics in reference to Israel-Palestine), their subjects are polyvalent.

### **Stereotyped and Schematized Representations of Difference**

Boughedir’s story about three girls of different religions (Jewish, Muslim, and Christian) making a pact to lose their virginity by the end of the summer (and ultimately with boys from other ethno-religious communities), might seem controversial, but it draws on a relatively prolific tradition in Egyptian writing and cinema of three friends, each one representing one of the Abrahamic religions. Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff, born in Cairo to parents of Tunisian and Iraqi Jewish origins, used the device in her short story “Passover in Egypt” (2011 [1965]).<sup>32</sup> Her Jewish narrator-protagonist’s two main friends are the devoutly Catholic Marie-Thérèse and the Muslim Kadreya. Though the three girls play together, Jacqueline’s inability to articulate the conflicting places of Egypt and Israel in Jewish tradition leads to her alienation from Kadreya.

Two fairly-well known Egyptian films also provided Boughedir with a cinematic history to draw on. The first *Fatima, Marika, and Rachel* (1949), the story centers on a Muslim protagonist pining after the girls of the title, a Muslim, Copt, and Jew, respectively. He masquerades as a member of each girl’s religion, giving ample opportunity for projections of stereotypes, before safely retreating to the “purest,” Fatima.

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<sup>32</sup> Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff, “Passover in Egypt” in *Mongrels or Marvels: The Levantine Writings of Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff*, eds. Deborah A. Starr and Sasson Somekh (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2011) 14-19.

In the second *Hassan, Marcus, and Cohen* (1954), the titular male characters, a Muslim, a Copt, and a Jew, respectively, are friends and business partners. Their religious differences are extensively stereotyped for comic effect. Yet they share a bourgeois class identity, as opposed to Hassan, their employee.<sup>33</sup> In this Levantine tradition, emphasizing the presence of multiple minority groups, each of the characters function as a synecdoche. Their individual qualities are often downplayed in favor of those of the community they represent. This highly schematic approach also allows for comparability. Much of the humor in the film derives from the cultural similarities between characters, including their stubborn desire to maintain their religious difference. Each character's choices and destiny also stand in for community's future in synedochal fashion.

His co-screenwriter for *Un été*, the Tunisian writer-director Nouri Bouzid made *Homme de cendres* (1986), the story of two friends coming of age in the coastal city of Sfax. As boys Hachemi and Farfat (both Muslim) were molested by Ameer, the carpenter they apprenticed with. The missing member of their boyhood trio is Jaco, a Jewish boy who immigrated to France, along with his sister Rosa. Jaco's father, Monsieur Lévy, stayed behind and seems to be all that remains of the Jewish community, and of Sfax's cosmopolitan past. During the days leading up to his arranged marriage, Hachemi begins to crack under the pressure of recurring flashbacks from childhood and concerns about his manhood, emblematic of his generation.

He goes to see Monseieur Lévy to invite him to the marriage and ask after Jaco. The Lévy house is decorated with European furniture, Tunisian Jewish jewelry, old class

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<sup>33</sup> The film was remade as *Hassan wa Marcus* in 2008, with megastars Adel Imam as the Copt "Marcus" and Omar Sharif as the Muslim "Hassan". Note the significant disappearance of "Cohen," corresponding to the migrations of Egypt's Jews. This seems to confirm that the continued presence of Jewish communities in Morocco and Tunisia (however minuscule) is an important condition of possibility for Benjelloun and Boughedir's films.

photos, along with candelabra. As with many of the other older characters in the film, Monsieur Lévy expresses profound nostalgia for the old Sfax. He and many of the other characters constantly apostrophize “ya hasra”, reflecting what they see as a present where social relations have broken down.

Increasingly isolated to his home by the gradual emigration of the Jewish community and having missed Jaco’s marriage in France, Monsieur Lévy responds warmly to the news of Hachemi’s wedding. He jokes about how close the boys used to be, and how his daughter Rosa and Hachemi seemed like the ideal couple; except, of course, for the fact that she was Jewish and he Muslim. Once again, the absolute interdiction on interreligious relationships comes up. Hachemi’s failure with women and the taint of homosexuality are symbolically with sexual taboos that structure Tunisian society.

Monsieur Lévy brings out a bottle of *boukha* (fig brandy made by Tunisian Jews) and his *oud*. At Hachemi’s request, he plays a song complaining of the loneliness of modern life. The singer complains that the streets are empty, the houses are quiet, no one sings and laughs on their balconies any more, and so on. The song reflects M. Lévy’s complaint about the departure of Europeans and Jews, and the residents of Sfax’s complaint about codes of civility and sociability falling into disuse. After much *boukha* has been drunk, Hachemi finally begins to bare his awful secret to Monsieur Lévy, only to discover the old man has fallen fast asleep. Not long after, we learn that he has passed away, symbolically closing a chapter on Hachemi and the city’s past.

Monsieur Lévy functions as an internal other who could provide Hachemi with a substitute father who would listen to him, and help him overcome his anxiety about

sexuality (as opposed to his own father who responds to Hachemi's erratic behavior by whipping him with a belt). Monsieur Lévy's death spells the end of Hachemi's boyhood and his final exorcism through a visit to a prostitute. Just as we only ever see Jaco in flashback and he haunts the relationship between Hachemi and Farfat, on a larger level, Jews' presence/absence appears as a spectral alternative to the impasse of Tunisian Muslim society. The construction of gender that leads to repression and destructive sexual practices seems to be related to what Gilbert Naccache considered to be a "processus de fermeture des esprits" created by European and Jewish departures (*Qu'as-tu fait* 85).

### **It's Always Summer in La Goulette**

In *Un été*, the story centers on two sets of three friends living in the small port of La Goulette. Jojo the *brik*-maker (Jewish), Yussef the ticket inspector (Muslim), Giuseppe the fisherman (Sicilian), are best friends, spending their free time together playing cards and going on fishing trips that are more an excuse to drink *boukha*. Their daughters Gigi (Jewish), Meriem (Muslim), and Tina (Sicilian), are also best friends, and their coming of age comprises a central narrative thread. We also see their wives Fritna (Jewish), Wassila (Muslim), and Lucia (Sicilian) occupying the domestic sphere, gossiping at cafés, and praying to the same saint. Finally, their sons Nino, Farzit, and Guitou run around the street and beaches together. To add to the symbolic nature of such schematic character construction based on trios, the enamored boys chasing after the girls, one Muslim, one Christian, one Jewish, refer to them in shorthand as TGM, the colloquial abbreviation of the Tunis-Goulette-Marsa train line. The train line is a

Tunisian *lieu de mémoire* representing passage from the city to the coast, and on a symbolic level, from the world of toil and struggle, to a ludic Mediterranean space of sunshine and sandy beaches. In a memorial context, the TGM also functions a heuristic device for narrative, moving the writer from the more violent spaces of the city center to the eternally sunny and harmonious world of the coast. La Goulette symbolizes escape from the city, but also escape from history, back into a reconstituted village society of simpler and, ostensibly, better times.

Indeed, the first part of the film's title, "a summer", anticipates the film's anachronistic character. Though the film appears to take place in the summer of 1967, it aspires to capture the essence of Tunisian summers through a focus on the fable of Mediterranean diversity. There is no sense of linear temporality, and the correspondences between historical time and diegetic time are distorted. As opposed to Alexandre Arcady's *Dernier été à Tanger* (1987), a police thriller which highlights the end of Tangier's anarchic cosmopolitanism status as it goes from being a free city to being reintegrated into Morocco in 1956, Boughedir's use of 1967 is secondary to the distinctively cinematic time frame of an eternally returning summer and the personal time frame of his memories of adolescence. He particularly wanted to pay tribute to his high school years, and his best friends, "un juif tunisien, c'est Joël Taïeb, qui vit toujours à Tunis, et l'autre c'est Claude d'Anna. Son père était italien de Sicile" (Hayoun and Tselikas, "Histoire des lycées français" 175). This autobiographical element adds to the distortion of time, in the sense that the past is self-consciously restaged around affective needs in the present.

