

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: (RE)CONSTRUCTING A HOMELAND:  
REFLECTIVE NOSTALGIA IN THE WORKS  
OF CONTEMPORARY FRANCOPHONE  
NORTH AFRICAN JEWISH WOMEN  
WRITERS

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This work examines the role of nostalgia in texts by Judeo-Maghrebian women writers who write retrospectively about their lives in North Africa. I study authors from Algeria (Rachel Kahn, Myriam Ben, Hélène Cixous and Annie Cohen), Tunisia (Annie Goldmann and Nine Moati), and Morocco (Paule Darmon). I specifically look at the ways in which these authors' multiple layers of identity—as Jews, as Arabs, as, in many cases, French citizens, and as women—inform their works and fuel the nostalgic tone of their narratives, shaping the way in which they recreate their homelands through their texts. Drawing on theoretical discussions of “home” and nostalgia, I consider these authors' writing processes, including their own reflections on nostalgia; their reliance on symbols related to nature and the body; their diverse depictions of the relationships between the North African Jews and their fellow non-Jews; and their representation of women's roles in Jewish and North African cultures.

(RE)CONSTRUCTING A HOMELAND: REFLECTIVE NOSTALGIA IN THE  
WORKS OF CONTEMPORARY FRANCOPHONE NORTH AFRICAN JEWISH  
WOMEN WRITERS

By

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## Dedication

To my mother and father, and in memory of my sister Lisa.

In love of Dinah.

## Acknowledgements

This has been a long and painful process and there are many without whose love and support I could not have made it this far. First of all I must thank my parents, who have been on my side through this entire process, encouraging me to pursue my dreams. To my mother, my rock, my friend, without whom I would be nowhere. To my father and Susan, who have supported me in all ways possible. To my best friend Jen, who has listened and listened to me, even when I became a broken record, despite the chaos of her own life breathing down her neck. To Gregory, who always believed I could do it. To my beloved dog Dinah, who has given me more joy, comfort, and solace through the past few years than she could ever know. To my aunt Ruth and uncle Jeff, whose never-ending support and generosity have made my graduate school career possible. To my sisters in struggle, my writing partners (you know who you are!) my dissertation writing support group and my friends with whom I have worked for ceaseless hours at Starbucks, College Perk, and various other locales. Without your companionship, commiseration, and courage, I wouldn't be here today. To Louise Clement, whose smiling face and kind words have so often helped me to keep trudging along in this thing called Graduate School.

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## Introduction: Homeland and Reflective Nostalgia

“A contemporary Russian saying claims that the past has become much more unpredictable than the future.”

-Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*

The search for and definition of “homeland” is paramount to the Jewish diasporic experience. Erich Gruen, in his essay “Diaspora and Homeland,” claims that there are two ways to look at Jewish diasporic existence. One is the “gloomy approach,” where diasporism becomes “*galut*, exile, a bitter and doleful image, offering a bleak vision that issues either in despair or in a remote reverie of restoration” (Wettstien 18). This is the most common in “modern interpretations of the Jewish psyche,” Gruen suggests, and Jews undergo a constant struggle to “achieve the ‘return,’ the acquisition of a real or mythical homeland” (18). The second way, according to Gruen, is a more positive way in which the Jews do not need a *geographic* homeland, since “their homeland resides in the text”—meaning both the Scriptures and Jewish writings throughout time and place (18). In this view, “a geographical restoration is therefore superfluous” (18).

In my study of seven contemporary texts (written within the last 30 years) by Francophone North African Jewish women writers, I explore the ways in which the “homeland” of these authors (Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco) resides within the texts themselves, as Gruen proposes, and how this homeland is recreated through their narratives. Working off of Svetlana Boym’s notions of nostalgia, I argue that the authors are not using these texts for a type of historical recreation, *per se*, but rather as a recreation of *their* homeland, infused with historical fact as well as nostalgic

fabrication. These works consist of Hélène Cixous's memories of her childhood in Algeria in her short story "Pieds Nus" and her "memoir" *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage*; Annie Cohen's personal journey to connect with her Algerian identity, *Le Marabout de Blida*; Nine Moati's historical novel about three generations of women in colonial Tunisia, *Les Belles de Tunis*; Annie Goldmann's familial history of her relatives in Tunisia, *Les Filles de Mardochée*; Paule Darmon's tale of a Moroccan Jewish woman's fight for emancipation in her novel *Baisse les yeux, Sarah*; Rachel Kahn's novel about the Algerian Jewish community as the country approaches independence, *Adieu Béchar*; and Myriam Ben's memoir of growing up Jewish in World War Two Algeria, *Quand les cartes sont truquées*. Some of these writers have been fairly prolific in their careers, while others have published only one or two texts (apart from critical works). However, one common thread ties them together: for most, the text I study is the first or only text they have written dealing directly with the complex past of the Jews of North Africa, either through a more personal narrative (such as Goldmann, Ben, Cohen and Cixous) or through a more detached, fictional tale (Moati, Kahn and Darmon).

The most well-known and prolific of the writers is Hélène Cixous, whose memoir<sup>1</sup> of her childhood experiences growing up in Algeria, *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage* (2000)<sup>2</sup> is a very non-linear journey through her past and present struggle with her Algerian identity. Her story consists of scattered memories of her

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<sup>1</sup> Although both the original French and the English translation are labeled as "fiction," I choose the term "memoir" as what I believe to be a more accurate description. At the same time, I refer to "Cixous's narrator" rather than Cixous herself as the voice of this narrative, acknowledging the ambiguity of this label.

<sup>2</sup> Translations from the French of *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage* are mine unless it is indicated that they come from the existing translation by Beverley Bie Brahic, *Reveries of the Wild Woman*, Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2006.

family— her German-Jewish mother, her father who died when she was young, and her brother who served as both play- and soul-mate. Her memories are intertwined with dialogues with her brother as an adult, stories her mother told her, and stream-of-consciousness reflections on her writing of this memoir. Best known as a feminist theorist and literary critic, this is one of Cixous's first texts dealing directly with her Algerian Jewish past. Some of Cixous's other works dealing with her life in Algeria include the short story "Pieds Nus" in the anthology *Une enfance algérienne* (1999)<sup>3</sup>, and *Rootprints* (1997) (which I refer to in my discussion of Cixous's work), as well as *Stigmata*, containing her famous essay, "My Algeriance" (1998).

Like Cixous's memoir, Annie Cohen's autobiographical *Le Marabout de Blida* (1996)<sup>4</sup>, is very non-linear, written with a fluidity that weaves in between present and past—an exploration of her identity as seen through her interactions with the *marabout* figure<sup>5</sup>, who brings into her consciousness memories of her past in Algeria as well as reflections on her current life in her comfortable Parisian neighborhood. Cohen has written several works, although this is one of the first that directly addresses her Algerian past. It is followed by *Bésame mucho* (1998), a book dedicated to her relationship with her mother, written after her mother's death. She very recently published *Géographie des origines* (2007), a narrative that continues to explore her Algerian past.

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<sup>3</sup> Translations from "Pieds Nus" come from the English translation, "Bare Feet," in *An Algerian Childhood*, St. Paul: Ruminator Books, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Translations of passages from Cohen's, Moati's, Goldmann's, Darmon's, Kahn's, and Ben's texts are mine. Due to time limitations, these translations are mainly for the purpose of ease for the reader, and therefore are not as thorough and elegant as a proper translation should be.

<sup>5</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* cites the origin of the word "marabout" to be from "murabit," "referring to a saint or to a person living in a Sufi Hospice. Specific to North Africa. Refers to Sufi leaders or saints who are believed to have received barakah, or blessing, from God, which they are able to pass on to their followers when petitioned, whether they are dead or alive." ("Marabout." *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. Ed. John L. Esposito. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.)

Nine Moati's *Les Belles de Tunis* (1983) is an intergenerational, historically framed work of fiction dealing with the Jews of Tunisia from before the onset of French colonial rule to the Jews' departure at the time of Tunisian Independence. The story centers around three generations of strong female characters and their struggle with poverty, traditional female roles, and the changing political landscape of Tunisia. This is Moati's third book, the first two being more personal tales of her childhood. Although her family later moved back to Tunisia, Moati is the only writer I study here who was born in France. She went on to write several more novels, many of them stories of women in France dealing with their Tunisian pasts and identity.

Annie Goldmann's *Les Filles de Mardochée : Histoire d'une émancipation* (1979) is what Goldmann calls in her preface a "simple testimony" about the lives of Jews in Tunisia, as documented through the stories of her grandmother, grandfather, aunt, and her own experiences. Goldmann uses the extraordinary story of her family to illuminate political and historical realities in Tunisia during French colonial rule, whose beginning and end were both witnessed by her grandmother Élise. Goldmann is best known for her critical works about women, Judaism, history and cinema. This is her only autobiographical work.

Paule Darmon's *Baisse les yeux, Sarah* (1980), her first novel, tells the story of Sarah Lévy, a young woman struggling with and rebelling against her role as a woman in a middle-class Jewish family in Morocco as it moves towards Independence from France. Sarah's voice is sarcastic and critical of the traditions she is forced to negotiate, and yet also betrays a vulnerability and ambivalence about her

true identity. Darmon has written only one other novel since, *L'homme adultère*, about a woman who pushes her husband to have an affair (1985).

Published in 2000, *Adieu Béchar* is Rachel Kahn's first and only novel to date, and, according to Kahn, is a "report" of what she witnessed growing up in an Algerian-Jewish community in Colomb-Béchar. The story focuses on Liana, an observer of the lives of those around her and seemingly one of the few who dislikes what she sees. One of the main stories we see through Liana's perspective is that of her friend Sara, a young woman who defies traditional expectations and falls in love with a non-Jewish French soldier stationed in Béchar. Liana witnesses the fatal consequences of Sara's actions, as well as those of many women around her, such as her friend Déborah who is forced by her family to remain in an abusive marriage. All of this occurs while Liana's family and community prepare for their departure as Algeria gains independence from France and conditions for the Jews progressively worsen.

Myriam Ben is unique in that among all of the authors, she is primarily considered an Algerian, rather than French, writer. Her childhood memoir entitled *Quand les cartes sont truquées* (1999), tells the story of a young girl growing up in a fairly secular Jewish family in Algiers in the 1940's. Throughout her narrative, she begins to question her identity and sense of belonging when her Jewishness becomes a source of ridicule, discrimination, and hatred among her peers. Ben's memoir, the final work published before her death, is the only one of her texts that deals directly with her Jewish identity; most of her other works focus on the general struggle of Algeria against colonial rule rather than a specifically Jewish experience. In 1982, for

the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Algerian Independence, she published *Ainsi naquit un homme*, a collection of short stories “recalling her commitment to the liberation of a pluralistic Algeria” (Liauzu)<sup>6</sup>, and then published *Sabrina, ils t'ont volé ta vie*, “very critical of Algeria after 1962” (Liauzu)<sup>7</sup>. A collection of poetry about the current conditions of Algeria, *Le soleil assassiné*, was published posthumously in 2002.

These seven women’s texts are distinct due to diverse experiences; the authors come from different countries and cities of origin, socio-economic statuses, and in some cases, grew up in different generations. They all have their individual writing style, format, and purpose. However, they are united in the story they have to tell about the unique situation of the North African Jews, as Guy Dugas in *Littérature judéo-maghrebine d’expression française* points out:

How it is undeniable that the ethnic origins, unique history, centuries of cohabitation in North Africa, could only have created in the heart of the Judeo-Maghrebian communities a unique and original way of being Jewish. Considering the Arab-Muslim majority on one hand, colonial power on another, and also in relation to other Jewish existences in the diaspora, plus in Israel. It’s the awareness of this originality that we want to demonstrate [in this book]. (*Littérature* 19)<sup>8</sup>

Yet, works such as those by Dugas and Tunisian-born Jewish writer Albert Memmi don’t adequately address the question of gender and how this added layer of identity complicates what Memmi calls a “trichotomy” of identity and alienation. In *La Statue de sel* (1966), Memmi calls himself “a native in a colonized country, a Jew

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<sup>6</sup> « rappelant son engagement pour la libération d’une Algérie plurielle ».

<sup>7</sup> « très critique sur l’Algérie après 1962 ».

<sup>8</sup> « Tout comme il est indéniable que les origines ethniques, une histoire particulière, des siècles de cohabitation en Afrique du Nord n’ont pu que déterminer au sein des communautés judéo-maghrébines un mode d’être juif particulier, et original à plus d’un titre. A l’égard de la majorité arabo-musulmane d’une part, du pouvoir colonial d’autre part, et aussi par rapport aux autres judaïcités en diaspora, puis en Israël. C’est la conscience de cette originalité que nous souhaitons mettre en évidence [dans ce livre] ».

in an anti-Semitic universe, an African in a world in which Europe triumphs” (*Statue de Sel* 109)<sup>9</sup>. Isaac Yetiv elaborates on this concept:

...being Tunisian, he experiences the cultural alienation of the intellectual North-African, being Jewish, he reaches another degree of alienation; being the son of a poor artisan living in the ghetto of Tunis, he feels like a stranger to the bourgeois Jewish environment of his native city.... Thus, Memmi has a triple distancing: culturally, ethnically, and socially. (Yetiv 145)<sup>10</sup>

The women in these narratives experience even further alienation culturally, ethnically, and socially, by the virtue of their gender, as I examine in depth in Chapter 4. Not only do the women in these texts (and in many cases, the authors in writing these texts) negotiate what Dugas calls their “double condition” of being both Jewish and Arab, but they also must struggle with their place as women in Jewish, Arab, and French society. Their attachment to their homelands, as manifested through the nostalgic tone of their narratives, is complicated by these struggles of identity and belonging, especially as women.

As I examine these authors’ attachment to a “homeland,” it is important to define this term, in particular within the Jewish diasporic community, as well as to put into question what this attachment to a “homeland” consists of. Is the homeland that they are attached to their true homeland, or is it a nostalgic vision of their past? Boym describes a couple from Germany who returns to post-Soviet Russia to visit their parents’ hometown, hoping to find some connection to the culture they grew up

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<sup>9</sup> «... indigène dans un pays de colonisation, juif dans un univers antisémite, Africain dans un monde où triomphe l’Europe ».

<sup>10</sup> « ...étant Tunisien, il subit l’aliénation culturelle de l’intellectuel nord-africain... étant juif, il atteint un deuxième degré d’aliénation; étant fils d’artisan pauvre habitant le ghetto de Tunis, il se sent étranger dans le milieu juif bourgeois de sa ville natale.... Il y a donc chez Memmi une triple distanciation : culturelle, ethnique, sociale... »

knowing. Instead, they are surprised to find that it is not what they had anticipated. Boym questions: “What was the couple nostalgic for, the old city or their childhood stories? [The man] dreamed of repairing his longing with final belonging. Possessed by nostalgia, he forgot his actual past” (xiii). Are the homelands these women describe what they actually were, or what they wanted them to be?

### **Defining “Homeland”**

In particular for the Jews of the diaspora, homeland could be defined in several ways: the place where one resides, the place where one grew up, the place one longs to be, or the place where one’s cultural roots are. In his essay, Gruen concludes that “diaspora, in short, is no burden; indeed, it is a virtue in the spread of the word. This justifies a primary attachment to the land of one’s residence, rather than the home of the fathers” (18). In this case, the homeland would be the place where one lives and grew up, as opposed to some mythical homeland that one must return to (such as Israel for Jews of the diaspora).

Daniel J. Schroeter’s “A Different Road to Modernity: Jewish Identity in the Arab World” addresses the way in which Moroccan Jews in Israel define themselves and poses the question:

What is home? What is Diaspora? The conventional response is that Jews living in Morocco were in exile, and the “return” to Israel constituted a homecoming. Yet despite decades of living in Israel, connections to the language and culture of their origin remain strong. This continued attachment to another homeland does not imply dual loyalties to separate nation states. The affiliation of Jews to Morocco is not the patriotism implied by citizenship to a nation state, but rather it constitutes identifying with a Diaspora culture that transcends national boundaries. (150)

In Annie Goldmann's text *Les Filles de Mardochée*, Goldmann's aunt Juliette also debunks this idea that all Jews living outside of Israel feel a sense of being in exile, and of needing to return "home." At one point, Juliette is asked to play Queen Esther in a production of the story of Purim<sup>11</sup>, and she has some trouble with her method acting<sup>12</sup>: "At that time, we had no notion of Jewish history nor of Palestinian history. In Tunisia, therefore, we did not at all feel in exile, and in our family, even one of Rabbis, the question of Zionism didn't even exist" (89)<sup>13</sup>. She must therefore "put myself in my character's shoes"<sup>14</sup> in order to understand how the characters felt.

Another way of looking at home is that people like those in the Jewish diaspora have no singular home, and are rather always, in some way, *homeless*. Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, in her essay in *From Memory to Transformation*, sees this search for "home" as an impossible one, claiming that there is no true "home" for diasporic peoples, especially within the Jewish diaspora:

One thing Diasporism definitely means: We're not looking to go home. We're not really looking *to be* at home... Given the multi-cultural nature of the Jewish community forged in the diaspora, even in the Jewish community we experience the simultaneity of home and strangeness... (244-5)

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<sup>11</sup>Purim is a Jewish festival "commemorating the deliverance of the Jews of the Persian empire from extermination." Esther was the King's Jewish wife who persuaded the King to allow the Jews to defend themselves against their impending doom. The Jews were victorious, and as a result, Haman, the King's evil advisor, was hanged. ("Purim." *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*. Eds. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.)

<sup>12</sup> Method acting is a technique whereby actors attempt to recreate the emotions a character would feel in a certain situation.

<sup>13</sup> « A cette époque nous n'avions aucune idée de l'histoire juive ni de la Palestine. En Tunisie, alors, nous ne nous sentions pas du tout en exil, et chez nous, même dans ma famille de rabbins, la question du sionisme n'existait même pas... »

<sup>14</sup> « me mettre dans la peau de mon personnage ».

Perhaps it is this very paradox that makes the works by these North African Jewish women so seemingly contradictory at times. No matter what country they are in or what community they associate with, they must experience “the simultaneity of home and strangeness,” the ambiguity of longing and *belonging*, and the ambivalence of the repulsion and attraction to their past. This can be seen in the alienation within their own communities expressed by many of the authors, notably Cixous, Goldmann, Ben and Darmon.

Kyla Wazana Tompkins in her essay in *The Flying Camel: Essays on Identity by Women of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish Heritage* also demonstrates her realization that such nostalgia for a homeland is futile, since one does not really exist:

I have long stopped looking for home. Home, I have learned, is where we sit down and decide to build it. And of course, this is the most profound lesson of the Diaspora, one that must necessarily change the shape of the identity narrative. Because if we leave open the question of where and what a home is, if we let it remain a question that has to be asked again and again and is never entirely answered, we accept that none of us have only one origin, whether ethnic, geographic, or religious. What we have is a more complicated narrative that intersects and intertwines with other citizens of the world, and remains, ultimately, forever unanswerable and open. (140)

Tompkins’s statement is clearly seen in Judeo-Maghrebian literature, where the search for home is always unsatisfied, and their narratives necessarily wind through many layers of identity and belonging. Cixous’s claim that even when she lived in Algeria, she never felt as if she truly arrived there (as I discuss later on), perfectly exemplifies this concept.

Miriyam Glazer addresses this issue of home in her study of Israeli poet Chava Pinchas-Cohen:

[Pinchas-Cohen] ...evokes the questions... that she has continued to explore in startlingly diverse, rich and provocative ways. "Whose home is Jerusalem?" asks "The Yearning of Karakashian" (one of her poems). What is "home"? Which "home" are we talking about? Is Jerusalem anyone's home? And what language does home speak? What art does the opposition of "exile" and "home" make, and what is the difference between the art born of displacement and the art born of home?" (Scott and Simpson-Housley 357).

Laura S. Levitt speaks to this notion of home particularly within the Jewish feminist community in her essay "Reconfiguring Home: Jewish Feminist Identity/ies":

Even as we stand in one particular place and claim a position, a home, we can also continue to acknowledge the we have other options. Thus, it is the fundamental instability of our cultural identities that allows us to reconfigure home, to claim both singular and plural, Jewish feminist identity/ies. (Peskowitz and Levitt 47)

Levitt and Glazer raise crucial questions when looking at the ways in which these women reconstruct (or "reconfigure") home within their narratives. Pinchas-Cohen's distinction between the art that comes from feeling at "home" and the art of feeling in exile is essential when examining what does or does not make these works uniquely works of exile. Levitt's claim that it is "instability of cultural identities" that allows for the flexibility of a configuration of home in these texts is also pertinent to this discussion. These women's instable identities result in both the presence and denial of nostalgia in their texts, as they are not quite sure where they belong or long to be. As I discuss in the first chapter, some of these writers, such as Annie Cohen, see the

Jewish condition as being a constant search for this home, and feel that Jewish diasporic literature is necessarily different from art that originates from a more stable existence.

### **Reflective Nostalgia: Longing for Home<sup>15</sup>**

In her discussion of nostalgia, Svetlana Boym speaks of two kinds of nostalgia- “restorative” and “reflective”: “Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately” (xviii). If the homeland of these authors therefore lies in the text itself, I argue here that the nostalgia we find in these texts is indeed reflective rather than restorative, as the “homecoming” Boym speaks of is never realized. Although texts like Moati and Goldmann’s may present themselves more as “transhistorical reconstructions” of their homeland, even these texts are a nostalgic reconstruction that centers on the longing, the *algia*, rather than the *nostos*, or the return home. The difference lies in the future, rather than the past. With restorative nostalgia, Boym claims, it “evokes national past and *future*” (*emphasis added* 49) while reflective nostalgia “is more about individual and cultural memory” (49). Moati and Goldmann, for example, may be evoking a national past, while the future is not at issue. Out of all of these authors, Ben could be the only one to truly border on restorative nostalgia, as the focus in most of her work is not only the past but the future of what she considers *her* country, Algeria.

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<sup>15</sup> The etymological roots of “nostalgia” are “*nóstos*” meaning “homecoming,” and “*álgos*” meaning “pain, grief, distress.” (“Nostalgia.” *The Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology*. Ed. Robert K. Barnhart. New York: Harper Collins, 1995.)

Dugas considers nostalgia inherent to the condition of North African Jews, and thus argues that it is inevitably a prevalent theme in their literature. Dugas compares their condition to that of Lot in the Bible, who is forced to leave behind his entire community in order to save himself and his family. His wife, however, cannot resist this glance back onto her past, and is thus turned into a pillar of salt (*La Statue de sel*, or *Pillar of Salt*, is the title of Memmi's famous work about growing up in Tunisia). Dugas describes the Judeo-Maghrebian writer: "the Judeo-Maghrebian novelist of the Diaspora likes to freeze himself in the contemplation of the past that has disappeared, through the nostalgic evocation of figures of the ghetto, lost forever, that it is his duty to bring back to life to the scattered community" (*Littérature* 133)<sup>16</sup>. This certainly points to claims like that of Rachel Kahn, in a personal interview, that her motivation for writing *Adieu Béchar* was in order to "bring back to life" this community that was left behind and potentially lost forever.

Yet memory can distort reality, and the past for which many of these authors are nostalgic may not correspond exactly to their actual experiences. In fact, as critic Susan Stewart argues in her book *On Longing*, the childhood one remembers through nostalgia is "not a childhood as lived; it is a childhood voluntarily remembered, a childhood manufactured from its material survivals. Thus it is a collage made of presents rather than a reawakening of a past" (145). Furthermore, Stewart asserts that

There is no continuous identity between these objects and their referents. *Only the act of memory constitutes their resemblance*. And it is in this gap between resemblance and identity that nostalgic desire arises. The

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<sup>16</sup> « le romancier judéo-maghrébin en diaspora aime se figer ainsi dans la contemplation d'un passé évanoui, dans l'évocation nostalgique des réalités et des figures du ghetto, à jamais disparues, qu'il lui appartient de faire revivre aux yeux de la communauté dispersée ».

nostalgic is enamored of distance, not of the referent itself. (*emphasis added* 145)

Do these works simply reflect an “act of memory” that “resembles” or perhaps, *reassembles*, the past? Undoubtedly, as Stewart claims, a certain level of recreation is necessary when speaking of the past, and, as Philippe LeJeune posits, autobiographical genres in particular hold much of their truth value through what is expected of them, as I discuss in Chapter 1. Boym describes reflective nostalgics as being “aware of the gap between identity and resemblance,” although it is not clear in many of these texts if such an awareness exists (50). For example, when Goldmann proclaims that her work is a “simple testimony,” it can be questioned whether or not she is aware of this gap, of this act of recreation.

### **History versus Fiction**

In Dominick LaCapra’s *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, he speaks about the impact that the trauma of the Holocaust has on writing about that particular history. While the experience of exile that the authors I study undergo is not as traumatic as the experience of the Holocaust, LaCapra’s theories about writing trauma still apply. He presents two types of historiography: one that is based on scientific “truth claims” that require concrete evidence, and the other which he calls “radical constructivism” for which “performative, figurative, aesthetic, rhetorical, ideological, and political factors that ‘construct’ structures—stories, plots, arguments, interpretations, explanations” are essential elements (1). If these women’s texts are to be read at all as historical documents, they would certainly fall more into the second category, since

all of the elements that LaCapra describes seem to be the most crucial to the stories these women are trying to tell<sup>17</sup>. However, just because a document does not have truth claims based on concrete, researched historical evidence does not make it worthless in illuminating a particular historical period, context, or problem. LaCapra maintains:

One might argue that narratives in fiction may also involve truth claims on a structural or general level by providing insight into phenomena such as slavery or the Holocaust, by offering a reading of a process or period, or by giving at least a plausible “feel” for experience and emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods. (13)

He adds that “truth claims are not the only nor always the most important consideration in art and its analysis. Of obvious importance are poetic, rhetorical, and performative dimensions of art which not only mark but also make differences historically” (15).

It is therefore crucial to note that my argument is not an attempt to devalue these women’s texts by at times questioning the extent to which these narratives are distorted by nostalgia, in particular concerning their ambivalent relationships with their non-Jewish neighbors. My argument is rather that, despite the reflective nostalgic reconstructive nature of these texts, the stories they have to tell are a necessary contribution to history and “make a difference” in the recorded history of the Jews of North Africa.

Judith Klein sees “making a difference” and contributing to the commemoration of the Jewish experience as a mission of Judaism, and argues that it

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<sup>17</sup> See also Hayden White, *The Content of Form* and Frank Ankersmit, *Historical Representation* for the similarity between historiography and fiction (LaCapra 8).

is the “vision of Judaism” to have a certain fluidity between the past and the present. She contends that it is this vision that “enables [Jewish] writers to keep the past as a living concept” (127). She maintains that Judeo-Maghrebian authors in particular “bring together the past and the present” as well as “enrich their memories with thoughts and actions of the present, since they mark it with the seal of memory: beyond the gaps and the tears, they establish a continuous chain of incorruptible experiences” (116)<sup>18</sup>. As with Boym’s story of the German couple, these women’s texts are just as much influenced by their present perception of the past as by their actual experiences. In bringing back to life this lost community, as Kahn claims her text attempts to do, these narratives create the fluidity Klein addresses here.

Klein’s notion of “obligation to memory,” which I address in Chapter 1, is salient in many of these texts, and also seems to be the motivating factor for many of these authors to recapture their lost homelands. Whether it is an obligation to the memory of a community, or an obligation to themselves is not always clear. Kahn states that her impetus for writing her novel was one of commemoration of a community, but at the same time, this fictional tale that she herself claims is based on her own life growing up in Algeria has a nostalgic quality that could be seen as Kahn’s own personal journey through healing from this past. Despite Kahn’s and many of the authors’ denial of any nostalgia, these texts can very easily be read as nostalgic journeys in search for identity, belonging, and peace with one’s past.

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<sup>18</sup> « les auteurs judéo-maghrébins ... renouent le passé au présent qui englobe l’expérience de l’exil et l’épanouissement d’une culture sépharade dans les pays de l’immigration. Ils enrichissent leurs souvenirs des pensées et des actions du présent, comme ils marquent celui-ci du sceau de la mémoire: au delà des brèches et des ruptures, ils instaurent ainsi une chaîne continue d’expériences incorruptibles ».

Taking this into account, I analyze the genres of these texts, and what the authors' "mission" is in presenting these narratives.

The nostalgia that is created in these texts is a romantic nostalgia, tied up in metaphors of nature, food, and sensual imagery. In my second chapter, I examine these authors' reliance on such metaphors, which convey a representation of the type of homeland one would long *for*. I look in particular at the ways in which these images are linked to the body, and how the body is a crucial symbol within post-colonial literature. The imagery of feet is of particular importance in these texts, not only because of its preponderance in religious doctrine and ritual but also its symbolic representation of the temporary connection to the earth—one which is always moving, changing, and growing. While these authors search tirelessly for their roots, for a stable, dependable identity, the imagery of the foot represents their journey through their past in order to find this identity. Terry Goldie underlines the notions of the post-colonial body and its connection to the primitive, to a perceived simpler lifestyle and simpler people, which are also pertinent to my examination of the imagery in the texts.

A large part of these authors' search for identity is based on their relationships to others. In my third chapter, I consider the representation of the Jews' relationships with their Arab neighbors, with the rest of the Jewish community, and with their own "Jewishness." Many of these authors work off of an idea of shared origins between the Jewish and Arab communities, to varying degrees of interconnectedness. Hélène Cixous, for example, inaugurates the term "*inséparable*," combining the terms for "inseparable" and "Arab" in French. This term encapsulates the representation of her

perception of this relationship with her Arab counterparts, one of wonder, fascination, and, most of all, desire. Cixous's desire to become "one" with her Arab neighbors is symbolic of the motivation that underlies most of these women's works: the desire to belong, to recreate a past that perhaps never existed. As Cixous writes, "All the while I lived in Algeria, I dreamed of one day arriving in Algeria" (9)<sup>19</sup>, exemplifying this sense among the Jews of that region that perhaps they never belonged anywhere, either in North Africa, in France, or in the Jewish community as a whole. In this chapter I also put into question the varied representations of the Jewish-Arab relationships, from hostile, to indifferent, to Cixous's *inséparable*. I question whether such differences can be attributed to class, geographical diversity, simple lived experience, or the function of memory.

The relationships of Jewish women to their religion and the traditions of a patriarchal society are also important in these narratives. Not only must they deal with traditional religious ritual and beliefs, but the cultural influence of the outside Arab society also inevitably plays a role. For many of these authors, this look into the past is wrought with ambivalence, as is demonstrated through the portrayal of the female characters in their texts. In my final chapter, I integrate into my analysis Susan Star Sered's notion of a "bifurcated" experience of identity for many Jewish women. These women struggle between religious tradition and establishing a place for themselves as women. This ambivalence of identity is housed in most of these texts in the mother figure, who in most cases does not serve as a source of comfort and support but rather as an extension of the paternal authority. On the other hand, the relationship with the father is often more central to the women's narratives and

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<sup>19</sup> « Tout le temps où je vivais en Algérie, je rêvais d'arriver un jour en Algérie... »

formation of identity—a relationship that is often filled with ambivalence both in reference to the father’s own identity and his interactions with his daughter. In some of these texts, such as Darmon’s and Cixous’s, the death of the father figure is symbolic of the loss of homeland or identity tied to that homeland, and thus the turning point in moving on to a new life/identity in France.

Although many of these authors may try, they cannot escape the nostalgia for a homeland and a past full of contradictions and ambivalence. Their works serve many missions: as a testament to their lives and struggles to establish a stable identity, as with Cixous, Cohen and Ben; as a “testimony” witnessing the history of a community and a people, as with Goldmann and Moati; as a “report” about the restrictive roles of women, as with Kahn and Darmon; and as a commemoration of a community that has mostly dissolved, as with, I argue, most of these writers. They recapture this community and its history with love and hatred, tenderness and resentment. Their tales are full of pain and longing. Nostalgia resonates through their use of language and imagery. Their creative choices demonstrate a desire to recreate a homeland that delights the senses, while at the same time raising complicated questions. Who were (*are*) the Jews of North Africa? What do their stories have to offer us as readers? What can their unique tales of identity teach us not only about the diasporic existence, but the human one as well?

The authors I chose are a sampling of the literature that exists in this field. While the number is not great, it is significant enough to merit attention. The study of texts like these can shed light on a unique type of Jewish diasporic experience, one with similarities to all Jewish communities who have been forced to leave their

homes. However, these texts also illuminate the particularly distinctive layers of identity of the North African Jews. While literature of the Maghreb has become a focus of French and Francophone Studies, studies on Judeo-Maghrebian literature are scarce<sup>20</sup>. The relationship of these women to French culture and society mirrors the ambivalence found in post-colonial Francophone societies, and yet has an even more complicated element, especially concerning citizenship and belonging. These narratives also help us to better understand how this community defines being a woman, and how these definitions affect and are affected by their multi-faceted cultures. Hopefully, my limited examination here will spark a new interest in this area of literature, which many critics are just beginning to explore<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> For works on literature of the Maghreb, see for example: H. Adlai Murdoch and Anne Donadey, *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005; Albert Memmi and Joëlle Bahloul, *Écrivains francophones du Maghreb*, Paris: Seghers, 1985; Christiane Chaulet-Achour, *Diwan d'inquiétude et d'espoir : la littérature féminine algérienne de langue française (essais)*, Algiers : ENAG-éditions, 1991; Guy Dugas, *La Littérature judéo-maghrebine d'expression française*, Paris : L'Harmattan, 1990; Jean Déjeux, *Maghreb : littératures de langue française*, Paris : Arcantère, 1993; Albert Memmi, *Anthologie des écrivains maghrébins d'expression française*, Paris : Présence africaine, 1965; Winifred Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb*, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1993; Valérie Orlando, *Nomadic Voices of Exile: Feminine Identity in Francophone Literature of the Maghreb*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999; Patricia Geesey, *North African Literature*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992; Marianne Bosshard, "Annie Cohen: A la recherche de l'eau, des origines, de la mémoire et du sens caché," *L'Eau: Source d'une écriture dans les littératures féminines francophones*, ed. Yolande Helm, New York: Peter Lang; 1995; and Denise Brahimi, *Maghrébines : portraits littéraires*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995.

<sup>21</sup> See for example: Marta Segarra, ed., *Hélène Cixous* (Special issue of *Expressions maghrébines*), 2.2 (2003). Yvette Bénayoun-Szmidt, "Annie Cohen: Pour une algérianité retrouvée," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 7.1-2 (2004): 19-34; Eva Martin Sartori and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage, *Daughters of Sarah : Anthology of Jewish Women Writing in French*, Teacneck: Holmes and Meier, 2006; Lora Lunt, "Reclaiming the Past: Historical Novels by Contemporary Women Writers," *IBLA* 62.2 (1999): 135-58; Johann Sadock, « Une mémoire plurielle parmi d'autres dans une histoire nationale », *Contemporary French Civilization* 31.1 (2007) : 49-80 ; and Nina Lichtenstein, "Forgotten Voices: Jewish Women Writers of the Maghreb," Australian Association of Jewish Studies Conference, The University of Melbourne, Australia, 12 Feb 2006.

## Chapter 1: Writing History, Writing Memory

“The position of the Jews in North Africa was one of ambiguity; ambiguity in the attitude toward Orient and Occident, toward Moslem and Christian, toward colonized and colonizers, toward North Africa and France, toward past and future. This ambiguity was the ultimate cause of the disappearance of North African Jewry in the course of one decade after twenty centuries of proud and tragic history.”

-André Chouraqui, *Between East and West: A History of the Jews of North Africa* (260)

Ambiguity of identity and belonging, between East and West, among different communities, cultures, and religions, epitomizes the North African Jewish experience. The “proud and tragic” history of this community is laden with painful experiences of exclusion and alienation, violence and exile. One cannot properly understand why the authors I study here write these works about such a past without knowing the history of Jews in this region—a history filled with ambivalence, exclusion, and alienation. From exploring their history, we can also come to realize the necessity of their commemoration, the “obligation” that drives these authors to “bring back to life” those who were forced to leave their lives behind. In this chapter, I discuss the context of these narratives, in order to more fully flesh out the picture of these women’s complex identities. I then look at the motivations for writing their texts, and how their motivations are often driven by their history and the need to recapture it. These motivations also guide their choice of genre as well as the ways in which nostalgia for their homeland is expressed.

## **An Overview of North African Jewry**

According to Elizabeth Friedman, Jewish presence in North Africa spans about 2,300 years. Some believe that the “original” Jews in the area were descendents of Berber converts, while others believe that they were of Palestinian origins. Friedman claims, however, that the presence of “indigenous” Jews is archeologically documented “in the earliest of finds” (2). Jewish presence therefore predates even the Arabs, who did not settle and “Islamize” North Africa until at least the seventh century (Donadey, *Childhood* viii). In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, a population of Spanish and Portuguese Jews also settled in this region, principally in Morocco, after being forced to flee the Iberian Peninsula (Friedman 2).

During this period of over two millennia, North African Jews have had a contentious and complex history, strongly based in contradictions and ambiguities of identity, nationality, citizenship, and belonging. In *Between East and West: A History of the Jews of North Africa*, Chouraqui speaks to this unique problem of identity that faced the North African Jews. He maintains that they were not bound by race or ethnicity; their blood had been mixed with Berber, Spanish, etc. and they were not necessarily distinguishable from Muslim or Christians living in the area. Instead, they were held together as a group by “religion, culture, history and tradition” (184). They could also be defined by common oppression and suffering (186), perhaps the reason for the “obligation to memory” among the Jews which I discuss later.

Michael Abitbol states that right before World War II, there were approximately 400,000 Jews living in the Maghreb (7). Due to increased hostility and racism towards the Jewish population after the creation of the state of Israel and

the wars of independence, many of them were compelled to leave, fleeing mostly to France, Israel, Canada, and the United States. According to Chouraqui, “Within the first 15 years of the creation of the State of Israel, over half of the Jews of North Africa had migrated to Israel” while one-third went to France, the Americas and other places (287). In 1954, due to varied political events in the Maghreb, there were about 11,000 migrants to Israel from that region (Chouraqui 288), while in 1955, when many nationalist movements gained force in the region, the number of migrants to Israel nearly tripled (288). The following year, in 1956, when “new administrations took over in Tunisia and Morocco,” the number of immigrants was over 43,000 (making up 80% of Israel’s total immigration that year). Those who remained, he claims, particularly in Morocco and Tunisia, “seemed doomed to disappear within a few years; their communities, disorganized and demoralized, dissolved one by one; the individuals who have stayed behind out of loyalty or love for their native countries...remain at the mercy of every unforeseen event” (287). According to the *Jewish Yearbook 2006*, in 1991 there were approximately 150 Jews still living in Algeria, about 7,000 in Morocco, and almost 3,000 in Tunisia<sup>22</sup>.

This exodus was not an easy task, a reality that is reflected in the texts I study here, some of the authors referring to being “torn” from their native lands<sup>23</sup>. Chouraqui also uses this term in his assessment of their departure:

The Jews had been in the Maghreb long before even the advent of Islam...; none would have thought it possible that one day they would all suddenly *tear* up their roots, abandon homes, businesses, property and possessions and flee as almost penniless refugees with never a thought of return. (*emphasis added* 283)

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<sup>22</sup> Stephen Massil, ed., *The Jewish Yearbook 2006*, London: Valentine Mitchell, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 3.

I address Chouraqui's claim that there was "never a thought of return" among these immigrants in this chapter as well, looking at the attitudes of the authors about nostalgia for their lost homelands. This nostalgia is also tempered by differences in experience, which can be partially attributed to factors such as geographic and class discrepancies.

Although the Maghreb region is often referred to as a whole for the purpose of simplicity, there are obviously many differences among, as well as within, the three countries. In *North African Jewry of the Twentieth Century*, Michael Laskier claims that the Algerian Jews were in the best situation out of the countries of the Maghreb, while the Moroccan Jews suffered the greatest discrimination, especially social and economic inferiority. Most of the Moroccan Jews lived in ghettos, were fairly poor and relatively uneducated, particularly in comparison to the Jews of Algeria and Tunisia. However, according to Chouraqui, there was still segregation in all three countries: "By virtue of their status as *dhimmis*<sup>24</sup>, the Jews of North Africa had been forced to live in special quarters outside of the pale of Moslem society almost from the outset of the Arab conquest" (122). In Tunisia the Jews lived in the "*hara*," as we see in Moati's novel, *Les Belles de Tunis*, and in Morocco they lived in the "*mellah*" (122). In Algeria, however, "the segregation was not as absolute" as in the other two countries (122). These areas that the Jews lived in were very much built like modern-day ghettos or projects. Some of the ones in Morocco "were perhaps the worst" (Laskier 123) and had horrid, miserable conditions. Just as Laskier said, the *haras* in

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<sup>24</sup>"A person living in a region overrun by Muslim conquest who was accorded a protected status and allowed to retain his original faith." ("dhimmi." *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*. 2003.)

Tunisia were a step up from the *mellahs* in Morocco, although they were still objectionable (Laskier 123). While most of the authors I study here address similar themes in their texts, understanding the geo-historical distinctions between the three countries of the Maghreb is essential to examining their varying depictions of “home.”