The film begins with the girls making a pact to lose their virginity before the *Fête de la Madone di Trapani*, which took place each summer on August 15. This folk religious practice celebrated the feast of the Assumption of Mary and her patronage of the Sicilian fishermen in Tunisia.<sup>34</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, this procession from the church around the streets of La Goulette symbolized Tunis's cosmopolitanism, with active participation by all La Goulette's communities, led by the Sicilians, Italians, and Maltese. Jews and Muslims took part in the festivities as members of the crowd and procession with surprising fervor. The festival also represented the end of the summer beach season and the return to city-life in Tunis.

The girls' desire to lose their virginity stems from the patriarchal environment of surveillance and control that they constantly chafe against. Not only does losing one's virginity constitute a central taboo, but the girls exacerbate the situation by choosing to have sex with boys of other religions. Meriem pairs up with Tina's cousin Salvatore (Sicilian), Tina with Gigi's cousin Jacky (Jewish), and Gigi with Meriem's cousin Tewfik (Muslim). Their first tryst takes place at Gigi's sister Lucette's wedding. The girls are caught in the act of kissing the boys, leading to a rift between the girls' fathers. After being severely punished and confined, they come up with the creative solution of meeting with their paramours at the Temple of Love at the ruins of Carthage, where they succeed in "becoming women." Boughedir does not "punish" the girls in the plot or in visual terms, marking a significant departure from earlier melodramas where women's transgression of moral codes must be disciplined. Yet neither do the girls and their lovers end up together. Their transgression lasts for all of 15 minutes and is mitigated through

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<sup>34</sup> See Pierre Soumille, "Processions catholiques en butte à l'anti-cléricalisme européen dans la Tunisie des années 1905-1910."

both groups joking immediately afterwards. As modern women oppressed by the obsession with family honor, the girls see virginity as a cumbersome element to be gotten rid of. Who better than each other's cousins, also boys of another religion to do the job? This way the transgression is even more profound and, if kept secret, does not prevent one from later marrying back in the group.

The 1967 Arab-Israeli War (which haunts the joyous atmosphere of the film) and subsequent anti-European and anti-Jewish rioting in Tunis took place much earlier, from June 5 to 10. These traumatic events culminated in the pillaging of the *Grande Synagogue*, traumatizing the Jewish community. The film dissolves the violence into a general climate of anti-Zionism that comes from the constant barrage of news from Egypt and the Middle East. In fact, many Jews and Europeans had already left by 1967, and the summer from the first week of June onward marked the departure of many of those that remained. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Colette Fellous left days after the riots of June 5, 1967, noting her family was among the last to leave.<sup>35</sup> After the *Fête de la Madone*, the title “a few months later” appears at the bottom of the screen, and we see a jubilant TSF announcing that there will be no war in the Middle East. All seems to be well in La Goulette, as we Youssef, Jojo, Giuseppe getting ready to go fishing as before. In the final shot, the camera fixes on the girls sitting on the beach, watching the waves come into shore. More titles appear on screen alerting us to the impending conflict. “Nous sommes le 4 juin 1967, à la veille de la deuxième guerre israélo-arabe du Proche-Orient. Après les Chrétiens, les derniers Juifs de Tunisie vont décider de quitter leurs pays natal... Ils n'oublieront jamais La Goulette.” Besides the fact that Jews were the main group affected by the war, not the Christians, many of whom already had left after the Bizerte crisis, the

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<sup>35</sup> “Ils seront les derniers à partir, les premiers l'ont fait en 1956, puis en 1961.” Fellous, *Aujourd'hui* 78.

main problem with this chronology is that August to June would be a year later, not few months. We would then be in the summer of 1968. Following Boughedir's dual imperative, "rappeler... la nécessité de la fraternité" and "fixer la magie de nos instants disparus", the film's deformation of historical time corresponds with its nostalgic reconstruction of the recent past (123).

No Jews or Europeans are seen leaving Tunisia during the film, the vague treatment of the political context becomes particularly acute with respect to the Sicilian characters. The film's focus on Jewish-Arab relations, conditioned by the "French passion" for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict<sup>36</sup> and the violent anti-Zionism reigning across the Arab world, mostly neglects the perspective of Giuseppe and his family. In one scene after the girls have all been punished, Tina promises her mother she will escape from the overweening patriarchy of La Goulette. Lucia chides her: "Ici, c'est ton pays, c'est la terre où tu es née ! Si tu pars, tu regretteras ce paradis où tu as eu la chance de vivre" (126). Given Tina's mother's affirmation, we must wonder how someone so deeply rooted could up and leave without being compelled to. Given that the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East principally concerned Tunisian Muslims and Jews, why did the Sicilians have to leave? Boughedir could gesture toward the anti-European riots of 1961 relating to the Bizerte Crisis and the anti-European riots of 1967 as factors, but in keeping with his displacement of the political, he chooses not to.

Boughedir's view of the history of migration itself reveals a great deal about present-day blind spots among Maghrebi intellectuals. Discussing the project, he declared that Tunisia's three communities "ont toujours réussi à maintenir une cohésion sans

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<sup>36</sup> Denis Sieffert, *Israël-Palestine, une passion française : La France dans le miroir du conflit israélo-palestinien*. (Paris: Editions de la Découverte, 2004).



faillie: cela autant sous le protectorat français qu'après l'indépendance de la Tunisie, et jusqu'à la guerre de Six Jours de juin 1967, qui a marqué le début du départ volontaire, au fil des années" (122). The Bizerte Crisis only comes up once during the film, despite the fact that many French citizens were expelled from the country and Jews were accused of collaborating with them.

The brief mention of the Jewish migrations to France and Israel that took place well before 1967 also fails to capture the anxiety Jews felt about their future. In Hamouda's café, a patron jokes about Jews going off to France to get rich. Youssef condemns this narrow-mindedness, but no one explains why they would have left. Even if one passes on Boughedir's problematic assessment of post-independence migrations, he avoids showing the consequences of the Arab-Israeli war for Tunisia within the body of the film.

The Arab-Israeli War does indeed appear as the source of conflict between Muslims and Jews in La Goulette, but in such an unreliable way that it becomes ridiculous. The main vector for news about the Middle East is the character "TSF" a radio-obsessed homeless man played by Michel Boujenah. Frequently tuned in to Radio Cairo or Radio Beirut, he frequently interrupts the fishermen and domino players in the café with news from the Middle East. Besides the fact that the news continually shifts ("tensions extrêmes" or "baisse de tensions"), Boughedir draws attention to the distance and unreliability of the news by having the boys on the beach constantly stealing TSF's antenna, thus making him lose the Radio Cairo signal just when he was about to hear something significant. In another scene around sunrise, TSF sleeps on the beach as the static-filled radio drones on about conflict. The repeated mentions of Radio Cairo also

alludes to the role that Gamal Abd'el Nasser's fiery speeches on the "Voice of the Arabs" program played in stoking up anti-Jewish and anti-European sentiment throughout the Arab world from the mid 1950s and throughout the 1960s.<sup>37</sup>

In Maghrebi Jewish literature from Morocco to Egypt, Nasser frequently emerges as a dreaded figure anti-Jewish violence. His visit to Morocco in 1960 sparked off considerable tension, and members of the Jewish community in Casablanca and elsewhere were harassed and arbitrarily imprisoned. If Egyptian pan-Arabism comes under direct critique, Zionism, a sort of elephant in the room, is never directly addressed. As we saw in chapter 3, Maghrebi Jews' discussing immigration to Israel and even the mention of the word "Israel" was taboo in post-independence Morocco and Tunisia. Violent criticism in the local and pan-Arabist press, along with the suspicion that Jews were not fully loyal citizens, made any talk of Israel, much any public defense of it, highly dangerous. Hence Boughedir avoids dealing with the Jewish community's very real fears about their future.