## **Algeria**

One of the main reasons for what Laskier sees as the relatively privileged position of the Algerian Jews was the Crémieux Decree of 1870, in which the French government granted Algerian Jews full French citizenship. Through this decree, there was an initiative by French Jews to try to “‘civilize’ their Algerian co-religionists” (Friedman 4), a mission based on the widespread attitude that Sephardic Jews were “‘archaic’ and nonprogressive, in large part because of [their] treatment of women and the extensive sexual discrimination found in it” (Bahloul, “Home” 83). One of the major implications of the existence of the Crémieux Decree was that it set the Jews apart by obvious access to certain privilege and social status. The push by some Algerian Muslims to obtain similar status was denied many times, most notably in a series of bills which would grant citizenship to only a select few<sup>25</sup>.

Eventually, in March, 1944, a reformed version of the Blum-Violette Bill of 1936 was implemented, allowing French citizenship to a small minority of “meritorious” Algerian Muslims, mainly “those who had received an advanced education in France or had served under French arms,” as well as government

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<sup>25</sup> It must be noted here that many Algerian Muslims did not want French citizenship, as they did not desire to be any more required to live under French rule. Instead, they wanted independence. The same was also true for some Jews when the Crémieux Decree was first implemented (Friedman 10).

officials<sup>26</sup>. These “elite” Muslims were in the minority; a large number of Muslims occupied the lower class, being both socially and economically inferior to most of the Jewish and Christian communities. In fact, many of the wealthy Jewish families employed Muslim “girls” as cooks, housecleaners, laundrywomen, etc. (Friedman 40). We see this in Cixous’s *Rêveries*, where her Muslim nanny Aïcha plays an important role in her vision of Algeria (see Chapter 2).

As a result of this decree, regardless of their extensive history in Algeria, most Algerian Jews considered themselves to be “French,” automatically setting them apart from their Muslim neighbors. Many of them also fought alongside the French during the Algerian Revolution, causing a further rift between them and their Muslim neighbors. According to a document by members of the French-Jewish Representative Committee presented in 1943, the decree remained relatively unquestioned until World War Two, adding that, “As a matter of fact, the moral and intellectual incorporation of the Algerian Jews into the French nation has been accomplished so completely, that nobody would have dared to contest their civil and political equality with other citizens” (6). However, the Crémieux Decree was repealed by the French Vichy government in October 1940, stripping the Algerian Jews of their French citizenship of the previous 70 years. This repeal was followed by an exclusion of Jews from the citizenship procedure still open to Muslims, which allowed them to apply for French citizenship on an individual basis (Friedman 86). The decree, and subsequently French citizenship to Algerian Jews, was reinstated in

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<sup>26</sup> *The Encyclopedia of World History, Sixth edition*. Ed. Peter N. Stearns. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001.

October 1943, then briefly repealed once again. The second repeal was annulled by Charles DeGaulle several months later (Laskier 81).

During World War II, Algerian Jews experienced many levels of discrimination, both by the French Vichy government and members of the Algerian nationalist movement within Algeria. Messali Hadj, a leader in one of the more radical nationalist movements, argued during this time that the Crémieux Decree “had transformed the Jews into an over-privileged element hostile to the Arabo-Berber population” (Laskier 58). However, according to Laskier, many European governments’ attempts to turn Muslims against their fellow Jews during this period worked only marginally (57). In fact, many Muslim political and religious leaders actually petitioned the government for reinstatement of Jewish citizenship when the Crémieux Decree was revoked (Friedman 88), and many of Friedman’s Algerian Jewish interviewees truly believed that “[all the Jews] would have been put in concentration camps were it not for fears of Muslim uprising” (89) during the war.

Yet, when the Algerian War for Independence from the French began in 1954, most of the Algerian Jews “chose to side with the French,” because, according to Friedman, for many of them it wasn’t even a “choice”: “They were French and the ‘Arabs’ were rebelling against France,” not them (83). Friedman found that even now, many of the residents of the town of Batna that she interviewed remain confused about their position in the conflict: “...even today, the Batneens disagree as to whether the Jews were attacked as Jews or simply as Europeans” (94). This strong Jewish allegiance to France is wrought with irony, considering that, as Friedman rightly points out, “French authorities rounded up Jews to be shipped to Hitler’s death

camps” during World War II (84), and, as touched on before, the Vichy government stripped Algerian Jews not only of their French citizenship, but many other civil rights as well.

The movement for Algerian Independence took the form of a war that was formally begun on November 2, 1954, and lasted for seven years (Chouraqui 272). One reason for the lengthy struggle was that the French in Algeria had come to see Algeria as “an integral part of France” and were therefore very reluctant to let it go (272-3). They lived their whole lives there and couldn’t conceive of it any other way, even though their links to their Muslim neighbors were almost non-existent (273). They believed in the “myth of *l’Algérie Française*” (273). The Jews, however, had more of a connection to their Muslim counterparts; their life in the Maghreb had

on the whole, been happier than that of those of Europe. Their coexistence had almost always been peaceful; they had lived in a symbiosis from which the Jews were generally the ones to benefit. They shared linguistic ties, and had similar attitudes, viewpoints, values, and characteristics... (Chouraqui 275)

As I discuss in the Chapter 3, these shared origins are essential to the relationship between the Jews and their Muslim neighbors.

This reality resulted in a dilemma for the Jews of Algeria:

It was impossible to oppose the French without betraying a deeply felt loyalty and a sense of gratitude...; it was impossible to support the French cause without becoming a traitor in the eyes of the Moslems, compromising all ties that bound [them] to the country and its citizens... (275)

As a result, Chouraqui claims, many Jews remained fairly “passive” in the struggle (275).

When the French finally realized that they were going to lose the battle in late 1961, more than a half a million French citizens, comprising more than three-quarters of their total population in Algeria, “fled Algeria, abandoning everything. Among them was almost the entire Jewish community” (Chouraqui 274).

Algerian Jews also stood out from their Moroccan and Tunisian counterparts by their education. While many Jewish children in Tunisia and Morocco attended schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), (which were established by French Jews specifically for Jewish communities in Arab countries), Algerian Jewish children attended French colonial schools alongside children of French settlers (Laskier 28). This educational integration was representative of the overall integration of the Algerian Jews into French culture. Laskier claims that “Algerian Jewry lead the way both in regard to the pace of French cultural assimilation and in the attainment of civil and political rights” (28). All of Algeria, in fact, was greatly intertwined with France “politically, militarily, and culturally” (Laskier 28), especially in comparison with countries like Tunisia and Morocco, therefore making Algerian Jews “inevitably ... part of France” (28). This can be seen in Ben’s text, when the young Ben’s card of French nationality is taken away during World War II and replaced by one reading “native Jew.” She is devastated and confused, telling her father that she thought they were French above anything else (see Chapter 3).

## **Morocco**

Morocco, on the other hand, was not as “inevitably” a part of France as was Algeria. The “French Zone” of Morocco was only a French Protectorate (as was

Tunisia), as opposed to the status of Algeria as a French colony. Equally, Morocco was only under French rule from 1912 until 1956, making Moroccan society less integrated with France than Algeria was. Therefore, the French government had significantly less control over what happened in Morocco than in Algeria, since Moroccan residents were officially under the rule of the Sultan and were required to answer to him and his Islamic officials (Laskier 56). While Moroccan Jews had some control over their “personal matters,” they were otherwise subjected to the laws implemented by the Sultan (56). The laws concerning the Jewish population were far from equal to those governing other segments of the population, since, as Laskier points out, “of the four social strata in Morocco—the French, the citizens of foreign countries, the Muslims, and the Jews—the Jews were at the bottom of the political scale” (56).

Despite strong efforts in the 1920’s for Moroccan Jews to obtain French citizenship, a decision made by the Madrid Convention of 1880 prohibited such a thing without consent of the Sultan, since both “Muslims and Jews had to maintain perpetual allegiance to him” (Laskier 25). The Sultan during this period, Muhammad V, who ruled from 1927 until 1961, was a large “nationalist symbol” for “Arab-Berber-Jewish solidarity,” so he was naturally opposed to allowing Jewish Moroccans to no longer be under his rule (25). The Sultan was not the only one who resisted French citizenship for Moroccan Jews; many members of the French government viewed the majority of Moroccan Jews as unfit to be French citizens, wanting only “educated” or “assimilated” Moroccan Jews to receive that privilege (Laskier 26). The colonial French in Morocco also did not want the Moroccan Jews on the same

“footing” as them, and since Morocco was not as “integral [a] part of Metropolitan France” as Algeria was, many French officials felt it unnecessary to risk angering Moroccan Muslims and create the horrible political tension that had already been caused in Algeria (Laskier 26).<sup>27</sup> Some of the political differences between Algeria and Tunisia and Morocco came from the fact that, as Chouraqui states:

Algeria was a colony, Morocco and Tunisia were protectorates; there were profound differences in the structure and the organization of the Jewish community. There were even greater regional divergences within each country, and the racial and cultural environment could be Berber or Arab, Spanish or French. (xxi)

When the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) schools were established in Morocco and Tunisia “as an instrument for modernizing the Jews” (Laskier 28), many Jews, most of whom lived in the ghettos (*mellāhs*) and experienced a fair amount of poverty, were able to move into residential areas and live in quarters built by the European Protectorates (28). These schools also allowed many of them to move up economically, and socially created an “elite of white-collar professionals, a modernized stratum of artisans, and in general, educated and semi-educated elements who spoke, read, and wrote French” (28). As a result of this, Jews in Morocco began speaking more and more French, instead of Judeo-Arabic, unlike most of the Muslims, the majority of whom did not attend “modern” schools like those of the AIU (29-30).

Already in a precarious position, Moroccan Jews in the “French Zone” experienced a significant amount of discriminatory laws under the Vichy government

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<sup>27</sup> In the “Spanish zone” of Morocco, there were higher hopes of citizenship with Spain among the Jewish population, especially since they were much better off as a whole than the Jews who lived in the “French zone.” Regardless, none of them were granted citizenship (Laskier 25).

during World War II. In 1941, such laws prohibited both Moroccan and French Jews from certain professions, including law, medicine, and money lending, similar to laws that were issued in Algeria and Tunisia as well (Laskier 61, 77). The Vichy laws also restricted the percentage of Jewish children that could attend Moroccan schools, resulting in a larger attendance at the AIU schools, which France continued to support financially even during the war (63-4). Moroccan Jews were forced back into the ghettos under Sultan's orders, and many were sent to detention and labor camps that were created in Morocco during this period (63, 66). Jews in the "Spanish Zone" of Morocco suffered far less during the war, as there were no "discriminatory laws" against the Jews issued under the Spanish government (66).

As Moroccan Independence seemed more and more imminent, Jewish leaders, especially in Israel, became worried about the safety of the Moroccan Jewish community. Ze'ev Khaklai said to David Ben-Gurion, Israel's Premier in 1954: "Arab nationalism is not the same as European nationalism. If the Arab nationalists will gain power and I say they will reach this goal, then the fate of the Jews should be evident [to us]" (Laskier 122, note 3). Violence increased in Morocco as independence approached, including attacks directed at Moroccan Jews, even though their anger was mostly intended for the French (127). At this point in time, Moroccan Jews were in the greatest danger of all North African Jews, so emigration quotas to Israel were quickly increased (127). On the "eve of Independence," there was panic that the Jews would not all be evacuated on time (131).

However, many obstacles faced the Moroccan Jews when attempting to immigrate to Israel. Although the "Law of Return" of 1950 granted all Jews the right

to move to Israel, there were necessarily quotas on the number of immigrants granted this right. This was particularly true of North Africa at the time, since there was such a large number of North African Jews attempting to immigrate to Israel (Laskier 121). These quotas were determined by strict “selection criteria” having to do with factors such as education, money, and health. In certain rural parts of countries such as Morocco, where many Jews were still relatively poor and uneducated, many were rejected due to these criteria (122). This practice became called “*écrémage*”- or skimming the cream off of the top- meaning that only the rich, educated Moroccan Jews were being allowed to emigrate (137). In addition, members of the French government feared that if too many Jews left for Israel during this highly politically volatile time, it would signal to the “Moroccan nationalists and the world that France was no longer in control; that segments of the population had lost confidence in French protection” (138).

Once Moroccan Independence was actually achieved in March of 1956, there was much lip service given to the Jewish population about their position in the new nation. They were granted Moroccan citizenship, called “Moroccan brothers” and were “called upon to build the new Morocco together with the Muslims” (Laskier 186). Even Alal al-Fasi, a conservative Muslim leader, claimed that “the Jews welcomed Arabization and that the artificial separation which had developed between Muslims and Jews during the Protectorate period was giving way to a healthy symbiosis” (191). He also claimed that Jewish culture, language, and music would be taught in schools, saying that if “certain elements were opposed to this education, as they were to French culture, then they were stupid and insensitive” (192). Despite

this, many Jews feared that this new “solidarity” with fellow Muslims might mean that they would one day have to fight against Israel on behalf of Morocco (187).

Inevitably, anti-Israel sentiment began to emerge in Morocco in late 1958, causing many more Jews to fear for their safety and seek out immigration to Israel. Yet, much like before independence, many of them were given bureaucratic hassles at all levels that made it nearly impossible for them to obtain passports, and other necessary documents (Laskier 193). According to Chouraqui, the Jews who remained in Morocco

continued to suffer the contradictions which are the lot of the Jews living in the Diaspora, aggravated by the special conditions of life in a Moslem country. The Moroccan fight for independence was followed by policies which deeply affected the tranquility of the Jews to follow in the steps of those who had gone before them in 1948, to settle in the land of their forefathers. (183)

Politically, the hostilities died down for a few years, causing the Jews who had remained in Morocco to feel somewhat “secure” (Laskier 246). However, when war broke out in 1967, more Jews prepared to leave, and over the next four years nearly half of the remaining Jewish community departed (249). Much of this immigration was to Israel, but this phenomenon diminished towards 1970 (249). Over the next few years, the immigration trend was for Canada, Europe, the United States and Latin America (251). Since Moroccan Independence, the Jews have “suffered from instability, and from constant fluctuation in the economic and political situation,” a condition which remained even in the early 1990’s, when 8,000 of them still lived there, a number which has significantly diminished since then (253).

## Tunisia

Under Tunisian law, all people born there were considered Tunisian even if they left the country, as long as they did not belong to any other nationality. Therefore, “All Jews born in Tunisia and unable to establish a foreign nationality were considered Tunisian under the law” (Laskier 24). At the same time, even though the Jews were considered subjects of the Bey, they had their own organizations and settled personal, civil, and commercial matters in rabbinical courts (Chouraqui 165). This also meant that they did not have much say in the Tunisian government, living on the “fringes” of European and Muslim societies, “excluded for all intents and purposes from public life” (Chouraqui 167). Tunisian Jews therefore wanted equal legal treatment to French citizens, yet despite a great push for a Tunisian version of the Crémieux Decree, (especially by members of the Zionist movement) they were granted the right to obtain French citizenship “on an *individual* basis only” in 1923, after Tunisian Muslims had already been granted this right (Laskier 24, 45). According to Chouraqui, only one-third of Tunisian Jews actually obtained French citizenship from 1911 to the end of the Protectorate (170). The Jewish community was therefore made up of two groups: “those who had opted for French nationality and those who had retained allegiance to the Bey” (170). In Moati’s novel, this decision seems to be somewhat based on class. Serge, Maya’s husband, claims that the Jews in Tunisia feel “almost as French as the Jews of Algeria” and yet it is only the “most evolved among the Jews who preferred to opt for France” (239)<sup>28</sup>.

During World War II, the German government conquered Tunisia for a period of six months, during which time they enacted discriminatory policies against the

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<sup>28</sup> « plus évolués parmi les juifs qui ont préféré opter pour la France ».

Jewish community (Laskier 74), leading to the arrest of Jewish leaders and thousands of Jews being sent to labor camps, some being killed (Chouraqui 170). Luckily, the Allied forces advanced in time to stop the Germans from committing any worse atrocities (170). Later on, when nationalist efforts against the French began in Tunisia, initially “the Jews were not seriously affected” (Laskier 260). There were only small attacks, such as on Jewish stores, up until that point, but then in June of 1952 there was a more serious series of attacks by Muslim youth on Jewish homes and property (260).

Representatives of the World Jewish Congress “feared that France’s position in North Africa had been weakened... [and that] French political concessions to the nationalists would be harmful to Tunisian Jewry” (Laskier 262-3). They felt that emigration (in a large part to Israel) was therefore necessary, and thus encouraged it (262-3). Nearly 8,000 Jews immigrated to Israel between 1948 and 1950 (268). Tunisian officials, however, tried to reassure the Jews that there would be no “discriminatory policies” towards them, and that they would be included in the new government (264). However, this “integration” into the new Tunisian society turned out to be more difficult than these statements implied, due to the Jewish community’s overall lack of knowledge of Arabic (the new official administrative language) and lack of adaptation to Arabization (265). Muslims were replacing Jews in liberal, civil, and commercial professions, causing many more Tunisian Jews to leave for Israel and France after independence (265).

Laskier claims that the adoption of French culture by many of the Tunisian Jews could have been a contributing factor to this growing hostility by the Muslims towards the Jewish community:

The pro-French cultural inclination of a growing portion of urban Jewry was doubtless a contributing factor to increased Muslim disenchantment with the Jews. This attitude was also, in some cases, accompanied by at least a theoretical inclination to support Zionism by segments of the Jewish population and by several of their leaders. (262)

The Jewish population in Tunisia, according to Laskier, was somewhat torn between the French and Muslim worlds. On one hand, they were “strongly attached to France, the source of their cultural inspiration and political emancipation” while on the other hand, the Tunisian nationalists also sought their support (262). Both sides were pressuring them to choose an allegiance (263).

As for education, when the AIU opened in Tunisia in 1878, the “movement spread rapidly in answer to the demands of a population avid for education” (209). In 1883 Tunisia became a Protectorate and therefore the Jews could attend public schools. However, Jews in Tunisia had more “religious” education than those of Algeria, for many reasons, one being that they were less “emancipated” and therefore less able to pursue a more “western” education, according to Chouraqui (210). Goldmann uses this term “emancipation” in the title of her text and often refers to the “emancipation” that her grandfather felt education would give the Jews. Education is presented as a means to liberation in many of these other texts as well.

## Waiting to Write

While the historical background of the different Jewish communities in North Africa is crucial to understanding the context of these women's narratives, it is equally as important to focus on their points of intersection. Regardless of differences in writing style and historical context, the writing process seems to have been similar for many of these authors. For most of them, speaking about their pasts in North Africa was not an easy task—one that they delayed for quite some time in their lives and careers. Some of this may be due to the enormous amount of pain and ambivalence in the history of the Jews in North Africa, in particular surrounding their departure. Chouraqui claims that despite their attachment to their homelands, “of those who had fled, the vast majority were resolved never to return, not even after a calm and order had been restored” (Chouraqui 279). Fittingly, it seems that some of the women I study here were resolved never to return even in their writing (for some time at least), as the process of remembering might prove too painful. As Boym states, nostalgia is often a “luxury” that one cannot afford, especially when the literal return home is close to impossible (xv).

According to Marianne Bosshard, Annie Cohen “has published over twenty works, [but] it is only in her more recent literary texts that we find references to her cultural origins and to her childhood in [Algeria]” (Sartori and Hage 205). In her article on Cohen's “*algérianité*,” Yvette Bénayoun-Szmidt agrees that

her initial works clearly demonstrate this desire to detach from her roots and distance herself from her country of origin. Passing from one register to another with the solid determination to carve out a space for herself

in French literature, she relegates her past to something that has long been done with ... (20)<sup>29</sup>.

Bénayoun-Szmidt implies that Cohen was forced to “relegate her past” in order to succeed as a French writer. This may be true, but Cohen herself attributes some of this delay to her own emotional readiness. In a personal interview, she explains that it took her a long time to be able to arrive at a place where she could write about her past:

It’s a path, it’s very long, Because the *marabout* arrived after... there were books and books before in order to arrive at him. For me it’s a stone. The *marabout*, he pushed me to examine myself. The *marabout*, it’s exactly him who is rooted in his land, wanted me to go back to my own origins. I look at this origin that is part of me, that constitutes me, and in [the *marabout*’s] own funny and demanding way, he is going to attempt to push me to the edge of what I didn’t want to see, what I couldn’t see... (Interview)<sup>30</sup>.

When asked what finally made her able to write about this subject, she replies that “Everything was hidden up until now... I think that it’s a maturation, it seems to me. I couldn’t have. It’s like a tree, like a fruit. I wouldn’t have known, I wouldn’t have found the words” (Interview)<sup>31</sup>. Cohen’s analogy here to a tree or a fruit is consistent with her reliance on connections to nature in describing her experience and her identity (see Chapter 2).

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<sup>29</sup> « ... ses premiers écrits traduisent clairement cette volonté de détachement de ses racines et de distanciation vis-à-vis de son pays d’origine. Passant d’un registre à un autre avec la ferme détermination de se tailler une place dans les lettres françaises, elle relègue son passé dans le lointain du révolu... »

<sup>30</sup> « C’est tout un chemin, c’était très long. Parce que le marabout il arrive après...il y avait des livres et des livres avant pour arriver à lui. Pour moi c’est une pierre. Le marabout, il m’a poussée à m’interroger. Le marabout, c’est en fait justement lui qui serait enraciné dans sa terre voudrait que je revienne sur mes propres origines. Je regarde au fond cette origine là qui fait partie de moi, qui me constitue, et il va de sa manière plutôt drôle et au même temps exigeante, il va tenter de me booster de me pousser à aller au bout de ce que je n’ai pas voulu voir, que je ne pourrai pas voir... »

<sup>31</sup> « Tout était caché jusque là... Je crois que c’est une maturation, il me semble. Je n’aurais pas pu. C’est comme un arbre, c’est comme un fruit... je n’aurais pas su, je n’aurais pas trouvé les mots ».

Like Cohen, Cixous is not mainly known for her North African Jewish roots, and is instead seen as a famous French feminist writer and critic. In her article on Hélène Cixous's "*algériance*," Christa Stevens discusses how Cixous is often defined in many ways—playwright, poetic fiction writer, philosopher, feminist theorist—but “rarely has literary criticism defined her by referring to her (Judeo)-Algerian roots” (77)<sup>32</sup>. This is not until recently, when she began publishing a series of works speaking about her Algerian childhood, which is why post-colonial and Maghrebian studies have started examining her work (77). Both Stevens and Guy Dugas<sup>33</sup> claim, however, that this is actually false, and that Cixous has been writing about Algeria all along, including it as the backdrop for many of her works and even speaking directly to it at times (Stevens 78-9). Yet, with all of this, Stevens questions if these elements “which transmit a feeling of attachment but also witness an impossible belonging, are enough to make Hélène Cixous an Algerian or even Maghrebian author” (80).<sup>34</sup> Stevens describes Cixous as never having identified herself that way (“nor as a French author”)<sup>35</sup> and always instead refers to her “literary nationality” or her “atoms without nationality” (80). In *Rootprints*, Cixous describes how it was after her move to France, where she battled with how to identify herself as far as nation and belonging, and that she “adopted an imaginary nationality which is literary nationality” (204).

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<sup>32</sup> « la critique littéraire l’a rarement définie par référence à ses racines (judéo)-algériennes ».

<sup>33</sup> See Dugas, “De l’algérianité à l’algériance.” *Expressions Maghrébines* 2.2 (2003): 5-15.

<sup>34</sup> « qui traduisent un sentiment d’attachement mais témoignent aussi d’une impossible appartenance, suffisent pour faire d’Hélène Cixous un auteur algérien ou encore maghrébin ».

<sup>35</sup> « ni celle d’auteur français d’ailleurs ».

Like Stevens, Elissa Gelfand claims in *Daughters of Sarah* that Cixous's past has affected her life and writing in profound ways, even if these ways have not been addressed directly until recently:

Yet, despite her earlier inattention to her own biography, Cixous acknowledged, even back in the 1970's, the traces left on her "Jewish unconscious" by the anti-Semitism she experienced as a child. The anxiety and guilt aroused by her childhood encounter with hatred have continued to haunt her characters, whose inner struggles reflect the alienation women and Jews have experienced. Moreover, she points to the importance given to books and words in Jewish tradition as having shaped her allegiance to writing, the only "native country" she now recognizes. (Sartori and Hage 2)

If writing is now her "native country," or what one could call her homeland, then Cixous's work would perfectly embody Gruen's theory about Jewish experience of homeland residing within the text itself. Cixous's alienation, complicated identities, and feelings of displacement all contribute to her need to find a homeland that resides outside of a physical space and in the realm of the literary. She can only pledge "allegiance" to this literary homeland, because to her it is the only thing that is real, that is tangible. If indeed she never actually "arrived" in Algeria the entire time that she lived there, the only true Algeria she can grasp onto is the one she creates in her texts.

Despite theories that Cixous's past has always been a large part of her writing, in *Rêveries de la femme sauvage*, Cixous's narrator claims that her past in Algeria was always a topic that she avoided:

I never wanted to write about Algeria this unknown country of birth whose high closed whiteness I skirted for all these years, the idea of writing never occurred to me that would be the most unexpected thing that would ever happen to me if all of a sudden a book took me *à bras-le-corps* (completely)

and transported me anyway to Clos-Salembier despite my resistance after all these years... (167)<sup>36</sup>

Even within this statement, Cixous's narrator's motives are unclear. At one point, she claims that it "never occurred to her" to write about Algeria, and yet within the same sentence she openly admits to "resistance" on her part against writing about it. She starts out by asserting "I never wanted to write about Algeria" and goes on to state that the idea of writing a book that would bring her back to Clos-Salembier would be the "most unexpected thing." This statement demonstrates her obvious ambivalence about the subject. She seems to be saying that she does not *desire* to write about Algeria, or rather, that she desires *not* to write about Algeria, not to be "transported" back to her homeland, which infers that yes, of course the idea *occurred* to her (probably many times), and that she decided not to do it. With the rest of her phrase, however, she infers that the book just took her by surprise, and "*tout d'un coup*" (such as in the middle of the night, perhaps in a dream) brought her back to Clos-Salembier and practically forced her to write it. However, in *Rootprints*, Cixous admits that she always knew her past was there, waiting to be addressed: "They have always been there. I do not look at them. I have never looked at them. I 'know' they are there. Their presence. Roots. Mine? My so strange roots" (179).

Like Cixous, Ben<sup>37</sup> mentions a lack of desire for reliving her past, thus a lack of desire for writing about it. In *Quand les cartes sont truquées*, she admits:

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<sup>36</sup>(With help from Brahic's translation, p. 95) « Je n'ai jamais voulu écrire sur l'Algérie ce pays natal inconnu dont j'ai longé la haute blancheur fermée pendant tant d'années, l'idée d'écrire ne m'est même jamais venue ce serait tout de même la chose la plus inattendue qui me serait jamais arrivée si tout d'un coup un livre me prenait à bras-le-corps me transportait quand même au Clos-Salembier malgré mes réticences après tant d'années.... »

<sup>37</sup> I refer to Ben's narrator as Ben herself, as her work is labeled "*mémoires*," unlike Cixous's work which is labeled as "fiction."

And my life as a child, despite appearances of family happiness, never gave me the desire to relive this past, even if I should have relived it not as I lived it, but as I never lived it. As if it were 'the' past without being 'my' past. But this past is an integral part of a universal history and all the blows it stocks in its carts have always been for me unforeseeable. (83)<sup>38</sup>

By claiming that they do not desire to relive this past and then reliving it through their narratives, writers like Ben and Cixous exemplify this contradiction of reflective nostalgia. Their nostalgia is complex and its depths are unknown even to them, as Cixous's narrator admits. While Cixous's narrator is in Algeria, dealing with her painful reality of the war, the poverty, and the discrimination that surround her, she declares:

I will depart, I will leave all of Algeria Clos-Salembier behind me, I will never come back, even in my imagination, everything that surrounds me here... will vanish forever, I will never suffer again... but from time to time I thought the contrary and sometimes I would love what I hated in spite of myself in spite of everything. (*Reveries* 45)<sup>39</sup>

Cixous's narrator's nostalgia also exists, as she claims, in spite of herself and in spite of everything that she has tried to leave behind. Her need to write about this past also seems to be in spite of herself, a need which is, as she claims, more an "obligation" than anything else.

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<sup>38</sup> « Et mon vécu d'enfant, malgré les apparences du bonheur connu en famille, ne m'a jamais donné l'envie de revivre ce passé, même si je devais le revivre non pas comme je l'avais vécu, mais comme si je ne l'avais jamais vécu. Comme s'il était 'le' passé sans être 'mon' passé. Mais ce passé fait partie intégrante de l'histoire universelle et tous les coups qu'il retient dans ses wagons ont toujours été pour moi imprévisibles ».

<sup>39</sup> This passage is taken entirely from the English translation.

## Inspiration and Obligation

For some of these authors, writing about their past is driven by an overwhelming desire to personally reconnect to their roots, while for others, it is a sense of obligation to the memory of a community. In many cases, there is a relationship between the two, linking a personal reconnection to a more collective one. As Boym claims, nostalgia is *inherently* a part of collective memory, related to identity and nation, to a whole people rather than necessarily to an individual: “Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory” (xvi). Sarah Cornell argues that writing for Cixous (and, as I suggest, for all of these authors) “serves as a necessary means of repairing the separation from a place or a person caused either by exile or death. Writing does the work of bereavement, of reconstituting loss, and of keeping the memory of the precarious” (32).

This drive towards collective memory is inherent to the Jewish voice. Critic Judith Klein claims that “to remember- the suffering, the catastrophes, and the persecution as well as the joy and freedom—this constitutes an *obligation* in Judaism”(127) and that this “remembering” is what keeps exiled Judeo-Maghrebian authors from “sink[ing] into despair like so many other exiled peoples” (127). This term “obligation” runs as a thread through these texts, where some of the authors feel that their writing is an obligation to tell their story, and by extension the story of their people. In fact, in Judaism, remembering (known as *Zakhor*) is an actual obligation,

and “has been a fundamental responsibility of the Jewish people throughout history” (Joseph 178)<sup>40</sup>.

Nine Moati acknowledges this sense of obligation as a motivation for her writing: “Each one of us, in our own way, has an obligation to memory, especially the Jews of Tunisia whose crucial role for centuries has been completely erased. I devote myself to reviving civilizations on the verge of being completely forgotten” (Lunt, “Reclaiming the Past” 145)<sup>41</sup>. Moati’s “obligation to memory” as she states it, is to the memory of all the Jews of Tunisia, as well as to her own personal memories. According to Moati, her search for identity is very much influenced “by war and by the pursuit of my past in Tunisia of which there is little left (due to oral tradition)” (Lunt, “bio”)<sup>42</sup>. She calls writing an “outlet” for arranging her ideas, as well as a means for “not allowing time to erase the past ” (Lunt, “bio”)<sup>43</sup>.

A sense of obligation is part of what brought Rachel Kahn to write her novel, *Adieu Béchar*, about the Jewish community in Colomb-Béchar, the town where she was raised in Algeria. She claims that her motivation for writing came during a dinner with some of her sister’s friends from Colomb-Béchar. These friends were Muslims who were only a few years younger than Kahn, and yet they were completely unaware of the former existence of a significant Jewish community there. This shocked and saddened Kahn, and gave her a feeling of obligation to her community to commemorate its existence in history: “It blew me away. I said to myself that this

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<sup>40</sup> According to Joseph, “the verb *zakhor* and its variations occur in the Hebrew Bible 229 times. As a noun it is found forty-seven times” (179).

<sup>41</sup> « Nous avons, chacun à notre niveau, un devoir de mémoire, surtout pour les Juifs de Tunisie dont le rôle déterminant pendant des siècles est complètement gommé. Je m’attache à faire revivre des civilisations en passe d’être complètement oubliées ».

<sup>42</sup> « par la guerre et par la recherche de mon passé en Tunisie dont on a très peu de traces (à cause de la tradition orale) ».

<sup>43</sup> « ne pas permettre au temps d’effacer le passé ».

community that had lived several hundred years—there is nothing left of it. I practically wrote this book for me and in order to make certain people live, so they won't die permanently" (Interview)<sup>44</sup>. Just like Moati, Kahn is not allowing "time to erase the past" of her community.

Cixous's narrator uses the same term as Moati of "obligation" when speaking about the sudden need she has to write about her Algerian past. In *Rêveries*, she wakes up in the middle of the night from a vivid dream about Algeria, which she jots down on a piece of paper. Upon waking, she desperately attempts to find this piece of paper, only to discover that most of it has been lost. What she does find, however, is a paragraph which ends with: "...for the first time, I have the possibility of returning to Algeria, thus, the *obligation*" (*emphasis added* 9)<sup>45</sup>. To Cixous's narrator, merely the opportunity to return to Algeria, even through memory alone, constitutes an obligation to do so. In *Rootprints*, Cixous again uses this term, stating that when she first arrived in France, "what fell from me first was the obligation of the Jewish identity" (204), and what was left was her realization that "my unacceptable truth in this world was my being a woman" (204). In Algeria, Cixous therefore felt a responsibility to her Jewish identity, being that she was so much of an outsider because of it.<sup>46</sup>

Annie Goldmann also reflects a sense of obligation in her motives for writing the multi-generational narrative of her family, *Les Filles de Mardochée*, which she prefaces with this:

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<sup>44</sup> « Ca m'a bouleversée. Je me suis dit, mais cette petite communauté qui a vécu là depuis quelque centaines d'années ... il n'y a plus rien d'elle. Je fais ce livre presque pour moi, et pour quelques personnes pour leur faire vivre, pour qu'ils ne meurent pas définitivement ».

<sup>45</sup> « ...pour la première fois, voici que j'ai la possibilité de retourner en Algérie, donc l'obligation... »

<sup>46</sup> In Paris, Cixous claims, "the anti-Semitism was incomparably weaker... than in Algiers" (204).

This book is a simply testimony. Not a return to the past nor nostalgic indulgence. It came to me, simply, that a trace should be kept, spanning some particular existences, of the path of one, then two, then three generations in a certain context: Tunisia at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>. (9)<sup>47</sup>

With this statement, Goldmann is juxtaposing nostalgia with “History.” She is “keeping a trace,” thus recording history, rather than taking a sentimentally charged nostalgic jaunt through her past. Goldmann continues to use this terminology in describing her aunt Juliette’s life, stating that Juliette wrote her own memoirs at age 80 in order to “leave a trace of the great cultural leap that had been her existence” (77)<sup>48</sup>.

Goldmann’s choice of subjects for her work is interesting, since she documents her life and that of members of her family, as opposed to the lives of other Tunisian Jews that do not have a sentimental connection to her. She also could have written an historical fictional account, as Moati does. However, her choice is to “keep a trace” of this history through personal memories, more like Cohen, Cixous and Ben, than through a somewhat detached account. Her use of the word “testimony” also implies an obligation to speak on behalf of a people about an important history.

John Beverley, in his book *Testimonio*, discusses the truth value of a self-proclaimed “testimony,” and claims that although it may not be the absolute truth, “it is what really happened, ‘the real thing,’ truth versus lie—the Big Lie of racism, imperialism, inequality, class rule, genocide, torture, oppression—that is at stake in

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<sup>47</sup> « Ce livre est un simple témoignage. Ni retour au passé ni nostalgique attendrissement. Il m’est apparu, simplement, qu’une trace devait être conservé, à travers quelques existences particulières, du cheminement d’une, puis de deux, puis de trois générations dans un certain contexte: la Tunisie de la fin du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle et de la première moitié du XX<sup>ème</sup> ».

<sup>48</sup> « laisser trace du formidable bond culturel qu’a été son existence ».

testimonio” (3). In using the term “testimony,” then, Goldmann implies the exposure of some larger wrong done to a society, such as the oppression experienced by the Jewish community in Tunisia. Her choice of title involving the “emancipation” of her family<sup>49</sup> implies that they are emancipated from some sort of oppression. Beverley points out that the term “testimony” connotes “an act of truth telling in a religious or legal sense” (3) and argues that the essence of what makes it a “testimony” is “the fact that we are meant to presume that its narrator is someone who has lived in his or her person, or indirectly through the experiences of friends, family, neighbors, or significant others, the events and experiences that he or she narrates” (3)<sup>50</sup>. It seems then that Goldmann, much like Moati, Cixous’s narrator, Kahn, and perhaps others, feels this sense of obligation that comes with producing one’s “testimony” and is driven by it.

Sarah Lévy in *Baisse les yeux, Sarah* by Paule Darmon has awareness of her narrative as having an audience, and sees part of its purpose, like Goldmann, as a type

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<sup>49</sup> One could interpret this term as meaning the larger Jewish community, although Goldmann’s narrative focuses on her biological family.

<sup>50</sup> The experience of testifying is also linked to the body, in particular to the feet, as I discuss in Chapter 2. In 24:24 of the Koran, feet are mentioned as a crucial part of the body that “testifies” to one’s sins. This is interesting in the context of Cixous’s comment (see Ch. 2) about feet touching those things that our hands will not, therefore witnessing what other parts of our bodies don’t. The Koran states that people who constantly accuse others of their sins will arrive at: “that Day when their own tongues, their own hands and their own feet will testify against their misdeeds” (24:24). (All quotes from the Koran are taken from Muhammad Farooq-i-Azam Malik, *English Translation of the Meanings of Al-Qur’an*, Houston: The Institute of Islamic Knowledge, 1997). However, in Judaism, women’s testimony has traditionally been illegitimate, where “women have been barred by Jewish law from serving as witnesses, both at courtroom trials... and at religious rituals, to witness a ceremony like marriage” (Hauptman 196). Goldmann’s claim, therefore, to be “testifying” or providing a “testimony” of the women’s lives that she portrays, could be seen as a subversive act in Judaism. (Even the word “testify” itself, stemming from the word “testes,” is obviously not associated with a woman’s voice.) In *Rereading the Rabbis*, Judith Hauptman claims that there are acts of women testifying on behalf of women that are documented in the Talmud, “support[ing] the theory that social status plays a role in setting qualifying standards for witnesses” (203). It would therefore be more acceptable for Goldmann, in the eyes of Jewish law and tradition, to be testifying on behalf of her female relatives, rather than her male ones. Goldmann does, however, speak about the life of her grandfather, Mardochee, thus breaking this rule.

of commemoration of her family's life. She speaks about the work as "*ce livre* (this book)" that her father and other members of her family are going to one day read. "*Ce livre*" that tells the story of her family, in often unflattering terms, worries her for this very reason. As her father lays dying, she says: "I engrave, in the copper of my memory, the traits of [my father's] face and, all of a sudden, this book, this book that I wrote for him and against him, weighs on my Heart and at the end of my arms like a suitcase full of stones" (11-2)<sup>51</sup>. She adds: "My father is still alive, he will live and will be able to turn the pages of this book. He will be able to get angry, laugh, and cry and still take me in his arms whispering: 'My Daughter'" (14)<sup>52</sup>. Like Goldmann, Sarah wants a document to live on in commemoration of her family and her past.

Ben's sense of obligation is somewhat different from the other authors. Unlike the imaginary return home that many of these authors attempt with their writing, Ben *literally* desires this homecoming, and yet is forced to stay away. In her extensive interviews with Achour, Ben does not once mention her Judaism or her place as a Jew in Algeria, but rather sees herself and her plight as purely and primarily Algerian. Her goal is to fight for a better Algeria for all of its people. She sees her work as having an important mission, claiming that "the writer, the true artist, is someone who is the reflection of society, who makes his work a mirror that he will offer to the brothers of his country" (Achour 76)<sup>53</sup>. Her obligation, therefore, is not to the memory of a Jewish community, but to her Algerian "brothers."

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<sup>51</sup> « Je marque au burin, dans le cuivre mou de ma mémoire, les traits du son visage [de son père] et, d'un seul coup, ce livre, ce livre que j'ai écrit pour lui et contre lui, pèse sur mon Coeur et au bout de mes bras comme une valise pleine de cailloux ».

<sup>52</sup> « Mon père est encore vivant, il vivra et pourra tourner les pages de ce livre. Il pourra s'irriter, rire et pleurer et me prendre encore dans ses bras en murmurant: 'Ma Fille' ».

<sup>53</sup> "l'écrivain, l'artiste véritable, c'est celui qui est le reflet de sa société, qui fait de son oeuvre un miroir qu'il va tendre à ses frères dans son pays ».

When asked about the fact that she is still writing in French in the Algeria of today, she replies:

Algeria is not narrow-minded. It's a country that is more open than one would like to think, that can live in great serenity the complexity of its problems. My problem would be to have been cowardly during the war. My sole pride is there. To put one's honor into a language is somewhat easy. I did many other more important things: isn't it important to write my testimony in French and to do my job for the formation of the elite in Algeria today? (Achour 74)<sup>54</sup>

As with Goldmann's use of the word "testimony" Ben's use of this term points to an obligation to speak on behalf of a larger community through her own personal story. For writers like Cohen and Cixous, their works are more of a personal journey through their pasts in North Africa than as a "testimony" for the larger community, as Goldmann and Ben claim. Their obligation is therefore more to themselves, or to the memories themselves, as opposed to an entire community or country. This could be seen differently for Ben, however, since most of her other work addresses issues of her homeland Algeria, and her devotion to working on such issues. However, it could also be said that Ben's memoir, although speaking to her own experiences, is trying to document the lives of Algerian Jews during World War Two and the discrimination they had to endure.