Another important temporal deformation centers on the subplot in the film concerns Claudia Cardinale, one of the most famous "enfants de la Goulette" (though as we will see, she is not actually from there). Cardinale's involvement in publicizing the film demonstrates her symbolic importance as ambassador for Tunisian tolerance. In *Un été à la Goulette*, news of Cardinale's return provokes a minor hysteria among the locals. While TSF bursts in with his usual news of "tensions au Moyen-Orient," another character Miro interrupts to announce that Cardinale has returned. Whereas no one responds to TSF's announcements, everyone empties out of the café as soon as they hear

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<sup>37</sup> Laura M. James, "Whose Voice: Nasser, the Arabs, and 'Sawt al-Arab' Radio" *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* 16 (2006).

about Cardinale. After the noise of the patrons stampeding out to see her has subsided, the camera zooms in on the empty café, showing the radio announcing Cardinale's arrival sitting on a table. Once again, the news fails to catch up with the "téléphone arabe." A Fellini-esque scene reminiscent of *Amarcord* follows, as young and old clear out into the streets rushing to see Cardinale. She finally appears at a balcony, mouthing "je vous aime" to the camera and the public (Jews, Muslims, and Christians indistinctly). In fact, Cardinale claims the whole *mise-en-scène* was a surprise for her.

De passage à Tunis, j'avais croisé le réalisateur Férid Boughedir, qui me demanda de faire une apparition dans le film. Il m'a convaincue. A Carthage où avait lieu de tournage, il m'a fait une magnifique surprise : il m'a dit d'aller sur le balcon... et j'ai découvert toute la population de la ville réunie pour m'applaudir (*Ma Tunisie*, 85).

Yet the much-aged Cardinale on the balcony is clearly not that of 1967. In a later scene, she later appears at Lucette's wedding, convincing Jojo to postpone Felix Mendelsohn's *Wedding March* in favor of Arab music everyone can dance to. Cardinale appears as embodied spectacle or cameo than actual speaking character. Her two appearances take place on dramatic platforms, the balcony from which she reigns over an adoring public, and then the stage at the wedding, where mediates between tradition and modernity. Thus she remains an eternal symbol of La Goulette's multiculturalism (and by extension, the Ben Ali regime's "tolerance" and secularism), helping erase the years between 1967 and the new wave of nostalgia in the 1990s, and holding out hope for the return of all of Tunisia's children. She becomes, as does Michel Boujenah in his recent appearances promoting French tourism to Tunisia, a celebrity spokesperson for the Tunisian exception.

Since her rise to stardom, she has become a universal symbol for Tunisians. Cardinale observed the anachronistic elements of this development during a return visit in

the 1990s, “Les gens viennent me raconter mes souvenirs: des mots et des gestes que je n’ai jamais eus. Les lieux et les époques sont inventés et intravertis et je suis ainsi présente dans une mémoire qu’on affirme être la mienne” (“Claudia Cardinale, Italienne de l’autre rive” 137). In fact, part of the Cardinale myth extends to her supposedly Goulettois origins. As wrote in *Ma Tunisie*, “n’en déplaise à la rumeur, je ne suis pas née à la Goulette : j’ai vu le jour le 15 avril 1938 sur l’avenue Jules Ferry, dans un grand immeuble qui s’appelait Foyer du Combattant, et derrière lequel se trouvait la [sic] port de Tunis.” (29) After the bombardments of the Second World War damaged her family’s home, moving to a house near the *Aéroport* station on the TGM (close to the Italian stronghold of Le Kram). She attended school and made her first communion in Carthage, the place she claims to be most attached to emotionally (“Italienne de l’autre rive,” 139). While Cardinale may allow herself to be pulled in by the mythology surrounding the “paradis perdu” (Boughedir “Un été à la Goulette,” 123) of the three religions coexisting in harmony, she is a “Goulettoise” in the cadre of nostalgia more than autobiography.

Her intervention to obtain permission for *Le Fil* (dir. Mehdi Ben Attia, 2009) to be shot on location in Tunisia, reinforced this role.<sup>38</sup> Though *Le Fil* does not deal with Jewish migration, it does address the long-standing Italian presence the country. Claudia Cardinale plays Sara, an Italian woman who fell in love with a Muslim man, and converted to marry him. Most notably, it highlights the taboo of homosexuality in Tunisia, through the love story between Sara’s son, Malik (played by Franco-Indian actor Antoine Stahly-Viswanadan) and Bilal, a young “beur” who has come back to a Tunisia he hardly knows (played Franco-Algerian actor Salim Kechiouche).

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<sup>38</sup> “Mehdi Ben Attia s’attaque au tabou de l’homosexualité,” Interview with Mehdi Ben Attia and Selim Kechiouche, TV5 Monde, April 30, 2010.

In both films Cardinale acts as a mediating presence on and off screen. While constantly speaking and writing nostalgically about “her” Tunisia (documented in a recent photo album<sup>39</sup>), she also has used her star power to persuade the government to give permission and funding for projects she supports. The young Cardinale represents Tunisia’s emblematic daughter, who won the prize for “la plus belle Italienne de Tunis” in 1956, the year of Tunisia’s independence, (140) starred in the first French-Tunisian joint film project *Goha le simple* (1959) then went to Europe and America to become an international star. Years later, in *Un été à La Goulette* and *Le Fil*, Cardinale returns as Tunisia’s symbolic mother, a multilingual, multicultural native, known around the world, emblematic of La Goulette’s diversity.

Boughedir’s use of star power in the form of Boujenah and Cardinale underscores a general sense of “timelessness” in the film that characterizes nostalgia. Yet his *ex-post facto* restoration of La Goulette’s fractious cosmopolitanism does comport a message of shared Tunisian identity, even the protagonists do not always recognize the other as the self. Boughedir seems to suggest that this has to do with excessive orthodoxy. His overt secularism comes through clearly from beginning to end, and in the middle of the 1990s functions as a direct attack on Tunisia’s Islamist group (now the leaders of a coalition bloc in the Constituent Assembly), *Ennahda*.

The only real villain in the film is El Hajj, mockingly called “Hajj double” by the Goulettois, because of his two failed pilgrimages to Mecca. To compensate for his failures as a pilgrim, he adopts an Arabian accent and white robes to appear more pious. While eating lunch with Youssef’s family, Hajj refuses to touch a dish prepared by Jojo’s wife, because he does not want to eat Jewish food. His arrogant disdain marks him as an

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<sup>39</sup> Claudia Cardinale, *Ma Tunisie*. Paris: Editions Timée, 2009.

outsider to Goulettois traditions of mutual exchange, “où l’on se définit d’abord comme ‘Goulettois’ ou ‘Goulettoise’ avant de se déterminer par son groupe ethnique ou religieux” (Boughedir 122). Finally, his desire to impose the *safsari* (Tunisian from of the veil) on Meriem, combined with his voyeuristic, predatory lust for her reveal him to be a classic religious hypocrite.