Of all of the writers, Cohen is the one who is the most focused on her own experiences as they relate to her as an individual, not as the member of a larger community. In fact, her "Jewishness" is barely even addressed, except in some

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<sup>54</sup> « L'Algérie n'est pas bornée. C'est un pays plus ouvert qu'on ne veut le faire croire, qui peut vivre en grand sérénité la complexité de ses problèmes. Mon problème à moi serait d'avoir été lâche pendant la guerre. Ma seule fierté est là. Mettre son honneur dans une langue, c'est un peu facile. J'ai fait beaucoup d'autres choses urgentes : n'était-il pas urgent d'écrire mon témoignage en langue française et d'exercer mon métier pour la formation des cadres de l'Algérie d'aujourd'hui » ?

cultural references to Jewish traditions or her parents' ancestry<sup>55</sup>. Bosshard describes Cohen as a self-proclaimed "geographic writer"<sup>56</sup> looking for her own roots (both literally and figuratively, especially through her extensive tree metaphors) through her writing (Sartori and Hage 2006). She does not see her obligation in Judaism as a commemoration of the past, but rather as a focus on the unknown future: "So, I examined [my past] thanks to [the *marabout*], but I don't know if I want to examine the orange blossom anymore. Because I rather feel like going towards tomorrow, because I think this is the profound destiny of the Jews. Not knowing... we are here, we will die there, we don't know where" (Interview)<sup>57</sup>.

Bosshard claims that Cohen's search for "missing links, origins, and roots, combined with her attempts to trace her own path-all seem to point in one direction, namely the search for and creation of her own answers to both physical and spiritual exile" and that Cohen herself admits that she is "without roots (*sans terre*)[sic]." Cohen's *Le Marabout de Blida*, then, is a search for these roots, even if she may never actually find them, in the very same way that the longing for one's homeland remains eternally unfulfilled. Cohen<sup>58</sup> speaks about her search for these roots in her text, saying that since she met the *marabout* he had awoken in her "the taste of the Mediterranean, the taste of roots... I had finally found my first *pot de terre*"<sup>59</sup> (124).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> For more on questions of "Jewishness," see Chapter 3.

<sup>56</sup> According to Bénayoun-Szmidt, Cohen studied geography in Paris (20). Cohen applies these studies to many of her works, notably *Le Marabout de Blida* and her most recent, *Géographie des origines*.

<sup>57</sup> « Donc j'ai interrogé grâce à lui, mais je ne sais pas si j'ai envie d'interroger plus la fleur d'oranger. Parce que j'ai plutôt envie d'aller vers demain, parce que je pense que c'est le destin profond des juifs. Pas savoir... on est ici, on meurt là-bas, on ne sait pas où ».

<sup>58</sup> Cohen herself claims that her work is not a novel, and that the "I" is not fictional (Interview).

<sup>59</sup> This means "clay pot." Cohen could be referring to a place where she can finally plant her roots, which is a common metaphor in her book. She could also be alluding to a fable by Jean de la Fontaine called "Le pot de terre et le pot de fer (the clay pot and the iron pot)" in which the clay pot, who comes from the countryside, agrees to go on a journey with the iron pot, who is more industrial, on the

Bosshard even goes on to claim that the *marabout* figure's important role in Cohen's work "is symbolic of Cohen's solidarity, manifested in many of her works, with all peoples who have suffered, as she has, misfortune at the hands of history" (Sartori and Hage 206). While this is certainly one way of interpreting Cohen's book, the narrative itself is a very personal one, addressing specific memories of her own past and experiences of her present struggles with this past. Her identity does not seem to tie in with those outside of herself, sometimes her family, and the *marabout*, but most of her discussion of identity is tied into inanimate objects, such as trees, food, and climate (see Chapter 2).<sup>61</sup>

Just as these authors have varying motivations for writing, they also are specifically pushed to begin writing by some specific incident, memory, or feeling that overwhelms them. Bénayoun-Szmidt describes the motivation behind Cohen's text:

Suddenly, a strong desire pushes her to write about a chance meeting, on a métro platform, with a mysterious character, the *marabout* of Blida. Since her settling in the city, she strives to escape, verily forget her Algeria at the feet of the poplar trees of a square in the 13<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris" (20)<sup>62</sup>.

Bénayoun-Szmidt's use of the term "feet" is reminiscent of Cohen's desire to wash all nostalgia off of her feet (see Chapter 2), as well as reminding the reader of

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grounds that the latter will protect him from being hurt. Consequently, the iron pot accidentally bumps into the clay pot and smashes him to pieces.

<sup>60</sup> « le goût du midi, le goût des racines...j'avais enfin retrouvé mon premier pot de terre ».

<sup>61</sup> Cohen's use of the *marabout* figure, traditionally a Muslim spiritual guide, raises many questions about the role of Muslims in her past life in Algeria. However, according to Dugas, many Jews and Muslims worshipped some of the same *marabouts* (*Littérature* 77).

<sup>62</sup> « Soudainement, un puissant besoin la pousse à écrire à propos d'une rencontre au hasard du temps, sur un quai de métro, avec un mystérieux personnage, le marabout de Blida. C'est que depuis son installation dans la Métropole, elle s'est eforcée d'enfouir, voire d'oublier son Algérie au pied des peupliers d'un square du XIIIème arrondissement de Paris ».

the roots of Cohen's trees that are one day pulled out of the ground as she walks past her beloved Parisian square. It is this "chance meeting" with the *marabout*, whether real or imaginary, that forces Cohen to come face to face with her past, and finally explore all of the pain and ambivalence associated with it.

For Cixous's narrator, her "calling" to write began gradually, but culminated in a fateful moment of "epiphany" that led her to try to capture her memories of Algeria. In *Rêveries*, she claims that it had been since 1994 (therefore approximately 6 years before she published the book) that there existed this supposed need to write about Algeria, and that little by little she became aware of the fact that she had been hearing, very faintly in the distance, a dog barking, in a way that became more and more familiar, until she realized that it was the bark of her childhood dog, Fips (who plays a very significant symbolic role in her book) (167). Since this realization, this book has been following her relentlessly:

After that I could no longer chase away the book that wouldn't stop calling my name once I opened the window of obscurity. I sat up in my bed in the middle of the night and with the soft pencil that is always resting next to my hand I wrote in big letters in the dark: *All the while I lived in Algeria, I dreamed of arriving there one day...* (168)<sup>63</sup>

As stated before, it is obvious by the fact that this book was calling her name and that she could not "chase it away," that Cixous's narrator is running away from having to write about Algeria, having to relive Algeria, having to be "transported" back to that time and place. This implies that the part of her that she claims to be

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<sup>63</sup> « Je ne pouvais plus désormais chasser le livre qui ne cessait de m'appeler dès que j'ouvrais la fenêtre de l'obscurité. Je me suis redressée dans mon lit en pleine nuit et avec le crayon gras qui est toujours couché à côté de ma main j'ai écrit à grands traits dans le noir: Tout le temps où je vivais en Algérie je rêvais d'arriver un jour en Algérie ».

‘inséparable’ (see Chapter 3) is something from which she has indeed been trying to separate, as Dugas suggests— to “separate herself” from her own self, her own identity.

On the other hand, in an interview concerning her short story “Pieds Nus” (from the anthology *An Algerian Childhood*), Cixous insists that she is “speaking about a memory, not about a fabrication. I could just as well have called it an Algerian epiphany<sup>64</sup>” (Le Boucher 72)<sup>65</sup>. This contradicts her original claim that the need to write about Algeria has been “chasing her” for several years. Cixous’s discussion of how she came to write her book also toys with the very nature of the reconstruction of memory, and addresses the problem of whether or not this reconstruction is, as Stewart claims, a “collage of presents” rather than an accurate depiction of “pasts.”

Cixous’s use of the term “epiphany”<sup>66</sup> has the implication of her almost complete lack of control over the process, as if the memory were simply channeled through her body, through her pencil onto the page. It is difficult to take Cixous’s statement at face value, being that she is a highly established and critically celebrated

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<sup>64</sup> Cixous uses a lot of religiously inflected terminology. For example, when she is describing the process of writing down on the piece of paper in the middle of the night her memories of Algeria – or rather her process of writing in general, she speaks about “Le Venant” who comes and “dictates” to her through her pencil while she acts as the host of the body and blood of this religious figure. She says: “I wrote down the first few lines that the Venant dictated to me, filling hastily in the dark the large page with these precious sentences, leaven for the book, gift of the gods whose name I don’t even know [j’avais noté les premières lignes que le Venant me dictait, remplissant dans le noir la grande page d’une précipitation de ces phrases inestimables, levain du livre, don des dieux dont je ne connais même pas le nom]” (*Rêveries* 10). The figure of the Venant is somewhat like that of the *marabout* in Cohen’s text, in that the author/narrator is forced to deal with these memories of their past, in particular by writing about it.

<sup>65</sup> « Dans ce cas, il s’agit d’un souvenir et non d’une fiction. J’aurais aussi bien pu appeler ce texte, une épiphanie algérienne... »

<sup>66</sup> “In Hellenistic times an epiphany (from the Greek epiphania, “manifestation”), or appearance of divine power in a person or event, was a common religious concept. The New Testament uses the word to denote the final appearing of Christ at the end of time; but in 2 Timothy 1:10 it refers to his coming as Saviour on earth.” (“Epiphany.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007.)

writer who prides herself on the play of language and images. Does she really want the reader to believe that this is an “epiphany” rather than a (re)constructed representation of her memory? This, too, seems all to be a part of Cixous’s conscious reconstruction of her past. By making the reader believe that she essentially has little control over the way in which her past is depicted, the reader might overlook some of the discrepancies in her representation, such as in her close relationship with her Arab classmates, as I discuss in Chapter 3.

As with Cixous’s “epiphany,” Ben’s need (or her desire) to write about her painful memories of Algeria comes about rather suddenly. Just as Cohen and Cixous put off this process, so did Ben. She explains in an interview with Christiane Achour what inspired her to write her first memoir:

One night, I found myself in Paris, in front of the Seine, on November 1<sup>st</sup>.... There was a festive mood in the air which I wasn’t a part of because... it was November 1<sup>st</sup> and I wasn’t in my own country<sup>67</sup>.... I suddenly realized how dramatic my life situation was. Every November 1<sup>st</sup> was a dramatic day for me. I was like an Algerian worker who had lost her job: and, standing in front of the Seine, I started to “write in my head” this novel.... To remember all of one’s life.... To return to your entire life. The story of my Algerian childhood, my emigration, and, added to that, my memories of the war. For several years, I was unable to write about what happened during the war<sup>68</sup>. What happened was completely intolerable to me. Maybe that is why I wrote it. (Achour 81-2)<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> November 1<sup>st</sup> is All Saints’ Day, an important Christian holiday in France. Although Ben’s family was Jewish, she attended a French school, so this was most likely a holiday for her. More importantly, however, this day in 1954 marks the start of the Algerian War of Independence. While this may seem strange for a Jew from Algeria to commemorate this day, Ben’s personal story indicates otherwise. Unlike the other authors I study here, Ben actively struggled for Algerian Independence from France, and she truly desired (and attempted) to stay in Algeria after Independence was won. Therefore, when she refers to “*mon pays* (my country),” she most likely means post-war Algeria.

<sup>68</sup> It is not clear if she is referring here to the Algerian War or WWII. Due to the date of the interview, it could be assumed that she is actually talking about the Algerian War, but this is not definite.

<sup>69</sup> « Je m’étais trouvée un soir face à la Seine, à Paris, un 1er novembre....Il y avait une atmosphère de fête dont j’étais exclue parce que... c’était un 1er novembre et que je n’étais pas dans mon pays.... J’ai senti tout à coup ce qu’avait de dramatique la situation que je vivais. Chaque 1er novembre était pour moi un jour dramatique. J’étais comme un travailleur algérien qui aurait perdu son travail : et debout, devant la Seine, j’ai commencé à ‘écrire dans ma tête’ ce roman....Se rappeler toute sa vie.... Un

Ben is simply standing in front of the Seine on an important day in Algerian history, and she is moved to begin to document her life. This is much like Cixous's narrator, who awakes in the middle of the night with her "epiphany" that forces her to write about her past as well. They are both in France, both far away from this homeland, and both feeling a somewhat other-worldly pull towards this need to return there. For Ben, the link is clearer, as she is reflecting upon Algeria's history on a crucial historical date. With Cixous's narrator, she claims it to be in the middle of July, which one could assume is near Bastille Day. However, she still maintains that it just literally *comes to her*.

Ben's statement that she must write about something that is "completely intolerable" to her also goes back to the idea of obligation. In writing about it, Ben is documenting these events that she feels the whole world must know about, much like the term "testimony" Goldmann uses. For Cixous, however, the obligation is more to herself than to anyone else; she must satisfy this need to write, she must answer this call from within that pushes her to recapture her past.

### **From Testimony to Memoir**

The motivation that drives these authors to write manifests itself differently in each text, most notably through the choice of genre. Ben, Cixous and Cohen present their memories in the form of a memoir, or a personal journey through their pasts. Goldmann, however, presents her text as a "testimony," and Moati, Kahn and

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retour sur toute une vie. L'histoire de l'enfance algérienne, de l'émigration et, à tout cela, j'ai intégré les souvenirs de la guerre. Pendant des années je ne pouvais pas parler de ce qui était arrivé pendant la guerre. Cela m'était intolérable. Peut-être est-ce pour cela que j'ai écrit ».

Darmon write works of “fiction.” Marie-Brunette Spire claims that the difference between “fiction” and “testimony,” though, is difficult to determine, and that Goldmann’s text demonstrates this:

As we were able to see in the course of the research that we undertake here, the difference is not fundamental between a *récit-témoignage*<sup>70</sup> and *roman-témoignage*<sup>71</sup>. Because fiction full of reality and “reality” impregnated with affect allow the author precisely to situate herself in relation to her sources. (289-90)<sup>72</sup>

Goldmann’s tale is definitely “impregnated with affect” and as Robert Elbaz notes, Goldmann’s use of the term “simple testimony” does not take into account the multi-layered nature of her narrative. If she is indeed trying to recapture the story of her past, or of the history of Tunisia at a certain time period, how could such an undertaking be simple? Goldmann’s “testimony” is certainly not a simple one. It is a story of other people’s lives from different generations, told through a mixture of Goldmann’s voice and a direct or indirect interpretation of their own. (426). It is filled with commentary and supplements, such as documents her grandmother wrote, copies of the journal her grandfather created and edited, and family photographs. It is also arranged in a fairly non-linear manner. Goldmann’s choice of life stories to tell is also an interesting and obviously deliberate one; the “history” is far from comprehensive. She does not tell the story of her parents, for example, and chooses only her grandparents on one side, her aunt, and herself. She may have chosen these people’s lives to profile because she found them to be more representative of that time period

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<sup>70</sup> This is a testimonial account, tale, narration.

<sup>71</sup> This refers to a testimonial novel.

<sup>72</sup> « Comme on a pu voir au cours de la recherche qui nous occupe ici, la différence n’est pas fondamentale entre récit-témoignage et roman-témoignage. Car la fiction toute pétrie de réalité et la ‘réalité’ imprégnée d’affects permettent justement à l’écrivain de se situer par rapport à ses sources ».

in Tunisia, but from learning about their lives (her aunt was the first female lawyer in North Africa, for example), we see that they are far from typical. Therefore, her choice seems to be based more on personal connection than on historical representation.

Darmon's text, even though it is a novel, takes a similar form to Goldmann's, acting partially as a family history of the narrator Sarah Lévy. Just like Goldmann, she has separate sections devoted to her great-grandmother, her grandmother, her mother, and her father. This intergenerational style can also be seen in Moati's novel, and although the two are presented as fictional, this style lends itself to a more "testimonial" feel, one that captures the history of a family or of a society, rather than merely telling a story.

Kahn's novel, although also fictional, has a larger purpose, according to Kahn, and is what she calls a "*constat* (report)" about that society. Kahn's use of that term implies a more detached, objective observation of a society, and yet Kahn's text is full of what she calls a "tenderness" towards her characters (Interview). This tenderness lends itself to a nostalgic feel to her novel, putting into question the label of it being simply a "report." Its reception in her hometown of Colomb-Béchar also speaks to its existence as more than a simple detached documentation of a certain time and place. Kahn's work evoked many nostalgic emotions in her readers, once again pointing to the nostalgic overtone of her work:

...I have a lot of people who write me from there. The only place where my book is a "best seller" is there. It's earth-shattering. Muslims have written me letters that have made me cry. I've cried. Because everyone left and they remain among themselves. The town has deteriorated. They tell me

that I describe a time when there was diversity... and that now they are [only] among Muslims. (Interview)<sup>73</sup>

Like Kahn's, Moati's text is presented as a novel, rather than a memoir or a testimony, and yet Spire claims that elements of her own personal history are sprinkled here and there within the narrative, making it more than a mere fictional tale (286). What also makes it more than a fictional tale, argues Spire, is the level to which it is rooted in history. Although it is a text with "characters... events...changes" which "give the imagination free reign," it is nonetheless a novel "controlled by historical truth" (286)<sup>74</sup>. Spire vacillates between interpretations of Moati's work as more fictionally or historically inspired. While she insists that in Moati's novel, "she reconciles History through her study, but a history highly colored by affectivity" (287)<sup>75</sup>, she also claims that what interests her about the novel is its "objective realism" and how "the author's choices illuminate this century of history" (286)<sup>76</sup>. The reader sees the characters' lives unfold to the backdrop of political events, from Tunisia becoming a French Protectorate, to the Algerian Jews gaining French citizenship, to the effect of the Dreyfus Affair in France. Therefore, just as Spire recognizes the historical value of Moati's narrative, she also sees the nostalgic aspects in its depiction of her homeland. Overall, Spire feels that, in this book, Moati "reconciles anything and everything by striving to infuse her work with

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<sup>73</sup> « ...j'ai beaucoup de gens qui m'écrivent de là-bas. Le seul endroit où mon livre est un « best seller » c'est là. C'est bouleversant. Les musulmans m'ont écrit des lettres à pleurer. J'ai pleuré. Parce que tout le monde est parti et ils restent entre eux. Elle a appauvri la ville. Ils me disent que je raconte une époque qui pour eux est une époque de rêves, enfin une époque où il y avait du brassage... et que là ils sont entre musulmans ».

<sup>74</sup> « [un texte avec des] personnages, ... [des] événements... [des] changements... [mais c'est un roman qui] permet de donner libre cours à l'imagination... contrôl[é] par la vérité historique ».

<sup>75</sup> « elle renoue par l'étude avec l'Histoire, mais une histoire fortement teintée d'affectivité ».

<sup>76</sup> « les choix de l'auteur éclairent ce siècle d'histoire ».

comprehension, this image being a metaphorical process of her own reconciliation” (287)<sup>77</sup>.

Cohen’s work, although listed as and presented in the format of a “novel,” is a very personal journey. Cohen herself objects to the interpretation of the narrator as anyone other than herself; when asked if the “*Je* (I)” in her text is herself, she says that it is, and insists that her text is “not a novel, no, I can’t” (Interview)<sup>78</sup>. In contrast to Cohen, Cixous remains more ambiguous, and although *Rêveries* reads like a memoir (inasmuch as anything written by Cixous fits into a conventional format), it is labeled as fiction. Ben’s story is subtitled “*mémoires*,” and could be seen as easily fitting into that category in form and content. Perhaps Cixous best expresses the difficulty of categorizing these types of works in *Rootprints* when she claims that “all biographies like all autobiographies like all narratives tell one story in place of another story” (178). And indeed, as Philippe LeJeune points out, genre is after all a matter of the expectation of the reader about the text, a way in which the reader may classify the work and know how to receive it (141).

### **Nostalgia and Reconstruction**

The notion of genre raises another question about the nature of literature of exile. Must this literature contain nostalgia, and if it does, what literary form does that nostalgia take? Many of the authors deny having a nostalgia for their lost homeland, either within the text or in outside interviews. For example, when asked about the presence of nostalgia in her book, Kahn claims that all of her nostalgia

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<sup>77</sup> « réconcile tout et tous à force d’infuser de la compréhension, image en reflet de sa propre réconciliation avec son passé ».

<sup>78</sup> « Pas un roman, non , je ne peux pas ».

disappeared a long time ago. Kahn recounts that she used to have nostalgia, after she first left Algeria, and that when she first arrived in France, she suffered a great depression. This, she realized after a trip to Morocco with one of her mother's friends, was because she had to leave Algeria too quickly: "I understood afterwards that I was too quickly torn from Algeria and that I didn't have the time to prepare myself to leave" (Interview)<sup>79</sup>. Once she went back to Morocco, where there was the same music, food, culture, etc., Kahn claims that she was cured of her nostalgia and was "ready to live in France" (Interview). Yet Kahn's novel definitely has a nostalgic feel to it, specifically because Liana is telling the story retrospectively, remembering with great emotion stories like that of Sara. Despite Kahn's denial of nostalgia, she does claim that

It's true that when you are in the Sahara you never forget it. A professor once told me. He said, "You are lucky to live here" and us, we said, but there's nothing here, with the desert, the rocks.... But he said "You will see that you will never forget it." It's true that it's an inviting landscape. I have nostalgia for that light and those spaces, but for the life of a woman there, no. (Interview)<sup>80</sup>

Just as with Kahn, Goldmann's denial of nostalgia in her preface can definitely be questioned. Elbaz comments that the fact that Goldmann claims to deny all "nostalgia" in her narrative "does not at all exclude the attempt to return to the past" (426)<sup>81</sup>. As Elbaz reasons, by the virtue of retelling her family's story,

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<sup>79</sup> « j'ai compris après qu'on m'avait trop vite arrachée de l'Algérie et que je n'ai pas eu le temps de me préparer au départ ».

<sup>80</sup> « Mais c'est vrai que quand on est au Sahara on n'oublie jamais. D'ailleurs un professeur me l'avait dit. Il disait « Vous avez de la chance de vivre ici » et nous, on disait, mais il n'y a rien, avec le desert, les pierres... Mais il a dit « vous allez voir que vous n'oublierez jamais ». C'est vrai que c'est un paysage qui vous invite. J'ai la nostalgie de cette lumière de ces espaces, mais de la vie là-bas pour une femme, non ». For more on women's roles in in these texts, see Chapter 4.

<sup>81</sup> « n'exclut aucunement la tentative de retourner au passé ».

Goldmann is essentially returning to her past, at least for a time, and could be seen as the form of nostalgia Boym calls “restorative,” which “stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home”(xviii). As stated in her introduction, Goldmann is doing just that: reconstructing Tunisia, what one could call her “lost home,” at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This reconstruction is happening through her own experiences and those of her family, and would be a perfect fit for the “restorative nostalgia” of which Boym speaks, except for the fact that she does not deal with, nor is she concerned with, the future of Tunisia or of the community. Whether or not Goldmann is consciously playing with these terms is unclear. It may be irony, or a form of self-conscious writing, or perhaps she is putting into question the very notion of recapturing one’s past and reconstructing “History.”

On the other hand, Spire describes Goldmann’s text as “not a return to origins, there is nothing of the past to save” (289)<sup>82</sup>, referring to the disappearance of the community Goldmann is trying to document. Instead of Goldmann’s text being a documentation of her life as a Jew, Spire argues, it is more of a personal tale of her role as a “*fille de Mardochee* (daughter of Mordechai),” in which she “denie[s] all nostalgia” and is “loyal to her grandfather and disloyal to their traditional Judeo-Arab origins” (289)<sup>83</sup>. In her tale, she instead links “in the same loyal combat, intellectual and feminine, if not feminist, emancipation” (289)<sup>84</sup>, as I discuss in Chapter 4.

Much like Goldmann and Kahn, Cohen also denies this nostalgia that pervades her narrative at various points. Cohen does this both within the text, where

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<sup>82</sup> « Ce livre n’est pas un retour aux sources, il n’y a rien du passé à sauver ».

<sup>83</sup> « en niant toute nostalgie, [elle] est fidèle à son grand-père et infidèle à leurs origines judéo-arabes traditionnelles ».

<sup>84</sup> « dans un même combat fidèle, l’émancipation intellectuelle et féminine, sinon féministe. »

she claims that she has “not a milligram of nostalgia left in her ‘bag’” and that she has washed her feet of all the sand of nostalgia that was left there (See Chapter 2), and in her interview. “I’m never in nostalgia,” Cohen says.<sup>85</sup> She continues:

What would I have nostalgia for? It’s not like Albert Camus or my parents who lived a happy Algeria (in quotation marks because there were Arabs who were in bad conditions)... Nostalgia is like an emotion that one can exploit. It’s like a commercial idea. What would it consist of? If I had had nostalgia, I should have left and stayed in Algeria. (Interview)<sup>86</sup>

If what Cohen says is true, then Ben is the only author I study here who could be said to truly have nostalgia, since she was the only one to attempt to stay in Algeria. Unlike Cixous’s narrator who longs to go back to Algeria, Cohen insists that she no longer has that desire, just as Kahn claims to have rid herself of that emotion:

As for me, I don’t want to go back. That’s me. That’s my point of view. I can’t. I don’t know what I would do. I don’t know how I could write there. My brother is younger than me, he very much wants to know where his elementary school is, or a certain street, etc. Me, I don’t care. (Interview)<sup>87</sup>

However, like Cixous and Kahn, Cohen did go back a few years after she had left, after independence, and truly discovered, or truly *arrived* (as Cixous would say) in Algeria.

Why did I go back, it was to understand the Algeria of the Algerians. I didn’t know one word of Arabic because we were from very separate communities. I wanted to see... I had never been to the *casbah*. I had never

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<sup>85</sup> « je ne suis jamais dans la nostalgie ».

<sup>86</sup> « Moi j’aurai la nostalgie de quoi? Ce n’est pas comme Albert Camus ou mes parents qui ont vécu une Algérie heureuse entre guillemets, parce qu’il y avait les arabes qui étaient dans des conditions mauvaises... La nostalgie c’est comme un sentiment qu’on exploiterai. C’est comme un fond de commerce. Il s’agit de quoi? Si j’avais eu de la nostalgie, il fallait partir et rester en Algérie ».

<sup>87</sup> « Pour moi je ne veux pas retourner. Pour ma part, C’est un point de vue. Je ne peux pas. Je ne sais pas ce que je ferais. Je ne sais pas comment je pourrais écrire là-bas. Mon frère qui est plus jeune que moi, lui il a très envie de savoir où est son école primaire, où est une rue, etc., moi je m’en fous ».

been to the desert. I didn't know the Kabylie<sup>88</sup>. France brought me unhappiness. Since I had this unhappiness, I went back not even two years later. I hadn't had the time to see the people of Algeria, to mourn together and all of that. Right away I burst the abscess in going there and trying to see what happened, what it was, Algeria. It helped me a lot, I think. I went to see the desert... I saw Algiers. But it wasn't my Algiers. It was over. (Interview)<sup>89</sup>

Similar to Kahn, Cohen claims that part of her unhappiness in France was that she was taken too soon from her homeland without the true opportunity to "know" it, just like Cixous's narrator who feels that she "never arrived" in Algeria, even when she was living there. Cohen's Algeria no longer exists, or perhaps never existed, and as Boym posits, how can you have nostalgia for something that doesn't (or never) existed?

Although Darmon does not deny nostalgia directly in her text or elsewhere, Spire feels that Darmon's critique of the contradictions present in a character like Sarah's father is an element at odds with nostalgia: "The contradictions that impose such complex stratifications are far from bringing Paule Darmon to a certain nostalgia" (283)<sup>90</sup>. Darmon's format of devoting different chapters to each of her family members lends itself to some form of nostalgia, but it is sometimes clouded by her criticism of the oppressive society that her female characters live in. Yet, just as Sarah Lévy describes living between two worlds that intersect, so do these two worlds

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<sup>88</sup> The Kabylie is a mountainous region of Algeria.

<sup>89</sup> « Pourquoi je suis revenue, c'est pour comprendre l'Algérie des Algériens. Je connaissais pas un mot d'arabe parce qu'on était de communautés très séparées. Je voulais voir... j'avais jamais été à la casbah. J'avais jamais été dans le desert. Je connaissais pas la Kabylie. La France m'apportait du malheur. ... comme j'ai eu ce malheur, je suis retournée même pas deux ans après. J'ai pas eu le temps de voir les gens d'Algérie, de pleurer ensemble et tout ça. J'ai tout de suite crevé l'abcès en allant là-bas et en essayant de voir ce qui s'était passé, ce que c'était l'Algérie. Ça m'a beaucoup aidée, je pense... j'ai été voir le desert... J'ai vu Algiers, mais l'Alger, c'était pas l'Alger de moi. C'était pas mon Alger. C'était fini ».

<sup>90</sup> « Les contradictions qu'imposent des stratifications aussi complexes sont loin de conduire Paule Darmon à une quelconque nostalgie ».

intersect in Darmon's text, painting her homeland Morocco as both beautiful and sensual as well as stifling and oppressive in its Oriental nature. Her numerous descriptions of the food, landscape, etc. of Morocco (See Chapter 2) certainly have a nostalgic feel to them, as do the endearing, albeit often critical, descriptions of her characters.

The longing for one's childhood is also an important part of the pervading sense of nostalgia in many of these works<sup>91</sup>. Most of the authors, having left North Africa when they were younger, necessarily associate their life there with their childhoods. Boym addresses the nature of nostalgia for one's childhood as being a nostalgia for a purer form of *oneself*. She cites Jean Starobinski and Michael Roth, who claim that "in the twentieth century nostalgia was privatized and internalized" and that "the longing for home shrunk to the longing for one's childhood" (53). In these narratives then, can we distinguish (and can/do the authors/narrators distinguish) between the longing for the past, for home, and simply for childhood? According to Boym: "At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams" (xv). This time of childhood is always inevitably shaped by experiences of the present, of the "collage of presents" that becomes the retelling of one's past.

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<sup>91</sup> This focus on childhood is also interesting in light of the following description of Sephardic Jewry by Joelle Bahloul: "Sephardic Jews are represented as both the heirs of the ancient Mediterranean origins of Jewish civilization and as the embodied defilement of this ancestral tradition under Arabo-Islamic influences....The Sephardic Jew, like other cultural aborigines, represents Judaism in its authenticity and originality, but at the same time in its symbolic, historical, and geographical childhood" ("Kinship" 199). Again, as with Sander Gilman's discussion of the aborigine or the native as being "closest to nature," as being the most primitive, Bahloul's use of the term "childhood" shows the ways in which Sephardic Jews are infantilized and seen as existing in a less sophisticated state.

In an interview in *Terre Inter-dite*, Cohen explains the problematic nature of speaking of one's past or recreating one's memory of that past: "Writing, for me, is a type of translation. It's both being there and at the same time being hidden, masked. Certainly when speaking of my childhood, I needed to find a type of escape" (101-2)<sup>92</sup>. Speaking specifically of her short story in the collection *An Algerian Childhood*, Cohen admits to the necessary distortion that takes place in the endeavor of speaking of one's past: "It was too difficult for me to be face to face with my childhood, since memories are twisted by the present" (101)<sup>93</sup>.

In *Terre inter-dite*, Christiane Achour describes how the writers represented in *An Algerian Childhood* (to which both Cixous and Cohen contributed) recapture their childhoods, "whether they lived in a hell that they never got rid of, a paradise that they idealized or a lost garden that only writing can bring back to life" (Le Boucher 18-19)<sup>94</sup>. The ironic aspect here, as is the case with Cixous, is that most of them are longing to "*faire revivre* (bring back to life)" a situation that was never paradise or ideal, and that could never be recreated due to the changed nature of the land which they long for.

Achour quotes author Roger Dadoun (who also contributed to *An Algerian Childhood*), in the introduction to *Terre inter-dite*: "Maybe I wrote of a happy childhood because our return to our Algerian childhood contrasts and acts as a certain compensation for the horrifying situation in Algeria of today (...) the idea that we

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<sup>92</sup> « Ecrire pour moi, c'est une forme de traduction. C'est à la fois être là mais en même temps cachée, masquée. Surtout en ce qui concerne l'enfance, je devais trouver une forme d'esquive ».

<sup>93</sup> « Il était trop compliqué pour moi de me mettre face à mon enfance, car les souvenirs sont tordus par le présent ».

<sup>94</sup> « qu'ils soient enfer dont on ne s'est jamais défait, paradis que l'on a idéalisé ou jardin perdu que seule l'écriture peut faire revivre ».

could live together in a certain harmony”(Le Boucher 19)<sup>95</sup>. Dadoun, an Algerian psychoanalyst of non-Jewish origin points to the reality that for many authors from North Africa, in particular Algeria, this nostalgia is universal- it is a nostalgia for a place that no longer exists, that is hostile to them. Using similar terms, Judith Klein describes Memmi’s *Statue de Sel* as being like “the wound of the loss of his paradisiacal childhood” (118). Perhaps equally to all, but more specifically to the Jews, this was a place that was always hostile to them to some degree, and therefore their nostalgia is quite complicated in nature and motivation.

In *Rootprints* Cixous claims that her hometown of Oran had a “feeling of paradise, even while it was the war and my family was hit from all sides: by the concentration camps in the North, by Vichy in Algeria” (196). Despite all of this, she says, “the family was full of dreams and creation.... We were happy” (196). Sarah Cornell in *The Body and the Text*, claims that Cixous’s birthplace, the city of Oran, “became a metaphor for Paradise Lost. Writing provided the means of regaining, reconquering and reconstituting the loss of paradise” (32).

This conflict between the memory of childhood as being a lost paradise and the reality of the political situation of the past appears in *Rêveries* when Cixous’s narrator is discussing with her brother possible titles for her memoir (an obvious self-consciousness within the narrative of the writing and shaping of her memoir). Her brother suggests the title “The Lost Paradise (*Le Paradis Perdu*)”<sup>96</sup> and she replies no, “The Lost Hell (*l’Enfer Perdu*)” to which her brother retorts: “All that we lose is

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<sup>95</sup> « Peut-être ai-je écrit une enfance heureuse parce que ce retour dans notre enfance algérienne joue en contraste et fait office d’une certaine compensation avec ce qu’a de terrifiant la situation actuelle en Algérie (...) l’idée que nous avons pu vivre ensemble dans une certaine harmonie ».

<sup>96</sup> In French, the word “paradis” means both “paradise” and “heaven.” Here, I am choosing to translate it as the former, due to the common use of “lost paradise” when referring to one’s childhood.

paradisiacal” to which she concludes: “It’s infernal....The hell of paradise” (121).<sup>97</sup> Cixous’s narrator’s comment that her past in Algeria was a “hell of paradise” might be speaking to the reality of Algeria today and at the time of her memoir, and the contradiction between her nostalgic desire to return and the painful reality of Algerian existence<sup>98</sup>.

With this type of nostalgia, it is clear that the possibility of “homecoming” is literally impossible: one can never return to one’s childhood. It is simply nostalgia for nostalgia’s sake, and could never result in any real actions. It is a desire for something which they know they can never achieve, and it is therefore quintessentially nostalgic—that necessary “distance” Stewart cites will forever remain, with no danger of it ever breaking out of the box that contains it. Since their homecoming will not be actualized in reality, these authors must return home through their texts, as Gruen proposes. They write their own “history” through memory, reminding us of the importance of these types of texts in the commemoration of a community and the formation of its narrative.

The texts are all written in French, the language of the colonizer, and while it could be seen as a “native” language for most of these women, only one of them (Moati) is actually “native” to France. Other languages instead infiltrate their works, such as Arabic, Judeo-Arabic, Hebrew, and Spanish, as well as the cultural expressions of their homelands. Boym poses the question: “When we start speaking

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<sup>97</sup> « Tout ce que nous perdons est paradisiaque....C’est infernal....L’enfer du paradis ».

<sup>98</sup> She lived in a war-torn Algeria, a place that she once describes as full of hate due to colonialism: “There has always been horrible violence in this country. It was not the Algerian war that brought this about, I believe it was colonization...[*Il y a toujours eu une violence féroce dans ce pays. Ce n’est pas la guerre d’Algérie qui a entraîné cela, je pense que c’est la colonisation*]” (Le Boucher 77)<sup>98</sup>. She calls Algeria a “*pays de sang* (country/land of blood)” where there were always war, massacres and violence (77).

of home and homeland, we experience the first failure of homecoming. How does one communicate the pain of loss in a foreign language? Why bother?" (251) What does it tell us if these authors are only able to communicate their experiences primarily in the language of a "motherland" that is not truly theirs? One way in which they attempt to bridge this gap between their memories and the lack of language to convey them is through a reliance on imagery, a nostalgic and sensual imagery that connects them to their lost homelands.

## Chapter 2: Bridging the Gap with Imagery

### Woman, Nostalgia, and the Body

Boym claims that what one misses when one is nostalgic for home (in addition to missing one's childhood) is a longing not for an actual location, but rather for "a sense of intimacy with the world" (251). What I argue in this chapter is that the reliance on sensual and natural imagery in texts by Jewish women writers of North African origin is an attempt to reconnect with this intimacy, which as Boym points out can be emotional or sexual (251). The images of feet, of the body, and of nature that these authors use are all connected to what Boym calls the "intimacy" with the world that lends itself to nostalgia. This intimacy, however, is not always expressed blatantly in the works of exiled writers, posits Boym, who use "*intimation* [sic], of speaking about the most personal and intimate pain and pleasure through a 'cryptic disguise.' Playing a game of hide-and-seek with memories and hopes... seems to be the only way to reflect the past without becoming a pillar of salt" (252). As with Memmi and Dugas, Boym uses the Biblical image of the pillar of salt to show the embodiment of nostalgia. Lot's wife's body literally *transforms* due to her longing for home. Boym creates the term "Diasporic intimacy" to demonstrate this entanglement of one's self, of one's body and soul, with the longing for homeland. She claims that this intimacy is "dystopic by definition" and is "rooted in the suspicion of a single home, in shared longing and belonging" (252). She adds that it is "haunted by the images of home and homeland, yet it also discloses some of the furtive pleasures of exile" (253).

The tale of Lot is noteworthy in that it is not Lot, but rather his wife, who gives into the temptation of nostalgic desire, conveying a certain message not only about women's emotional nature but the ways in which their emotions are often represented as *embodied* literally by their flesh. Cixous argues that women's femininity, as well as their ways of expressing that femininity, "derives from the body, from the anatomical, the biological difference, from a whole system of drives which are radically different for women than for men" ("Interview" 20).

The process of women writing is often described as an "embodied" experience; as Trinh Minh-ha points out in *Woman, Native, Other*, many authors have spoken to the need for women to "write through their bodies" (36) in order to find themselves. Minh-ha echoes Cixous in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa":

By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display.... Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth. (Marks and Courtivron 250)

This passage, as well as many others in this essay, demonstrates how Cixous sees a woman writing as an experience which cannot be divorced from the very real physical component. In a famous interview in *Signs*, Marguerite Duras claims that "the rhetoric of women...is anchored in the organism, in the body" (Marks and Courtivron 238). The same is true, Cixous contends, for a woman's speech:

Listen to a woman speak at a public gathering.... She doesn't "speak," she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the 'logic' of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact, she

physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body...  
(Marks and Courtivron 251)

In writing about her Algerian childhood, Cixous is therefore "laying herself bare," as is exemplified by her bare feet, which I discuss later. Her feet's nakedness represents this vulnerability that comes when a woman expresses herself, inevitably "signifying" herself through her physical body. She cannot be divorced from this body, and it therefore affects the way in which she communicates her experiences. In the texts I examine here, writing nostalgia (in a search for the "intimacy" of home) comes through in the authors' imagery which connects their bodies to the earth, and their sensuality to their identity.

The embodied nature of these authors' nostalgia for homeland also echoes the popular notion in feminist post-colonial theory that a woman's body is often the site of struggle over national and colonial identity.<sup>99</sup> "All nationalisms are gendered," Anne McClintock argues in *Dangerous Liaisons* (89), and adds that "women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit....Women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency" (90). According to McClintock, women are not only "symbolic signifiers of national difference" but also "active transmitters and producers of national culture" (*Liaisons* 90). The signs of difference and sameness that exist in these women's bodies, then, can also have a greater meaning, carrying with them not only signs of class and social status, as I discuss here, but of nationality and culture.

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<sup>99</sup> See for example Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds*, New York: Methuen, 1987.

### **Images of Nature**

One of the most prominent ways in which these Jewish women writers of North African origin experience “intimacy” with their homelands is through nature. André Chouraqui describes how the North African Jews, in particular those of Algeria, were “ardently attached to the country itself, a land both rich and beautiful” (275). Most of these authors therefore rely very heavily on natural images to convey the desired feeling of their lost homelands. This is true because of the symbolic nature of one’s land as being one’s nation, one’s citizenship, one’s identity, as well as on a more visceral level; these authors have a need to experience their lost homelands through their senses, through their bodies, and through the earth. With vegetation, climate, food, landscape, and sensuality, all as symbols of culture, identity, and memory, much of their nostalgia is shaped by a return to a more “primitive” and natural state.