On the Jewish side, we catch a brief glimpse of an increasing orthodoxy through the figure of Maurice Attal, Jojo’s prospective son-in-law. When Meriem’s family sends over a pot of *ganaouiia* (a lamb and okra stew), Fritna offers some to Maurice as the guest of honor. Maurice politely refuses stating he only eats kosher food. Jojo congratulates Maurice on his piety after helping himself to a heaping portion, seemingly delighted that he will not have to share. Nevertheless, Maurice’s refusal does in no way make him comparable to Hajj; the situation is defused through humor and nowhere else does he make any indication of eschewing Muslims or Christians. For Boughedir, Jews, Muslims, and Christians could coexist in Tunisia only if they threw aside strict interpretations of religious tradition, by eating each other’s food despite it not being *kosher* or *hallal*. Indeed, his position can best be understood as a secularist one, sympathetic to vernacular religious practices that transgress externally imposed orthodoxy. Just as Hajj’s accent, clothing, and supercilious piety come from “the East”, Boughedir aims at the Islamization of Tunisia during the 1990s, seen as a product of the increasing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood along with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, the role of actors representing the all the different communities was crucial for the success of Boughedir’s film. Besides Cardinale, Boujenah, and the veteran

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<sup>40</sup> Christin Ivey, “A Satellite Self: The impact of Gulf States satellite television on Tunisia’s cultural identity” Dissertation, School for International Training, 2008.

Greek-Tunisian actress H el ene Catzaras (who plays Lucia), Jewish and Italian actors contributed to the film’s success. The Sicilian and Jewish communities also “needed” someone with Boughedir’s expertise, relations with the state, and established reputations to help tell their story (at least one version of it). If the film uses a light touch to deal with many of the actual historical minefields and points of contention between the communities, it does not only correspond to Tunisians’ desire to be perceived as tolerant. Displacing “History” to make space for an idealized representation of everyday life also corresponds to Tunisian Jews’ and Sicilians’ desire to rediscover their roots. Equally important in return for their participation, Muslims recognize them as authentically “Tunisian”. It also provides yet another opportunity for the in-vogue declarations of the possibilities for peace among the Abrahamic faiths and Israel-Palestine. If only Israelis and Palestinians could emulate the freewheeling cosmopolitanism and heterodox syncretism of La Goulette—we are told—peace in the Middle East would be possible. All the different parties involved find affirmation through this sun-drenched retelling of post-colonial history.

### **Where did the Jews go? Where is Morocco going?**

Hassan Benjelloun’s *O u vas-tu Mosh e* uses a similarly schematic narrative structure to address the “exodus” of Moroccan Jewry after the death of Mohammed V in 1960. The dusty village of Bejjad in foothills of the Atlas Mountains serves a backdrop for the anachronistic, partially enclosed world of rural Morocco just after independence. The opening narration speaks of Jewish migration from the large cities, “Fez, Meknes, and Marrakesh”, though by the early 1960s, Casablanca and Rabat were much more

important. The Jews of the village are uncertain about the future and being lured by Zionist organizers and their pious Rabbi to make *alya*.

The film focuses on Shlomo Bensoussan, the clockmaker and musician who, alone among the Jewish community resists the pressure to leave, and his daughter Rahel. In the Muslim community, we see Mustapha an excitable, self-interested employee about to take over ownership of the village's only bar. His son Hassan is a thoughtful young man, deeply in love with Rahel and frustrated by the lack of opportunity in Bejjad. Finally we have the municipal government and the imam, who see the bar as a symbol of public immorality and vestige of French colonialism. These conflict groups intersect and collide over the dispute about the bar. Mustapha can keep the bar open only if he can prove that there is at least one non-Muslim customer leaving in the village. Hence he and the drinkers try to keep Shlomo in Bejjad.

Just as with *La Goulette*, external forces are largely responsible for unsettling the social order. In the wake of Mohammed V's death and the political uncertainty it generated, Zionism has made inroads among the Jewish villagers. The rabbi uses his moral authority and religious scholarship to argue for settling in Israel as part of a messianic ideal. On the other side, in a parallel way, local Muslim leaders want to impose strictly interpreted Islamic law in the village. These forces converge to create the tragicomic situation driving the film centered on the fate of the town's only bar. Built and owned by the now infirm Frenchman Pierre, the bar will now be passed on to Mustapha, if the municipal council does not revoke his license. In order to keep the bar open, Mustapha needs to prove that it does not primarily exist to serve Muslims. Hence, his urgent need to keep at least one Jewish client residing in Bejjad. The bar appears as an



ambiguous space, neither exclusively Jewish nor Muslim nor French. It represents a privileged space of alterity, where normal rules and patterns of interaction (segregation on the basis of gender and religion) can be temporarily transgressed. The bar's tenuous existence after independence parallels the continuing existence of otherness in an age of resurgent nationalism. Economically and symbolically linked with the external other, the French, and the internal other, the Jews, it shows a certain freedom that might disappear in the face of orthodoxy.

Shlomo, the “last Jew” who might be prevailed upon to stay constitutes an embodied form of cultural synthesis. Here again, the real and the melodramatic are overlapping. Simon Elbaz, who portrays Shlomo, is not only a professional actor, but also a master of the *oud*, a historian/anthropologist, and a symbol of Jewish-Muslim cultural symbiosis. His research into classical Andalusian music and experience playing in a variety of contexts (transcending the religious/secular, private/public divides) led him to focus on *matrouz*. Derived from the Arabic word for “braided”, Moroccan Jewish historian Haïm Zafrani used the term to describe the hybrid Andalusian poetry in which singer alternate profane Arabic verses alternate with Hebrew drawing from Biblical themes.<sup>41</sup> For Elbaz, *matrouz* functions not only as a relic of a shared past, but a philosophy and practice that can be applied to Jewish-Muslim collective memory and political reconciliation. Simon Elbaz/Shlomo also represents the diminishing Moroccan Jewish community today, caught between their desire to stay in what they perceive as their homeland and their ever-deepening sense of social isolation. Shlomo is shown as an old man, living in the world of his music. His wife Friha takes over the masculine role,

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<sup>41</sup> See also Lucette Valensi, “Multicultural Visions,” 175.

preparing the family for departure to Israel and even leaving Shlomo behind when balks at the last minute.

Shlomo's "Moroccanness" comes across not only through his music, but also the fact that he only speaks and understands *darija*. His Muslim friends, especially Hassan, have to read Rahel's letters from Israel written in French, and then translate them for him. Judeo-Arabic, the language that Simon Elbaz along with other historians and writers such as Haïm Zafrani, Simon Lévy, and Edmond Amran El Maleh consider the most important characteristic of Moroccan-Jewish identity, fails as a language of diasporic communication and transmission. Shlomo might be able to read it written in Hebrew characters, though he is not shown to be especially pious or book-oriented. He seems to have learned his music by ear, emphasizing the traditional, oral culture that Benjelloun valorizes. His daughter Rahel would likely not have been taught the Hebrew alphabet since women were often excluded from traditional religious education in Morocco.

The very books written in Judeo-Arabic by Maimonides and Bahya ibn Paquda are mobilized by the rabbi to "prove" the religious necessity of *alya* to Shlomo. Just as he uses the great books of Sephardi tradition to argue for emigration to Israel, the rabbi also rejects incorporating a Muslim to make a *minyán* (quorum of ten Jewish men necessary for public prayer) to say the *kaddish* for a deceased member of the community by appealing to Sa'adia Gaon. Widely considered the founder of Judeo-Arabic literature and one of the greatest scholars of rabbinic Jewish history, Gaon, along with ibn Paquda and Maimonides, are mobilized against popular practices of Jewish-Muslim coexistence *à la marocaine*.

Shlomo participates in a deeper level of sung communion with Jews and Muslims alike; one that continues in Israel where we see the Bejjaouis speaking Arabic and brandishing portraits of Mohammed V at their *ma'abarot*. One evening, during the communal celebration, the rabbi and sabra camp organizers attempt to lead them in singing the *Hava Nagila*. The group rebels, transforming the song into a Moroccan one, accompanied by jubilant you-yous. Rahel, on the other hand, would not have learned Hebrew because of the gendered nature of religious education. Her abilities to speak French (in the opening voiceover narration) and the stream of French letters from Israel point to women's "emancipation" through education, just as her move to Paris points to France as the future homeland for Moroccan Jews (at least in Benjelloun's imagination). The inability to communicate between the generations proves fatal to the plot to keep Shlomo in Bejjad. The only possibility for cultural transmission lies elsewhere.

The family unit, central to Hollywood melodramas, resurfaces in multiple ways over the course of *Où vas-tu Moshé*. On one level, Shlomo loses paternal and marital authority because of the Zionist's recruitment. His wife constantly berates him for wanting to stay, making him seem dithering and indecisive. In a cathartic scene, he gets on the bus with the last group to leave the village, only to get off at the last minute. Abandoning his wife and daughter to a dangerous journey emasculates him. To leave "his" women unprotected essentially means giving them away to David and the Zionists. It renders him sterile and draws attention to the way that Morocco's present-day Jewish community can no longer reproduce itself because of emigration. Indeed, young Moroccan Jews and their Tunisian counterparts usually travel to France or Israel to find marriage partners, since local prospects are often lacking.

Shlomo's emasculation also points to the breakdown of the Maghrebi and Middle Eastern family unit in Israel. Against the Moroccan ideal of the reigning patriarch and autarkic clan, the industrial economy and Ashkenazi feminism combined to displace and denigrate Mizrahi men in Israel. Increasingly perceived as violent, aggressive and backward, Moroccan-Israeli men in the 1960s and 1970s appropriated the hyper-masculine identity of young African-Americans.<sup>42</sup> The Israeli Black Panthers protested against Israeli discrimination toward Mizrahi Jews by adopting the name and ideology of Black Power for their own situation. In Benjelloun's film, we see David, formerly a heartless tool of Zionism, now turned into a violent, masculine protester against Ashkenazi hegemony. His longer hair and sideburns, along with more casual dress (complete with more unbuttoned shirt, revealing more of his chest) mirror the look Israeli Black Panthers embodied.<sup>43</sup> Yet David will presumably be tamed by the cool-headed Rahel, and will be able to become a more modern, productive man in Paris.

On another level, Rahel and Hassan's failed coupling reveals one of the lasting divisions between Maghrebi Jews and Muslims. Whatever else they could share, intermarriage stood as the ultimate red line. Conversion immediately followed, and even then, lasting suspicion about the convert's reliability remained. The family romance of Shlomo as Hassan's ideal father, as opposed to the unscrupulous Mustapha, and Hassan as Shlomo's true son and musical inheritor, finally collapses because Rahel opts to marry David (the repentant Zionist organizer) and to move to Paris. This romance would be necessary for keeping Shlomo and the Jews in Morocco ("where they belong"), as it

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<sup>42</sup> The 2003 documentary *The Black Panthers (in Israel) Speak Out*, a collaboration between poet Sami Shalom Chetrit and Eli Hamo and offers a helpful introduction to the movement.

<sup>43</sup> See Raz Yosef, *Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

would be for avoiding the devastating brain-drain Morocco continues to suffer from, represented by Hassan's departure to Casablanca, and perhaps to France. Yet what would happen if Rahel had remained in Bejjad? Would she convert to Islam, which would ultimately mean the disappearance of Morocco Jewry just as much as migration did? As we have seen, the family-village romance is always doubled by a national-historical romance. The inability of the Shlomo-Rahel-Hassan triad to stay together parallels post-colonial Morocco's failure to find a place for its Jews and more relevant for the present, its educated young (the "diplômés-chômeurs").

If *Où vas-tu Moshé* ostensibly sets out to explain Jewish departure in the 1960s, as with Ferid Boughedir's work, its reconstructive architecture reveals much about the present. Both filmmakers want to educate the younger Moroccan and Tunisian generations about the diversity that used to be the norm. In this internal struggle for contemporary Maghrebi identity, acknowledging and sometimes co-opting the narratives of minority groups, especially Jews but also others, brings on board valuable external support. *Où vas tu Moshé?* gives Simon Elbaz a stage for his project of reconciliation and tolerance, just as he, the symbolic "last Jew" of Morocco, provides Benjelloun with ammunition for his denunciations of external ideologies, Zionism and Islamism, that he believes were responsible for undermining the Moroccan tradition of coexistence.

Finally, if Israel goes in *Un été*, Benjelloun on the other hand places it at the obverse, obscene side of post-independence Bejjad and Morocco as a whole. Moroccan leaders, both the policemen who let the Jewish migrants through checkpoints and the Bejjaoui municipal council who push Shlomo out in order to close the bar are by

extension guilty of “supporting” Israel. As does Boughedir, Benjelloun deploys a series of subtitles at the end of film as an epilogue:

En 2006, Israël attaque le Liban, des membres du gouvernement, des dirigeants syndicaux, et des chefs de partis politiques sont issus de cette immigration [juive marocaine]. Et si les pays arabes avaient gardé leurs enfants?

Benjelloun seems to be referring primarily to Amir Peretz who, appropriately enough, is also a native of Boujjad. Born in 1952, Peretz’s family left for Israel upon Moroccan independence in 1956. He grew up in Sderot and became secretary-general of the *Histadrut* (the Israeli labor federation), then the Israeli Labor Party and Minister of Defense in the coalition government that ordered the bombings of Lebanon in 2006. For Benjelloun, if Amir Peretz and other Jews had stayed in Morocco, they would have instead contributed the development of the country, rather than the murder of their Arab “brothers” in the Middle East. The tactic of offloading the explicit political message to the very end of the film serves as paratext. As with an epilogue or conclusion, it serves an interpretative imperative, offering a moral only implicitly revealed by the action. Nevertheless, it adds another level of discourse not entirely consonant with the more complex realities of the film. Benjelloun’s imperative for Moroccans to have cared more about “their” Jews functions both as a barb directed at the *makhzen* and a popular call for a “devoir de mémoire.”<sup>44</sup>

His overt politicization also potentially alienates Moroccan Jewish viewers who, whatever their political stances, have family living in Israel and remain symbolically attached to it. It also draws on the infantilizing rhetoric “si les pays arabes avaient gardé

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<sup>44</sup> The concept of a duty to remember has expanded from its origins in Holocaust memory to encompass a whole host of other traumas. On the attempt to contain and direct this duty toward political ends in the present, see Joan B. Wolf, *Harnessing the Holocaust: The Politics of Memory in France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

leurs enfants,” similarly employed by authoritarian leaders across the Maghreb, who created a paternal conception of the national subject’s relationship to the state that impeded the development of citizenship. This national allegory articulated in familial relationships continues to haunt Maghrebi cinema as Robert Lang has pointed out. “There is a crisis in Tunisian society around questions of national/cultural identity, brought about, or exacerbated both by authoritarianism of the (F)ather and the (dialectically related) pressures of globalization.”<sup>45</sup> When the Father of the nation, Bourguiba in Tunisia and Mohammed V in Morocco, disappeared, ordinary people felt bereft of paternal authority in the face of a European and American-dominated world order.

In *Ou vas-tu Moshé*, Mohammed V is omnipresent if only as a sacred image and *Nom-Du-Père*. We see the Jewish villagers kissing, embracing and even weeping over pictures of him while preparing to leave. During their first Hebrew classes at the transit camps, traditional family authority and gender hierarchies are overturned as husbands and wives are placed together and parents take classes with their own children. As they are learning to count to ten in Hebrew, the class gets to five (*hamesh*) and one woman yells out “ya Mohammed hamesh!” (Oh Mohammed V!). Later, after they have become fed up with the lack of permanent housing and discrimination in the allotment of jobs, they demand to go home. The Bejjaouis gather outside the camp offices, brandishing the King’s picture along with the Moroccan flag. As much as Benjelloun wants to use these scenes to show Jews’ attachment to Morocco, they also reveal the weakness of post-

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Lang, “Sexual Allegories of National Identity in Nouri Bouzid’s *Bezness* (1992)” in *North African Cinema in a Global Context: Through the Lens of Diaspora*, ed. Andrea Khalil, New York: Routledge, 2008, 44.

colonial identity in Morocco and the problematic nature of Jews' attachment to central power. In the film, Jews in Morocco have no representation with the municipal authorities and government officials in Rabat who make the laws and run the country; rather they have child-like affective relationship with the image of the deceased sovereign/Father. Nowhere, do we see Jews being persecuted or assaulted in the film. The main factor in Jews' departure, according to Benjelloun, seems to be the way the nation as a whole was orphaned. Hassan II's inability to adequately step into the role of his father and the symbolic Father of the nation created turmoil and insecurity within the family.