Looking to Terry Goldie’s studies on representations of native peoples, we could consider the reference to nature as a perceived return to innocence, to something that was lost: “The ‘natural’ character of the indigene is etymologically obvious in the term itself. It represents beginnings. Similar associations are provided by related words such as ‘roots’” (21). Nature might therefore “represent a beginning” for these authors, or at least bring them back to their own roots. It may also be an attempt to gain back the security and comfort which such natural surroundings gave them, in comparison to the harshness of their new environments. In citing Joel Kovel, Goldie continues:

Kovel considers the divorce from nature as psychologically debilitating: “Abstraction and splitting gain power without awareness, and so serve the needs of repression. But they also diminish the self, and progressively cut it off externally from what is done to the world. The result is an inner void, which is filled synthetically, just as the machines fill in the gaps in the natural landscape torn up in the name of production.” The embrace of the indigene is thus presented in many texts as a return to a whole, before the “abstractions and splitting” of civilized life. (36)

Perhaps these writers find this separation from the nature that surrounded them as children, or at least this nature as *representative* of another time and place, as traumatic, and must return to this nature in order to “fill in the gaps” caused by their new, strange, cold lives in France.

## Climate

Climate is a common metaphor that runs through these narratives to describe the complex identities associated with living between two worlds. The sensory images related to heat and cold reflect the ambivalence of the authors’ connection to their homelands as well as to their new homes, in most cases, in France.

In *Le Marabout de Blida*, Cohen often compares the climates of France and North Africa. She expresses how she longs for the heat of the south, where you can’t necessarily tell that it is “hot” (23)<sup>100</sup>. This is unlike the heat of a Parisian summer, for instance, where it is humid and overwhelming, and the heat is a burden: “Summer in the French capital is an insult to summer, even along the Seine where the coolness of the water makes the heavy, humid days more humane” (95)<sup>101</sup>. She sees heat as not suitable for Paris, or at least, Paris as not suitable for the heat: “I wished [the sun]

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<sup>100</sup> « qui ne fait pas cette impression de chaleur ».

<sup>101</sup> « L’été dans la capitale française est une insulte à l’été, même si au bord de la Seine la fraîcheur qui monte de l’eau rend plus humaines des journées lourdes et humides ».

would turn black, this city is not used to the heat” (27)<sup>102</sup>. Again, the oppressive climate of France is a metaphor for its stifling, unwelcoming culture. Cohen also speaks of how her skin has lightened since living in Paris, and since people from the south associate light skin with sickness (21) she therefore has the “logical skin color for France” (21)<sup>103</sup>. In these passages, Cohen paints a bleak picture of France, and yet at other points in her narrative, she speaks of throwing away her past and longing for nothing but the cold winters of Paris. This contradiction is central to Cohen’s text, demonstrating the ambivalence of her identity between her new French identity and her southern roots.

Cixous’s complicated identity is exemplified by a story her mother tells her about bringing two pigeons to a Rabbi in town so that he could kill them properly. When the Rabbi is preparing to kill the first pigeon by plucking feathers from its neck, the second one flies away. He says that he can’t kill the first one, because they must always be together, either live or die together, so she returns with no pigeons. Cixous uses this image of the pigeon as a metaphor, comparing herself to the pigeon that flew away after its neck had been plucked of feathers—she flew away to France, not knowing where she was going and what she was heading towards:

I arrived in France, my neck naked, it was so cold everywhere, inside, outside, up and down and all around, I looked everywhere trying to find myself in vain. No I didn’t come to France, this winter, I certainly had never thought of this winter called France, I had only finally left Algeria leaving there the feathers that protect the place of life. (157)<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> « Je souhaiterais que [le soleil] devienne noir, cette ville n’est pas adaptée à la chaleur... »

<sup>103</sup> « la peau logique couleur de France ».

<sup>104</sup> « J’arrivai en France, le cou nu, il faisait tellement froid partout, dedans, dehors, en haut en bas et tout le long, je cherchai partout où me trouver et en vain. Non je n’étais pas venue en France, cet hiver, je n’y avais d’ailleurs jamais pensé à cet hiver appelé France, j’avais seulement enfin quitté l’Algérie en y laissant les plumes qui protègent l’endroit de vie ».

Just like Cohen, who repeatedly refers to the coldness of Paris versus the warmth of the “South,” Cixous uses the same metaphor of climate, demonstrating not only that France is a cold place upon her arrival, but that France is literally winter itself, and therefore she is unable to find herself within this winter. Interestingly enough, she claims that she looked all over France to try to find where she belonged, only in vain, much like her attempt to “arrive in Algeria,” only in vain. This is the essence of her split identity. She doesn’t belong anywhere, and is always trying to “arrive” wherever she goes- in France, in Algeria, everywhere. This may indeed be the constant struggle of the identity of exile.

When the young Marie in Moati’s novel looks at her family’s situation as they are forced to move to France, she speaks of how difficult it will be for her parents’ generation to adapt to being “French,” citing specifically the climate that contrasts that of Tunisia. When she is talking to her Muslim friend Slim about leaving Tunisia and questioning where she belongs, he says to her: “This is your home. Tunisia will still be your country.”<sup>105</sup> She replies:

No Slim, you know full well. I am French and my place will be in France once Tunisia finally goes back to the Tunisians. The problem is different for my parents, for older people who have spent their lives here. How can they get used to Parisian life, to the cold, to the different living conditions of Europe? Redoing one’s life at sixty or older, isn’t that horrible? (323)<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> « Tu es ici chez toi. La Tunisie restera ton pays ».

<sup>106</sup> « Non, Slim, tu le sais bien. Je suis française et ma place sera en France quand la Tunisie reviendra enfin aux Tunisiens. Le problème est différent pour mes parents, pour les gens âgés qui ont passé leur vie ici. Comment pourront-ils s’habituer à la vie parisienne, au froid, aux conditions d’existence si différentes de l’Europe? Se refaire une vie à plus de soixante ans, n’est-ce pas horrible » ?

This reference to the coldness of Paris echoes once again the concerns of both Cohen and Cixous, who discuss the change in climate between their homeland in North Africa and their new, cold, foreign home in Paris. This contrast between the climates symbolizes the contrast of identities that Marie and her parents experience—as she states, will they be French or Tunisian? Where will they belong? The Parisian climate being described as cold, as opposed to the warmth of the south, also represents an unwelcoming, harsh new culture especially for the older generation of Tunisian Jews.

Darmon's narrator Sarah Lévy also refers to France in terms of hot and cold. Once her family moves there, she describes her feelings towards her homeland: "We abandoned the heat of copper for the coldness of tin and I suddenly realized that I loved this land, this country, these people," referring to her homeland Morocco (113)<sup>107</sup>. Spire comments on this moment in Darmon's text: "The depart for France so promising, so awaited, reveals to Sarah the local Moroccan life, so baroque, so simple and grand, full of noise, flowers and sun" (284)<sup>108</sup>. The heat from this sun creates a warm, welcoming memory for Sarah, whose nostalgia is embodied in the sensory perception of the difference in climate between her two "homes." Sarah's metaphor here is also fitting in that she finds herself very unwelcomed by her husband's French Ashkenazi family, who criticize her customs and what they see as her non-Jewish traditions.

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<sup>107</sup> « Nous abandonnions la chaleur du cuivre pour le froid de l'étain et je découvris brusquement que j'aimais cette terre, ce pays, ces gens ».

<sup>108</sup> « le départ pour la France si prometteur, tant attendu, révélera à Sarah la vie locale marocaine, si baroque, si simple et grande, pleine de bruit, de fleurs et de soleil ».

## Flora

In many of these authors' works, vegetation plays a crucial role in acting as a symbol of the North African culture, as well as a connection to the earth. In an interview with Marianne Bosshard, Annie Cohen once said that she was "*sans terre* [without roots]" [sic] (Sartori and Hage 2005). Yet in a recent interview, Cohen insists that she "needs the earth (*a besoin de terre*)" and for this she goes to the square near her apartment in Paris, in order to connect to the nature that grows there: "Sometimes when things are going badly, I go to the square.... There are these one hundred year old chestnut trees, they have enormous trunks... I put my back against the chestnut tree. In order to touch the tree. I need the strength that comes from the earth" (Interview)<sup>109</sup>. At one point in her text, Cohen also describes herself as "a blade of grass born between the disjointed pavement of the street with walls covered in vines, determined to attached itself to the little bit of earth that it needs to live" (29)<sup>110</sup> and writes that "the plane-tree in my back pulls apart my vertebrae and distributes its sap in my disloyal bones" (37)<sup>111</sup>. Cohen is choosing to represent Algeria as something that is invading the narrator's body, despite herself, in an uncomfortable manner, once again displaying the painful ambivalence of her identity, as well as the inevitable embodiment of her desire to find belonging. Once again, Cohen relies on natural imagery to express her conflicted identity.

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<sup>109</sup> « Parfois quand je vais très mal, je vais dans le square....Il y a des marronniers centenaires, ils ont des troncs énormes... Je mets mon dos contre le marronnier. Pour toucher l'arbre. J'ai besoin de la force qui vient de la terre ».

<sup>110</sup> « un brin d'herbe né entre les pavé disjoints de la rue aux murs recouverts de vigne vierge, attaché à fortifier le peu de terre qu'il lui fallait pour vivre ».

<sup>111</sup> « le platane dans mon dos écartèle mes vertèbres et distribue sa sève à mes os infidèles ».

Moati also uses a plant as a symbol in her novel as the young Marie takes off for Paris. Slim and Mounera call out to her “Don’t forget your country!” (347)<sup>112</sup>, and as a way of doing so, she brings jasmine with her so that it will bloom in Paris and she will always have a piece of home with her there. Just as the jasmine will help Marie remember her homeland of Tunisia, many of these authors’ memories of their homelands, particularly in connection to family rituals and traditions, feature plants and flowers, emphasizing the importance of nature and the senses in the representation of these memories.

Flowers are important symbols because they affect the sense of smell as well as sight. For example, Goldmann’s aunt Juliette fondly recalls the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, where they “built a nice shed on the terrace, covered in white sheets, garnished with Chinese lanterns of different colors, myrtle leaves and flowers” (82)<sup>113</sup>. Cohen writes: “In Algiers, the roses were as fat as Brittany artichokes, huge, roses, roses, with amazing scents, gardens of gladiolas and arum lilies, roses and carnations, daisies and lilies...” (98)<sup>114</sup>. In Kahn’s novel, the French character Anne thoroughly enjoys tending to her garden, with all the beautiful trees, flowers, and vegetation of Algeria that she finds to be so wonderful. To her, these things represent a fairly utopian vision of Algeria, in an exoticizing way. As in many of the texts, images of North Africa are often presented in a sensual manner, emphasizing the connection between the body and its environment as well as the beauty and the warmth of the natural surroundings.

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<sup>112</sup> « N’oublie pas ton pays! ».

<sup>113</sup> « dressait une belle cabane sur la terrasse, entourée de draps blancs, garnie de lampions de couleurs, de feuilles de myrte et de fleurs ».

<sup>114</sup> « À Alger, les roses étaient aussi grosses que des artichauts bretons, énormes, roses, roses, aux odeurs de folie ; les jardins de glaïeuls et d’arums, de roses et d’oeillets, de marguerites et de lis... »

Cohen's natural descriptions, however, are more often tied to her new life in Paris, in particular the plants and trees that grow in the small square by her Parisian home, than to her memories of Algeria. She often compares the vegetation in that square to those of Algeria, exemplifying her feelings towards her identity as an exiled Algerian in Paris. Throughout her narrative, Cohen is afraid of her nostalgia for Algeria getting out of control and attempts to prevent this by containing her own Parisian life within this square. Here she is, as Kovel maintains, "cut off" from the rest of the world and attempts to fill her emptiness by cavorting with nature. The square becomes a metaphor for the life she has created for herself in Paris, which contains the vegetation, climate, and culture she has adapted to since she left Algeria to live there. If she can contain this new existence within this little square, she does not have to deal with the messy, "unpredictable" chaos that the memories of her life and her past in Algeria create inside of her. Much like Cohen, Anne in Kahn's novel encloses her world into her garden, being blinded to the world outside of it.

As she tells the *marabout*, her spiritual guide, Cohen goes frequently to this square to "contemplate nature" (151) and states that she has become accustomed to the vegetation that grows there: "...I learned to love the maple and cedar trees of the Atlantic that grew in the square in my neighborhood" (107),<sup>115</sup> proclaiming how she loves "winter as much as the north" and the "skeletons" of dead plants "as much as the cold" (153). Similar to Cixous's contradictory descriptions of her feelings about Paris, Cohen's statements give the reader the feeling that she is trying to convince herself of something. Cohen learned to love these new kinds of "Northern" trees and this new climate, certainly, but there is an amount of regret, sadness, and loss tied up

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<sup>115</sup>« ... j'avais appris à aimer les érables et les cèdres atlantiques de mon square de quartier... »

in this new love. Cohen herself reflects this regret when she describes her transformation from warm “Southern” vegetation to cold Parisian shrubbery: “I was an orange tree in plain earth, I had become a bush in the forest of Fontainebleau!” (27)<sup>116</sup>.

In Ben’s narrative, she also uses the metaphor of being transformed into a tree, in this case, to escape the atrocities of life. Shortly after she is kicked out of school for being Jewish, she becomes ill and very sad, reading about the story of Joseph and his brothers who sell him out: “This world was full of nothing but meanness. Who was going to help me transform into a pine tree in order to escape all cruelty?” (109)<sup>117</sup> Her desire to be transformed into a part of nature goes back to Goldie’s theory about the return to the primitive state as a return to innocence, to childhood. This transformation also recalls Lot’s wife transformation, where a desire to return literally changes the form of her body.

When Cohen’s narrator finally brings the *marabout* to her beloved square, she says to him: “It took me twenty years, *marabout*, to accept seeing an oleander or orange tree again, and today, I still can’t go towards the south” (150).<sup>118</sup> The angry *marabout* replies: “You prefer the distorted *ginkgos* of your square!” (150)<sup>119</sup>, and then walks on the “*pelouses interdites* (restricted grassy areas)” (150), blatantly showing his disrespect for this “*patrie*” and the embodiment of this country in her

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<sup>116</sup> « J’étais un oranger en pleine terre, je suis devenue une fougère de la forêt de Fontainebleau ».

<sup>117</sup> « ce monde ne vivait que de méchancetés. Qui donc allait m’aider à me transformer en Pin pour échapper à toutes cruautés » ?

<sup>118</sup> « J’ai mis vingt ans, marabout, pour accepter de revoir un laurier-rose ou un oranger, et aujourd’hui encore je n’arrive pas à descendre vers le Midi ».

<sup>119</sup> « Tu préfères les ginkgos dénaturés de ton square » !

Parisian square.<sup>120</sup> He adds: “*Your land is elsewhere....* You can go up and go down, but you will always be the beautiful daughter of the roots of your tribe. And believe me, that goes further than... the roots of your plant, whose name I’ve forgotten” (*emphasis added* 153)<sup>121</sup>. Cohen is incredulous at this dismissal of her beloved plant, vehemently reminding him of the name of the flower, information the *marabout* does not care about. His reply is that “The beauty of a plant comes from its capacity to change directions, to adapt, to turn towards other suns!” (153)<sup>122</sup> His metaphor is an obvious comment on Cohen’s necessity to adapt, or perhaps, to *readapt* to the warm sun of her past, instead of rigidly remaining in her closed off Parisian square of identity. Cohen herself has internalized such contradictions, even before the *marabout*’s disruptive appearance in her life, and expresses her own self-proclaimed “betrayal” of her homeland by her not only moving to a “cold” place like Paris, but more importantly by her *adaptation* to such a place. She cries out to the *marabout*: “...how could I love my people... I betrayed the South, I betrayed my land. I spit on my ancestors’ soil, I seek the land of peace... ” (134)<sup>123</sup>.

The *marabout*’s play on the word “roots” is a crucial one, and definitely points to the importance of these authors’ use of plants and trees as symbols of their identity. Cohen’s narrator is attempting to implant herself in this new French culture, and yet, as the *marabout* points out, these roots are very shallow and weak, unlike her

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<sup>120</sup> « Pelouses interdites » indicates a section of grass, in a park or outside of some public or private building, that is off-limits. The closest English equivalent would be a sign saying “Do not walk on grass.”

<sup>121</sup> « Ta terre est ailleurs.... Tu peux monter et descendre, tu seras toujours la belle fille des racines de ta tribu. Et crois-moi ça va plus loin que ... les racines de ta plante dont je ne me souviens plus du nom ».

<sup>122</sup> « La beauté d’une plante vient de sa faculté à se bouger les orientations, à s’adapter, à se tourner vers d’autres soleils » !

<sup>123</sup> « ...comment peut-on aimer les siens, j’ai trahi le Sud, j’ai trahi ma terre. J’ai craché sur le sol de mes ancêtres, et je cherche la terre de la paix ».

connection to the land of her “tribe” in Algeria. In a significant passage at the end of the story, Cohen walks by her square only to find that the trees have been uprooted without her knowledge. This could be symbolic of a feeling of her past being taken away from her without her consent, or perhaps a reflection of the pain of being uprooted from her land and being forced to be replanted elsewhere. It could also symbolize the uprooting of her new French identity as she struggles to find a balance between it and the past that the *marabout* forces her to confront.

Much like Cohen’s narrator is confronted about her “transformation” into a new, northern, colder form of vegetation, so does Cixous’s narrator’s brother confront her about the pine trees that surround her Parisian home. These trees are an important symbol in Cixous’s text, acting as representative of her new life in Paris, as well as her connection to the “land” she plants herself in. When her brother comes to visit her in Paris, he dismisses the pine trees in her backyard as not being “real” pine trees like those back in Algeria. He uses them as a representation of Cixous’s narrator’s new home, and is amazed that she could live there with such “idiotic” trees:

The sea is not the sea, the sky is nothing like the sky, the pine trees, when I look at the pine trees here all I see are husks of pines, only reproductions of pine trees, when you define these pine trees here you must tell the truth, they are idiotic pine trees, look how this pine tree goes straight up look... I tell you it’s idiotic and at the end of 20 meters a feather duster, looklook my brother says whereas the Algerian pine is a parasol pine, and not idiotic, a graceful twisty velvety sunshade ... (88)<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup>(With partial translation taken from Brahic, p. 50.) « La mer n’est pas la mer, le ciel n’a rien à voir avec le ciel, les pins, quand je regarde les pins d’ici je ne vois que des pins extérieurs, rien d’autre que des pins reproduits, dans la définition des pins d’ici tu dois dire la vérité, ce sont des pins idiots, regarde ce pin il monte tout droit regarde...te dis-je cet idiot et au bout des vingt mètres un plumeau, regarderegarde dit mon frère tandis que le pin d’Algérie est un pin parasol, et non pas idiot, parasol gracieux tordu et velouté... »

Cixous's narrator uses her brother's opinion of the pine trees to symbolize his view of France and her new life in France in general. She continues:

...look at this tree on the right, how ridiculous it is, it's grotesque here the idiotic pine tree is grotesque and you don't say so, and all that I experience alone, thinks my brother... and I can't even tell you that I experience it alone since by all evidence, thinks my brother, you don't experience any of what I experience, the proof is that you can *live here* h-ere. The more I come back here to see you the stronger my conviction that you never knew Algeria, the more I feel objectively in danger of mutilation, since you could have totally renounced what fundamentally unites us, he thinks... (88)<sup>125</sup>

It is not clear here whether Cixous's narrator is projecting this thought onto her brother or whether he is expressing his opinion out loud. If it is indeed the former, then his perceived point of view could be seen as her own fears, her own perceptions of herself in this new life, in this new land of strange pine trees. Much like Cohen, Cixous's narrator appears to have a sense of betrayal of her homeland by having adapted to her new life in France, as is symbolized by these "different" trees.

## Food

Food, like metaphors and symbols of nature, is obviously a key cultural element for exiled peoples. According to Boym, early patients diagnosed as "nostalgic" in the 17<sup>th</sup> century had "an amazing capacity for remembering sensations, tastes, sounds, smells, the minutiae and trivia of the lost paradise that those who remained home never noticed. Gastronomic and auditory nostalgia were of particular

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<sup>125</sup> « regarde ce pin à droite comme il est ridicule, c'est grotesque ici le pin idiot est grotesque et tu ne le dis pas, et tout cela je l'éprouve seul, pense mon frère... et je ne peux même pas te dire que je l'éprouve seul puisque de toute évidence, pense mon frère, tu n'éprouves rien de ce que j'éprouve, la preuve c'est que tu peux vivre ici i-ci. Plus je reviens par ici à seule fin de te voir plus ma conviction que tu n'as pas connu l'Algérie se fortifie, plus je me sens objectivement en danger de mutilation, puisque tu peux avoir renoncé totalement à ce qui au fond nous unissait, pense-t-il... »

importance” (4). Apparently, studies showed that tasting their mother’s soup was a huge nostalgic trigger for Swiss soldiers of the time (4). Likewise, in many of these texts, food is another aspect that represents the authors’ homelands, in particular as compared with the food of France.

Food as a cultural symbol can be seen at one point in Ben’s story, when her French classmates come across a wild mint plant, and inquire what it is and what it is used for. Without hesitation, Ben explains:

There was no question that I could tell them how, in Algerian families, we used this plant for this sacred dish [couscous- a native North African dish]. Also, thrilled to appear knowledgeable in front of all of these girls from the most prestigious French colonial families, I said to them: “This plant? It is used in my family to ‘do dinner.’”(Ben 101)<sup>126</sup>

This knowledge of a native North African plant sets her apart from her French colonial classmates, whose connection to the earth, to the culture of Algeria does not exist the way that it does for Ben. (Ben’s use of the term “sacred dish” echoes Goldmann’s text where she refers to her grandmother preparing what she calls the “sacrosanct couscous” (39).) The same relationship between food and culture can be seen in Kahn’s novel when Sélim, the Algerian gardener of the French Anne, ponders about the differences between the food in France and the food in Algeria. At one of Anne’s parties, as he watches the guests circulate in the garden, he wonders to himself “what the French could possibly eat when they didn’t know of the existence

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<sup>126</sup> « Il n’était pas question de leur dire comment, dans nos familles algériennes, était utilisée cette plante pour ce plat sacré. Aussi, ravie d’avoir l’air savante au milieu de ces filles qui portaient les noms français parmi les plus prestigieux de la colonisation française, je leur dis: ‘ Cette plante? Elle sert dans ma famille à ‘faire le manger’ ».

of *méchoui* (a dish consisting of a whole roasted sheep)” (41)<sup>127</sup>. Once again, food as a metonymy for culture and cultural memory is very prevalent in these texts, and its description contributes to the nostalgic tone of many of these narratives.

Such comparison between French and North African food plays a crucial role in Darmon’s novel. As Sarah Lévy’s family prepares for their departure for France, they are unsure what they should take with them that they will be unable to find abroad. For example, they ponder, does olive oil even exist there? (117) They are positive that the French “never ate tomatoes, nor oranges, nor lemons, nor olives, nor hot peppers” (117)<sup>128</sup>. As a consequence of this confusion, they take with them several large baskets and bundles of fruits, vegetables, and spices. In a comic yet symbolic scene, upon their arrival in the Orly airport in Paris, Sarah’s grandmother, *La Mamie*, accidentally drops these parcels and “a spectacular avalanche of green and black olives, oranges, lemons were crushed onto the heads of the men below, with a dull sound of broken bottles that spilled out all the scents and local color of a spice market” (119)<sup>129</sup>. This image of the avalanche of color is representative of the colorful and multiply-layered identity of Sarah and her family. Cohen uses a similar image in her narrative, describing the mixture of her cultures as a “*bouillabaisse*” (a soup from Provence that contains many types of fish and seafood) (37).

Cohen relies on all of her senses throughout the text, depending heavily on smell and taste. Therefore, food plays an important role in her descriptions of the *marabout*, and the images of her past that his presence brings about for her:

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<sup>127</sup> « ce que pouvaient bien manger les Français quand ils ignoraient l’existence du *méchoui* ».

<sup>128</sup> « ne mangeaient jamais des tomates, ni d’oranges, ni de citrons, ni d’olives, ni de piments ».

<sup>129</sup> « une avalanche spectaculaire d’olives noires et vertes, d’oranges, de citrons s’écrasait sur les crânes des messieurs du bas, dans un bruit mat de flacons cassés qui déversaient toutes les senteurs et la couleur locale d’un marché aux épices ».

When I saw him,... his face and his body transformed into other forms, landscapes, colors, eggplants, smells of *mérou*<sup>130</sup> with tomato sauce, circles of zucchini fried in a pot of olive oil, grilled red peppers... wrapped dates, sweet potatoes in syrup, caramelized. (19)<sup>131</sup>

Here she uses traditional North African cuisine as a symbol of her past as it is manifested in her contact with the *marabout*. Instead of stating this explicitly, she engages the senses of the reader, in order to evoke the sensual image of the South.

In Goldmann's text, her aunt Juliette recalls the daily life of a Tunisian Jewish kitchen, describing it as being full of "cases of dates, boxes of *halva*<sup>132</sup>, chili peppers, *boutargue*<sup>133</sup>. On the ground, immense jars of oil, jugs of honey next to large bags of semolina and couscous" (82)<sup>134</sup>. Once again, integrating this cultural element of food depicts her Tunisian memories or representation of the past in a way that is connected to the senses and ultimately to the body.

Cohen also remembers her mother's trips to the market, where loaded up with food like a "donkey," the porter follows her mother:

between the displays of vegetables in the Clauzel market, she carried, also, I don't know how many baskets filled with *mérou*, eggplants, *cardes*<sup>135</sup>, tomatoes, dates, fresh figs, peppers, sweet potatoes, grenadines, oranges,

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<sup>130</sup> « Grand poisson sphérique des côtes de la Méditerranée, à la chair très délicate [Large spherical fish from the Mediterranean coasts, with very delicate flesh] ». (Paul Robert and Alain Rey, eds. *Le Robert micro : dictionnaire d'apprentissage de la langue française*. Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1994).

<sup>131</sup> « Quand je le voyais, ... son visage et son corps se démultipliaient, offrant d'autres formes, des paysages, des couleurs, des aubergines, des parfums de mérou à la sauce tomate, des rondelles de courgettes frites dans une poêlée d'huile d'olive, des poivrons rouges grillés... des dattes fourrées, des patates douces au sirop, caramélisées ».

<sup>132</sup> *Halva* is a sweet, block-shaped dessert sometimes made with semolina or tahini.

<sup>133</sup> This is a type of Mediterranean caviar .

<sup>134</sup> « caisses de dattes, de boîtes de halva, piments, de boutargue. Par terre, d'immense jarres d'huile, des gargoulettes de miel voisinaient avec de grands sacs de semoule et de couscous ».

<sup>135</sup> This refers to the edible part of the stalk of a beet or cardoon.

clementines without pits, olives, anchovies, cloves of garlic for the huge *smala* (large family) she needed to feed. (99)<sup>136</sup>

In Moati's novel, food not only represents Tunisia, but it sets apart the "backward" old world Tunisian Jews from the ones more influenced by European culture. Myriam experiences this distinction when she attends a wedding of one of her poor sister's friends. At this point, Myriam is more accustomed to eating "*à l'Européenne*" and the description of the food prepared for this event reminds her of her true Tunisian roots and represents what Myriam sees as a more primitive way of life (128). The meal consists of an egg that is stuffed into a quail, which is in turn stuffed into a pigeon, which is then stuffed into a chicken, which is stuffed into a turkey, which is finally stuffed into a large sheep (128). Myriam always remembers this meal, and associates it with a certain type of Tunisian Jewish tradition (128).

## **Landscapes**

Description of the landscape of France versus that of North Africa is a common thread throughout these works, in particular since it brings forth the food and nourishment for the culture. For example, in both Cohen's and Darmon's texts, the narrators speak about the fat, healthy cows, the "bovines of a noble race" (Darmon 112) or the "Norman cows" (Cohen 49) of France compared to the "appalling visions" of those of Morocco (Darmon 112). They also remark about the difference in greenery between the two locations. According to Sarah Lévy, in France

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<sup>136</sup> « entre les étalages de légumes du marché Clauzel, elle portait, elle aussi, je ne sais combien de couffins remplis de mérrou, d'aubergines, de cardes, de tomates, de dattes, de figues fraîches, de poivrons, de patates douces, de grenades, d'oranges, de clémentines sans pépins, d'olives, d'anchois, de gousses d'ail pour l'immense smala qu'il fallait nourrir ».

“green invades everything. The trees, the prairies, the mountains, nourished, fattened, inlaid with green” whereas in Morocco, “green is just a symbol, hope” (114)<sup>137</sup>. She describes the greens of Morocco as “subtle” unlike the blatant greens of France (114). Cohen’s narrator has the same reaction to the blatant difference in color between the two regions, calling France “a continent... of green lawns! We had never seen that! Our whole lives, we had never seen it: green along the sea, grass surrounding lakes!” (49)<sup>138</sup>. Although the green of France can be seen as a positive description, Darmon’s choice of the word “invades” gives it a negative undercurrent, alluding to the imperial tendencies of France.

Kahn’s character Guy, a French soldier, sees the landscape of Béchar, a small town in Algeria, as beautiful, unlike a description of Algeria he found in Camus’s writing. Quoting Camus, Guy exclaims: “‘We enter into a yellow and blue world where the smelly and acrid sigh of the earth of summer in Algeria welcomes us.’ Evidently, our friend Camus never made it to Béchar” (28)<sup>139</sup>. One of the elements that attracts Guy to Béchar, and in turn evokes a nostalgic tone, is its simple, exotic, “southern” beauty. Camus’s realistic depiction of Algeria is in contrast to Guy’s foreign eye, perceiving the exotic location to have a certain beauty unknown in his native France.

In Darmon’s text, Sarah Lévy attaches her memory of Morocco to its coastal landscape, using imagery of the sand and sea to depict her anticipated nostalgia for

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<sup>137</sup> « le vert envahit tout. Les arbres, les prairies, les montagnes, nourris, engraisés, incrustés de vert....le vert n’est qu’un symbole, espérance ».

<sup>138</sup> « un continent ... de pelouses verdoyantes! On n’avait jamais vu ça! De la vie, on ne l’avait jamais vu: des verdure au bord des mers, de l’herbe au bord des lacs » !

<sup>139</sup> « ‘Nous entrons dans un monde jaune et bleu où nous accueille le soupir odorant et âcre de la terre d’été en Algérie.’ On voit bien que notre ami Camus n’est jamais arrivé jusqu’à Béchar ».

Morocco's beauty. Sarah speaks of how once her family moved to a small village in France, she would no longer "see the sea" (115) and therefore spends her days at the beach, "storing up all of the sun and the sea that I was going to lose along with Morocco.... In letting the sand slip between my fingers, I convinced myself that I was very unhappy, that I was losing my roots, that I was drifting" (116).<sup>140</sup> Much like the roots of the plants in Cohen's narrator's square that the *marabout* discusses, Darmon's use of "roots" here fits in well with her association of Morocco with its natural components—things that Sarah must leave behind. Here it is her fingers, and not her feet or her toes, that seek to capture the essence of her homeland, to absorb it, and to carry it with her. Sarah recognizes that with this move to France, she not only loses the sea, but "with [the sea] would disappear the silent witness to my adolescence, the complicity of our secret understanding" (115)<sup>141</sup>. Once again, nature is tied to innocence, to Sarah's youth, which is being uprooted as she is uprooted from her life in Morocco.

After she moves to France, Sarah's reaction to the first time that she sees "the sea" as the Europeans see it reflects her feelings about her new home in Europe. Sarah's husband's French family takes her and her family to a seaside resort in Italy after her first child is born. Her mother-in-law is thrilled at the sight of this beautiful body of water, asking, "Isn't the sea magnificent?"<sup>142</sup> to which Sarah replies to herself: "The sea, this oily lagoon, domesticated, spread out shamelessly along a band

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<sup>140</sup> « Je passais mes journées à la plage, emmagasinant tout le soleil et toute la mer que j'allais perdre avec le Maroc.... En laissant glisser le sable entre mes doigts, je me persuadais que j'étais très malheureuse, que je perdais mes racines, que je partais à la dérive ».

<sup>141</sup> « avec elle, disparaîtrait le témoin silencieux de mon adolescence, la complicité de notre entente secrète ».

<sup>142</sup> « N'est-ce pas magnifique, la mer » ?

of multi-colored sand, as indecent as a prostitute?” (207) To her and her family, this is not the true “sea”- *La Mer* with a capital “M.” In fact, she uses the same technique as Cixous who claims that Paris is not a “*Ville*” with a capital “V” (see Chapter 4) when she compares this sea to “*Notre Mer à nous, de Notre Plage à nous* (Our Sea, Our Beach),” using capital letters as well<sup>143</sup>:

We were not going to stand there, all three of us, frozen like statues, contemplating with disillusionment this abundance of tourist equipment, mourning the distant memory of Our Own Sea, Our Own Beach. The shock of disappointment was always the same before the vision of these anemic beaches. (208)<sup>144</sup>

The fact that Sarah and her family are “mourning” their memory of Morocco demonstrates the nostalgia that such a landscapes evokes for them. They do not feel as if any other beach could truly be *theirs*, or that they could belong anywhere else than on the beautiful shores of Morocco.

For Myriam in Moati’s novel, “La Mer” has an entirely different meaning. Again, she uses water as an important symbol, however this time it represents freedom and “western” liberation, rather than the oppressive nature of the French sea for Sarah Lévy. When Myriam sees the ocean for the first time, her breath is taken away (106). To her, a poor illiterate girl from the *hara* (ghetto), the ocean is a symbol of progress, of a more enlightened future. This is significant in that on the other side

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<sup>143</sup> Darmon often uses this technique, for example when she speaks about her grandmother as “*La Mamie*”—she is a figure that is larger than life.

<sup>144</sup> « Nous n’allions pas rester figés tous les trois comme des statues, à contempler avec écoeurement cette profusion d’équipements touristiques, en pleurant sur le souvenir lointain de Notre Mer à nous, de Notre Plage à nous. Le choc de la déception était toujours le même devant la vision de ces plages anémiques ».

of this ocean is the Western world, complete with a more “modern” culture and “civilized” society.

Contrasting the climate, vegetation, food and landscapes of North Africa to those of France (the “West”) is prevalent in Darmon’s novel. It is not only the sea and the sand that her family will be leaving behind, but the sights, sounds, and smells of daily life in Morocco. As Sarah Lévy is faced with her family’s departure for France, she reflects upon all that they will be missing, and compares it with what she imagines their new life will be. This image of her new life is full of contradictions; while she claims to be leaving “ignorance” for “culture,” and a primitive state for modernity, she also bemoans the perceived loss of warmth and beauty:

We were going to abandon the song of the *muezzin*<sup>145</sup> for the call of the Sunday morning bells, the sun for the rain, large spaces for the small gardens, the poetry of hills scattered with white cemetery stones for flowery cemeteries garnished with crosses, curly hair and dark dyes for blond and Aryan *touffeurs*, *djellabas*<sup>146</sup> for suit jackets, the royalty of the Empire of *Sharifs*<sup>147</sup> for the Republic, ignorance for culture, the grandeurs of Islam for those of Christianity. We were going to leave modern European cities paired with *medinas*, whose narrow white streets, shadowed alleys and round porches kept the secrets of an immutable and stirring life. We were leaving the violence of oppositions, the infinitely changing variety of scenery, the *casbahs* made of earth married to the mountains, the snow that overhangs the desert, blue that contrasts red, green that struggles with yellow, the gilding of the moon in the blazing of the *medinas* and the donkeys which turn around the *norias*.<sup>148</sup> We were abandoning the *souks*’ aromas of spices and mule dung, this simple and generous life, the heat, the dust, the filth, the misery, the

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<sup>145</sup> According to *Encyclopedia Britannica* “in Islam, the official who proclaims the call to prayer (adhan) on Friday for the public worship and the call to the daily prayer (salat) five times a day, at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and nightfall. To summon worshipers the Jews use a trumpet and the Christians use a bell, but the Muslims use the human voice.” (“muezzin.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007.)

<sup>146</sup> This is a traditional hooded Moroccan garment.

<sup>147</sup> “Arabic title of respect, restricted, after the advent of Islam, to members of Muhammad’s clan of Hashim.” (“sharif.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007.)

<sup>148</sup> This refers to an animal- or water-powered scoop wheel (“technology, history of.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007.)

greatness and the fountains, the cactus and the bougainvillea<sup>149</sup>, the hibiscus and the palm trees, for a life that resembled, from a distance, a smooth, round stone, worn down by the water. We were abandoning the heat of copper for the coldness of tin, and I suddenly realized that I loved this land, this country, these people. We were going towards hope, with all of the anxiety of a newlywed.” (113)

Note that here, Darmon uses Christian or Muslim analogies or contrasts, as opposed to Jewish ones. She speaks of the *muezzin* (Islam) and the Sunday morning bells (Christianity), and not of the Jewish Sabbath which would take place on Friday night or Saturday morning. She uses images of the European versus the Oriental, but there is never a mention of Judaism. She mentions traditional Moroccan customs, styles of dress etc., but not distinctively Jewish ones. It is interesting to note that Darmon’s contrasts in her passage are quite dichotomous and stereotypical in their depiction of East versus West, creating a very Orientalist image of Morocco.

As Edward Said argues in *Orientalism*, “...the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (1-2). This point is illustrated perfectly in this passage of Darmon’s novel. Her description seems to be based on the assumption of this basic difference between East and West, which is Said’s very definition of “Orientalism”:

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.” Thus a very large mass of writers... have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels... (2)

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<sup>149</sup> This is “a genus of about 14 species of shrubs, vines, or small trees, in the four-o’clock family (Nyctaginaceae), native to South America. The inconspicuous flowers are surrounded by brightly coloured papery bracts...” (“Bougainvillea.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007.)

Said adds that this notion of the Orient is “an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West” (5). Darmon’s imagery fits into this “tradition,” referring to the “curly hair and dark eyes” of the natives, as well as the “simple” life they lead. She also mentions the “dust” and “filth” so commonly associated with more “primitive” peoples, as I discuss later. One wonders if her choice of imagery is based on her position as a now French citizen that gives her this Orientalist view of her homeland, or whether this is how she would have described Morocco had she never left it. On the same token, her descriptions of France (“the West”) are pretty stereotypical as well, in particular her use of terms like the “coldness of tin,” and her depiction of the blond “Aryan” population they would now be surrounded by. Other parts of the novel suggest that this description may be lined with a touch of sarcasm, or rather a reflection of the image of Morocco that she sees in the eyes of her Ashkenazi in-laws.

Cohen, in her attempt to trade in her past in North Africa for her new life in Paris, also contrasts the sights, colors, and tastes of the opposite worlds:

Give me the North in order to forget my mother, so she no longer comes back with her corny old southern tunes and her old African accents.... Give me the cold, the snow, the ice, the underbrush of northern forests, the wintry summers, the rain, the fatty land, the wet lawns! Give me the pastures! Take off the table the spices, the cumins, the ginger, the cloves, the nutmeg, the hot peppers, the vanillas, the saffrons, the red peppers, the pomegranates, the olives, the *cardes*, the variants.... Here we are with the French, let’s quickly turn to other things, pork, pork, pig, *jalouf*, cooked meats, too bad, *andouillette*<sup>150</sup>, potted meat, salami... (49)<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> This is a grilled sausage-like dish.

<sup>151</sup> « Donnez-moi le nord pour oublier ma mère, pour ne plus qu’elle revienne avec ses rengaines méridionales et ses accents de vieille Africaine.... Donnez-moi le froid, la neige, le gel, les sous-bois des forêts septentrionales, les étés hivernaux, la pluie, les terres grasses, les gazons humides! Donnez-moi les pâturages! Retirez de la table toutes les épices, les cumins, les gingembres, le clous de girofle, les noix muscade, les piments, les vanilles, les safrans, les poivrons rouges, les grenades, les olives, les

Cohen turns here once again to food in order to compare the warm, southern Algeria to the cold, northern France. What is most interesting in this passage is that she uses the symbol of pork to represent French cuisine, and thus she is presenting France as not Jewish, or even as anti-Jewish, since pork is very obviously a non-Kosher food. In using the phrase “too bad,” she may be interpreting what the French think about the North African Jews—that it is too bad if they cannot or should not eat French cuisine; they must adapt anyway.

Cixous also utilizes the concept of landscape, food and smells to exemplify her divided identity:

The landscape of my childhood was double. On one hand there was North Africa, a powerfully sensual body, that I shared, bread, fruit, odors, spices, with my brother. On the other hand existed a landscape with the snow of my mother. And above the countries, the always present History of wars. (*Rootprints* 196)

As with many of the other authors, Cixous uses the smells and spices of Algeria as a reminder of her past, as a representative of her Algerian identity. She also refers to the sensual nature of the North African body, a trope that appears in many of these texts.