The King's role is to provide a sacred person through which the awareness of difference and conflict can be resolved. Karim Mezran points out that:

throughout the centuries, Moroccan social and cultural life has been characterized by divisions and differences, especially ones based on language and ethnicity (Arab-Berber), religion (Muslim-Jew), religious ritual and practice (maraboutic-scripturalist), socio-economic class (Fassi-Soussi), and social organization (rural-urban).<sup>46</sup>

In Benjelloun's film, Mohammed V's death laid bare the fragility of the Jewish presence in post-independence Morocco. Jews are thrust back into the position they occupied before the French arrival; if the Sultan maintained law and order, they were safe; if the Sultan was inept or unfavorably disposed toward them, they were in mortal danger.

While Benjelloun and Boughedir want to argue that conflict in Israel caused Moroccan and Tunisian Jews to leave, Boughedir goes further in making comparisons with other historical movements. Like Edmond El Maleh, Boughedir suggests in some subtle and not so-subtle ways taht Zionist campaign to make Maghrebi Jews migrate to

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<sup>46</sup> Karim Mezran, *Negotiation and Construction of National Identities* (London: Martinus Nijhoff, 2011), 62.



Israel was similar to the Nazi deportations.<sup>47</sup> As the Bejjadi Jews are making their way into one of the many buses they take on their way to Marseille and then Israel, one woman cries out “I hope they’re not taking us to the gas ovens!”. This incendiary comparison is hammered home in a scene in Casablanca, where the Bejjad group has been put in a hotel room they are forbidden by the Zionist organizers from leaving, so as not to alert the authorities. A young asthmatic boy begins coughing uncontrollably and his mother has a panic attack, demanding to be let out to seek medical attention. She screams that they have been “kidnapped” by the Zionists and demands to be let out of the room. Throughout the journey, the émigrés are packed into one form of transport after another, looking increasingly humiliated and worn down.

Boughedir and Benjelloun attempt to retroactively nationalize Maghrebi Jews in collective memory and history, despite the failure of such a project in the years after independence. They ostensibly show the Israeli-Palestinian as an external problem that soured the excellent Jewish-Arab relations in Tunisia and Morocco. If Jews and Muslims in the Maghreb could have ignored the conflict in the Middle East, they could have continued to live in harmony as they “always had”. Yet their analysis ends up making Arab-Israeli conflict central to the story. We never get to see trouble-free coexistence in their films; the sources of conflict are always already there in the religious difference that structurally divides the communities. Though both filmmakers wish to celebrate diversity, in their films it is also the underlying cause of conflict. They wish to have their cake and eat it too; to speak of coexistence, while also imagining its disappearance or at

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<sup>47</sup> See Rachel Nisselson, “Locating the Productive in the Unthinkable: El Maleh’s Zionist/ Nazi Comparisons.” *Expressions maghrébines* (December 2010), 15-32.

least marginalization into a unified community. The tension between celebrating diversity, while dreaming of its eventual dissolution, is a *décalage* haunting both films.

In this chapter, we have focused on the spatial and temporal shifts that have brought Jewish and Muslim visual imaginaries in closer proximity. Maghrebis of all religions look back to the recent past for nostalgic pleasure, but also as a countervailing force to the present narrative of intractable conflict in the Middle East. While their interests and aims might be different, they engage in co-constructed reflection on the historic and cultural shifts that moved Tunisia Jewish grandmothers to the Paris suburbs and Jewish villagers of the Atlas Mountains to Israel. Stand-up comedy and historical melodramas are two of the forms that have been able to interpolate multiple audiences to relive the past and possibly re-imagine the present.

## CONCLUSION

In the first two chapters, we saw the ways Jewish writers reconstruct everyday life, particularly through memories of the self and other in linguistic and spatial encounters. In chapter three, we moved to how Maghrebi Jews were forced to define themselves while deciding what to do with their future. Finally, in the last two chapters we looked at the ways Jews deal with the changes in the contemporary Maghreb, on return trips and through co-construction of a collective identity with Maghrebi Muslims and Europeans. What are the future prospects for Maghrebi Jewish identity, which seems to be threatened with obsolescence no sooner than it has emerged? As Daniel Schroeter and Emily Gottreich succinctly point out:

Although the fact is shocking to any Moroccan over the age of 50, there are no practically no Muslims living in the Maghrib today who interact with Jews. In fact, whole generations of North Africans have never met a Jew; for these generations, they very notion of Jews as indigenous is an alien concept. Jews have become almost invisible in the Maghrib, yet for a new generation of researchers, they are everywhere part of the landscape: the objects of memory, nostalgia, and research. (12)

On an everyday level, things have changed for Moroccan Jews. Whereas Armand Abécassis describes Jewish women self-assuredly haranguing Muslim merchants in Casablanca's *mellah* during the 1950s, during the 1990s, André Lévy repeatedly observed Jews at the Tahiti Beach Club in Casablanca making sure to let Muslim card-playing partners and adversaries accuse them of cheating, while never responding in kind.<sup>1</sup> Lévy has documented how the Jewish community in Morocco confines itself to communal spaces where French reigns as a prestige language and controlled external spaces where Muslims can be encountered in a safe environment.<sup>2</sup> Lévy insightfully notes that memory displaces the present in academic and popular attention paid to

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<sup>1</sup> André Lévy, "Playing for Control of Distance: Card Games between Jews and Muslims on a Casablanca Beach" *American Ethnologist* 26.3 (August 1999): 632-653.

<sup>2</sup> André Lévy, "Notes on Jewish-Muslim Relationships: Revisiting the Vanishing Moroccan Jewish Community" *Cultural Anthropology* 18.3 (August 2003): 365-397.

Moroccan Jewry. “There is an irony here, in that Morocco’s Jewish *absentees* remain present in the landscape, whereas present-day Jews appear to be absent” (“Notes” 366). The local community has also re-organized itself toward providing a positive image of the country to the outside world. By dint of the large numbers of Moroccan Jews from the diaspora returning for pilgrimage and tourism, the community maintains a unique place.

It is a community that is at once insulated yet dependent on Muslims, that is politically weak but able to maneuver in such a way as to cultivate a sense of superiority, and that has complicated relationships with France and Israel yet is unwavering in its Moroccanness. (12)

Judging from the literary and cinematic corpus I have examined, we see that Moroccan and Tunisian Jews in the diaspora can “return home” without moving back in a permanent way. Gad Elmaleh maintains a house in Marrakech, family in Israel and Montreal. Even André Azoulay, an advisor to the Moroccan monarchy who played a central role in rebranding Hassan II as the protector of tolerant, multicultural country in the 1990s, maintains a house in Israel. These elite figures might be exceptional in their wealth and visibility, but not in their mobility: many Moroccan and Tunisian Jews are able to maintain ties to multiple sites without necessarily privileging one over another.

Yet to consider Maghrebi Jews as “deterritorialized nomads” à la Deleuze would overlook the historical context of hyper-mobility and the precarity of this form of diasporic identity. As we have seen, diaspora first took place within Morocco and Tunisia itself, with communities from smaller towns in the interior moving to the coast, especially to Tunis and Casablanca, spaces where cosmopolitan modernity came to them. These cities were not only trampolines for the next jump to France, Canada, or Israel, they also represent a liminal form of modernity that Jews look back to with nostalgia. In Casablanca and Tunis, one could imagine one’s self in Paris, while still going to the beach, bathing in the sun, and being a short trip away from the cemetery where one’s ancestors and saints were buried.