### **The Senses**

The sensual nature of Darmon’s, Cohen’s and Cixous’s passages here is also reminiscent of Goldmann’s text, when she describes her trips to the library, located among the *souks*, where “I felt great happiness crossing the small perfumed and noisy

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cardes, les variantes... ici on est chez les Français, passons vite à autre chose, du porc, du porc, du cochon, du jalouf, de la cochonnaille, tant pis, de l’andouillette, des rillettes, du salami... »

streets. It was for me a sensual and almost physical pleasure, but it was an invasion into a parallel universe, not devalorized, but different, to which I didn't have the keys" (117)<sup>152</sup>. Once again, the link to the homeland of North Africa is tied into the body, into the primitive, into the sensual. In addition, just like Cixous, Goldmann wants to be a part of this world, longs to know more about it, and yet it remains a mystery to which she doesn't have access except through her senses and her own imagination.

This is much like Cixous's description of her nanny Aïcha, whose feel and smell are her link to Algeria—somehow, to her, Algeria is embodied by her, just as the smells of the *souks* embody Tunisia for Goldmann. Cixous describes Aïcha<sup>153</sup> as epitomizing the sensuality of Algeria, with

the beauty of the soft, a rare and difficult beauty. The flabby breasts deliberately badly hitched up, which makes each one autonomous. The round eyes wholly brown wet glistening like brown moons outlined in kohl. The flesh pastries, the look of a layer cake which I still find enticing... (*Reveries of the Wild Woman* 53)<sup>154</sup>

Cixous's imagery of Aïcha, and thus of her Algeria, is not only laden with sensuality but with the cultural symbol of food, which as previously mentioned often represents the memory of North Africa in these texts. Aïcha literally embodies Algeria for Cixous, going back to the notion of women's bodies as sites of national identity.

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<sup>152</sup>« je ressentais un grand bonheur en traversant les ruelles parfumées et bruyantes. C'était pour moi un plaisir sensuel et presque physique, mais c'était une incursion dans un univers parallèle, non pas dévalorisé, mais différent, dont je n'avais pas les clefs ».

<sup>153</sup> We later find out that Aïcha is actually named Messaouda, but her family falls into the Orientalist trap of calling her a stereotypically Arab name without bothering to find out her true identity. When Cixous learns of this fact, she is horrified.

<sup>154</sup>« la beauté du mou, beauté rare et difficile. Les grands seins mous mal accrochés à la corde exprès, ce qui leur donne une autonomie à chacun. Les ronds des yeux entièrement marron mouillés luisants comme des lunes brunes contournées au khôl. Les pâtisseries de chair, un air de pièce montée qui m'allèche encore... »

The embodiment of the “East” through the sensuality of its inhabitants appears in Goldmann’s text as well, when she discusses the inherent sensuality of a “hot country” (122), due to the lack of clothing and the great appreciation for “natural beauty” (123). In contrast, Cixous’s narrator’s admiration for Aïcha is not based on “natural beauty,” but rather the extent to which she views Aïcha as exuding elements of “Algeria.” Goldmann describes:

If the question of sex was never addressed openly, it was implicit in all behavior. Perfumes also played a large role. The jasmine of summer nights, the incense that my grandmother burned the night before a happy occasion... the grey amber necklace that I received for my sixteenth birthday that stained my pillow, my skin, my books. In short, all the sensual and intoxicating heat of the Orient that sometimes made us lose our heads that, I think, left indelible marks on my sensibilities. (123)<sup>155</sup>

The jasmine, the amber, and the heat are all sensual symbols that represent the south for Goldmann and, as she claims, help shape her identity. Despite any claims to the contrary, her text is full of passages like this one, which are laden with nostalgic sentiment and convey a definite longing for the sensual memories of her childhood in Tunisia.

Ben also uses her senses to describe her childhood memories. Here she describes the first day of school:

I went to sleep with my soul and my body bathed in the smells of bath soap and of the new leather of my *bordeaux* shoes with fringed cuffs with laces and with tassels at the end of the laces. I was drunk with scents that I

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<sup>155</sup> « Si la question sexuelle n’était jamais abordée ouvertement, elle était implicite dans tous les comportements. Le rapport avec son propre corps en était en un sens simplifié. Les parfums jouaient aussi un grand rôle. Le jasmin des soirs d’été, l’encens que ma grand-mère faisait brûler à la veille d’un événement heureux... le collier d’ambre gris que je reçus pour mes seize ans et qui imprégnait mon oreiller, ma peau, mes livres. Enfin, toute la chaleur sensuelle et grisante de l’Orient qui nous faisait parfois perdre la tête et qui, je pense, a laissé des marques indélébiles dans ma sensibilité ».

spent the night inhaling, from my pencil case with three flaps of red marble that enchanted me, and from the strong emanations emitted by the box of Crayolas. (21)<sup>156</sup>

Like Goldmann's image of amber rubbing off on her body and her possessions, Ben uses smells as representative of her Algerian childhood, smells that absorbed into her being and stayed with her through adulthood. Ben's reliance on the sense of smell to convey this memory to the reader is a powerful one, once again pointing to the dependence upon sensuality that many of these texts have in depicting the homeland of North Africa.

Cohen's memories of her youth in Algeria are also filled with sensual memories, where the warmth of the south is personified by the people she comes in contact with, just as vegetation and climate exemplify the South in other parts of Cohen's text. In a scene in which she describes her and her friends dancing on the beach, the heat of the south, as it is expressed through sexual desire, is very apparent:

I slide between bodies that stick together and kiss on the neck, I turn as I can, the musicians beat like gods on their congas and shake their maracas in four [beats]. The *grands* move in front of me with bodies of love that want love and pleasure, the women with still wet hair are splendid with sun and salt, the men have in their hips movements that say desire" (34)<sup>157</sup>.

Cohen's description not only radiates sensuality, but also emphasizes the warmth of the natural surroundings (the sun, the sea). Her depiction also conveys the

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<sup>156</sup> « Je m'étais endormie avec l'âme et le corps baigné des odeurs de savonnette et du cuir tout neuf de mes souliers bordeaux aux revers frangés sur le dessus et aux cordons terminés de pompons. J'étais ivre des senteurs que j'avais passé la soirée à humer, de ma trousse à trois volets d'un rouge marbré qui m'enchantait, et des fortes émanations dégagées par la boîte de crayolors ».

<sup>157</sup> « Je me glisse entre les corps qui se collent et se bécotent dans le cou, je tourne comme je peux, les musiciens tapent comme des dieux sur leurs congas et rythment de leurs maracas un air à quatre temps. Les grands bougent devant moi avec leur corps d'amour qui veut l'amour et le plaisir; les femmes aux cheveux encore mouillés sont splendides de soleil et de sel, les hommes ont dans leurs hanches des mouvements qui disent le désir ».

stereotypical image of more “primitive” societies as being driven by visceral needs, such as desire and the need for love.

Darmon echoes this image in her discussion of the Moroccan body:

The body, in Morocco, can light up with happiness. This country of sun, of wide spaces, of sand, of the sea, of the sky, of wind, of trees and of rock, gives fullness to bodies that want to move.... My foot instinctively found its place in the grooves of the rocks. My body let itself be carried and rejected by the waves, absorbed the foam, the sun and the smell of spices. My mouth opened in laughter and hunger, shriveled up in salt and heat, bit grilled corn, oranges and figs, burnt itself on mint and orange blossom tea, tasted the wind of the desert. My arms, my legs liked the resistance and the gentleness of the water, espoused the trees and the rock. My *sexe* melted, moistened itself in the brutal heat of the midday sun, my breasts hardened by the wind and the waves. The body lived the elements, opened up, danced. (97-8)<sup>158</sup>

Darmon’s passage here integrates all the sensual elements—food, climate, landscape, and the body. Sarah’s body has *become* Morocco, just as Lot’s wife becomes a pillar of salt. Once again, the body can be seen as a site of national identity, as the body literally transforms itself into Morocco. We also see the poignant image of the foot as it finds its place in the cracks of the rocks, connecting to the land of Morocco through its crucial touch.

### Images of Feet

Darmon is not the only one who uses this imagery of the foot as a connection to the land. In fact, the body part most often described in this capacity in these texts

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<sup>158</sup> « Le corps, au Maroc, peut s’épanouir avec bonheur. Ce pays du soleil, des grands espaces, du sable, de la mer, du ciel, du vent, des arbres et de la pierre, donne la plénitude aux corps qui veulent bouger.... Mon pied trouvait instinctivement sa place au creux des rochers. Mon corps se laissait porter et rejeter par les vagues, absorbait l’écume, le soleil et le parfum des épices. Ma bouche s’ouvrait dans le rire et la faim, se desséchait au sel et à la chaleur, mordait le maïs grillé, les oranges et les figues, se brûlait au thé parfumé de menthe et de fleurs d’oranger, goûtait le vent du désert. Mes bras, mes jambes aimaient la résistance et la douceur de l’eau, épousaient les arbres et la pierre. Mon sexe fondait, s’humidifiait à la chaleur brutale du soleil de midi, mes seins se durcissaient au vent et à la vague. Le corps vivait l’élément, s’ouvrait, dansait ».

is the feet. Yolande Cohen (with Joseph Yossi Lévy) in her article on Moroccan-Jewish women in Montréal speaks of the “roots” of her community and extends this term to a larger metaphor involving the connection of one’s feet to one’s cultural roots:

We do not feel we have lost our roots, though, in spite of two successive emigrations.... we are like a farmer who does not have a problem finding his roots, since they are always under his feet. Our Moroccan-Jewish identity is rooted in culture and tradition. It can be taken along and transplanted to the soil of the host country, and thrive here as it did in Morocco under the Muslim dhimma [restrictive laws/taxes on Jews in Morocco] and the French protectorate. (Silberstein and Swartz 268)

Yolande Cohen’s statement is reminiscent of Sarah Lévy’s discussion of her family being transplanted to France from their native Morocco (see Chapter 4). Her claim, however, that one’s roots are always under one’s feet is a crucial one, further elucidating the reason why so many of the writers I examine try to explore, recapture, and recreate their homelands, their identities, through their feet. The choice of this symbol represents the journey through their pasts, as they try to reconstruct the memories of their homeland.

The name of Cixous’s short story, “Bare Feet,” is reflected in the beginning of her story, where the young narrator shows her attachment to her native Algerian heritage and history, by a moving description of her hometown of Oran: “Oran was native: one could not not be born, not be birthed, from that white-hot summer’s nest” (51). In describing her connection to the earth and her ancestors of Oran, she speaks of how she “put [her] bare feet down on the stones that had known their feet, stepped where earlier steps had been made, and went all the way back to the family of the Creation, the steps hewn into the rock to the size of [her] earliest ancestors...”

(Cixous, “Bare Feet” 53). Once again, Cixous uses religious terminology such as “The Creation” in her descriptions. In this passage, her feet serve as her bond to the earth of her homeland, as well as a tie to her ancestors. Comparing her ancestors of Oran to those of her mother’s side of the family, coming from Germany, they would be the more “primitive” ones, which is implied in the term “native” Cixous uses when speaking of Oran. Culturally, bare feet would be far more common in Cixous’s homeland of Algeria, than in her new home of Paris, where she could not speak of placing her bare feet on the earth to feel a connection with the city.

She uses the image of feet again in *Rêveries*, talking about feet as a connection to the land. She claims that she has let go of this connection, while her brother still holds on. She also references feet as a connection to her ancestors, to her family, as a sign of her lineage:

...each time I see my brother’s feet, his large toes bend towards the edge of his steps, the way in which he grips the world with his toes, I see my own feet from yesteryear, it is in our feet that you can clearly see our parentage, the same feet, and these are my father’s feet, the same way, —my brother—my father, to take Algeria by the earth—my brother having never stopped holding on and being held onto, me on the other hand one day let go and stretched out my toes—our bare feet feel the quaking muscles of this continually agitated earth rolling. (19-20)<sup>159</sup>

Although Cixous’s narrator insists that she has “let go” of her feet’s grip on Algeria, her narrative certainly shows otherwise. How can her grip be so loose when it is such a part of her? This ambivalent connection to her homeland and to her roots

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<sup>159</sup>« ...chaque fois que je revois les pieds de mon frère, ses gros orteils recourbés sur les bords des marches, sa façon d’agripper le monde avec ses doigts de pied, je vois mes propres pieds d’antan, c’est à nos pieds que l’on voit clairement la parenté, les mêmes pieds, et ce sont les pieds de mon père, la même façon, --mon frère—mon père, de prendre l’Algérie par la terre—mon frère n’ayant jamais cessé de tenir et d’être tenu, moi au contraire ayant un jour lâché prise et allongé les orteils—et nos pieds nus sentent rouler les muscles séismés de cette terre continuellement agitée ».

is consistent throughout Cixous's works, reflecting her own conflicted feelings towards writing about it. This leads us to wonder about the nature of her depiction of her homeland, and how much her ambivalence informs the way in which she shows us her past.

### **The Primitive Body**

Cixous, in an interview in *Terre inter-dite*, explains the notion of “savageness” that she associates with her native land: “But I think what I must do, as someone tied to Algeria in a very complex and divided way, is to make people feel something new. To make them feel what it is to discover that one is a savage being” (72)<sup>160</sup>. She links this primitive state, or this simpler state, to her childhood, as a time when one is not concerned about the complexities of politics and identity one knows and understands as an adult:

My childhood was spent barefoot. My brother and I often talk about how we did dozens of kilometers like that, whereas now it's unthinkable. That's exactly why we need to remember it. It wasn't a sociological sign or a sign of poverty— which that can be sometimes— it was a relationship, a contact. We touch with our feet more than with our hands. And we touch what we usually avoid touching. Because when you are a child, you are not scared to put your feet in dust and dirt. So, you are in this continuous relationship with the earth which is everything, and which, as far as the mountain of Santa Cruz goes [which she describes at the beginning of her story], is also full of dead people since it's an Arab cemetery. My own internal legend wanted my inscription into this society to be through its dead. This continuity between the living and dead that we experienced when we climbed up [the mountain] was very beautiful. (74-5)<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> « Mais je pense que ce qui me revient à moi, en tant que personne liée d'une manière extrêmement complexe et divisée à l'Algérie, est de faire sentir quelque chose qui n'est pas connu. Faire sentir qu'elle est à découvrir comme un être sauvage ».

<sup>161</sup> « J'ai passé mon enfance pieds nus. Nous nous racontons souvent avec mon frère comment nous faisions des dizaines de kilomètres ainsi, alors que maintenant cela n'est même plus pensable. C'est pourquoi il faut le rappeler justement. Ici ce n'était pas un signe sociologique ou un signe de pauvreté- ce que cela pouvait être aussi parfois- c'était un rapport, un contact. On touche avec les pieds plus

The fact that Cixous's narrator and her brother spent most of their childhood barefoot raises many crucial themes within her text. One is the primitive, visceral connection of her body to the land of Algeria, a connection she does not know in her new homeland of France. Another theme is the close association with dirt and dust. The last is the issue of class, which she addresses directly in this passage, contrasting the bare feet of poverty to the voluntary bare feet of her and her brother. They longed to be part of Algeria, to *touch* its stones, to connect with its "savage" nature.

Cixous's legend<sup>162</sup>, the one that she wants to inscribe, is rooted in the body, more specifically in the dirty, savage, barbaric body, which was a focus in the imperial project. Explorers in the colonized lands "returned with stories of barbarism.... Reports of culturally sanctioned practices...ranging from Chinese foot-binding and Polynesian tattooing to African scarification and circumcision, seemed to cry out for a *mission civilatrice*" (Aldrich 201).

Octave Mannoni in *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* discusses the link between the primitive and childhood:

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qu'avec les mains. Et on touche ce qu'en général on évite de toucher. Sauf que lorsqu'on est enfant, on n'a pas peur de marcher dans la poussière et dans la saleté. Donc, on est dans ce rapport de continuité avec la terre qui est tout, et qui, en ce qui concerne la montagne de Santa-Cruz, est aussi pleine de morts puisque c'est un cimetière arabe. Ma propre légende intérieure a voulu que mon inscription dans cette société se fasse en passant par les morts. Cette continuité entre les vivants et les morts, que nous éprouvions quand nous montions, était très belle ».

<sup>162</sup> Cixous's use of the term "legend" here points to an element of the imaginary in her works describing her past in Algeria, highlighting the highly constructed nature of her narratives. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, a legend is a "traditional story or group of stories told about a particular person or place. Formerly the term legend meant a tale about a saint." Legends are linked to folktales and are therefore agreed to have elements of fiction and surreality. The religious link of the term legend also fits into Cixous's terminology, as many of her word choices contain religious undertones. Legends are also "associated with a particular locality or person and are told as a matter of history." Legends are tales that are known for being passed from generation to generation through oral tradition, something that is associated with more primitive societies. ("legend." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007.)

The savage, as I have said, is identified in the unconscious with a certain image of the instincts—of the id, in analytical terminology. And civilized man is painfully divided between the desire to “correct” the “errors” of the savages and the desire to identify himself with them in his search for some lost paradise...because of his unconscious and ambivalent attitude towards his memories of his own early childhood. (21)

Mannoni’s passage echoes Cixous’s notion of the “Paradis Perdu (lost paradise)” that she toys with when deciding on the title of her memoir (see Chapter 1). If we were to follow Freud, then Cixous’s desire to recapture this “lost paradise” would be rooted in this desire to reconnect with the body in a very primal, primitive, *savage* way. This connection is evident in the title of her memoir, referring to herself (presumably) as a “Savage woman” and as mentioned previously, feels it is necessary to discover one’s “savageness” as a creature of this earth.

Cixous’s narrator describes her Algerian identity as not only connected to her feet, but also to the entire body, inside and out, that is affected by her Algerian past. She expresses in *Rêveries*:

I’ve got Algeria in my lungs in my throat I don’t find it strange that it should turn me hot and cold and bruise my nervous system with its toxic overflow. I attribute the scars of my marked body to the *malgerian* force of my imagination, but it’s not that I think I see what I don’t see, it’s that I think what I see and I see what the French do not see (*Reveries of the Wild Woman* 64)<sup>163</sup>

As Cixous’s narrator walks around, a seemingly “normal” French citizen, she feels herself carrying these “splotches” of Algeria that not only mark her as different,

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<sup>163</sup>This passage is taken from the English translation. The original French is : « ...j’ai l’Algérie dans mon poumon dans mon gosier je ne trouve pas étrange qu’elle me donne les fièvres et meurtrisse ma toile mentale de bavures envenimées. J’attribue à la force malgérienne de mon imagination les cicatrices de mon corps ponctué, mais ce n’est pas que je pense voir ce que je ne vois pas, c’est que je pense ce que je vois et je vois ce que les Français ne voient pas... »

but also cause her to see differently from other French citizens as a result of her Algerian perspective. Therefore, no matter how much she may adapt to her new surroundings, she will always feel set apart in fundamental way that can never be erased. It has irrevocably marked her being, just as the red splotch of blood mark her new white sandals as well as her soul, as I discuss shortly. Albert Memmi writes about the irreversible marks that being a colonized person leaves both on one's soul and on one's body, just as Cixous describes: "The body and face of the colonized are not a pretty sight. It is not without damage that one carries the weight of such historical misfortune" (*Colonized* 163). Once again, Cixous's use of metaphors here that refer to the body and parts of the body act as a connection to her Algerian heritage and her more "savage" nature.

Cohen indeed uses the symbol of her feet as a connection to her more "primitive" nature:

The sole of my feet... *admirably* conformed to Northern norms, one could hardly ask them today to go back to the earth of oleanders nor to the earth of jasmine or of orange trees.... Where does God want me, in the North or the South? I become primitive again ever since I amused myself by examining the compass of the sole of my feet. (41-2)<sup>164</sup>

Cohen's use here of the term "primitive" links her feet's true nature, her feet's true desire, to her southern roots. In describing them as a "compass," she expresses the direction in which she is naturally pulled, which is towards a more primitive state. Once again, she uses nature as a symbol of the two identities between which she is

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<sup>164</sup> « Mes plantes de pieds... se sont admirablement conformées aux normes septentrionales, on ne peut guère leur demander aujourd'hui de revenir à la terre des lauriers-roses ni à celle des jasmins ou des orangers.... Où Dieu me veut-il, au nord ou au sud? Je redeviens primitive depuis que je me suis amusée à interroger la boussole de mes plantes de pied ».

torn: that of the northern Parisian self and that of the more “primitive” southern self. It is obvious that Cohen’s use of these symbols contributes to the way in which she desires to represent her homeland—through natural phenomenon—rather than through other means.

Perhaps one of the other reasons that Cixous uses the feet as a symbol in her work is the fact that her father practiced as a podiatrist during World War Two when Vichy laws forbade him from practicing his medicine in Algeria. In a paper entitled “My Algeriance,” she elaborates: “Vichy, which had forbidden him the treatment of bodies, had nonetheless abandoned to him the corns of the feet” (Wood 265-266). Cixous’s choice here demonstrates how she uses both personal family history and political history to help shape her narrative, and how important these elements are in her ultimate search for discovering who she is. This is also a good example of Cixous’s dependence upon wordplay and images to recreate her past. Here she touches again on the importance of the body in her discourse, particularly in the discussion of feet as something dirty, something that her father had to be relegated to when the Jews themselves were being treated as “filth.”

Cixous’s concept of our feet touching that which is “dirty” echoes many theories about the connection of native peoples to the body, which is seen as a dirty entity, full of savage desires. Joel Kovel describes it as: “The mind, good, makes words and thoughts; the body, bad, makes shit and filth” (132).

McClintock in *Imperial Leather* speaks about a fetish for cleaning one’s shoes (more specifically, one’s boots) in Victorian Britain that stems from the distinction

between the filth of the body that comes from contact with the outside world and the cleanliness of one's private (classed) space:

The middle class fetish for boundary purity surfaced in a peculiarly intense fixation with the cleaning of boots. Boots are threshold objects, carrying traces of streets, fields and markets into polished interiors, confusing public with private, work with leisure, cleanliness with dirtiness and thereby accruing a special fetishistic power. For this reason, maids were especially tasked with keeping their employers' shoes scrupulously clean. (171)

Filth, in this case, represents the outside world, where there is contact with other classes, with poverty and dirt, with more primitive states of life. Any signs of this needed to be removed in order to return to one's proper state of existence.

Cohen's need for this filth to be removed is revealed in her narrative, where unlike Cixous's narrator in "Bare Feet," she does not always revel in her connection to Algeria which also occurs through her feet:

There is no longer a single milligram of nostalgia left in my bag, even better, the final departure, the exile was our opportunity, our benediction.... I left no tree, no cherished plant, not a single blade of grass, in that land. All of the vegetation in the world was in the square in my neighborhood, wedged against the city buildings, far from the sea, behind bars. Better yet, I washed my feet with baking soda to decrust them of this useless sand, this dried mud, imagining with joy devoting myself to that luminous, slate-colored sky of our good earth of the mother country" (139)<sup>165</sup>.

In a personal interview, Cohen claims that she is being sarcastic when she speaks of the "good earth of the mother country,"<sup>166</sup> and therefore does not have this

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<sup>165</sup> « Il ne reste dans ma sacoche pas un seul milligramme de nostalgie, mieux encore, le départ définitif, l'exil fut notre chance, une bénédiction.... Je n'ai laissé sur cette terre de soleil aucun arbre, aucune plante chérie, pas un seul brin d'herbe. Tous les végétaux du monde sont dans mon square de quartier, calés contre les bâtiments urbains, loin de la mer, derrière des barreaux. Mieux encore, j'ai traité mes pieds à la soude pour bien les décrotter d'un sable inutile, d'une boue séchée, envisageant avec joie d'épouser les ciels d'ardoise, lumineux, de notre bonne terre de la mère patrie ».

<sup>166</sup> « bonne terre de la mère patrie ».

type of devotion to her new homeland France, even though her denial of nostalgia conveys otherwise<sup>167</sup>. Obviously, Cohen has neither literally nor symbolically washed herself of her Algerian past. She still has powerful remnants of Algeria left on her feet, in her heart, and in her consciousness. Cohen's denial here of any "nostalgia" for Algeria, as well as her leaving behind all of its vegetation and every bit of sand that was "encrusted" on her feet, points to an actual fear of this nostalgia itself. Perhaps nostalgia for Algeria would mean that she would have to return "home" to this place from which she has so many ambivalent and painful memories. Perhaps it would mean a recognition of the necessity of facing her past, of facing her connection to this land that Cixous's narrator embraces.

Again, to use Cixous's comment that feet touch that which we usually avoid touching with our hands, Cohen's claim to have cleaned her feet of all nostalgia points to the reality that this nostalgia remains with her whether she desires it or not, as it clings to her feet, putting her in close contact with a past that she would perhaps like to avoid. Instead, she would rather pretend to notice only the hope and lightness of her new country, her "mother land" rather than the ambivalence, pain, and loss associated with her memories of Algeria. She could also be trying to disassociate with the link her filthy feet would have to a more primitive state, illuminating even further her ambivalence towards her identity as a native Algerian.

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<sup>167</sup> We also see this sarcasm in Darmon's novel, when Sarah Lévy is describing France, this country where her family will begin their new lives. She uses the same term as Cohen, saying "France.... The Mother Land (*La Mère Patrie*), where the trumpets of the renowned blew out my eardrums, whose bleeding glory stood in blue-white-red at the bottom of the *arc de triomphe*...[La France... je connaissais un tout petit peu. La Mère Patrie, dont les trompettes de la renommée me faisaient péter les tympanes, dont la gloire sanglante se dressait en bleu-blanc-rouge sur fond d'arc de triomphe...]" (114).

## From Bare Feet to *Pieds-Noirs*

When examining imagery of feet in North Africa, it is impossible not to mention the “*pieds-noirs* (black feet).” The *pieds-noirs* were the French settlers who came to Algeria in the 1800’s, mostly due to their economic or social status. The origin of the term is not completely known, although Benjamin Stora claims that

some say it may have been invented by the Arabs, surprised to see soldiers landing in 1830 with black boots on their feet. Others suggest it was the color of the feet of wine growers in Algeria, tramping grapes to make wine. Whatever the explanation, the French of Algeria did not encounter that characterization until they arrived in the metropolis- in 1962 [when the] *pieds noirs* left Algeria en masse. (8, 128)

Daniel Leconte comments on the term:

What a surprise it was to those who, debarking in the metropolis, heard themselves systematically designated as “pieds-noirs”? .... “Pieds-noirs,” the term appearing in this context responded to this new necessity, but it comes from a milieu that has nothing to do with those that were labeled as such.... Since then, the expression made a fortune. In fact, the word refers back to another colonial mythology, to the conquest of the West: “pieds-noirs,” is the name of one of the Indian tribes decimated by the American pioneers. (237)<sup>168</sup>

Joëlle Allouche-Benayoun claims that the Jews of Algeria, once they arrived in France, also became grouped as *pieds-noirs*, although their experiences and memories of Algeria differed: “The crossing of the Mediterranean, *la nostalgie du pays perdu*<sup>169</sup>, achieved in France what had never occurred in Algeria: the proximity of

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<sup>168</sup> « Quelle n’est pas la surprise de tous ceux qui, débarquant en métropole, s’entendent systématiquement désigner du nom de ‘pieds-noirs’?... ‘Pieds-noirs,’ le terme apparu dans ce contexte répond à cette nouvelle nécessité, mais il émane de milieux qui n’ont rien à voir avec ceux qu’on qualifiait ainsi.... Depuis, l’expression a fait fortune. Le mot renvoie en fait à une autre mythologie coloniale, à la conquête de l’Ouest: ‘pieds-noirs,’ c’est le nom d’une de ces tribus indiennes décimées par les pionniers américains ».

<sup>169</sup> “nostalgia of the lost land.”

Algeria's Jews and the 'others,' all having become *pieds-noirs*, bonding together in the myth of a fraternal Algeria" (72)<sup>170</sup>.

Regardless of its origin, the term refers once again to the body, more specifically to the feet, and would have been a term that was imprinted in these authors' minds. Ali Yedes, in his article "Social Dynamics in Colonial Algeria: The Question of *Pieds-Noirs* Identity," discusses an identity crisis within the *pieds-noirs* that also deals with the mind/body split associated with civilization versus savagery. Quoting Pierre Bourdieu, "The 'Pied-Noir' defines himself/herself by defining the *Françaoui* in opposite terms: on one side, there is generosity, virility, the cult of the body... on the other side, meanness, impotence, impotence, intellectualism, etc." (qtd. in Yedes 244) Once again, the body is compared to the mind as being the place of filth, of savagery and primitivism, as being closer to the earth, or to a child-like state. The *pieds-noirs* therefore are torn between these two worlds of civilization and connection to the earth, just as the authors are all torn between these identities. It must be noted, however, that none of these authors actually refer to themselves as *pieds-noirs*, even though they may have been designated as such once they moved to France. Therefore, the foot as a symbol in these texts does not represent all of those who have left Algeria (labeled as *pieds-noirs*), but rather the community of Jews who are now in exile.

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<sup>170</sup> The translation of this quote was taken from Nancy Wood, "Remembering the Jews of Algeria," p. 260.

## Feet and Difference

According to Sander Gilman's article "The Jewish Body: A Foot-note," the Jewish foot has a unique history of its own that has linked Jews to this more primitive state. Particularly in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, the Jewish foot, stereotyped as flat and therefore causing a "heavy-footed gait" was seen as a sign of weakness that prevented Jews from performing their military service. Gilman claims that this marked the Jew as being a "'bad' citizen of the new nation state" (224) because he was unable to perform his citizenly duties. This state of flat-footedness also linked him<sup>171</sup> to unsound mind and weak body in general (231).

Being flat footed, Gilman points out, has also often been ascribed to black people, who are linked to a more primitive state. He cites a German orthopedist G. Muskat who discusses the Jewish foot as a "marker of racial difference":

[Muskat] begins his essay with a refutation of the analogy present within the older literature that speaks about the flat foot of the black (and by analogy of the Jew) as an atavistic sign, a sign of the earlier stage of development.... Muskat notes that flat feet have linked the black and the Jew as 'throw-backs' to more primitive forms of life" (229). He quotes Karl Hermann Burmeister who said in 1855 "Blacks and all of those with flat feet are closest to the animals." (229)

Just as Goldie speaks of the native as being closer to nature and therefore more "primitive," so do the bodily characteristics of the Jew make him closer to the animals. This thinking continues through the Nazi period, when, Gilman claims, "Flat feet remain a significant sign of Jewish difference" (230). Gilman adds that "What is

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<sup>171</sup> I use "him" here because, as Gilman points out, these discussions of the Jewish body are almost always referring to the male, and in particular when discussing military service (224).

vital is that this diagnostic category soon became the marker in neurology for the difference between the Jewish foot and that of the ‘normal’ European” (232).

While feet can act as markers of racial difference, in Cixous’s story “Bare Feet,” they also signify class distinctions between the young girl and a Muslim shoeshine boy. Cixous’s claim that the barefooted state of her and her brother was not a sign of class rings true in this story, where it is the narrator’s ownership of shoes that sets her apart from her Arab neighbors. The story centers on a pair of white sandals that she receives as a gift. The young narrator is very much affected by her knowledge of the disparities in socio-economic status between herself and her Muslim counterparts, the ‘*petizarabes*’ down the street. This is most poignantly illustrated by her interaction with the young boy whom she encounters near her house. Cixous’s speaker comes across this boy in a moment of tension and anxiety, where she has just received a gift of a pair of white sandals, and is excitedly showing them off. Here, her privileged status is greatly highlighted in contrast to the boy’s impoverished existence, and yet, what she perceives as his immense hatred for her as a privileged Jew brings out feelings of her own inferiority. Deciding to get her shoes shined, a complex and intricate power struggle ensues between the two children, exemplifying the many layers of conflict that her identity embodies:

Trembling, I put my foot on the box as a fierce blow of the brush ordered me to do. I confessed. I was guilty. Before his tribunal, the acquittal I had enjoyed since Vichy was of no value whatsoever. I lived in the rue Philippe on the second floor, and I had been given sandals that were almost entirely new. I confessed. (58)

In the end, the young boy gets his revenge, and Cixous's speaker gets her punishment: "Then the shoeshine boy took out one of his boxes of polish, opened it, rubbed his brush on the bright red cream, and smeared my white sandal with a greasy layer of thick blood" (59).

This punishment, although painful, is also somewhat of a relief to Cixous's character, as it partially absolves her of her tremendous guilt. In addition, it "awakens a rebellion" in her, finally allowing her to "stand up for [her]self" and defend her position against her quote "enemy's rage" (59). In response, instead of allowing the boy to humiliate and quote "mutilate [her] entirely in red" (59), she creates the pretense of needing to go home in order to get his payment. She thus concludes with: "I extricated myself from the trap and moved away with my dignity, my foot red as a scream, blood on my soul for eternity" (59).

This foot that served as her connection to the earth, to what she saw as her people, is spoiled and revealed as an imposter. Are these truly her ancestors? Can she claim such a connection? This boy's actions reply with a resounding "no." Her precious feet, her connection to this land she loves so dearly, are marked forever with the guilt of the part that she feels she played in the game of colonialism. As Cixous argues previously, our feet touch that which we avoid touching, and in this case, the use of feet as being smeared with blood shows how the topic of colonialism and the relationship between herself and this young boy is something not spoken about, something taboo.

Using very similar language to Cixous's narrator, Ben expresses her horror at being confronted by the poverty of her Muslim neighbors, as well as by a powerful

speech that her father delivers about the socio-economic discrepancies between themselves and their Muslim counterparts. After having seen the abject poverty of the Muslim neighborhood, Ben has a strong reaction:

As soon as I got back to the house, I threw off my shoes, convinced that my feet were covered in blood. So much did it pain me to see those children running, barefoot, across those sharp stones.... I was ashamed to be walking hand-in-hand with my father, so well-dressed, in such a horrible environment. In the slums, all of the children ran by themselves, without any father, covered in rags. (Ben 123)<sup>172</sup>

This passage echoes Cixous's not only in the fact that she feels her feet are covered in blood, but also in the description of the Muslim children running across stones, much like Cixous's narrator places her feet on the hot white stones of Oran. In this case, however, their bare feet are cut by the sharp connection with the stones, as opposed to comforted as Cixous's narrator is. To them, the realities of their homeland are painful and detrimental to their well-being, and Ben does not witness this as a "connection" to their ancestors. This also reflects Cixous's comment that she and her brother being barefoot was not a "sociological sign or a sign of poverty-which that can be sometimes." The barefoot children that Ben sees in the poor Arab quarter are not children like Cixous and her brother. Their nakedness *is* a sign of poverty, rather than a sense of freedom and the carefree feeling that it gives Cixous and her brother.

Ben sees the distinction between herself and poor *pieds-noirs* who live in her neighborhood and harass her as she walks to school. Here, it is not the body but

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<sup>172</sup>« Je rentrai à la maison et dès mon arrivée, j'ôtai mes chaussures, persuadée que j'avais les pieds en sang, tant je souffrais d'avoir vu ces enfants parcourir, les pieds nus, ces pierres tranchantes.... j'avais honte, dans ce contexte misérable, de marcher tenant la main de mon père, si bien habillée moi-même. Dans le bidonville, tous les enfants dépenaillés couraient seuls, sans père ».

rather what covers the body that is the marker of difference. A young orphan girl whom she passes every day on her way to school calls her a “*juive, sale juive* (Jew, dirty Jew)” as she walks by, and Ben’s reaction to her is pity rather than anger:

I had an acute awareness of this huge difference between my appearance and hers. As for my mother, who passed her house everyday to go to the market... her allure and her elegance, her beauty that would make the gods jealous, could be felt, by this child without a mother, as an insult to her troubles as an orphan. (99)<sup>173</sup>

This bloodstain of guilt on the two narrators’ souls remained with them into their adult years, as their childhood tales are laden with questions of self-blame and crises of conscience. The bloodstain on Ben’s soul compels her to follow her father’s critical advice about the living conditions of her poor Muslim neighbors. And Ben does just this. During the times when she is not forced into exile, Ben works as a teacher in poor towns in Algeria, trying to embetter the lives of those who live in the conditions her father speaks about. Before the fight for Algerian liberation intensifies, Ben trains to become a teacher and gets a position teaching in a small Arab peasant town, where the parents do not send their children to school because they have no shoes. When she tells her supervisor that she wants the children to come to school anyway, he says incredulously: “Without shoes? Barefoot?” (186)<sup>174</sup>. These words echo Cixous’s title of her short story. Once again, as in Cixous’s story, the fact that these children are barefoot ties them to a primitive way of life, based on poverty and ignorance, in contrast to any European children that would be going to

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<sup>173</sup> « J’avais une conscience aiguë de cette différence si grande entre ma tenue et la sienne. Quant à ma mère, qui passait chaque jour devant cette maison pour aller au marché... son allure et son élégance, sa beauté à rendre les dieux jaloux, pouvaient être ressenties, par cette enfant sans mère, comme une insulte à ses malheurs d’orpheline ».

<sup>174</sup> « Sans chaussures? Pieds nus? »

school in Algeria. In reaction to her students' absence, Ben makes a point to go to their houses, find them, and bring them to the schoolroom.

In the case of Cixous and Ben, their feet stand for multiple signs of difference. By the very virtue of *not* being barefoot, they are set apart from their Arab neighbors by class and race assumptions. As Cixous's narrator climbs the hills of Oran, she is *choosing* to be barefoot, as we know that she has a perfectly good pair of sandals waiting for her. Compared with the shoeshine boy down the street, she therefore belongs to a different category. The same is true for Ben, whose shame is centered on the poor children's feet as they run barefoot on the "sharp stones," while she does not have to. At the same time, their being barefoot, especially in the case of Cixous, is a way of *connecting* to their homeland, to their Arab neighbors and ancestors, and thus a marker of sameness and connection.

Rituals surrounding washing of the feet might also serve as markers of both difference and connection between Jews and Arabs. Cohen's claim that she "washes her feet" of nostalgia could allude to a Jewish ritual of washing one's hands and feet before entering as a guest in someone's home. Although there does not seem to be an actual law that is dictated in Judaism for washing the feet, it is mentioned several times in the Bible. The ritual appears to be influenced by the surrounding culture rather than a requirement of Jewish law. In Genesis, for example, there are three instances of water being brought so that the men who came to visit could wash their feet after their long journey (19:2, 24:32, 43:24). According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "the practice was originally an act of hospitality in Palestinian homes performed for guests (who wore sandals and walked on dusty roads) by a servant or

the wife of the host. St. Paul refers to the custom in 1 Timothy 5:10, and St. Augustine mentions it in one of his letters about AD 400.”<sup>175</sup>

However, Judith Bleich, in her article “The Symbolism in Innovative Rituals,” describes a story in the Bible that could demonstrate this ritual as one which differentiates between a “clean” Jew and a “dirty” Arab or, in this case, idol worshipper. Abraham, after his circumcision, is greeted by three visitors whom he offers water to wash their feet before entering his house. Rashi<sup>176</sup> comments on this passage:

...Abraham offered the visitors water to wash their feet because Abraham ‘thought that they were Arabs who bow down to the dust of their feet, and he was meticulous not to bring idol-worship into his house.’ According to Rashi's exegesis, Abraham, not yet aware of the visitors’ true identity, thought they were idol worshippers and therefore insisted that they wash their feet immediately in order scrupulously to avoid bringing anything connected with idolatry into his house....Rashi's comments, as well as the similar midrashic observation, *Yalkut Shim'oni (Genesis 18)*, are obviously based upon the Talmudic passage (cited verbatim in the *Midrash*), *Baba Metzi'a 86b*: ‘They said to him, “Do you suspect us of being like Arabs who worship the dust on their feet?”’ In light of these sources, washing of the feet hardly appears to be a suitable manner in which to welcome a new member of the family of Jews.

This passage is telling in light of Cixous’s discussion of the filth associated with feet, as well as the pleasure that she and her brother got from walking barefoot through their beloved Oran, particularly through the “dirty” Arab cemeteries on the hills. If the perception is that Arabs “worship the dust on their feet,” then Cixous’s joy in having her bare feet dirty with the dust of Oran would bring her closer to her fellow Arabs. Likewise, Cohen’s washing of the nostalgia off of her feet may also be

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<sup>175</sup> “foot washing.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2007.

<sup>176</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040-1105 C.E.- “renowned medieval French commentator on the Bible and Talmud” (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2007).

a way of cutting off ties with her Arab roots, of washing her feet before entering her new home of France, therefore washing her feet *of* her old home, and asserting her identity as a “civilized” Jew who follows rituals of purification<sup>177</sup>.

Bleich adds that ritual foot-washing appears as a precursor to prayer:

It should be noted that one does find mention of feet washing as a Jewish ritual in entirely different contexts. The *kohanim* washed both hands and feet prior to performing the divine service (see *Exodus 30:19-21*). In later times there is reference (*Shabbat 50b* and Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Tefillah 4:3*) to the practice of washing the feet prior to the *shaharit* prayers. Normative Jewish law does not posit this requirement.

Most likely due to the shared cultural heritage of Jews and Muslims, the Koran also mentions the washing of one’s feet as necessary before the call to prayer, as it states in 5:6: “O believers! When you rise up for Salah (*prayer*), wash your faces and your hands as far as the elbows, and wipe your heads and your feet to the ankles.”<sup>178</sup>

It is essential that these authors choose this metaphor of feet to describe their connection to their history in Algeria, to describe their links to their fellow Arabs, and to draw up an image of what still remains with them from their pasts. First of all, the reliance on this symbol points to the ways in which they attempt to construct their pasts through metaphors and imagery. The repetition of this symbol also shows that no matter how hard they may try to “clean off their feet” of the past, it is an integral

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<sup>177</sup> This also contains hints of the ritual bath (*mikveh*) that Jewish women must go to every month in order to purify themselves from menstruation.

<sup>178</sup> (Muhammad Farooq-i-Azam Malik, *English Translation of the Meanings of Al-Qur’an*, Houston: The Institute of Islamic Knowledge, 1997.) Obviously, the washing of one’s feet may also allude to Jesus washing his disciples feet the night before his Crucifixion. This ritual has been adopted by the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church on a holiday called “Maundy Thursday of Holy Week (preceding Easter) and by members of some other Christian denominations in their worship services” (“foot washing.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007).

part of their beings that shape the rest of their lives as well as their narratives. The foot is the foundation for the wanderer, for the exiled people lost in the desert for forty years, for someone who is without home or stability.

## Chapter 3: Origins and Others

“Between the Jews and the Arabs there is a lot of hate and at the same time a fascination.”<sup>179</sup>

-Rachel Kahn, Personal Interview

### **Arab-Jewish Relations<sup>180</sup>: From the Intolerant to the Imaginary**

In the collection of essays by Jewish women of the Middle East and North Africa entitled *The Flying Camel*, Rachel Wahba discusses the sensitive topic of the history of Jews in Arab countries: “Sometimes when I bring up the oppression of Jews in Arab countries, progressive Jews get strangely uncomfortable—as if recognizing the Jewish experience under Islam would make someone racist or anti-Arab” (57). This could be one explanation for the conflicted image of Arab-Jewish relations in the novels and memoirs I study by North African Jewish women writers. Some parts of the texts are almost utopian in their representation of this “harmonious” relationship that remained that way until right before the wars of independence, while others are quite pessimistic and bitter. However, some of the texts feature a type of nostalgia that affects the portrayal of the realities of the Jewish community living as minorities in a society sometimes hostile towards them.

The contradiction in the depiction of these relationships is necessarily influenced by difference in class, geographic location, and various social factors, but may be most influenced by the creation of an “imaginary” homeland by these authors, whose texts contain their effort to metaphorically return home through a nostalgic

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<sup>179</sup> « Entre les juifs et les arabes il y a beaucoup de haine et en même temps de la fascination. »

<sup>180</sup> I use the term “Arab” here to mean primarily Muslim, although many argue that the North African Jews are Arabs as well. I use this term to mimic that of most of the criticism I have read on the topic.

journey. The homelands which “reside” in these texts are based on what Marie-Brunette Spire calls, when referring to Moati’s novel, “the study of History, but a history highly colored by affectivity” (287).<sup>181</sup> This affectivity pervades many of these narratives, resulting in a more tender reconstruction of the past where historical accuracy is not necessarily the focus.

Guy Dugas explains the possible ambivalence of Arab-Jewish relations in these texts:

The Arab can represent in the eyes of the Jew at once one who is very close, the privileged interlocutor for centuries, himself a victim of colonial iniquity, and always a possible enemy, always dreaded, to whom his statute on Islamic land granted in the past absurd privileges, hardly reconsidered by a colonial power often anti-Jewish in itself. (*Littérature 73*)<sup>182</sup>

Dugas recognizes this ambivalence of representation in Judéo-Maghrebian texts, arguing that the most common image of Jewish-Arab relations is a multifaceted, complex one, rooted in this dichotomy of love and hate: “...the most often expressed feeling would be that of an atavistic ambivalence, unconstrained by the individual conscience: speaking of a Jewish [female] singer, Elissa Rhaïs (a famous writer from Algeria) shows her to us enjoying herself ‘in the company of Arabs, who loved her,’ and, at the same time, ‘profoundly hating them’” (77)<sup>183</sup>.

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<sup>181</sup> « elle renoue par l’étude avec l’Histoire, mais une histoire fortement teintée d’affectivité ».

<sup>182</sup> « L’Arabe peut représenter à la fois aux yeux du Juif le très-proche, l’interlocuteur privilégié depuis des siècles, lui-même victime de l’iniquité coloniale, et un ennemi toujours possible, toujours redouté, à qui son statut en terre d’Islam a octroyé par le passé d’aberrants privilèges, fort peu remis en cause par un pouvoir colonial d’ailleurs souvent anti-juif lui-même ».

<sup>183</sup> « le sentiment le plus souvent exprimé serait celui d’une ambivalence atavique, échappant à la conscience individuelle: parlant d’une chanteuse juive, Elissa Rhaïs (a famous writer from Algeria) nous la montre se plaisant ‘dans la compagnie des Arabes, qui l’adoraient,’ et, dans le même temps, les détestant profondément ».

As I posit here, the nostalgic overtone of many of these works seems to skew the perception of these relationships, showing them as perhaps more harmonious and interconnected than they actually were. Dugas agrees:

In the works after exile, under the effect of an omnipresent nostalgia, this ambivalence will be made explicit, and it is the idea of a Judeo-Arabic proximity which will prevail the most often, even though fear and resentment have, depending on the case, never disappeared. (78)<sup>184</sup>

This nostalgia is often expressed by a return home, if not in a literal sense than through the creative imagination. Dugas calls the longing for home a “beloved theme to young Judeo-Maghrebian novelists” (78)<sup>185</sup>.

### **Shared Origins**

Dugas maintains that part of the reason for the ambiguous relationships between Maghrebian Jews and their Arab counterparts is based on a recognition of shared origins, both religiously and culturally. Despite any hostility or indifference, these commonalities cannot be ignored, and are therefore ever-present in texts by Jewish women of North African origins. André Chouraqui, who sees the relations between Jews and Arabs in a generally negative light, does argue, however, that these different groups had a certain bond, even if it came only from a shared culture: “The scorn that the adherents of the different faiths expressed for each other could not obliterate the strong bonds of a common source of inspiration and a way of life intimately shared” (54). Elizabeth Friedman agrees, pointing out an acknowledged

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<sup>184</sup> « Dans les oeuvres postérieures à l’exil, sous l’effet d’une nostalgie omniprésente, cette ambivalence sera explicitée, et c’est l’idée d’une proximité judéo-arabe qui prévaudra le plus souvent, bien que crainte et ressentiment n’aient, selon les cas, jamais disparu ».

<sup>185</sup> « thème cher aux jeunes romanciers judéo-maghrébins ».

“cultural affinity [among the Jews] with the North African Muslim population” even if there was a large association with the French (2).

A search for shared origins is also a common theme in Judeo-Maghrebian texts, reflecting a nostalgia for a culture they had to leave behind:

If... this atavistic hate frequently results in brawls or crimes, the accent is also frequently placed on the resemblance of ways of life, common traditions or reciprocal services rendered. A surprising religious solidarity is even sometimes evoked, symbolized here or there by the veneration of the same *marabouts*. (Dugas, *Littérature* 77)<sup>186</sup>

As previously mentioned, Cohen’s search for these origins can be linked to the *marabout* symbol, one which unites the Jews and Muslims. The *marabout*, Cohen’s spiritual guide, is more often associated with Muslim culture, even though some of them were a part of Jewish tradition in the region as well. Cohen’s journey through her past and re-discovery of her Algerian identity are facilitated by her interactions with the *marabout*, and thus her choice of such a figure can be seen as a way to unite herself with the people from whom Cixous’s narrator calls herself *inséparable*.

Cixous’s concept of “*inséparable*” stems from this sharing of origins, a theme which is often a focus of Cixous’s texts. These shared origins make the political realities of Algeria and any unrest between Cixous’s narrator and her Arab neighbors intolerable to her. In her memoir, she speaks over and over again to her and her brother’s longing to be loved and accepted by their Arab neighbors, but never reveals that this ever came to pass. When she speaks about her state of being “*inséparable*,”

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<sup>186</sup> « Si... ces haines ataviques aboutissent fréquemment à des rixes ou des crimes, l’accent est tout aussi fréquemment mis sur les ressemblances des modes de vie, des traditions communes ou des services réciproquement rendus. Une étonnante solidarité religieuse est même quelquefois évoquée, symbolisée ici ou là par la vénération des mêmes marabouts ».

she explains that she and her brother were “vaguely convinced that we had been since the cradle and before destined one for the other and separated like you read about in Grimm’s fairytales” (45).<sup>187</sup>

Cixous’s narrator’s image of twins that were separated at birth echoes her mother’s story about the two pigeons who must be either set free or killed together. She uses this imagery to describe herself upon arriving in France, her neck “naked” like the pigeon whose twin escaped to freedom (see Chapter 2). Just like the pigeons who are inseparable, so are she and her Arab neighbors, as she describes it, *inséparable*. Therefore, when she arrives in France, she feels naked because half of herself is missing—her Algerian self, her self that was “destined” to be part of her for eternity.

Cixous’s depiction of the situation may or may not reflect the reality of the closeness of these groups, and in fact, many other depictions represent a conflicting picture of this. Most of the works that I examine here, however, include this desire to have a connection, this sense of regret at having such a gap between the two communities. This regret is often linked to a recognition of similar origins, just as Cixous’s narrator describes, “to whom we were linked we thought by our ancestors and communities of origin, of destiny, of frame of mind, of memory” (50) What is interesting here in Cixous’s narrator’s statement is that not only are they linked by origin, but also by *memory*, which is a crucial concept in these works. The concept of “obligation to memory” that I have discussed, when applied to this idea of a shared memory between the Jewish community and their Arab neighbors, raises the question

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<sup>187</sup> « C’est-à-dire avec ceux que nous appelions ‘les petitzarabes’, persuadés obscurément que nous étions d’avoir été depuis le berceau et avant destinés les uns aux autres et séparés comme on le voit dans les contes de Grimm... »

of whose memory needs to be documented, and whose testimony needs to be told (see Chapter 1).

Moati's and Kahn's texts both address this notion of common origins as well. At one point in Moati's novel, when neighbors approach one of the protagonists Maya about her daughter Marie's love affair with the Muslim Fouad, Maya replies that they are all of the same origins, Muslims and Jews: "And us?" says Maya, annoyed, "Where are we from? Jews and Arabs, we have the same origins, and I am not embarrassed by my daughter's conduct" (330)<sup>188</sup>. A similar question about shared origins appears in Kahn's novel. The French teacher Anne is very upset when there are rising tensions between the Muslims and the Jews. Referring to another character, Monsieur Sebban, she says to her Muslim friend Malek: "Monsieur Sebban comes from Berber converts to Judaism, and you from Berber converts to Islam. Can you tell me what the difference is?" (158)<sup>189</sup>. Anne brings this up again later on in the novel, when Liana ponders her own relationships with her fellow Arabs. As she leaves her school one day, she sees Algerian girls laughing and playing with each other. She wonders why the only Algerian girl she every befriended was a young Muslim named Sultana (271). She remembers how her French friend Anne felt about this, seeing this "distance between them and the Algerians" as confusing (271):

You share so many things! Your language, your music, your food, your superstitions. But I don't understand why one part of you remains irrevocably resistant to the other! And you continue to consider the worst

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<sup>188</sup> « Et nous? dit Maya, qui s'énervait, d'où sortons-nous? Juifs et Arabes, nous avons la même origine, et je n'ai pas à rougir de la conduite de ma fille... »

<sup>189</sup> « M. Sebban descend de Berbères convertis au judaïsme et toi de Berbères convertis à l'Islam. Tu veux me dire où est la différence » ?

insult in Algeria to be called a “Jew!” for an Arab and an “Arab” for a Jew!  
(271)<sup>190</sup>

Liana ponders on this, and she “can’t deny that they have both accommodated this cohabitation on a tightrope” (271)<sup>191</sup>. But then says bitterly to herself, “Finally they’ll be relieved by our departure” (271)<sup>192</sup>. Kahn herself repeats this notion of common origins many times in her interview, bemoaning the fact that “we had the same language, the same cuisine, the same music, but the religion was there. It’s really crazy” (Interview)<sup>193</sup>.

The claim that the Jews and Arabs share their language, music, food, and superstitions, echoes Cixous’s narrator’s comment that she and her Arab neighbors are of the same “origin, of destiny, of frame of mind, of memory, of touch, of taste.” All of these elements contribute to one’s memory, especially of one’s childhood and one’s culture. They are all elements that these authors incorporate into their narratives when speaking of their homelands in North Africa, as we saw in Chapter 2.

Ben’s narrative also tackles the question of origins, particularly in a crucial scene between herself and her father when her French Nationality identity card is confiscated and replaced by one reading “indigenous Jew (*juif indigène*).” She is

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<sup>190</sup> « Vous partagez tant de choses! La langue, la musique, la cuisine, les superstitions. Mais, j’ignore pourquoi une part de vous reste irrévocablement réfractaire à l’autre! Et vous continuez à considérer que la pire des injures en Algérie est d’être traité de ‘juif!’ pour un Arabe et ‘d’Arabe!’ pour un juif!. »

<sup>191</sup> « [elle] ne peut nier qu’ils se sont les uns et les autres accommodés de cette cohabitation sur la corde raide. »

<sup>192</sup> « Finalement ils seront soulagés par notre départ ».

<sup>193</sup> « On avait la même langue, la même cuisine, les mêmes musiques, mais la religion était là. C’est quand même fou ».

horrified, and confronts her father about it, but he laughs at what he sees as her ignorance about her own origins<sup>194</sup>:

- And why did they do that?
- Do what?
- Kick me out of school. Strip me of my French nationality. Declare me a “Native Jew.”
- Ah! Because you thought you were something else?
- Yes.
- And what’s that?
- French.

My father let out a loud laugh.

- Because you thought that you were French? You thought that your ancestors were Gallic?
- Yes.
- But not at all! They were Berbers... (Ben 120-121)<sup>195</sup>

This passage from Ben’s text not only demonstrates the fact that her father sees their origins as “native” to Algeria and therefore theoretically more linked to her Arab neighbors, but it also illuminates the sense of conflicted identity inherent to the Algerian Jews. The young Ben sees herself as French rather than Algerian, and more

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<sup>194</sup> In some articles about this excerpt, there seems to be a discrepancy in the actual words her father says to her, indicating that there is perhaps more than one edition of her memoir or that this conversation is replicated in another work of hers. In these articles, they report her father’s response as being, “But, you are Algerian, since the Roman conquest!” From his side of the family, this is true; his family are descendents of an old Algerian Berber tribe, while her mother comes from a family of Andalucian musicians who were expelled from Spain (Bitton 257).

<sup>195</sup> « -Et pourquoi ils ont fait ça?  
-Ça quoi?  
-Me mettre à la porte du lycée. Me rayer de la nationalité française. Me déclarer ‘juive-indigène.’  
-Ah! Parce que tu croyais que tu étais autre chose?  
-Oui.  
-Quoi donc?  
-Française.  
Mon père partit d’un grand éclat de rire:  
-Parce que tu te croyais française? Tu croyais que tes ancêtres étaient des gaulois?  
-Oui.  
-Eh bien non! Ils étaient des berbères... »

importantly, rather than “Jewish.” In many of these texts, Ben’s in particular, there is not a clear articulation of Jewish identity, and thus Ben identifies herself more closely with French nationality and culture than with being a “native Jew.”

Cixous explains her confusion about her nationality and identity in her book *Rootprints*. Unlike the young Ben, however, Cixous resists this French identity, uncertain about where she belongs in the colonial struggle:

That logic of nationality was accompanied by behaviours that have always been unbearable for me. The French nation was colonial. How could I be from France that colonized an Algerian country when I knew that we ourselves... were other Arabs. I could do nothing in this country. But neither did I know where I had something to do. (204)<sup>196</sup>

As Gelfand explains, “Cixous was therefore both oppressor and oppressed; she was at once French, Algerian, and neither” (Sartori and Hage 148). Here Cixous sees herself as another “Arab” just like her inseparable twins, yet admits to the reality that she also does not truly belong in Algeria. By claiming that she has “nothing to do” in Algeria and yet does not know where she has “something to do,” she exemplifies the complicated identity of the North African Jews, and thus their ambivalence towards their Arab neighbors.

### **A Harmonious Co-Existence**

This ambivalence manifests itself in numerous ways, one being a fairly idealistic depiction of the co-existence between Arabs and Jews. Moati’s novel is a prime example. According to Lora G. Lunt, Moati’s novel “features the tolerance and

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<sup>196</sup> Cixous also addresses this confusion in her short story “Pieds Nus” in which her young narrator must confront her colonial position in relation to a Muslim shoe-shine boy down the street. For a discussion of this story, see Chapter 2.

diversity of Tunisia, in spite of the differences, and even violence, within the community” (“Reclaiming the Past” 143). This is demonstrated by the Muslim character Slim’s description of the Jewish Marie after her Muslim lover Fouad first meets her:

I must let you know that Marie is Jewish. She’s a childhood friend, almost a sister. Her father is a liberal socialist who does a lot for our country. Our families have known each other for generations and I don’t think that there are any other Jewish and Arab families in Tunis as closely linked as ours are. (328)<sup>197</sup>

The decision to make Marie’s family one that is always closely linked with its Arab neighbors shows how intertwined the communities were, at least culturally; however, Slim’s comment that no other Muslim and Jewish family is as close as theirs may be a hint that this relationship is more an exception than the norm. Spire sees Moati’s novel, although partially rooted in historical reality, as being quite utopian in its vision of interpersonal relationships as well as in the ideals of its characters, such as “Justice” and “Progress” (287). This is particularly true for relationships between Arab and Jewish women in the novel. Spire comments:

In a society at once extremely diversified, stratified, and partitioned, one has the sense of circulating at ease, friendships form between Arab and Jewish women who consider themselves sisters, each one assuming her particularity; the book bathes in a climate of casual optimism. Between people, between parents and children, love and understanding prevail. (287)<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> « ...je tiens à ce que tu saches que Marie est juive. C’est une amie d’enfance, presque une sœur . Son père est un socialiste libéral qui fait beaucoup pour notre pays. Nos familles se connaissent depuis des générations et je crois bien qu’il n’existe pas à Tunis de familles arabe et juive aussi liées que les nôtres ».

<sup>198</sup> « Dans une société à la fois extrêmement diversifiée, stratifiée et cloisonnée, on a l’air de circuler à l’aise, des amitiés se nouent entre femmes arabes et femmes juives qui se considèrent comme soeurs, chacune assumant son particularisme; le livre baigne dans un climat d’optimisme bon enfant. Entre les gens, entre parents et enfants, règnent amour et compréhension ».

Class, however, is an issue in these relationships, determining the level of “progress” of the Tunisian Jews and the level of connection to their fellow Arabs<sup>199</sup>. Speaking about the Crémieux Decree in Algeria, the character Serge in Moati’s novel explains how some Tunisian Jews feel “just as French as the Jews of Algeria” and these are the Jews that are “the most evolved among the Jews” (239). As for the rest of the Jews: “there will never be a big difference between a Jew from the *Hara* and an Arab from the *casbah*...” (239)<sup>200</sup>.

Ben also depicts a fairly harmonious relationship between her family and their Muslim neighbors. During World War II, she and her family are stripped of their French citizenship and receive a census to complete. The census concerns how many Jews there are in the family, if the grandparents are both Jewish, etc. Her father, however, refuses to fill it out (75). Their neighbor, a Muslim, comes over to try to help them out, calling them “*frères* (brothers).” This is reminiscent of Moati’s depiction of Slim and other Muslim characters, who see themselves as members of the family of their Jewish neighbors, and vice versa. An example of this in Moati’s novel is when Maya (and her husband Serge) agree to help their Muslim neighbors however they need to be helped, declaring: “There will be some French people, like Serge and myself, to help you with all their heart. We have always fought for the rights of everyone” (318)<sup>201</sup>.

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<sup>199</sup> For further discussion on class differences between Jews, see the section “Relations within the Jewish Community.”

<sup>200</sup> « il n’y aura jamais une grande différence entre un juif de la *Hara* et un Arabe de la *casbah*... »

<sup>201</sup> « Il y aura des Français, comme Serge et moi, pour vous aider de tout leur coeur. Nous avons toujours combattu pour les droits de chacun ».

In Kahn's novel, although there is a large amount of mounting tension and strife between the two communities, there are still relationships maintained between some of the Muslim and Jewish families. For example, when two Jewish musicians are killed by Arabs, Liana's friend Sultana's father comes to the Jewish neighborhood (with a very unwelcoming reaction from most of the community) trying to make amends for his people. He asks: "How could one of us have committed such a sacrilege, such a crime of crimes? I came to ask you to stop mistaking your enemy and have confidence in those who have lived next to you for centuries" (195)<sup>202</sup>. Once again, Sultana's father's appeal to a shared history points to the degree to which the two communities' lives are intertwined.

Although Goldmann discusses at length the "mystery" surrounding the Muslim community she experienced growing up, she also describes the small village in which she grew up as a place of more than tolerance, but respect and almost friendship. She not only portrays the Muslims and Jews as being "without friction," but she also claims that there was an exchange of gifts among the different religious groups for various holidays (108). She concludes that: "By appearance, equality ruled; of course, I couldn't see what was underneath, all that I took away was the idea that there were a lot of religions, a lot of different morals and that each one held onto their own" (108)<sup>203</sup>. Her aunt Juliette also alludes to a mutual respect between the Jews and their Muslim neighbors: "Never did we have a reason to deplore a profane

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<sup>202</sup> « Comment l'un d'entre nous aurait-il pu commettre ce sacrilège, ce crime des crimes? Je suis venu vous demander de cesser de vous tromper d'ennemi et de rendre votre confiance à ceux qui vivent à vos côtés depuis des siècles ».

<sup>203</sup> « En apparence, l'égalité régnait; bien entendu, je ne pouvais pas voir le dessous des choses, ce qui m'en restait était simplement l'idée qu'il y avait beaucoup de religions, beaucoup de mœurs différentes et que chacun tenait à garder les siennes ».

or discourteous gesture from our Muslim neighbors whose tradition of Ramadan we also respected” (82)<sup>204</sup>. However, Goldmann’s acknowledgement of the something “underneath” reveals ambivalence; on the surface the relationship may have seemed fairly harmonious, but underneath there was always an undercurrent of fear or resentment.

In Darmon’s novel, she addresses this contradiction between what appeared on the surface to be an agreeable relationship and some of the complicated emotions that lay beneath. Speaking about her grandmother, “La Mamie,” who grew up in the Jewish ghetto (*mellah*) of Morocco, Sarah Lévy describes a superficial camaraderie, just as Elissa Rhaïs depicts the ambivalence of the singer towards her Arab friends. Sarah’s grandmother, despite these seemingly good relationships with her neighbors and the workers in her house, maintains an air of superiority over her fellow (non-Jewish) Moroccans:

In the *mellah* where she had lived, these Jews and Arabs who knew each other so well, who respected each other’s customs, ignored each other and asserted themselves with disdain. She was not Moroccan, ultimate insult, but a Jew from Morocco, and felt infinitely superior to the *fatmas* who worked in the house, all the while spending most of her time joking with them. (39)<sup>205</sup>

Her grandmother’s attitude towards her identity, just like the young Ben’s feelings about being called a “native Jew,” demonstrates the confusion of where the North African Jews truly belong. Ben does not want to be called Jewish rather than

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<sup>204</sup> « Jamais nous n’avons eu à déplorer un geste profane ou discourtois de nos voisins musulmans dont nous aussi nous respectons le Ramadan ».

<sup>205</sup> « Dans le *mellah* où elle avait vécu, ces juifs et arabes qui se connaissaient si bien, qui respectaient les coutumes des uns et des autres, s’ignoraient et tenaient à s’affirmer par le dédain. Elle n’était pas marocaine, injure suprême, mais juive du Maroc, et se sentait infiniment supérieure aux *fatmas* qui travaillaient à la maison, tout en passant le plus clair de son temps à plaisanter avec elles ».

French, and yet, in this case, Sarah's grandmother would rather be a Jew from Morocco than an actual Moroccan. Being a Jew from Morocco, it must be noted, connotes a certain association with French identity, something that sets her apart from her Muslim workers.<sup>206</sup>

Sarah Lévy, however, does not have this sense of superiority over her fellow women, instead being welcomed into the world of the Moroccan women around her. They bring her one day to the public bath to take part in this important ritual, referring to her as "The French girl who's not used to" going to the baths (101)<sup>207</sup>. From this experience, Sarah explains: "I integrated myself into the world of the Moroccan woman, I involved myself in the warm ties that united them" (103)<sup>208</sup>. She finds solidarity among them, seeing a common bond in their relationship to men, to whom she refers as their "masters" as well as their "enemy" (103). Through commonality of gender struggles, Sarah's character is able to connect to her fellow Muslims, a connection which many of these authors/narrators long for in their narratives<sup>209</sup>.

### ***"Inséparable" and Imagined Relationships***

For Cixous's narrator, her idea of the relationship with her Arab neighbors is more than harmonious or peaceful. Her concept of "*inséparable*," as previously

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<sup>206</sup> The use of the term "fatmas" to describe the generic Arab woman is reminiscent of Cixous's family calling her nanny "Aïcha," even though her name was actually something else (see Chapter 2).

<sup>207</sup> « La Française qui n'a pas l'habitude ».

<sup>208</sup> « j'avais intégré le monde de la femme marocaine, je m'immisçais dans le liens chaleureux qui les unissaient ».

<sup>209</sup> For more on this, see Chapter 4.

mentioned, articulates a feeling of extreme closeness, intertwinedness even, with her Arab counterparts, whether or not this feeling may have been based in reality.

In his article on Cixous entitled “De l’algérianité à l’algériance,” Dugas explains one possible reason for Cixous’s narrator feeling this sense of “inseparability”:

So what disrupts this binary relationship [between recognition and renunciation by the Algerian nation], if not *judéité*, which, at the heart of all colonial societies and even more in Algeria during this period (during the war of 1939-45, when the Crémieux Decree was repealed by the Vichy government), whether we like it or not, leads to a marginalization by all of the communities: scorned by the colonizer towards whom he is inevitably drawn, the Jews unavoidably distance themselves from the indigenous communities with whom they have cohabitated for thousands of years, and from whom they consequently feel inseparable (along these lines, Cixous creates the beautiful neologism *inséparable*). (12)<sup>210</sup>

Alice Shalvi in her essay “The Geopolitics of Jewish Feminism” speaks to the intertwined nature of two cultures such as the North African Jews and their Arab counterparts, and agrees with Dugas’s claim that separating two similar communities is a difficult task: “It appears to me to be the inescapable conclusion [that].... what occurs within Jewish society is profoundly influenced by and approximates what occurs within the host society” (Rudavsky 241). Maurie Sacks asserts a similar claim in “An Anthropological and Postmodern Critique of Jewish Feminist Theory”: “Anthropologists believe that cultures operate as whole systems and that subsystems, such as religion, cannot be understood outside the context of the larger culture in

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<sup>210</sup> « Et qu’est-ce qui vient donc perturber ce rapport binaire [de reconnaissance ou de reniement par la nation algérienne], sinon la judéité, qui, au sein de toute société coloniale et plus encore en Algérie à la période considérée (durant la guerre 1939-45, alors que le décret Crémieux a été annulé par Vichy), conduit, qu’on le veuille ou non, à une marginalisation par rapport à toutes les communautés: méprisé par le colonisateur vers qui il est indéniablement attiré, le Juif s’éloigne irrésistiblement des communautés indigènes avec lesquelles il a cohabité pendant des millénaires et dont il se sent de ce fait inséparable (Cixous forge à ce sujet le beau néologisme *inséparable*) ».

which they operate” (Rudavsky 295). Cixous’s narrator feels that she cannot be understood, or understand *herself* outside of the context of this culture which she has integrated into her being. Her Arab neighbors are such an integral part of this culture that she cannot separate herself from them. At the same time, however, she feels this inevitable distance between them, and with this distance knows that a return “home” would never be possible.

Dugas raises this notion of distance that is reminiscent of Susan Stewart’s theories of nostalgia, where, according to Dugas, many Jews have been forced to *distance* themselves, both emotionally and geographically, from the very communities of which they were a part for so long. This complicates the nostalgia even more. To distance themselves from a community from which they feel “inseparable” is an impossible task. Dugas points to Cixous’s term “*inséparable*” as an attempt to express this impossible feeling. Cixous’s work therefore raises the question of “how to separate oneself”—a problem in all literature of exile...” (Dugas 13).<sup>211</sup> How to separate oneself from one’s past, one’s identity, and to “never look back” towards the homeland (as Lot’s wife did)—to let go of the longing for *nostos*.

When Dugas speaks of “separating oneself,” however, he may not be using it in the sense in which Cixous uses it. He seems to be speaking of the problem of separating oneself from one’s past, while Cixous’s narrator is referring to separating herself from the “*petizarabes*” (the Arab children) that lived in her neighborhood. It can be questioned as to whether or not Cixous’s narrator actually felt this close of a relationship with the Arabs that surrounded her, and if she did, whether or not this

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<sup>211</sup> « ‘comment se séparer’—problématique dans toute littérature d’exil- que d’interroger une composante supplémentaire d’une identité particulière ».

was unique to her or a universal situation. What Cixous's narrator's quest is, perhaps, is more a *desire* to have this kind of relationship with her neighbors, rather than a reflection of reality. In her memoir, she speaks over and over again of her and her brother's longing to be loved and accepted by their Arab neighbors, but never reveals that this ever happened. When the political unrest increases, Cixous's narrator expresses a feeling of betrayal:

The most intolerable is... that we were attacked... by the very beings that we wanted to love, with whom we were lamentably in love, to whom we were linked we thought by our ancestors and communities of origin, of destiny, of frame of mind, of memory, of touch, of taste, our enemies were our friends, there was mistake and confusion on sides on all sides.... I wanted nothing but their City and their Algeria, I wanted with all my being to arrive there.... The minute there was French I was exultation arms where there were Arabs I was hope and wound. Me, I thought I am *inséparable*. It's an unlivable relationship with oneself. (*Rêveries* 45)<sup>212</sup>

With this passage, Cixous's narrator calls her condition, and by extension the position of most North African Jews, "unlivable," since her identity is caught at the intersection of two communities.

The theme of inseparability appears many times throughout Cixous's book, such as during a scene in which a few Muslim girls arrive at her French high school. Cixous's narrator is delighted at this discovery, feeling in some way as if she's finally come home to the Algeria she has longed to know. Once again, this notion of her solidarity with these girls is brought to the forefront, Cixous's narrator seeing them as

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<sup>212</sup>(With help from Brahic's translation, p. 24) « Le plus insupportable c'est...que nous étions assaillies... par les êtres mêmes que nous voulions aimer, dont nous étions lamentablement amoureux, auxquels nous étions liés pensions-nous par toutes les parentés et communautés d'origine, de destin, d'états d'esprit, de mémoire, de toucher, de goût, nos ennemis étaient nos amis, il y avait erreur et confusion de côtés de tous côtés.... , je ne désirais que leur Ville et leur Algérie, je voulais à toutes forces y arriver....dès qu'il y avait Français j'étais exultation arme où il y avait Arabes j'étais espoir et plaie. Moi, pensais-je je suis inséparable. C'est une relation invivable avec soi-même ».

symbols of Algeria, of actually *embodying* Algeria<sup>213</sup>, as being her Algerian sisters that this French school (which she refers to at one point as “*l’Algériefrançaise*” (*Rêveries* 142)) is trying to erase. She even goes so far as to claim that the presence of these girls in her classroom is the closest she gets to actually “arriving” in Algeria—something she claims to have desired the entire time she lived there: “...I did nothing but despair over never being able to approach Algeria....and suddenly, as if nothing in the world were more commonplace, easier, there were three of them” (151)<sup>214</sup>. In her mind, her Muslim counterparts represent Algeria, this place in which she so desires to arrive. She adds that once the girls arrive at the school, she has “flesh on her soul” and that “I was with them. I was attached to their presence”(151).<sup>215</sup> Once again, we see an imagined solidarity with her Arab neighbors. Cixous’s narrator does not speak of any direct interaction with these girls, but is ecstatic when their Arab names are read alongside hers in roll call<sup>216</sup>. She indicates this as “proof” that Algeria exists within that school, or that Algeria exists for her at all (153).

Yet, at the same time, she acknowledges that this solidarity with their Arab counterparts she and her brother desire so greatly is not reciprocated, and remains purely a desire. She admits:

I was with them and they were not with me... I was with them without them me who except for them couldn’t be me. I looked all my algerias in the face. I saw in bright glimmers I would never be “theirs.”<sup>217</sup> They went to their

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<sup>213</sup> As I discuss in Chapter 2, this also reflects the notion of women’s bodies as sites of national identity.

<sup>214</sup> « je n’ai fait que désespérer de pouvoir jamais approcher l’Algérie....et tout à coup, comme si rien au monde n’était plus courant, plus facile, il y en a trois ».

<sup>215</sup> « J’étais avec elles. J’étais attachée à leurs présences ».

<sup>216</sup> The image of the two names juxtaposed to one another mirrors Cixous’s style, where she is constantly placing clauses side-by-side without conjunctions (parataxis).

<sup>217</sup> There is a play on words “*lueur*” (shine) and “*leur*” (their) in the original French that is very difficult to replicate in English.

life theirs, their turn is coming I guessed, without which I would not be me and which shines far away from me, I guessed. (152)<sup>218</sup>

It is again evident from this passage that Cixous's narrator's desire to "arrive" in Algeria is nothing more than a desire, one that can never be realized. Her imagined relationship with these girls and what they represent to her will remain imaginary, as she will never be "theirs."

In Kahn's novel, the protagonist Liana has a similar desire to have this kind of relationship with her Arab counterparts. As she leaves her school one day, she sees Algerian girls laughing and playing with each other. As previously mentioned, she wonders why the only Algerian girl she ever befriended is the character Sultana, and wants a closer relationship with her neighbors (271). Kahn uses the same term as Cixous (when she refers to the Grimm fairytale), describing her fellow Algerians, girls Liana's age, as "her twins" (271). She continues: "Twins and yet and from then on forever strangers" (271).<sup>219</sup> It is noteworthy that she uses the term "Algerian" to describe the Muslims in her community, which would automatically exclude her from that group. This implies that she does not see herself as truly "Algerian," aware of her unique position between identity categories.

## Two Separate Worlds

In contrast to the connection Cixous's narrator imagines in being "*inséparable*," Goldmann's depiction of the Arab-Jewish relationships in Tunisia is

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<sup>218</sup>(Part of this translation is Brahic's, p. 88) « J'étais avec elles et elles n'étaient pas avec moi...j'étais avec elles sans elles moi qui à moins d'elles ne pouvais être moi.... Je voyais toutes mes algéries face à face. J'ai vu en vives lueurs comment je ne serai jamais une leur. Elles allaient à leur vie leur, leur tour vient devinais-je, sans lequel je ne serais pas moi et qui brille loin de moi, devinais-je ».

<sup>219</sup> « Jumelles et pourtant et désormais pour toujours étrangères ».

often one of two separate worlds. The relationships are certainly not described in as idyllic of a manner as in Moati's novel, nor as contentious and hostile, but rather more ambiguous and very minimal. For Goldmann specifically, this contact seems to be very limited. She claims that she only sometimes played with her Arab neighbors when she was younger, and part of the limited contact had to do with the fact that, once the girls reach puberty, they were closed up in their houses until marriage. Also, according to her, the Arab families did not send their girls to school (101). In contrast, "if the Arab women were cloistered, the Jewish women moved about freely" (105)<sup>220</sup>. Her association with Arab boys was even less, due to the "segregation" of boys and girls in general (101). She claims that if anyone in these two communities were more connected, it was the poor Arabs and Jews of the ghetto who bonded over their misery, especially the women (105). She explains: "contact between the different communities existed either way at the top of the social stratum, in the *grande bourgeoisie*, or all the way at the bottom" (101).<sup>221</sup> Goldmann was from one of the richer families in Tunisia, so she would not have experienced this kind of contact. She states that in general, she also had little interaction with any other communities (Arab, Corsican) at least until she was in her adolescence (116).

Goldmann's perception is that they practically existed in different worlds:

You must understand that Tunisian society was colonial, and typically colonial at that. There were three worlds that rubbed elbows, lived in parallel worlds with hardly any contact between them: the world of metropolitan

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<sup>220</sup> « si les femmes arabes étaient cloîtrées, les Juives, elles, circulaient librement ».

<sup>221</sup> « les contacts entre les différentes communautés existaient soit tout en haut de l'échelle sociale, dans la grande bourgeoisie, soit tout en bas ».

origins made up of [French] functionaries and settlers; the Arab world, and the Jewish world. (101)<sup>222</sup>

Goldmann emphasizes the nature of a colonial society as one that is separate and segregated, where each community, as Dugas suggests, is marginalized by the colonizer. Likewise, Kahn describes Algeria as a place where “geographically the towns were set up in such a way that the territories were practically separate. There were the Arab neighborhoods, the Jewish neighborhoods, and the neighborhoods where the French lived...” (Interview)<sup>223</sup> Chouraqui echoes this portrayal: “[The Muslims, French and Jews were] separate groups [that] were never superimposed. They never attempted to create conditions that might lead to their fusion” (xviii).

In interviews with both Kahn and Cohen, they speak of the Arabs and Jews in Algeria as living in “two different worlds” (Cohen) and in separate communities. There may have been some friendships, or at least relationships of some sort, but they never went to each other’s houses, except for housekeepers or merchants (Cohen, Kahn). The two worlds were so separate, in fact, Kahn recounts, that she had to go to visit her Muslim friend in the Arab quarters without her mother’s permission: “I had a friend, Sultana, the one I write the story about. And when I went to her house, I always went with fear in my stomach. Because I was passing into the other’s territory. It was as if I passed a border. My mother, I never told her I was going”

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<sup>222</sup> « Il faut comprendre que la société tunisienne était alors coloniale, et typiquement coloniale. Il y avait trois mondes qui se côtoyaient, vivaient parallèlement presque sans aucun contact entre eux: le milieu d’origine métropolitaine composé de fonctionnaires et de colons; le milieu arabe; et le milieu juif ».

<sup>223</sup> « Géographiquement les villes étaient faites d’une telle manière que c’était des territoires presque séparés. Il y avait les quartiers arabes, les quartiers juifs, les quartiers où vivaient les français... »

(Interview)<sup>224</sup>. Muslim-Jewish relationships changed depending on the political situation, according to Cohen, and yet even when there were more harmonious times in the past, there were still these “borders” that were not crossed: “No, [the communities] were separated. My father, for example, it’s another generation, before the events of Sétif of 1945<sup>225</sup>, [where] a lot of Arabs were killed, he had friends with whom he played soccer in the street and all that, but never did they go to each other’s homes. It was closed off” (Interview)<sup>226</sup>. Cohen describes the worlds as having been so separate that she didn’t even know what it was like in the Arab quarters. It was only once she returned after Algerian Independence that she experienced “things like men, lowering their eyes before women, etc. It was very separate” (Interview)<sup>227</sup>.

Goldmann regrets this separate reality: “It’s because of having lived in a society where each community lived in its own specificity that I know the dangers of exclusion that this conceals” (125)<sup>228</sup>. Again Goldmann refers to what she calls the something “underneath” these relationships between Jews and Arabs, whether they seem harmonious, hostile, or indifferent. In a separate essay on identity and acculturation in Jewish women, Goldmann feels that the coherence of the Jewish

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<sup>224</sup> « Moi j’avais une amie, Sultana, qui c’était celle dont je raconte l’histoire. Et quand j’allais chez elle, j’y allais toujours avec la peur au ventre. Parce que je passais dans le territoire de l’autre. C’est comme si je passais une frontière. Ma mère je lui disais jamais que j’y allais ».

<sup>225</sup> According to *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, “In 1945 the Sétif town area was the site of a spontaneous outburst against French colonial rule, and more than 100 Europeans were killed. In retaliation, by Algerian count after the fact, between 6,000 and 8,000 Muslims were massacred.” (“Sétif.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007.)

<sup>226</sup> « Non, c’était séparé. Mon père, par exemple, c’est une autre génération, avant les événements de Sétif de 1945, beaucoup d’arabes ont été tués, il avait des amis avec qu’il jouait au foot dans la rue et tout ça mais jamais les uns allaient chez les autres. C’était fermé ».

<sup>227</sup> « des choses comme les hommes, il baissent les yeux devant les femmes, etc., C’était très séparé. C’était deux mondes différents ».

<sup>228</sup> « C’est pour avoir vécu dans une société où chaque communauté vivait dans sa propre spécificité que je connais les dangers d’exclusion qu’elle recèle ».

community also “permitted tolerating the rejection or ignorance of other communities” (“Identité” 300)<sup>229</sup>.