Colonial Tunis and Casablanca seem in the memory of many Jews to have been the best of all possible worlds, an intermediate form between tradition and modernity, between artisanal and industrial economies, where they could interact with their Muslim and Christian counterparts on more equal terms than had ever been possible in the past. This idealized model of the past also appears as a potential solution to the present world, frequently viewed through the lens of the clash of civilizations, the rise of religious extremism, the excessive stress and dislocation brought about by untrammelled economic competition, and so on. Whereas today international conferences are regularly organized on the problem of coexistence between Jews, Muslims and Christians, Maghrebi Jewish life-writing proudly gestures back to a time in the recent past where such coexistence was the norm. As we saw in Chapter Five, they are not the only ones who find such a narrative compelling. Maghrebi Muslims in North Africa and in the diaspora also find this past worth celebrating and offering it as a model for their own modernity and cosmopolitanism. Against the accusing glance of colonial historiography and contemporary media, which portray Maghrebis as irremediably patriarchal, conservative, and intolerant, deeply personal visions of a better past exercise a distinctive appeal. Yet political events do not always coincide with nostalgic desire as the upheavals of 2011 proved.

### **The “Arab Spring” and Maghrebi Jewish Diaspora**

Most Maghrebi Jews have been publicly supportive of the revolutions, but also express anxiety about the transformation of authoritarian regimes that had (at least) publicly recognized and protected Jewish patrimony as part of the national landscape. The pillages of synagogues in the southern Tunisian towns of Sfax and Gabès, variously attributed to Islamists or criminal elements linked to the Ben Ali regime, caused alarm. On the other hand, Gilles-Jacob Lellouche

a Jewish restaurateur from La Goulette has begun his campaign to be a delegate at the Constitutional Assembly, which will be elected in October 2011. His candidacy has raised important questions related to the place of religion and minority rights in the new Tunisia. Though the Moroccan monarchy under Mohammed VI survived widespread street protests in February 2011, it is under tremendous pressure to democratize. In November 2011, the moderate Islamist *Parti de la justice et du développement* (PJD) won a plurality of seats in Morocco's first-ever free multi-party elections. Its leader Abdelilah Benkirane became prime minister, further alarming Moroccan Jews around the diaspora. During my visit in late November and early December on the heels of the PJD's triumph, Simon Lévy passed away. The director of the Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca, a historian and retired university professor, and last but not least, a major figure of the Moroccan left, his death was a major event for the Jewish community.<sup>3</sup> Benkirane's presence at the funeral was a nationally televised event, in what many interpreted as a calculated gesture designed to reassure Moroccan Jews about their security in a PJD-ruled Morocco.

Serge Berdugo, the President of the *Conseil des communautés israélites du Maroc* served as Minister of Tourism in 1993, and was rumored to be under consideration for the post under the new Benkirane government. Though Berdugo was not eventually chosen, the meetings he held with the prime minister were designed to reassure multiple publics: Jews in and outside of Morocco, as well as the international community. "En désignant M. Serge Berdugo, M. Benkirane compte sûrement rassurer les partenaires économiques du Maroc et les investisseurs internationaux sur les tendances modérées de son parti qu'il ne faudrait surtout pas

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<sup>3</sup> "Simon Lévy, mort d'un symbole," *TelQuel*, Dec. 10, 2011.

confondre avec les partis salafistes.”<sup>4</sup> By flirting with the possibility of appointing a Jewish minister, the PJD was further able to distance itself from the charges about its ideological extremism.

Raphaël Elmaleh, Morocco’s only Jewish tour guide and a researcher for the Jewish Museum, expressed gratitude for the gesture, but made it clear that if the government moved to restrict the production and sale of alcoholic beverages, the few Jews that remain would be adversely affected and likely to migrate. Despite his own devotion to unearthing and preserving the traces of Morocco’s past and his declarations about Jews’ absolute safety in Morocco thanks to Mohammed VI’s protection, Elmaleh declared that he would leave in an instant if the PJD banned alcohol or restricted clothing on the beaches. This strange alternance between rootedness in Morocco and being willing to leave at a moment’s notice reflects the community’s diasporic connections and mobility.

Elmaleh left Morocco as a young boy after an incident that revealed the fragility of Jews’ place in Casablanca after independence. Forgetting to remove his kippa after leaving religious school resulted in a fight with a group of Muslim children who assaulted him. After years in Israel, including a stint in the IDF, and time spent in Canada and the United States, he returned to Morocco along with his younger brother to take his father’s business over. His own peripatetic existence does not conflict with his profound attachment to Moroccan Jewish history, particularly in the Berber regions of the country. Yet he told me that he dreamed of spending some time in India (a popular destination for many young Israeli backpackers), as well as the beaches of Miami, Florida. I would argue that Elmaleh’s itinerary and aspirations, while

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<sup>4</sup> Rachid Barbouch, “Serge Berdugo: un israélite dans un gouvernement à majorité islamiste” *Ahfir*, December 17, 2011, accessed at <<http://ahfir.blog.lemonde.fr/2011/12/17/serge-berdugo-un-israelite-dans-un-gouvernement-a-majorite-islamiste/>>.

demonstrating the contradictions of Maghrebi Jewish diaspora in an especially acute way, are far from exceptional.

If the Arab Spring made many Jews nervous about the direction that Islamist governments might take, the popular uprisings also gave those in the diaspora a chance to reconnect with their countries through the media spectacle of international solidarity. Comedian Michel Boujenah offered one of the most spectacular examples of this diasporic return through his public appearances during the Tunisian uprising. During the height of the Jasmine Revolution, he made an emotional appearance on French television, tearing up while speaking of his admiration for the Tunisian youth leading the protests. More recently, he cast his support behind the “Engagements du Jasmin” initiative, dedicated to reviving international tourism to Tunisia. At his speech for the opening gala, he apologized for not having spoken out against the Ben Ali regime before the uprising. Boujenah continues to embody Tunisian Jewish diaspora, successful and influential in its new homeland, but deeply nostalgic for what it left behind.

Serge Moati also wrote about and appeared on television confronting his lack of criticism for the Ben Ali regime. Arguing that most French people did not know the extent of corruption and human rights abuses in Tunisia, he points out that many preferred Ben Ali to what they saw as the only other possibility: militant Islamists. As Moati said in an interview in October 2011, “Je m’en veux... j’ai manqué de courage. Pendant dix ans, j’animais une émission de télévision *Ripostes*, j’ai pas parlé une fois de la Tunisie.”<sup>5</sup> Moati went on to say that as one of the last representatives of the Tunisian Jewish community, he could not bear the thought of being forbidden to return to his ancestral homeland. The combination of the Ben Ali regime’s façade of tolerance along with Jews’ desire to remain connected to their country of origin helped ensure

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<sup>5</sup> Serge Moati, “Ma Tunisie a rendez-vous demain avec l’Histoire.” *L’invité*. TV5 Monde, October 21, 2011. <<http://www.tv5.org/cms/chaine-francophone/Revoir-nos-emissions/L-invite/Episodes/p-18624-Serge-Moati.htm>>.



their relative silence before the Revolution. Moati stated “Je voulais être là et témoigner, qu’il y a encore des Moatis en Tunisie.” For Moati even being in Tunisia as a French tourist, which is increasingly how Jews relate to their homeland, meant something on a symbolic level. He feared that speaking up against the government would endanger the few Jews left in Tunisia the “right of return” of those in the diaspora.