Goldmann also speaks about a certain feeling of distance from her own community, and is sorry about this fact. She is equally as unhappy that, just as she was unaware of Jewish culture, she was unaware of Arab culture. The culture around her was Western culture: “[There was] not one word of Arab culture, not at school, nor in cultural demonstrations.... There were no visible and accessible traces of this [Arab] culture around me” (117, 125)<sup>230</sup>. Goldmann sees the Arab world as a mystery, and alleges that any contact with the reality of the world around her she chose to ignore for her own imagination of how the world should be (116): “There was neither marginality nor eccentricity. The Arab world had become even more opaque [in the city of Tunis] than it had been in the countryside: It was silence and mystery”(116).<sup>231</sup> This notion of mystery applies also to Cixous’s narrator’s imagined relationships with her Arab counterparts. Both Goldmann and Cixous’s narrator see their Arab neighbors with a veil of imagination, creating in their heads a type of reality that they know is somewhat illusory.

In retrospect, Goldmann lived in a “mythical Tunisia”: the Arab world was “closed” to her, in that “the present seemed to be without History [sic], frozen in a predetermined space and time” (*Les Filles* 117)<sup>232</sup>. This mythical aspect, she claims, is characteristic of a colonial society—the illusion that everything would continue “as

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<sup>229</sup> « permettait de supporter les rejets ou l’ignorance des autres communautés ».

<sup>230</sup> « [Il n’y avait] pas un mot de la culture arabe, ni à l’école ni dans les manifestations culturelles.... Il n’y avait pas de traces visibles et accessibles de cette culture [arabe] autour de moi ».

<sup>231</sup> « Il n’y avait ni marginalité ni excentricité. Le monde arabe était devenu encore plus opaque qu’à la campagne: c’était le silence et le mystère ».

<sup>232</sup> « le présent semblait sans Histoire, figé à jamais dans un espace et une temporalité prédéterminés. »

[it was] before”—that the colonized peoples are essentially erased from public view (117). If the culture that was colonized is not visible any longer, then it is easier to forget that it has been eradicated through the colonial process. She maintains that even the Arabs themselves had forgotten their past culture:

The Arabs that I met at school or at college didn't speak to me about their past. We talked about the same books, the same movies (European). They themselves studied at the French high school and were culturally turned towards the West. I regret that our contact at the time happened through this type of acculturation... (125)<sup>233</sup>

Passages like this one in Goldmann's text not only document the reality of her life as an exiled Tunisian Jew in France, but also convey to the reader a certain regret that makes it difficult to believe that her text is devoid of nostalgia, as she claims in her preface.

### **Strained Relations**

More than many of the other texts, Kahn's novel goes into more depth about the strained relationships between Arabs and Jews in Algeria. Despite increasingly tense relations between the Arabs and the Jews as independence approaches, Liana still remains hopeful in her relationship with Sultana, a young Muslim woman who lives across town. Although they are friends, Liana soon learns from her interaction with Sélim the animosity that much of the Muslim community holds towards the Jews. During a conversation with Sélim, Liana sees her father, who tells her the good

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<sup>233</sup> « Les Arabes que je fréquentais au lycée ou à l'université ne me parlaient pas de leur passé. On discutait des mêmes livres, des mêmes films (européens). Eux-mêmes avaient fait leurs études au lycée français et étaient tournés culturellement vers l'Occident. Je regrette que nos contacts à l'époque se soient passés sur ce mode d'acculturation... »

news that he finally received his French citizenship. Liana proceeds to tell Sélim that she has received the “best news in the world”-- her father is French now. He replies, lips tense, “Only Allah has the power to change a man’s destiny. Even the French with all of their power can’t make your father one of them!” (181)<sup>234</sup>

When Liana and Sélim go to see her friend Sultana, Sélim says that Sultana should congratulate Liana, because “The French are true magicians. With a slip of paper, they transform a Jew from Algeria into a Frenchman!” (181)<sup>235</sup> Very upset, Liana responds: “When they come to cut our throats, it will certainly not be you who will come help us!” (182)<sup>236</sup>

Kahn defends her depiction of Sélim, claiming that he and many other Muslims reacted this way not because they truly hated the Jews but because “there’s a time when we make choices and he chose his country, even if he was torn up inside” (Interview)<sup>237</sup>. She continues: “Sélim is a guy of integrity, so he couldn’t... he chose independence despite everything, even if he was close to the French, the Jews, Anne and all, the moment arrives, he needed to make the choice” (Interview)<sup>238</sup>. Kahn is very careful to create complex characters, and not to present any of them as decidedly one way or the other. She continues:

... in the south there isn’t the same notion of time. Everything is slower, more complicated. It’s not black and white... there are people who spend hours sitting, because it’s hot, who think, who reflect. So Sélim was

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<sup>234</sup> « Seul Allah a le pouvoir de modifier le destin d’un homme. Même les Français avec toute leur puissance ne peuvent pas faire de ton père l’un des leurs! »

<sup>235</sup> « Les Français sont des véritables magiciens. Avec un bout de papier, ils transforment un juif d’Algérie en Français! »

<sup>236</sup> « Quand on viendra nous égorger, ce n’est pas sûrement pas vous qui viendrez nous aider! »

<sup>237</sup> « il y a un moment où on fait des choix et lui il a choisi son pays, même s’il était déchiré ».

<sup>238</sup> « Sélim est un gars d’intègre, donc il ne pouvait pas ... il a choisi l’indépendance malgré tout, même s’il était très proche des Français, des juifs, d’Anne et tout, le moment venu, le choix il fallait le faire ».

one of those Muslims who wasn't Manichean –either I'm for or against— but it came to a making a choice. That's what we did, we made a choice to leave (Interview).<sup>239</sup>

Kahn's statement here shows that part of the ambiguity in the picture of Jewish-Muslim relations in these texts could be relative to the experiences of the authors as well as the time period of the narratives. Here, Kahn shows that Sélim was close to his non-Muslim neighbors before the war, and therefore his relationship with them changes drastically throughout the novel. Most of the events of these texts take place before the wars of Independence, when the Jewish community's precarious position was illuminated. The Jews, as well as their fellow Arabs, wondered where they fit into the colonial project. Were they the colonizer or the colonized? As Cixous points out in her short story "Pieds Nus," they were both. Critic Jennifer Yee describes the narrators of Cixous's story as "twice innocent—as children and as Jews, members of an excluded community—and yet they are necessarily implicated in the colonial system" (192).

The perceived role of the Jews as an extension of the colonizers led to a feeling of betrayal on both sides. Interviews that Elizabeth Friedman conducted with members of a small Algerian Jewish community revealed the perception of a fairly harmonious co-existence between the Algerian Jews and their Muslim neighbors up until the beginning of the Algerian Revolution (33):

A constant tale of the past was a sense of kinship with the Muslim population coupled with anger and hate. Betrayal is the word which comes to

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<sup>239</sup> « ... dans le sud on n'a pas la même notion du temps. Tout est plus lent, tout est plus compliqué. Ce n'est pas blanc et noir ... il y a des gens qui passent des heures assis parce qu'il fait chaud, qui pensent, qui réfléchissent. Donc Sélim était un des musulmans qui n'étaient pas manichéens – ou je suis pour ou je suis contre—mais à l'arrivée il fallait choisir. Ce qu'on a fait nous, on a du choisir aussi de partir ».

mind....Many an interview would finish on an abrupt reference to the Algerian Revolution...and an angry recall of how the Muslims had changed.... Jews I spoke to often said that before the Algerian War “we were all alike”... there was no “difference,” and that the war made everything “rotten.” (Friedman 33, 98)

The political events in North Africa affect both the Jews and the Muslims. In Kahn’s novel, Liana undergoes a transformation from having a hopeful worldview to experiencing feelings of betrayal and distrust. This is demonstrated in a heated argument with Sultana about how the Jews cannot trust the Arabs for all of the violence that they have perpetrated against them:

Liana: It’s because we don’t trust you! Because of what we have gone through in Arab countries!

Sultana: We say the same thing about you that you say about us!

Liana: I’m not talking about that! I am speaking about the true horrors that happened in Morocco before the French arrived<sup>240</sup>. And also in other Arab countries.

Sultana: Why are you talking to me about Morocco<sup>241</sup>? What do I have to do with that country?<sup>242</sup>

Liana stops the conversation because she feels that Sultana is coming from a completely different world. Liana’s family is profoundly affected by the violence towards Jews in other parts of North Africa; every year her mother commemorates their ancestors who were killed in Morocco<sup>243</sup>. According to Liana, “the citizenship of

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<sup>240</sup> According to Kahn’s narrator, the Jews in Morocco were treated as “scapegoats” and were shot to death in public squares (191).

<sup>241</sup> It is interesting to note that “one of the earliest forced segregations of Jews was in Muslim Morocco when, in 1280, they were transferred to segregated quarters called *millahs*.” (“ghetto.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007.

<sup>242</sup> « -C’est parce qu’ils n’ont pas confiance en vous! À cause de ce qu’ils ont subi dans les pays arabes!

-On dit de vous exactement ce que vous dites de nous!...

-Je ne parle pas de ça! Je te parle de véritables horreurs qui se sont passées au Maroc, avant l’arrivée des Français. Et aussi dans d’autres pays arabes.

-Pourquoi tu me parles du Maroc? Qu’est-ce que j’ai à voir avec ce pays, moi? »

<sup>243</sup> See note 63.

her father, this ‘piece of paper’ that Sélim despised, is nothing more than their shield against that [kind of] arbitrary violence” (190-191)<sup>244</sup>. Liana’s conflation of Algerian and Moroccan Jews reflects an obvious sense among the Jewish community that they have been oppressed and persecuted by Arabs as a group, rather than specifically those within their own country. This is interesting in light of the repetition in many of these works that the Jews in each country shared common origins with their fellow Arab residents.

The anti-Semitism portrayed in Kahn’s novel may be a sign of the reality of anti-Semitism that existed in Algeria. According to Benjamin Stora, a large wave of anti-Semitism broke out in the late 1800’s, protesting the Crémieux Decree of 1870 and accusing Jews of being “‘capitalists’ who oppressed the people, even though the vast majority were very poor” (10). He adds that “what we can discern in the anti-Jewish campaigns is denunciation of the ‘native’ who had been elevated to the status of French national” (10-11). When Sélim is outraged at Liana’s father, a mere “native” Algerian, being elevated to the status of a Frenchman, Stora’s statement is echoed in Kahn’s work. This notion of “native” also refers to the categorization of the colonized peoples. Thus, if the Jews are no longer “native,” then they would by default fall on the side of the colonizer, rather than the marginalized, oppressed “native” population. The term “native” here is reminiscent of Ben’s text, when the label of “native” confuses and disturbs her. Just as she is unsure of how to categorize her own identity, Sélim’s statement that the Jews are actually Algerian and not French conveys a similar confusion in how their Muslim neighbors view the Jews as well.

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<sup>244</sup> « La naturalisation de son père, ce ‘morceau de papier’ que méprise tant Sélim n’est rien d’autre que leur bouclier contre cet arbitraire-là ».

### **French-Jewish Relations: Betrayal and Belonging**

This ambiguity of identity is conveyed not only through the Jewish relations with their Muslim neighbors, but also in their interactions with the (Christian) French. The French who live in North Africa therefore view the Jews as not completely “one of them,” even if many of the Jews felt a strong allegiance and association with the French.

In the case of Ben, she experiences discrimination from both the government (being kicked out of school and stripped of her nationality) and from her peers. At one point, she becomes very good friends with the French Gisèle, whom she adores and admires. One day while the two are playing hopscotch, Gisèle turns to her suddenly and says: “First off you, I’m no longer speaking to you” and she replies “And why?” Gisèle answers: “Because you killed the good Lord” (54)<sup>245</sup>. She points out that this was the same day that Gisèle began her lessons of catechism. From this incident, Ben says that she learned one lesson: “that it would be difficult... to have friends” (54)<sup>246</sup>.

This scene with Gisèle and Ben raises questions of an older, more deep-seated feeling of betrayal, in this case by the Jews against Jesus Christ. When Gisèle accuses Ben of killing her God, it points to anti-Semitism that stems from this belief. This is also reminiscent of the sentiment surrounding the Dreyfus Affair in France, where the accusations of treason against Alfred Dreyfus were based on the perception that the

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<sup>245</sup> « D’abord toi, j’tu parle plus ». « Et pourquoi ? » « Parce que tu as tué le bon Dieu ».

<sup>246</sup> « ...qu’il me sera difficile d’avoir des amis ».

“threat posed by Jews... extend[ed] to the very heart of the French state” (Wood 256).

This betrayal, therefore, goes both ways when it comes to the Jews’, and in particular, the North African Jews’, relationship to the French. In Ben’s text, after the Crémieux Decree is reinstated and the Jews are allowed to vote again in governmental assemblies in Algeria, Ben’s parents still feel the sting of the discriminatory laws under the Vichy government: “My parents, who had been given back their French citizenship.... still felt the painful *tear* that remained on their hearts from the anti-Semitic laws implemented by the Vichy government” (158-9, *emphasis added*).<sup>247</sup> Ben uses the image of a “tear” earlier in her book when she talks about a nightmare that she has<sup>248</sup>.

Ben’s choice of a “tear on the heart,” representing both a conflict of identity and a scar left from a traumatic betrayal, is also particularly significant in the Jewish religion. Traditionally, close mourners of a deceased loved one put a tear in their clothing over their heart symbolizing their loss, as well as signaling others in the community to treat them gently during the mourning period while their heart heals.

This “tear” in Ben’s text stems from the feeling of betrayal by the French that the Jews experience. Albert Memmi, in his famous work *La Statue de sel*, outlines the betrayal he feels when he enlists in the French army and is told that he must change his ethnic-sounding name<sup>249</sup>. Memmi recalls the incident as a

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<sup>247</sup> « Mes parents, à qui l’on avait redonné la nationalité française, votaient donc au premier collège. Mais, elle était encore douloureuse la déchirure qu’ils gardaient au coeur, depuis les lois antisémites de Vichy ».

<sup>248</sup> See “Defining Being Jewish” in this chapter.

<sup>249</sup> Memmi’s real name is Mordekhai Alexandre Benillouche.

painful, astonishing betrayal... by a civilization in which I had placed all my hopes, to which I offered all my ardent admiration. Suddenly, the nice idea that the Europeans of Europe were different from the colonial Europeans collapsed. All of Europe showed itself to be unjust. (293)<sup>250</sup>

As a result, “Having refused to align himself with the Jewish Orient and now rejected by the French Occident, he feels depressed, unable to belong, ‘vanquished’” (Horn 149). As Jarrod Hayes says in *Queer Nations*, Memmi’s inability to become truly “French” mirrors his inability to ever be truly “Tunisian,” due to his status as a Jew. Hayes says: “Even prior to colonization, the Jewish narrator [in Memmi’s book] would not have been completely Tunisian, and thus Memmi complicates even Bhaba’s paradigm [of ‘not quite/not white’]. Not quite Tunisian. Not French. Not quite/not Tunisian or French” (279). This goes back to Cixous’s dilemma of being Arab and yet not truly Arab, Algerian and not truly Algerian, and French yet not truly belonging in France.

The betrayal in this scene in Memmi’s book also echoes that of Liana in Kahn’s novel, when the French send all the little Algerian children a package full of toiletries, implying that they are dirty “in short, a necessity for scrubbing down those little grimy natives!” (308)<sup>251</sup> Liana is humiliated, and this is the first time that her illusions about France are shattered: “Her first quarrel with France can be traced to this wound of self-esteem. She confusedly understood that day that the adoration that she dedicated to that country would not be without some disillusionment” (308)<sup>252</sup>.

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<sup>250</sup>(I owe part of this translation to Horn, 149) « C’était la douloureuse, l’étonnante, trahison, ... d’une civilisation en qui j’avais placé tous mes espoirs, à laquelle j’accordai toute mon ardente admiration. Brusquement, l’idée complaisante que les Européens d’Europe étaient différents des Européens coloniaux s’effondrait. L’Europe tout entière se révélait injuste ».

<sup>251</sup> « bref, un nécessaire à récurer les petits indigènes crasseux! »

<sup>252</sup> « Sa première brouille avec la France date de cette blessure d’amour-propre. Elle a compris confusément ce jour-là que l’adoration qu’elle voue à ce pays n’ira pas sans quelques désillusions ».

Like in Cixous's, Ben's, and many of these authors' texts, the relationship to France and their supposed French identity is wrought with ambivalence, just like their relationship to their Muslim neighbors.

Darmon's novel shows another side of this relationship: the disdain that some North African Jews have for the French. Sarah Lévy describes her grandmother, "*La Mamie*," as "not feeling French, and she admired the French even though she despised them. She hated in them not their nationality but their religion that represented for her a combination of stupidity and barbarity. She pronounced 'Cristo' like one spits" (39)<sup>253</sup>. This attitude is certainly an exception among these texts, where the Muslims or the Jews are more often seen as "stupid" and "barbaric" rather than the "civilized" Christians.

### **Alienation and Ambivalence within the Jewish Community**

#### **Cohesion of Community**

Nevertheless, the Moslem environment—its culture, its religion, its attitudes, its language and its economy—was still basically close to Jewish society. The French...encouraged the Jews to abandon the milieu of the colonized masses and to become an integral part of the colonizing elite. Thus the Jews lost touch simultaneously with both the North African society and the Jewish community without, however, being able to strike firm roots among the French. They never really acquired a sense of belonging to the new world they had entered. (Chouraqui 260)

Chouraqui's passage paints a picture of the North African Jews as a community that truly belonged nowhere, and was perhaps not even a community to

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<sup>253</sup> « ne se sentait pas française, et elle admirait les Français tout en les méprisant. Elle méprisait en eux non pas leur nationalité mais leur religion qui représentait pour elle le comble de la stupidité et de la barbarie. Elle prononçait 'Cristo' comme on crache ».

begin with. The invasion of the French and the desire for the Jews to assimilate with the French culture may have resulted in an alienation from the Jewish community and a disassociation with a Jewish identity. Chouraqui's claim that the Jews did not fully belong anywhere, neither in their North African homeland, nor in their new homeland of France, is reflected in all of these authors' texts quite strongly. This feeling of a lack of belonging with their Jewish community may be a motivation for these women to write these nostalgic pieces about their childhoods and their pasts growing up Jewish in North Africa. Perhaps these women, through their writing, are trying to find this connection to other Jews, this connection to *something*, so that they can make sense of their pasts and their identities that are so multiply-layered and complex.

Dugas, in *Littérature judéo-maghrébine d'expression française*, speaks to what he calls this "dual relationship" between the self and belonging to one's community in the case of Maghrebians Jews:

This dual relationship, with the original *milieu* on one hand and the "society of belonging" on the other, the characters in Judeo-Maghrebian novels can only live [this relationship] in a conflictual manner, and—while the "collective me" of their community continually oscillates between two opposite poles of inclusion and singularization— their "individual me" appears torn between a reassuring anchorage at the heart of the group of origin, and an adventurous desire to escape. (99)<sup>254</sup>

Many of these authors express feeling various levels of belonging to the larger Jewish communities. In her interview, Kahn tells of her distance from her own Jewish community, mainly because of the terrible way that she feels women were treated

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<sup>254</sup> « Cette double relation, avec le milieu originel d'une part, la 'société d'appartenance' d'autre part, les personnages de romans judéo-maghrébains ne peuvent que la vivre de façon conflictuelle, et—de même que 'le moi collectif' de leur communauté oscille en permanence entre deux pôles antagonistes d'inclusion et de singularisation—de même leur 'moi individuel' apparaîtra déchiré entre un rassurant ancrage au sein du groupe d'origine, et un aventureux désir de fuir ».

within this community. She states that she started very young rebelling against this: “Very quickly, I started to say no. No to religion; I was not a believer. No to practicing it, even” (Interview)<sup>255</sup>. Since Liana, according to Kahn, is based on her own life, Liana’s rebellion against her community is an important part of the novel as well. To her, her religion represents oppression and lack of choices, and it is for this reason that she longs to go to France to be “free.” However, Kahn emphasizes that her book is not a criticism of the Jewish community: “It’s not a value judgment because they had no choice” (Interview).<sup>256</sup>

Goldmann describes a feeling disconnectedness from her community as well. She states that her family was non-practicing and called themselves “agnostic” (*Filles* 108). She writes about her lack of integration within the Jewish community around her, claiming that not only did she have little part in the Jewish culture, but there was little that was purely part of a Jewish culture to begin with. She says that the only activity for Tunisian Jews was to go to synagogue—that there was no real Jewish culture outside of the religious aspect in Tunisia (123). However, in a separate article, she presents a contradictory view of the Jewish community: “The feeling of belonging was actually very strong, even if there wasn’t, in the family, religious practices or contacts with official Jewish institutions” (“Identité” 299)<sup>257</sup>. One reason for this, Goldmann claims, is that the Jewish community of Tunisia had existed for so long, and that even if “its history was not well-known, it was part of the Tunisian

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<sup>255</sup> « Moi, très vite, j’ai commencé à dire non. Non à la religion; je n’étais pas croyante. Non à la pratique même ».

<sup>256</sup> « Ce n’est pas un jugement de valeur parce qu’ils n’avaient pas le choix ».

<sup>257</sup> « Le sentiment d’appartenance était en effet très fort, même s’il n’y avait pas, dans la famille, de pratique religieuse ou de contacts avec les institutions juives officielles ».

landscape for centuries” (299)<sup>258</sup>. Another reason is that the communities (Jewish, Arab, French) were so divided, that each individual group was “structured and homogenous” (300)<sup>259</sup>. This representation of the cohesion of the Jewish community contradicts those in many of the other texts, as well as in Goldmann’s narrative. Such inconsistencies reflect Dugas’s assessment that the North African Jewish community was constantly “torn” between belonging and alienation.

### **Defining Being Jewish**

One important factor in the varied levels of connectedness to their Jewish community is how each of these authors define being Jewish. Goldmann feels that, for her, being Jewish is “one aspect of her personality” and that she didn’t receive any Jewish religious education nor does she know much about Jewish dogma, ideology, or history (*Filles* 124). At the same time, as previously mentioned, Goldmann regrets this lack of connection.

Goldmann obviously sees her position as a Jew as problematic and complicated. She believes that certain categorization breeds intolerance, and her main goal is to avoid this. Spire elaborates upon Goldmann’s perspective:

Yes, she is Jewish, but by and for the universal values that “her” Judaism drives. With the implicit contradictions that such a position brings about: recognition of an Arab culture oppressed by colonization, but unconsciousness of the same phenomenon in relation to the Jews. And it’s not until recently that Annie Goldmann claims to have discovered the existence of a “oriental Jewish culture” and, asking herself how it is possible that she remained in ignorance, she short-circuits any response (289)<sup>260</sup>.

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<sup>258</sup> « son histoire était mal connue, elle avait fait partie depuis des siècles du paysage tunisien. »

<sup>259</sup> « structurées et homogènes ».

<sup>260</sup> « Oui, elle est Juive, mais par et pour les valeurs universelles que ‘son’ judaïsme véhicule. Avec les contradictions implicites qu’une telle position entraîne: reconnaissance d’une culture arabe opprimée

Goldmann also has a negative attitude towards the preponderance of nostalgia that she sees within the Jewish community. She takes issue with this notion of Judaism as always looking to the past: “Even as a Jew, I don’t think that looking to the past, that loyalty to any type of fixed thinking, is a way to claim one’s Jewishness in the present (124)<sup>261</sup>. Cohen has a similar view of this, saying that she examined her past, but “I don’t know if I want the orange blossom anymore. Because I rather feel like going towards tomorrow, because I think this is the profound destiny of the Jews. Not knowing... we are here, we will die there, we don’t know where” (Interview).<sup>262</sup> She does not want to look into the past, into nostalgia. Her hesitancy about looking into the past may also be a contributing factor to the self-proclaimed denial of nostalgia in their texts.

Moati has a unique way of defining her Jewishness. She says that she is “not a Jew in the Sartrean sense. It’s not the look of others that defines me. I am intensely and entirely Jewish, without fanaticism, without credo, without interference with anyone or anything” (König)<sup>263</sup>. Once again, her definition of being Jewish is not tied to her community, but rather to a more individual idea of what being Jewish means.

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par la colonisation, mais inconscience du même phénomène quant aux Juifs. Et ce n’est que récemment qu’Annie Goldmann dit avoir découvert l’existence d’une ‘culture juive orientale,’ et, se demandant comment il est possible qu’elle en ait toujours été dans l’ignorance, elle court-circuite toute réponse ».

<sup>261</sup> « Même en tant que Juive, je ne pense pas que le recours au passé, à la fidélité à des formes de pensée figées, soit une manière d’assumer sa judéité dans le présent ».

<sup>262</sup> « mais je ne sais pas si j’ai plus envie de la fleur d’oranger. Parce que j’ai plutôt envie d’aller vers demain, parce que je pense que c’est le destin profond des juifs. Pas savoir... on est ici, on meurt là-bas, on ne sait pas où ».

<sup>263</sup> « pas une juive à la façon sartrienne. Ce n’est pas le regard des autres qui m’identifie. Je suis intensément et entièrement juive, sans fanatisme, sans credo, sans heurt avec qui que ce soit ou quoi que ce soit ».

Goldmann, too, shapes her identity and political beliefs around a more individualized sense of who she is, due to her distance from the Jewish community.

Spire maintains:

The atheism of [Goldmann's] environment makes a traditional Jewish environment foreign to her, one she sees as obscure. What she knows is a guilt of the rich, of the bourgeoisie, that she holds equally against the Arabs and the Jews, not as outdated or obscure cultures, but as socially oppressed classes, which will lead to her political orientation after her departure. (288)<sup>264</sup>

In her text, Goldmann describes herself as existing between two worlds: Arab and European, not Jewish. Spire underlines that this vision of the Jewish people is of “Jews with no longer any positive content, Jews only by social labeling, so assimilated to the West that they aren't even part of Tunisia, they are going leave by their own free will” (289)<sup>265</sup>. According to Laskier, many North African Muslims were in the same position after World War II: “Muslim Algerians, ... found themselves between two worlds: the modern Western world and the world of their historical Arabo-Berber past” (316). He adds:

All colonial revolutions are characterized by [a] duality, but in the case of Algeria the duality, or dichotomy, was especially marked—because of the length of the conquest (since 1830), because of the unusual exposure of its elite to French acculturation, and because it had lived so long on the edges of the modern and Western economic and social world of the *colons* (316).

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<sup>264</sup> « L'athéisme de son milieu la rend étrangère à un milieu juif traditionnel ressenti comme obscurantiste. Ce qu'elle connaît, c'est une culpabilité de riche, de bourgeoise qui la porte également vers Juifs et Arabes, non pas en tant que cultures périmées ou occultées, mais en tant que classes opprimées socialement, ce qui entraînera son orientation politique puis son départ ».

<sup>265</sup> « Juifs sans plus aucun contenu positif, Juifs seulement par étiquetage social, tellement assimilés à l'Occident qu'ils ne font même pas partie de la Tunisie, ils vont partir d'eux-mêmes ».

This term “duality” is crucial to the discussion of the identities of not only Jewish North Africans, but all colonized and diasporic peoples<sup>266</sup>. As Moati says in the epigraph of one of her books (quoting Primo Levi): the Jewish people, like all exiled people, feel “the ancient grief of the people that has no land, the grief without hope of the exodus which is renewed every century” (König)<sup>267</sup>.

According to Elissa Gelfand, Cixous’s notion of what it means to be Jewish is very politically charged, shaped by her own experiences as a Jew in Algeria:

Cixous was at once French, Algerian, and neither. Given these shifts in the Jews’ status, Cixous rejects the notion of a fixed, predetermined Jewish identity. She also, until recently, attributed no particular importance to her own Jewishness. In this sense, Cixous has viewed being Jewish as a philosophical, rather than a religious or ethnic question. Just as she sees “woman” as the “other” who has been repressed, both conceptually and materially, in the masculine order, so too “Jew” as an idea and as a reality has been subjected to violence. (Sartori and Hage 148)

Cixous’s invention of the term “*juifemme*” (or “Jewoman”) embodies the violence that both women and Jews have suffered, combining “two incomplete labels” in order to convey “Cixous’s refusal of stable identity categories” (Sartori and Hage 148). Cixous’s relationship to her Jewishness is ambivalent and often unclear in her texts, an element that many of these authors have in common.

Darmon’s protagonist Sarah Lévy not only feels ambivalent about her identity as a Jew, but outwardly criticizes aspects of her religion, taking issue with what she sees as its hypocrisy. She sees her family emotionally saying Passover prayers one

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<sup>266</sup> For example, see Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé, Portrait du colonisateur*, Paris: Éditions Corr  a, 1957.

<sup>267</sup> « L’antique douleur du peuple qui n’a pas de patrie, la douleur sans espoir de l’exode que chaque si  cle renouvelle ».

day, “tears in their eyes” and then the next day “devouring ham and butter”<sup>268</sup> sandwiches at the beach. Why this duplicity, this incoherence?”(61)<sup>269</sup> She also hates her grandmother’s feeling of superiority at being Jewish, and her disgust for other religions, as well as many Jewish foods and stereotypical Mediterranean Jewish emotionality (60): “I hated Jewish Moroccan cooking, matzah, *dafina*”<sup>270</sup>, I hated the screams, the drama, and the frenzy” (60)<sup>271</sup>.

In general, Sarah finds Jewish traditions to be strange and wonders why she should be proud of her religion, as he father tells her to be (61). Her father says: “Because you need to know, Sarah, that you are Jewish. If you have the misfortune of forgetting, others will be there to remind you.... You need to know that you are Jewish, and you need to be proud of it” (61)<sup>272</sup>. She doesn’t understand why she should be proud of such strange customs and regulations (61). Her father replies that all religions are stupid, “but when you belong to a hated minority, you need to affirm yourself as part of that minority. Period.” (62)<sup>273</sup>.

Sarah’s father’s speech is not only reminiscent of the speech Ben’s father gives her as they drive through the Muslim ghetto, but it also touches on a crucial aspect of Judaism that I mentioned previously: the obligation to memory. As Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz says in her essay “Diasporism, Feminism and Coalition,” the

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<sup>268</sup> Ham is not only a non-Kosher meat, but the combination of meat and dairy products is also a non-Kosher practice. In addition, the bread from the sandwich would violate the rules of Passover.

<sup>269</sup> « Il fallait taper la Haggadah au grand complet, les larmes dans les yeux, mais le lendemain nous dévorions des sandwiches jambon-beurre sur la plage. Pourquoi cette duplicité, cette incohérence? »

<sup>270</sup> This is a Sephardic version of a meat, potato and bean stew, usually served on the Sabbath.

<sup>271</sup> « J’avais horreur de la cuisine juive marocaine, des *matzoths*, de la *dafina*, j’avais horreur des cris, du drame et de la frénésie ».

<sup>272</sup> « Parce qu’il faut que tu saches, Sarah, que tu es juive. Si tu as le malheur de l’oublier, d’autres seront là pour te le rappeler....Il faut que tu saches que tu es juive, et que tu en sois fière. »

<sup>273</sup> « ....mais quand on appartient à une minorité haïe, on s’affirme comme faisant partie de cette minorité. Point ».

“vehicle” for diasporists to connect intergenerationally is “not [through] the bloodline but culture, history, memory” (247). She applies this specifically to the Jewish diaspora, commenting on Alain Finkielkraut’s *The Imaginary Jew*:

[Finkielkraut claims]: “For if Judaism has a central injunction, it should be thought of not as a matter of identity, but of memory...” Memory. History. And, implied, but let me make it explicit, *larger than oneself*. No surprise, the idea that Jewishness is about connection to other Jews. (250)

Sarah Lévy thinks that this connection is largely through a history of suffering, as she describes her grandmother as possessing “all the obsessions, all the anxiety, and all the audacity inherent in the Jewish people” (41)<sup>274</sup>.

In fact, determining what connects or defines all Jews is crucial to Sarah’s search for her identity. Darmon’s text, like many of the others I study, struggle with what being Jewish actually means. At one point in a conversation with Sarah’s mother and sister, one of them says, in reference to Sarah’s brother’s girlfriend wanting to convert to Judaism, “...one does not become Jewish. One is born Jewish” (16)<sup>275</sup>. This reverses Simone de Beauvoir’s famous statement that one is not born a woman, one becomes one, in defining both what makes one *really* Jewish and what makes one *really* a woman. Sarah’s questioning and lack of connection to her community has her father scared that she will convert, that she is ashamed of being Jewish. Yet, according to her, she is not ashamed: “I didn’t feel ashamed. Only a helpless rage, a desire for something else, but I didn’t know what” (62)<sup>276</sup>.

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<sup>274</sup> « toutes les obsessions, toute l’angoisse et toute l’audace inhérentes au peuple juif ».

<sup>275</sup> « ...on ne devient pas juif. On naît juif ».

<sup>276</sup> « Je n’éprouvais pas de honte. Seulement une rage impuissante, un désir d’autre chose, mais je ne savais pas quoi ».

Sarah Lévy spends much of her story questioning what it means to her to be Jewish, especially when one day, on a trip with one of her Jewish friends, she sees her kneel down to pray in a church. When Sarah questions her friend as to why she is kneeling in a church, her friend replies that God does not care where or how she prays (91). However, something about the situation bothers Sarah deeply. After all, regardless of her criticism and questioning her own religion, she says “I was Jewish, and I owed it to myself to stay that way” (91)<sup>277</sup>.

The discrimination and violence Ben experiences also lead her to question this identity of “Jew” which, at her young age, is a new concept to her. In one scene, she is harassed at school by her Christian classmates for being Jewish, for not having straight blond hair (30)<sup>278</sup>. She is called a “dirty Jew,” and her younger brother is beaten up after school. Up until this point, she is unaware that this aspect of her identity makes her any different from the rest of her class, and is at first baffled by the names which she begins to hear on a regular basis: “That was the first time I had ever heard these words. I didn’t know then that this word [Jew], against which I rebelled immediately, had instilled in me a certain anguish, a fear...” (27).<sup>279</sup>

As she continues to be faced with this discrimination and name-calling, she struggles to understand what this label, this new identity, really means:

What did it mean to be Jewish? And why was I beaten up because of it? Maybe this was why my teacher got me in trouble with the principal. But if the principal was a friend of my grandmother’s, then she couldn’t be as mean to me as the other girls. Unless my grandmother wasn’t Jewish. Maybe

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<sup>277</sup> « J’étais juive, et me devais de le rester ».

<sup>278</sup> Later, she speaks of her non-Jewish friend Gisèle, whom she is attracted to without knowing why, perhaps, as she says, to “learn the secrets of straight hair” (48).

<sup>279</sup> « C’était la première fois que j’entendais ces mots.... Je ne savais pas encore que ce mot contre lequel je me rebellais immédiatement... venait de faire pénétrer en moi l’angoisse, la peur... »

I was the only one in the whole family, and that was why I slept in the kitchen, while my sister and brothers each had their own room (33).<sup>280</sup>

Goldmann also poses this question in her narrative: “In what way am I Jewish? Now what is it to be Jewish?” (124).<sup>281</sup> Ben’s passage reflects an obvious sense of alienation, even within her family, instead of a sense of community with her fellow Jews. It also shows that, until she is teased for her Jewish identity, she does not self-identify as Jewish, nor does she understand what being Jewish is. When this happens, she is taken in by her fellow Jewish students, who tell her “you’re Jewish like us”<sup>282</sup> even though she feels that she has “nothing in common” with them (30). Instead, she is drawn towards the French Gisèle, “the little blond girl,” who, “unaware, like me, of all these problems, became my friend, up until the day when... but that is another story” (30-31)<sup>283</sup>.

Once Ben learns that this label of “Jew” makes her different from the other children at school, and that this is cause for her to be teased and physically abused, her entire world is turned upside down. Her identity, which up until this point she had perceived to be stable and secure, has been put into question, and she is faced for the first time with the feeling of a divided self, a confusion that manifests itself in her dreams:

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<sup>280</sup> « C’était quoi d’être juive? Et pourquoi cela me valait des coups? C’était pour ça aussi peut-être que la maîtresse m’avait traînée pour me dénoncer à la directrice. Mais si la directrice était l’amie de ma grand-mère, elle ne pouvait pas être aussi méchante avec moi que ces filles. A moins que ma grand-mère ne soit pas juive. Peut-être moi seule l’étais dans la famille, c’est pourquoi je dormais dans la salle à manger, alors que ma soeur et mes frères avaient chacun leur chambre ».

<sup>281</sup> « En quoi suis-je Juive?.... Or qu’est-ce qu’être Juive? »

<sup>282</sup> « tu es juive comme nous ».

<sup>283</sup> Elle « ignorant tout, comme moi, de ces problèmes, devint mon amie, jusqu’au jour où... mais ceci est une autre histoire ».

That night, for the first time, I had a dream that would become quite regular throughout my life, for periods of months, sometimes even years: I am resting against the railing of a balcony that flips over and tosses me into nothingness. Something rips inside of me like a curtain. The nothingness originates from this tear. I am sinking. (43)<sup>284</sup>

The discovery that being Jewish makes her different shows that she did not feel a part of the larger community. This could be part of the reason that she ended up staying in Algeria and in some way “betraying” her Jewish community in Algeria.

### **Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews<sup>285</sup>**

A lack of cohesion within the Jewish community stemmed from many factors, two of which being class and ethnicity, which are often linked. In Darmon’s novel, the Sephardic Sarah Lévy must deal with the prejudice of her Ashkenazi in-laws. Darmon, as a footnote in her text, describes the Ashkenazim and Sephardim as “permeated by different cultures, their lives and customs are just as different” (157)<sup>286</sup>. This image of the differences between the Sephardi/Mizrahi and Ashkenazi cultures is a large problem in Darmon’s novel, when Sarah marries an Ashkenazi Frenchman:

I was going to enter, me, Sarah Levy, Sephardic Jew, and miscreant, into the noble Ashkenazi family of the Rotzenberger-de-Vilnas, deservedly

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<sup>284</sup> « Cette nuit-là, je fis pour la première fois, le rêve, qui devait être le mien, régulièrement, tout au long de ma vie, à intervalles de plusieurs mois, voire plusieurs années: je suis au balcon, accoudée à la balustrade qui se renverse et je tombe dans un néant. Quelque chose en moi s’est déchiré comme un rideau. Ce néant sort par cette déchirure. Je suis en perdition ».

<sup>285</sup> “*Bene Ha-Mizrah*” means “Sons of the East” and the term “Mizrahi” refers to “the approximately 1,500,000 Diaspora Jews who lived for several centuries in North Africa and the Middle East and whose ancestors did not reside in either Germany or Spain.” The Mizrahi Jews are categorized differently from the two other major groups of Jews, namely “the Ashkenazim (German rite) and the Sephardim (Spanish rite)” (“Oriental Jews,” *Encyclopedia Britannica* 2007).

<sup>286</sup> « imprégnés de cultures différentes, leurs vies et leurs coutumes sont également différentes ».

and painfully enveloped by the still piercing memory of the last Nazi Holocaust.... So it was that. We were part of the under-developed group of Sephardim... We were left out of the Ashkenazi nobility. We had not suffered even a quarter of what they had suffered. Irrefutable proof of our barbarism over there, in Morocco, the Jews didn't speak Yiddish but Arabic, worse, Judeo-Arabic.... Sure, we were Jews, which was something. But Jews of Morocco... (157, 174)<sup>287</sup>

Her in-law's family attitude towards the differences between the two groups is quite evident in the ways in which Sarah describes their reaction to her different customs. It not only puts into question their level of civilization, but also their level of Jewishness. "These Jews of Morocco had stayed buried for so long in barbarism, in savagery, in ignorance, that they had certainly lost all sense of their Jewishness.... It was all the while necessary to verify if those Jews were really Jews" (173)<sup>288</sup>. This raises the question of what defines "Jewishness," which in this case is associated with education and civilization. As mentioned previously, education for the Jews in many of these works equals, as Goldmann calls it, "emancipation"—access to a world of more privilege and opportunity.

At a family gathering, Sarah must face their views of superiority over her people: "And what was more, looking at it more closely, what differentiated the Moroccan Jews from the Arabs? Huh? Same physical characteristics, same skin color, same eyes, same rampant illiteracy, and, worst of all, same language" (174).