Boujenah and Moati’s visceral responses to the Revolution and their public penitence for not having spoken out against Ben Ali’s dictatorship earlier reveal a contentious fact. Most Tunisian and Moroccan Jews were more comfortable with authoritarian regimes that cracked down on Islamists and maintained at least basic relationships with Israel. Jews living in the Maghreb instinctively favor direct alliances with centralized power structures as opposed to popular rule based on notions of Islamic piety and Arab unity, which by nature exclude them. Maya Nahum addressed these tensions even more directly with respect to national memory in her article, “Ces Tunisiens effacés de l’histoire: La liberté, c’est aussi pour les juifs!.” Nahum emphasizes the importance of rewriting Tunisian national history to include the Jewish contribution.

L’avenir du pays, qui s’écrit aujourd’hui, devra mettre fin au silence sur la présence incontournable de nos ancêtres juifs depuis la nuit des temps ainsi que leur départ. Cet acte de reconnaissance ne sera que justice. Et ce jour-là, nous acclamerons les révoltés avec une fraternité encore plus confiante.<sup>6</sup>

Nahum’s honesty about the need for Jews to hear from the new governments in the Maghreb that they are not only welcome as tourists, but also as “les enfants du pays,” goes to the heart of diasporic memory. For those outside the homeland to continue to identify with it as such, there must be a reciprocal opening.

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<sup>6</sup> Maya Nahum, “Ces Tunisiens effacés de l’histoire: La liberté, c’est aussi pour les juifs,” *Causeur*, January 26, 2011 <<http://www.causeur.fr/ces-tunisiens-effaces-de-l%E2%80%99histoire,8477>>.

## Writing Diasporic History Online

Along with digitalization of literature, life-writing itself has migrated from major publishers into smaller, artisanal sources online. Maghrebi Jewish web forums, <dafina.net> and <darna.com> for those of Moroccan origin and <harissa.com> for those from Tunisia function as news outlets as well as spaces where lost friends and family can reconnect, share photos, archival materials, recipes and even access a newsfeed that selects stories geared toward the diaspora. These sites have given birth to ever-expanding popular history projects, in which ordinary people share archives, shape narratives about major political and cultural trends, and debate current diasporic issues. While I have yet to encounter any full-length autobiographical text published primarily on the web, it seems reasonable to expect that this will take place in the not too distant future.

In the interim, these above-mentioned forums offer radically mediated forms of telling one's story. Concerning such historical events as the return of Mohammed V or Bourguiba from exile, or the Second World War, one finds long threads originating with a person narrating their experiences in a few paragraphs. Authors might ask others who lived through the same events to contribute their stories, and the result is an evolving text written and commented upon by a community. Some Muslims and Europeans born in Morocco and Tunisia are also avid readers of these discussion threads and will even intervene with their own stories, or with questions and clarifications. Professional historians and writers will sometimes write original content or respond to other postings. The implications of such a system are difficult to ignore: access to life-writing has dramatically increased, and with it, the democratization of diasporic memory. Historians and professional writers still command respect because of their publicly recognized

expertise, but their visions are placed side by side with those of the average diasporic subject. Yet this new diasporic Republic of Letters opens up new contradictions and challenges.

The following two examples encapsulate some of these difficulties. The first concerns a thread initiated by a subscriber who revisited one of the pilgrimage sites southeast of Casablanca. He was shocked by the dilapidated state of the tombs and mausoleum, and called upon the regional governor to take immediate action to remedy the situation. He claimed that the neglect demonstrated the Moroccan state's discrimination against Jews. This comment implies that it is the Moroccan government's responsibility to take care of Jewish religious sites in the cadre of national patrimony. A historian and professor at the University of Fez, Mohamed Hatimi, then intervened to say that the tradition of Islamic jurisprudence reigning in Morocco does not emphasize the maintenance of cemeteries as a religious act. Hatimi suggested that the concerned parties take the matter to the Jewish Community Council of Morocco. Here in a brief interchange emerge many of the issues related to memory, the role of the state, and the diaspora's relation to the homeland. Many of these thorny conversations continue to take place with variable levels of moderation and vitriol.

The second example is more literary, in the technical sense of the term. Web forums have also changed the way works are received and debated. On <harissa.com>, a certain Braitou Cohen Sola reviewed Maya Nahum's work *Les Gestes*, a work discussed in chapters one and three.<sup>7</sup> Cohen Solal's comments reveal the expectations of a reader in contemporary networks of diasporic circulation. He commends Nahum for the way she captures the nuances of spoken French and for the inclusion of the nut-vendor Ravailac, whose presence on the beaches of La Goulette, Le Kram, Khéredine, and La Marsa is attested into the works of many Tunisian Jewish writers. Hence Nahum's work is credited for its intersubjective, intertextual authenticity. On the

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<sup>7</sup> Braitou Cohen Solal, "Maya Nahum, *Les Gestes*", <[http://harissa.com/D\\_Arts/mayanahum.htm](http://harissa.com/D_Arts/mayanahum.htm)>, nd.

other hand, he critiques her for not devoting more space to the Bizerte Crisis, which he considers to be one of the most traumatizing moments in post-independence Tunisian Jewish history. Hence the web forum gives non-professional writers and historians the space to engage in activities traditionally closed to outsiders, while also advancing notions of how personal experience should be channeled through collective memory.

### **Futures Lines of Inquiry**

More study is needed on multiple facets of Maghrebi Jewish life-writing, for example a comparison of literature produced in France and Canada with the works that have come out of Israel. Yet even more immediate is the way Maghrebi Jews' works line up next to those of Muslims and the not-quite-French, Italians, Sicilians, Maltese, Greeks, and Spaniards who lived in North Africa for multiple generations and write their life narratives in French. Studying how these groups perceived other others would be an essential task in constructing a more thorough and nuanced portrait of intercommunal relationships in the nineteenth and twentieth century Maghreb.

Just as much of Maghrebi Jewish life-writing employs a three generation framework, comprising the stories of grandparents, parents, and the writer him or herself, Michel Auguglioro used a similar structure to tell the story of his Sicilian family in Tunisia. In *La Partenza: saga d'une famille sicilienne* (2008), he dramatizes the family's dangerous crossing in the 1880s to La Goulette in a desperate search for work. The second volume, *Besbessia: L'odeur des fenouils sauvages* (2009) continues the family's story from 1910 to Tunisian independence. Tunisian Muslim writer Nourredine Djilani's work *La Goulette, la déchirure* (1996) recounts the post-independence departure of Jews and Europeans from a Muslim boy's perspective. The Maltese-

Tunisian author Claude Rizzo has written several works reflecting on the history and fate of his working-class family and community, including *Le Maltais de Bab-el-Khadra* (2003) and *Tunisie de notre enfance* (2006). For Morocco, Margarita Ortiz Macias's *Espagnols de Casablanca* (2004) highlights the role that poor Andalusian immigrants played in the city's development even before the French protectorate was officially established, along with the stories of those that stayed after Moroccan independence. Roberta Yasmine Catalano, an Italian scholar of Lebanese origins, has made an important contribution to recovering a forgotten part of Casablanca's cosmopolitan makeup with her *Eclats de mémoire: Les Italiens au Maroc* (2009).

Bringing these works together would make for an interesting work that could triangulate everyday perceptions and relations, without depriving any one community of a voice. Such a study would further encourage the shift away from a colonized-colonizer paradigm toward a richer understanding of multiple actors involved in shaping everyday life and colonial history. More than fifty years after decoloniation, many postcolonial scholars have still not emancipated themselves from the hold of the colonized-colonizer paradigm. Whereas histories are still written with "Europe" on one side and the "Maghreb" on the other, we would do well to take seriously the emergence of these first-person histories, which capture the nuances of what life was like in between those monolithic categories. The dozens of Jewish stories I have examined here are but pieces in a much larger picture, as yet unfinished.

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