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<sup>287</sup> « J'allais entrer, moi, Sarah Lévy, juive sépharade, et mécréante, dans la noble famille ashkénaze des Rotzenberger-de-Vilna, dignement et douloureusement auréolée du souvenir encore cuisant du dernier holocauste nazi.... C'était donc ça. Nous faisons partie du groupe sous-développé des sépharadim... Nous étions exclus de la noblesse ashkénaze. Nous n'avions pas souffert le quart de ce qu'ils avaient eux, souffert. Preuve irréfutable de notre barbarie, là-bas, au Maroc, les juifs ne parlent pas Yiddish mais arabe, pis, judéo-arabe.... Certes, nous étions juifs, c'était déjà quelque chose. Mais juifs du Maroc... »

<sup>288</sup> « Ces juifs du Maroc étaient restés plongés si longtemps dans la barbarie, dans la sauvagerie, dans l'ignorance, qu'il en avaient certainement perdu tout sens de leur judaïté.... Il fallait tout de même vérifier si ces juifs-là étaient bien des juifs. »

Darmon's novel therefore addresses issue of the way the Arab Jews are seen by the Jews of the rest of the world. Their close ties to the Arabs, in both culture and physical appearance, is often a source of discrimination. An example is in Moati's novel, when, in the first generation of women of the saga, the young orphaned Myriam, (who lives in the Jewish ghetto), is adopted by a wealthy Italian Jewess, Eugenia. When Eugenia and her sister Frida are speaking of marriage prospects for Myriam, Frida is horrified at the thought of setting Myriam up with one of *her* children because she is "a child of savages! What are Oriental Jews? Savages, barbarians. Berbers<sup>289</sup> even! No education, no culture. They are dirty, boorish, illiterate, repugnant... My God! When I think that we are supposed to have the same religion as them!" (109)<sup>290</sup>. Eugenia replies that "Myriam is our chance because she shows us our role: to pull from poverty and obscurity our Tunisian coreligionists..." (109)<sup>291</sup>. Eugenia's comment is indicative of the "*mission civilatrice*" mind-set held by many European Jews.<sup>292</sup>

Joëlle Bahloul claims that this civilizing mission is based on a view of the Sephardim as primitive and "backwards":

the opposition between "Oriental" and "Occidental" is not only a geographical and cultural one; it is also a historical one that opposes a traditional and stable (if not backward) world to a modern and advanced one. The Sephardic immigrants are themselves constantly caught in these cultural dilemmas in the construction and display of their identity... ("The Sephardic Jew" 198).

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<sup>289</sup> In the original French, there is a play on words in the phonetic similarity between "barbares" and "Berbères."

<sup>290</sup> « une enfant de sauvages! Qu'est-ce que c'est que ces juifs orientaux? Des sauvages, des barbares. Des Berbères, même! Aucune éducation, aucune culture. Ils sont sales, grossiers, illettrés, répugnants... Mon Dieu! Quand je pense qu'on est censé avoir la même religion qu'eux! »

<sup>291</sup> « Myriam est notre chance parce qu'elle nous indique quel est notre rôle: tirer de la pauvreté et de l'obscurantisme nos coreligionnaires tunisiens ».

<sup>292</sup> The Alliance Israélite Universelle schools were founded upon this principle.

She adds that there are two kinds of Sephardic Jews—“the one is the Ladino-speaking Jews, descendant of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Spanish exiles, and the other is the Judeo-Arabic speaker who, until modern times, has remained deeply rooted in Arabo-Muslim culture” (201). The first is seen as being of a “European register,” and the other is seen as a “poor, uneducated, and illiterate Jew whose cultural characteristics were closer to the Islamic than to the Jewish world” (201).

Dugas points out the extremely different experiences of Sephardic/Mizrahi Jews and Ashkenazi Jews:

The identity consciousness of the Ashkenazi Jew was constituted in an almost exclusive relationship to the Christian West ; that of the Sephardic Jew essentially [constituted] from contact with Islam : this difference appears very clearly in the realm of religious and cultural customs.... In essence it is a consciousness of a foreigner and a vague inferiority complex, that the Maghrebien Jewishness nourishes in the consideration of the Ashkenazim... (81-2)<sup>293</sup>

The association of the Ashkenazi Jews with the West contributes to their desire to “civilize” the “Oriental” Jews, as does it influence their view of them as more “primitive,” as Bahloul points out.

Rachel Wahba writes in her essay in *The Flying Camel* about her parent’s heritage and how their identity was perceived when they moved to the United States. Her mother’s boss, an Eastern European Jew, “could never quite understand how such a sophisticated person could have come from such a ‘backward culture.’ He

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<sup>293</sup> « La conscience identitaire du Juif ashkénaze s’est constituée en rapport quasi exclusif à l’Occident chrétien; celle de juif séfarade essentiellement au contact de l’Islam: cette différence apparaît très clairement au niveau des habitudes religieuses et culturelles.... C’est en somme une conscience d’étranger et un vague complexe d’infériorité, que la judaïcité maghrébine nourrit à l’égard des ashkénazes... »

repeatedly introduced my mother to people with a sensationalistic, ‘Can you believe it, she is Jewish and Arab! Unheard of!’” (53). Once again, this demonstrates the concept of Arab as being “savage” or “backward” and being European (or in this case, being Jewish) as being “civilized.”

In the same book, Ella Shohat adds: “...we as Mizrahi women never will achieve the same as Ashkenazi women, as long as the media and educational system continue to teach us that Mizrahi Jews are inferior, backward, fanatical, governed by uncontrollable impulses” (71). Henriette Dahan Kalev describes her surprise at discovering the stereotypes surrounding Mizrahi women:

When I finally found texts written about the real me, I discovered that I was Mizrahi, described as dirty, poor, contagious with infectious diseases, spiritually impotent, lacking moral capacities, ignorant, violent, and lazy. At best, my parents and I were described as “having fallen into an historical coma” (161).

The link is inevitably made by the larger Jewish community that non-European Jews are like their Arab counterparts—perceived as less evolved, just as all natives are perceived by their colonizers.

There is even a discrepancy *between* North African Jews, both within their own country and between countries. Sarah’s description of her entrance into the “noble” family of her Ashkenazi husband is similar to her description of her Moroccan mother entering her father’s Algerian family. According to Sarah, the Algerian Jews were the aristocracy and Moroccan Jews the savages. Her father, from Algeria, made a “misalliance” by marrying a Moroccan Jew “to whom he gave the

charity of his noble French nationality.... That is how I was born French in Morocco” (18)<sup>294</sup>.

This distinction between the Jews of the East and those of the West is prevalent in many of these texts. For example, in Kahn’s novel, there is a differentiation made between the “uncivilized” behavior of the Jews in Béchar and the “civilized” behavior of “modern” Jews in a place like France. In reference to the “barbaric” behavior of Sara’s family when she falls in love with a non-Jewish French soldier, Liana says: “Imagine what your friends in Paris would think if they learned what happened here! And all of this because a girl fell in love with a Frenchman!” (253)<sup>295</sup>. Here, the image of France is one of liberation and progress, as compared with the “backward” behavior of the North African Jewish community.

### **Jewish versus French: Behavior, Economics, Education**

Sarah Levy in Darmon’s text also points out the differences between the “old” world in Morocco and the modern attitudes of her new homeland, France. Sarah adapts somewhat quickly to her life in France, but her *Mamie* is there to serve as a constant reminder of her old life back in Morocco. Now that they had moved to France, Sarah insists, they no longer needed to worry about *aïchawas*, or any other superstitions, and yet her grandmother still holds onto these beliefs and acts accordingly. To her, it shows that her grandmother is still stuck in a more “primitive” way of living and thinking: “It certified that this unknown house in this unknown city

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<sup>294</sup> [il a marié une femme] « à laquelle il avait fait la charité de sa noble nationalité française....C’est ainsi que je naquis française du Maroc ».

<sup>295</sup> « Imagine ce que penseraient tes amis de Paris s’ils apprenaient ce qui se passe ici! Et tout ça parce qu’une fille est tombée amoureuse d’un Français! »

was indeed ours. At the same time, I was exasperated by this sign that proved in a glaring manner that her tribal and primitive mind would never, ever evolve” (122)<sup>296</sup>. In her eyes, her grandmother becomes “a real problem” because she still thinks she lives in Casablanca, speaking to everyone in informal French and offering everyone mint tea (122). Darmon uses the symbol of mint tea quite frequently throughout the novel as representative of the traditions and cultural of Morocco, and in this instance it shows how difficult it is for Sarah’s grandmother to let go of such an important link to her heritage and homeland.

Darmon’s description of Sarah’s family’s move to France is laden with sarcasm: “FFFFFrance (to be pronounced with ecstasy), FFFrance awaited us. Justice, equality, liberty, fraternity, tugged at our arms” (112)<sup>297</sup>. She makes the comparison between the impoverished, supposedly cultureless world of Morocco, to the new world of France where they would have contact with the “Grande Culture” which would penetrate their “cerebral cells fossilized by the sun” (112-3)<sup>298</sup>. Again, we see the warmth of the southern climate as symbolizing the culture of North Africa, in this case exemplifying what Darmon is critiquing as a “backwards” view of her homeland.

In Moati’s text, the character of Myriam evolves from a poor, ghetto-dweller, to a more “modern” advanced character with class and education. She is also shown in contrast to her poorer sisters, who married out of the ghetto and continued on in

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<sup>296</sup> « Il certifiait que cette maison inconnue dans cette ville inconnue était bien la nôtre. En même temps, j’étais horripilée par ce signe qui prouvait de manière éclatante que son esprit tribal et primitif n’évoluerait jamais, jamais ».

<sup>297</sup> La FFFFFrance (à prononcer avec extase), la FFFrance donc nous attendait. La justice, l’égalité, la liberté, et la fraternité nous tendaient les bras

<sup>298</sup> nos cellules cérébrales sclérosées par le soleil

their “oriental” ways, while Myriam was adopted out of the “old” world into the “new.” When she and Eugenia go to visit her sister Rebecca, Rebecca is painted as the stereotypical image of a poor woman, with dozens of children at her feet, a pretty face but a heavy physique, and shabby attire (123). Rebecca even comments on Myriam’s “look of a young European girl” (123)<sup>299</sup> and how all of her neighbors have come to “admire her dresses” (124). In one scene, Myriam is horrified at the “primitive” medicine used by Rebecca and her neighbors, when they use mysterious creams and animal products to help cure one of her pimples (126), and notes the huge difference between the large meals prepared by her sister and those of her adoptive family. Joëlle Bahloul claims that the stereotype of the Sephardic Jew has often been one of a family with many children, extreme poverty, “lack of hygiene and of proper medical care” (“The Sephardic Jew” 202).

In Darmon’s novel, Sarah speaks about living between two worlds, stuck between the different classes of Jews that lived in Morocco. The stereotypes of the poor, dirty, illiterate Arab Jew are described in contrast to rich, modern, educated, European one. Sarah expresses this difference in her family as if they figuratively live on the two sides of Casablanca:

I lived compressed between two breasts: that of oral civilization, primitive and religious, coming from my mother, and that of rational Western civilization, coming from my father. In these two distinct families, that only mixed with repugnance, predominated on one side, the reign of reason, of culture and the arts, the reign of money, of order and of hygiene—with male and female cousins milky and pink, blond hair and blue eyes—on the other side, the all powerful religious taboos, generous poverty, rigorous cleanliness, and a swarm of black cousins, passably dolled up, except the day of Shabbat. On one hand, we lived in the European city, without ostentation, and on the other the *mellah* (Jewish ghetto).... On one hand we took liberties as far as the

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<sup>299</sup> « mise de jeune fille européenne ».

laws of religious tradition with an ironic view and condescended to those who were enlightened, and on the other hand, we tried to respect the rules of these laws without ever daring to question them. My father's task alone was to serve as the junction between these two worlds. (17)<sup>300</sup>

This difference in levels of “civilization” not only divided Jews from different classes or regions, but also resided within many of the Jews themselves, as with Sarah Lévy. This conflict between the “old world” customs and traditions and the more “cultured” life influenced by the French seems to exist in many of these narratives.

Elizabeth Friedman elaborates on what she calls this “blend of identity,” in particular those from Algeria:

The past has created that curious blend of identity which enables the Jews to call themselves Europeans while simultaneously affirming their cultural affinity with the North African Muslim population. We will see the origins of the curiously contrived syllogism whereby the Algerian Jews reason that, since Europeans were the only ones with the legal right of French citizenship (in colonial Algeria), and as Jews were French citizens they must be European. (2)

According to Michael Laskier, however, Tunisian Jews straddled these two worlds—European and Arab—and in some ways served as the “hyphen” that kept them together:

... the Jews were strongly attached to France, the source of their cultural inspiration and political emancipation, and yet they were obliged to

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<sup>300</sup> « J'ai vécu compressée entre deux mamelles: celle de la civilisation orale, primitive et religieuse, venant de ma mère, et celle de la civilisation rationnelle occidentale, venant de mon père. Dans ces deux familles distinctes, qui ne se mélangaient qu'avec répugnance, prédominaient d'une part, le règne de la raison, de la culture et des arts, le règne de l'argent, de l'ordre et de l'hygiène—avec des cousins et cousines léchés et roses, le cheveu blond et l'oeil bleu—et d'autre part, la toute-puissance des tabous religieux, la pauvreté généreuse, la propreté rigoureuses, et une nuée de cousins noirs, passablement attifés, excepté le jour du shabbat. D'un côté on habitait la ville européenne, sans ostentation, et de l'autre le mellah (ghetto juif)... D'un côté on prenait des libertés envers les lois de la tradition religieuse avec le regard ironique et condescendant qui convient aux éclairés, et de l'autre, on s'appliquait à respecter ces règles et ces lois sans jamais oser les remettre en question. Mon père à lui seul avait pour tâche de faire la jonction entre ces deux mondes ».

emerge as mediators and encourage a *trait d'union* (coming together, *literally* hyphen) [sic] between Muslims and Frenchmen in the wake of the ensuing conflict" (262).

The main player in the "emancipation" Laskier mentions is education, in particular Western education. In Moati's novel, despite all of Eugenia's charity to Myriam, her statement that their role is to "pull from poverty and obscurity our Tunisian coreligionists" conveys a sense of superiority of European over "Oriental" Jews, going along with the mission of the schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. This mission, to civilize their coreligionists of the "East" (Friedman 4), was based on the widespread attitude that Sephardic Jews were "'archaic' and non-progressive, in large part because of [their] treatment of women and the extensive sexual discrimination found in it" (Bahloul, "Home and Remembrances" 89).

Daniel Schroeter comments on Western education for the Jews in this area of the world in his essay "A Different Road to Modernity: Jewish Identity in the Arab World":

Most European Jews believed that under colonialism the transformation of Oriental Jews would come about through the instruments of Westernization, especially through modern Jewish schools, which would lead to the demise of the primitive traditional education. The process of modernization, however, proved to be uneven, and "traditional" Jewish culture was often tenaciously maintained. (Wettstein 156)

In Goldmann's narrative, her grandmother experiences first hand the "mission" of the AIU; her French teacher changes her name from her too native "Ziza," which is what she continues to be called at home, to the Frenchified "Élise." This is just one of many conflicts of identity that enter into her life as she and her

family deal with the influence of the French education system. Nobody else in her family speaks French, and Élise is the first girl to attend school. Due to her success there, she is sent over to Brussels to be shown off as the “little Tunisienne” who learned French, as a representative of the progress of Tunisian Jews and “how the Jews had evolved in Tunis” (23)<sup>301</sup> through the work of the AIU (23). Her name Élise is a powerful symbol, as well as a marker of the “Westernization” that she is exposed to at school which will eventually change her whole life.

As in Goldmann’s text, being educated is a crucial aspect of Myriam and Mochée’s lives in Moati’s story, especially education for men and women alike. When the AIU finally opens a girls’ school in Tunis, Myriam is thrilled (150). Myriam is the one who taught her husband how to read and write, and makes a promise to teach all of the children of the ghetto as well (142). Much like in Goldmann’s story, education is seen as a key to modernity and progress, and is fully embraced by the main characters. (Women in both Goldmann’s and Moati’s books go on to law school. Goldmann’s text, however, is autobiographical, while Moati’s is fictional.) Myriam can also be seen as a strong, progressive female character, in that not only does she teach her husband how to read and write, but she is the one who asks *him* to marry *her*. This is quite evolved for the time period during which this portion of the novel takes place (the late 1800’s).

Similarly, Goldmann’s grandmother Élise is quite progressive compared to her family and other Jewish girls around her. It is through French that she learns to read and write, but her education will “go to waste” if she becomes a traditional Jewish woman with a man who wants an ignorant woman. The man that she is

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<sup>301</sup> « comment les Juifs avaient évolué à Tunis ».

arranged to marry, Mardochée, insists that she speak French and dress in a Western style, and is very progressive in his life and thoughts (they were “civilized” compared to others in the community who believed in superstitions such as the “evil eye” and also had cases of polygamy- 33) . Mardochée insists that she be educated, and, like Myriam, teaches her to read and write (37). She becomes his equal partner and together they create a life that Annie calls full of “conscience.” His number one goal was for his children not to be ignorant like all the others, so he sent them to a French high school (35, 41). Mardochée’s goals are not simply progressive on the level of gender, but for his entire community. According to Goldmann, he feels that education is “the essential means of emancipation for the Jews of Tunisia” (35)<sup>302</sup>. It is not clear what exactly Mardochée feels that the Jews need to be emancipated *from*, but it is obvious that Western education is the vehicle. He wants this education to change what he sees as ignorance among his fellow Tunisians.

The family, however, is not happy with the Westernization of Mardochée and his family: “The family, very religious, completely closed off to Western influences, on the contrary very orientalized, looked upon the innovations of Mardochée with horror” (41)<sup>303</sup>. Eventually, Mardochée, after a long struggle for it in his life, becomes French and dies French (51). His influence, however, is passed on very strongly to both his wife and the next two generations, who value education highly. Even Annie’s father, who still has some traditional values about women’s role in society, encourages Annie to go to school and become a lawyer just like her aunt. This is quite

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<sup>302</sup> « le moyen essentiel d’émancipation des Juifs de Tunisie ».

<sup>303</sup> « La famille, très religieuse, complètement fermée aux influences occidentales, très orientalisée au contraire, regardait avec horreur les innovations de Mardochée ».

exceptional, considering Goldmann's narrative recounts the real-life story of her family.

Education is very much linked to the emancipation of women (to use Goldmann's term) in many of these texts. In Darmon's novel, Sarah Lévy describes her grandmother as being "Oriental and illiterate" and "represent[ing] the distant past of woman, her lack of education and her refusal to evolve" (16)<sup>304</sup>. Lack of education, therefore, is linked to the "Oriental" or the traditional culture of North Africa, as are restrictions on women. The uncertainty of Jewish identity extends to gender roles, which are linked to traditions and customs that are both challenged and accepted by the men and women in these texts.

These authors' ambivalence of identity, whether it relates to their relationship with their Muslim neighbors, their relationships to the French, or the relationship to their Judaism, highly affects their portrayals of their past. The contrasting portraits of these aspects of life in North Africa can be attributed to many factors, but it is evident that nostalgia plays a significant role. These narratives show that not only are these authors attempting to define their place within different communities and cultures, but they are also longing for the stories of their past to conform to a certain vision. As we see with Cixous's notion of *inséparable*, most of these texts reflect a strong desire to feel at home in a place where perhaps they never did.

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<sup>304</sup> La grand-mère de Sarah « représente le passé lointain de la femme, son inculture et son refus d'évolution ».

## Chapter 4: Gender, Family, and Society

“Don’t disrespect me, Sarah, and lower your eyes when I speak to you. Lower your eyes, I tell you, and do not say a word.”

Obviously, I didn’t lower my eyes, since he had taught me to look your speaker in the eye as a sign of frankness...<sup>305</sup>

*-Baisse les yeux, Sarah*

### **Oppression, Tradition, and Ambivalence**

While these women’s texts deal with their pasts, their memories, and struggle to reconstruct the lives of the women in North African Jewish communities, traditional gender roles, informed by culture and religion, inevitably come into play. Many of these authors’ critiques of traditional roles within the texts sometimes complicate the nostalgic aspect of their narratives, representing North Africa in a somewhat “backwards” light. This is not true for all of the narratives: Moati and Goldmann in particular depict women who defy traditional roles and have strong, influential positions in their societies. Darmon and Kahn are perhaps the most critical of restrictive roles for women, showing the Moroccan and Algerian Jewish communities as oppressive and old-world in their beliefs and attitudes towards women. The most salient way in which the women’s situations are depicted as oppressive is in the disenfranchisement and alienation of women, through both religious and cultural traditions. These traditions are enforced by the father figures in

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<sup>305</sup> « ‘Ne sois pas insolente, Sarah, et baisse les yeux quand je te parle. Baisse les yeux, je te dis, et ne réponds pas.’ Je ne baissais évidemment pas les yeux, puisqu’il m’avait enseigné que regarder son interlocuteur en face était une preuve de franchise... »

these women's lives, by society at large, and most interestingly, by the other women in their family and community.

In most of the texts, the role of the male authority figure, the father, is highly influential in shaping the authors' lives, the stories of their pasts, and the way in which they perceive their homelands. This is thus reflected in their female characters. Surprisingly enough, there seems to be a common thread throughout most of these works: the mother figure is strangely absent, or at least usually takes second place to that of the father. Therefore, for some of the women in these texts, no matter how authoritarian their fathers may be, their mothers don't seem to be the place of refuge for them to escape. Many of the mothers' expectations for their daughters are just as strict, if not more so, often based on their own struggle with their identity as women.

Sarah Lévy's relationship with her mother is a highly ambivalent one, and she looks more to her father for guidance and mentorship. His authority also has a greater power over her, and continues to shape her life until he dies. Ben also speaks very highly of the influence, particularly political influence, of her father, mentioning only very briefly her mother's role in her narrative. Although Goldmann's text focuses mostly on her female relatives, she devotes an entire chapter to her grandfather, whom she describes in a God-like fashion. His effect on her grandmother, her aunt, and herself is very clearly outlined. Goldmann's actual mother is only mentioned once in the text. Cixous's narrator's mother seems to be a source of alienation rather than comfort for her and her brother, and, although her father dies when she is fairly young, he still has a great amount of power in her life; he is referred to quite often throughout her narrative, particularly in relation to her Algerian identity. Paternal

authority has a strong hold on many of the characters in Kahn's novel as well, although Liana's mother in particular also enforces restrictive rules on her behavior.

On the other hand, Cohen's text shows a connection to her mother that is quite clearly outlined, while the role of her father is vague at best. Moati's text also depicts a strong maternal lineage and creates female characters that are quite influential in their daughters' lives.

### **Role of the Mother**

Although the female characters in these texts experience oppression from their fathers as well as religious laws and traditions, many of them face the restrictive commands of their mothers, who are themselves often wrought with ambivalence about their positions as women. The ambivalence of identity that many of these young women experience is therefore modeled after the inconsistencies they see within their own mothers.

Sarah Lévy's disenfranchisement by her role as a woman in the larger society is modeled and perpetuated by the other women in her family. She begins early in her struggle against the concept of the traditional "Jewish woman" that many desire for her to be. Her link to her father, the "authority" in the family in all matters, is very strong from the start of her life. Perhaps because of her place as first born within the family, young Sarah carries herself as a young boy, or perhaps, as without "gender" from early on in her life. Despite the fact that she comes from a long line of female role models of what she calls "venerated Saints" (13), Sarah perceives herself as "masculine," mostly because she longs to emulate her father. He is the "powerful" one in the family, the one whom she sees as possessing the most strength—a quality

she desires for herself. As a result of this self-perception, she doesn't exactly "realize" that she is female, until the monumental event of her younger brother's birth. Afterwards, she marvels at how her grandmother ("*La Mamie*") goes gaga when her little brother is born, practically worshipping his little penis, and all of the privileges inherent therein: "My days' routine was greatly disturbed by the hymns of joy sung to the glory of my royal brother's masculine attributes. I held moral virility, but he held the tangible instruments of power, which freed him totally of any other obligations" (49).<sup>306</sup> Sarah does not value her traditional woman's role as the bearer of moral goodness, as is modeled by her mother and grandmother, but rather longs for the authority and control implicit in possessing the male sexual organ, as does her revered and beloved father.

Sarah resents her mother's conformity to traditional domestic women's roles (exemplifying this conflict between the "old" and "new" worlds of Judaism within Sarah's family) and therefore her relationship with her mother is equally as contentious as that with her father. She sees her mother simultaneously as a "Saint" and as a weak, pathetic being. In her eyes, her mother represents all of the contradictions in female existence that infuriate her, particularly the practice of worshipping one's husband as a superior being:

I couldn't feel any solidarity with her.... I couldn't forgive her for putting her intelligence, her vivacity, her body, her good humor, her anger, and the meaning of her life into serving a man whom I was supposed to be

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<sup>306</sup> « Le rythme de mes journées était scandé par les hymnes de joie chantés à la gloire des attributs masculins de mon royal frère. Je possédais la virilité morale, mais lui possédait les instruments tangibles du pouvoir, ce qui le dispensait totalement de toute autre obligation ».

like. My mother reflected the image of my own contradictions and this left a violent mark on me. (30)<sup>307</sup>

In desiring something different from her own daughter, and yet continuing to live in a completely contradictory manner, her mother stands for what Sarah calls “the symbol of the transition between archaism and modernism” (31).<sup>308</sup> She describes her mother as a giant watermelon filled with juice, “totally full of my father. She belonged to him” (29)<sup>309</sup>. This depiction of women as worshipping their men is solidified by Sarah’s first trip to the synagogue, where men enter in the regular part of the synagogue, and women must enter in the back, where they can “contemplate in all humility our fathers and husbands, our own gods...” (93)<sup>310</sup>.

However, Sarah has conflicting impulses herself, which is why she sees her mother as a reflection of her own internal “contradictions.” She knows that many aspects of her mother’s behavior sicken her, and yet she feels the pull of this traditional role within herself. She says: “...I was supposed to be all that she couldn’t become. I was supposed to be the feminine double of her god of a husband...” (26)<sup>311</sup>.

As a result of Sarah’s perceptions of her mother’s identity as a woman and a wife, Sarah is part of a “turning-point generation” where “she can only construct herself by rebelling against the familial models that she is supposed to adopt, being

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<sup>307</sup> « Je ne pouvais pas me sentir solidaire d’elle.... Je ne lui pardonnais pas de mettre son intelligence, sa vivacité, son corps, sa bonne humeur, ses colères et les sens de sa vie au service d’un homme auquel il me fallait ressembler. Ma mère me renvoyait l’image de mes contradictions et son empreinte s’est gravée en moi comme une violence ».

<sup>308</sup> Sa mère était « le symbole du passage de l’archaïsme au modernisme ».

<sup>309</sup> Sa mère était « pleine de mon père. Elle lui appartenait ».

<sup>310</sup> « contempler en toute humilité ces pères et maris, nos dieux à nous... »

<sup>311</sup> « ...je devais être tout ce qu’elle n’avait pu être devenir. Je devais être le double féminin de son dieu de mari... »

chaste until marriage, then a loving wife, submissive and devoted, the backbone of the couple” (Spire 284).<sup>312</sup>

Like Sarah Lévy, Liana in Kahn’s novel rebels against the stereotypical female role, and is very critical of the traditional mind-set her mother demonstrates. Liana’s mother eventually learns that Liana has been complicit in her friend Sara’s scandalous relationship with a non-Jewish French soldier. She scolds Liana, demonstrating her views about the “proper” role of a young woman: “You punished yourself, my daughter! Even if we must leave Béchar, you will never go to France, never! I’ll send you to my sister in Israel where you will get married off just like all the girls your age! And no more school for you either! It is polluting your mind!” (250)<sup>313</sup>

Liana’s mother’s threat upon her sense of freedom is threefold. First of all, her mother’s claim that she will be sent to Israel represents to Liana a step backwards, where the expectations of her as a traditional Algerian Jewish woman will be intensified. Kahn explains this perception of Israel as the embodiment of restrictive religious practices:

Israel was the fear that we would perpetuate—which isn’t true, since in Israel they are much freer, but we didn’t know that at the time—First of all, we were fed with French culture. France represented [freedom]. Israel represented religion, remaining in the patriarchal family. I saw Israel as having to still fight and I told myself that my only chance was France<sup>314</sup>.

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<sup>312</sup> La femme « d’une génération charnière, ne peut se construire qu’en révolte devant les modèles familiaux qu’elle est censée perpétuer étant une jeune fille chaste jusqu’au mariage, puis une épouse aimante, soumise et dévouée, cheville ouvrière du couple ».

<sup>313</sup> « Tu t’es punie toi-même, ma fille! Même si nous devons quitter Béchar, tu n’iras jamais en France, jamais! Je t’enverrai chez ma soeur en Israël où on te mariera comme toutes les filles de ton âge! Et les études aussi, c’est fini! Ça te pourrit trop la tête! »

<sup>314</sup> « Israël c’était la peur qu’on perpétue-- ce qui est faux, parce qu’en Israël on est beaucoup plus libre, mais ça on ne savait pas à l’époque... D’abord on était nourri de la culture française. La France représentait tout ce que je vous ai dit. Et qu’Israël ça représentait la religion, le maintien dans un giron

To Liana, being married off would be a fate worse than death, since she speaks of marriage as “*un long cauchemar* (a long nightmare)” (51), similar to the real-life experience that Sarah Lévy endures in her marriage. Liana’s negative perception of marriage is increased by observing all of the young women around her as they are “trapped,” or literally forced, into unhappy, restrictive marriages. Therefore, if Liana cannot be “emancipated” from the restrictions of marriage as it is traditionally carried out within her community, she can never be truly “emancipated” from the patriarchal authority that dictates her life. Along these lines, perhaps the most important part of Liana’s mother’s speech is her decision to withdraw Liana from school altogether, as education is the main method of liberation for women in these texts<sup>315</sup>.

Liana’s mother, whom Kahn refers to as being based on her own mother, is also very strict about Liana’s behavior in public. Kahn claims that this is because “sex was obsessive. My mother would see me talking to a boy, a neighbor, the son of a neighbor, and she would pull me back into the house. It was obsessive, like today in Islam” (Interview)<sup>316</sup>.

In Moati’s novel, the character Marie has a similar attitude to Liana’s towards the idea of marriage. At her sister Colette’s wedding, the young Marie talks to her

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patriarchal.... Moi je voyais Israël comme encore se battre et je me disais la seule chance est la France ».

<sup>315</sup> See section “Formal and Informal Education” in this chapter.

<sup>316</sup> « Le sexe c’était obsessionnel. Ma mère me voyait parler avec un garçon, un voisin, un fils d’un voisin, elle me retirait pour que je rentre à la maison. C’était obsessionnel, comme aujourd’hui l’Islam ».

friend Slim who tells her that she is “on the verge of falling in love” and that “all she needs is a man” (326). Her response is:

You’re crazy! You see me like Jacotte or Marlène, with guys like theirs? You see me learning how to iron shirts at my in-law’s house? You don’t know me very well. Really, I know all the boys of Tunis, and there’s not one who appeals to me, whatever it may be... (326)<sup>317</sup>

Marie eventually does fall in love, but her relationship is far from traditional, as her lover is Muslim. Her statement here about the nature of marriage reflects a persistent societal expectation, despite her parents’ marriage being egalitarian. Bahloul posits that by challenging the traditional system of marriage, these women “were struggling for their own emancipation together with that of their entire families and communities” (“The Sephardic Jew” 204).

As with Sarah Lévy’s mother, Ben’s mother shows ambivalence about her role in society, seeming to be torn between the traditional roles of women and the desire for liberation. In one scene, Ben’s father is asked to be a candidate for serving on a political body in Algeria. He declines, while Ben’s mother accepts the position, claiming that the man who offered her husband the job should have asked a woman, since “men don’t have the courage” (159)<sup>318</sup>. Meanwhile, Ben’s mother would never “accept” her daughter being politically active, especially in the Young Communist party that Ben longs to belong to (131). This may be partially due to the fact that she is female, and partially due to an objection to her involvement in what her mother sees as such a subversive movement.

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<sup>317</sup> « Tu es fou! Tu me vois comme Jacotte ou Marlène, avec des types pareils? Tu me vois apprendre à repasser les chemises dans ma belle-famille? Tu me connais bien mal. Vraiment, je connais tous les garçons de Tunis, et il n’y en a pas un qui me dise quoi que ce soit... »

<sup>318</sup> « les hommes n’ont pas de courage ».

Ben's mother's view of gender roles is also reflected in her vision of Ben's future. Upon learning of Ben's great talent for the piano, and with the recommendation of Ben's teacher that she go study at the conservatory in Algiers, her mother protests: "...I don't want to see my children become artists. Especially not a girl!... She'll be a teacher<sup>319</sup>" (179). In forcing her daughter into a stereotypically female profession, her mother is reinforcing the traditions that have been instilled in her. She is at least one step above Liana's mother, who punishes Liana for her lack of adherence to her rules by no longer allowing her to go to school at all. The mother figure in these texts is thus sending a message about the "proper" place for young women in their society.

The internal contradictions of the mother figures greatly influence their daughters, causing them a considerable amount of ambivalence as well as a strong desire to resist traditional gender norms. The fathers are also highly influential on their daughters' lives, not only as enforcers of tradition, but, as with the mothers, the embodiment of ambivalence between this tradition and emancipation.

### **Father as Tradition**

Although Sarah Lévy states that her father comes from a "rational Western" background, he still often falls very nicely into the "backwards" ideas of a more "primitive" civilization. Because of this contradiction, Sarah's relationship with him is highly confusing and contentious. When faced with his impending death as an adult, Sarah reflects back upon her childhood, calling her father "my hero, my king,

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<sup>319</sup> « Je ne désire pas voir mes enfants devenir artistes. Surtout pas une fille!.... Elle sera institutrice ».

my ideal, my master and my hatred” (23).<sup>320</sup> Within these five descriptors seem to lie generations worth of these young women’s ambivalent relationships with their fathers, and with their fathers as symbolic of the larger patriarchal definition of gender roles within their religion. Regardless of the ambivalent relationship with her father, he is the most influential person in Sarah’s life and has the most profound effect upon her.

As a young woman, Sarah longs to go to France to continue her studies. She imagines a “total freedom” once away from her restrictive parents, in particular her father. This freedom, however, is never realized. Deep down, Sarah probably knows that this freedom will never be possible under her father’s supervision, especially since he insists that the whole family move to France along with her: “Rather than set me free from my cage, he thought it would be simpler to move the cage across the ocean” (107)<sup>321</sup>. She later describes herself, once married, as living in a “cage of gold (*cage d’or*)” because she has all of the finest things, all of the material goods she could want, and yet she still feels trapped by her marriage (199).

Liana in Kahn’s novel expresses a sense of relief once her father is physically absent from her life. While the rest of the Jewish community departs for France, Liana and her mother must stay behind for the birth of Liana’s newest sibling. Upon hearing the news of her father’s landing in Marseille, Liana says: “Knowing that her father was at the other end of the world gave her a marvelous sense of freedom” (18)<sup>322</sup>. Sarah’s desire to have her father literally gone from her life and Liana’s

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<sup>320</sup> « ...mon héros, mon roi, mon idéal, mon maître et ma haine ».

<sup>321</sup> « Plutôt que de me laisser m’envoler hors de la cage, il lui sembla plus simple de transporter la cage de l’autre côté des océans ».

<sup>322</sup> « Savoir son père à l’autre bout du monde lui procurait une merveilleuse sensation de liberté ».

excitement at her father's departure show the way in which tradition (as embodied by the father) presents an obstacle in their path to autonomy.

The crucial role of the authority of their fathers in many of these women's lives also translates to the authority of *the* "Father," meaning God. Here they must not only answer to their own paternal figures, but to the supreme one as well. Chandra Mohanty and Biddy Martin discuss the way in which paternal influence becomes intertwined with law (in the case of these texts, religious law), and is therefore nearly impossible to reject: "Change is not a simple escape from constraint to liberation. There is no shedding the literal fear and figurative law of the father, and no reaching a final realm of freedom....the past, home, and the father leave traces that are constantly reabsorbed into a shifting vision" (201).

In Kahn's novel, the character Déborah is eventually the victim of marital rape, and yet is persuaded by her family to return to her abusive husband, in order to restore peace and order within their family and their family's reputation:

One week prior, [Déborah's] family and in-laws were summoned by the chief Rabbi. In a matter of minutes, he instructed them what to do. Recommended to remind herself that she had married her husband before God, Déborah was told to return to her in-laws' house and act like a good wife.... And she obeyed him. (87-88)<sup>323</sup>

In this passage, the chief Rabbi, as community "Father," enforces the laws of Jewish tradition that are sent down to him by the supreme "Father," God, who is the ultimate witness not only to Déborah's marriage, but to her misconduct. In returning to her

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<sup>323</sup> « Une semaine plus tôt, sa famille et sa belle-famille avaient été convoquées par le chef religieux. En quelques minutes, il avait instruit le procès. Invitée à se souvenir qu'elle avait épousé son mari devant Dieu, Deborah était priée de regagner à son bras la maison de ses beaux-parents pour s'y comporter en épouse.... Et elle avait obéi ».

husband to “act like a good wife,” Déborah is not only obeying her husband (the new patriarchal and paternal authority in her life) but is also answering to the community “Father” and the supreme “Father” as well. Liana, who constantly questions what her peers see as an inherent authority within these patriarchal figures, responds sarcastically to the news of Déborah’s situation that: “...no woman has ever been raped in Béchar. Except by her husband ” (88).<sup>324</sup> Kahn maintains that Déborah’s story was not uncommon in her town, and “that’s all there was. Women like Déborah, they were everywhere” (Interview).<sup>325</sup>

Although Cixous admires her father greatly, she also admits in *Rootprints* that he represented for her and her brother “the law. Moral, absolute law. He was extremely severe” (198). According to Manners, there is also a level of the Elektra complex in the relationship Cixous has with her father, which results in an ambivalent feeling towards her widowed mother, whose role as mourner and primary love of her dead father is threatening to Cixous. Manners argues that in her novel *Dedans*, Cixous “replaces God/father/husband/lover in a series of substitutions” within the text (153). This reflects the conflation of the human father with the celestial Father, whose power is representative of a larger tradition or societal attitude. According to Manners, Cixous’s text associates the father with the “Law” and compares her experience of both his life and his death as a form of “prison” (155), just as Sarah Lévy and Liana see their lives beneath their father’s rule as a type of imprisonment.

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<sup>324</sup> « ...jamais aucune femme n’a été violée à Béchar. Sauf par leur mari... »

<sup>325</sup> « Il n’y avait que cela. Des femmes comme Déborah, il y en avait partout ».

## Father's Ambivalence

Much like many of the other fathers in these novels, Sarah's father is the one who at once teaches her to question her religion even though he adheres to many of its traditions. While Spire describes Sarah's father as a "turned towards the West, assimilated, 'emancipated,' liberal intellectual, [who] married a woman from the *mellah* [ghetto] of Casablanca, traditional, superstitious, poor and generous" (283)<sup>326</sup>, we also observe his reliance on more traditional and conservative ways of thinking. As I discuss later, her use of the term "emancipated" is also the term used by Goldmann to describe the effect of education on her family.

Sarah Lévy's father is what she calls "secular (*laïc*)", just like the fathers of many of these women, and yet he "[gave] me the image of contradictions he had within himself" (61)<sup>327</sup>. Although Sarah's father is "secular," he also "defined himself as Jewish, socially or by opposition. He was of the type to say: 'I am Jewish, yes, and I will piss you off'" (22-3)<sup>328</sup>. At the same time, he embodies the contradiction between tradition and challenging tradition. Sarah follows this statement by claiming that he is "hardly attached to religious rituals" (23)<sup>329</sup>. Consequently, Sarah inherits her father's complicated, contradictory nature, especially when it comes to matters of religion (23). Sarah wonders why she must follow all of these archaic, "stupid" traditions, and her father replies: "Because you need to know, Sarah, that you are Jewish. If you have the misfortune of forgetting,

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<sup>326</sup> « tourné vers l'Occident, assimilé, 'émancipé,' intellectuel libéral, [il] a épousé une femme du mellah de Casablanca, traditionnelle, superstitieuse, pauvre et généreuse ».

<sup>327</sup> Son père « me donnant ainsi l'image des contradictions qu'il portait en lui ».

<sup>328</sup> Son père « se définissait en tant que juif, socialement ou par opposition. Il était de genre: 'Je suis juif, oui, et je vous emmerde' ».

<sup>329</sup> Il est « peu attaché aux rites religieux ».

others will be there to remind you.... You need to know that you are Jewish, and you need to be proud of it” (61)<sup>330</sup>. She doesn’t understand why she should be proud of such strange customs and regulations (61). Her father replies that all religions are ridiculous, “but when you belong to a hated minority, you need to affirm yourself as part of that minority. Period” (62)<sup>331</sup>.

Goldmann’s father is an “atheist” and does not conform at all to Jewish (or any) religious ideology: “My father was rigorously atheist and we didn’t practice [Judaism] at home” (Goldmann 103)<sup>332</sup>. (Her grandfather and consequently her grandmother are also what she describes as atheists, 38.) He is a big admirer of the French Revolution, believing that “all men are equals” (106)<sup>333</sup>. However, just like Sarah’s father, Goldmann’s father is quite authoritarian and makes all of the decisions in the house in a traditional way (113). As mentioned previously, Goldmann feels that this authoritative manner affected her own behavior towards male authority, much like the passivity of Sarah Lévy in the face of her father’s authority. This ambivalence of identity is therefore present for the paternal figures as well as for the female characters themselves.

In Moati’s novel, the third generation’s protagonist, Marie, also has an atheist father who fights for the socialist cause. Yet, just as with Sarah Lévy’s father, the role

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<sup>330</sup> « Parce qu’il faut que tu saches, Sarah, que tu es juive. Si tu as le malheur de l’oublier, d’autres seront là pour te le rappeler....Il faut que tu saches que tu es juive, et que tu en sois fière ».

<sup>331</sup> « mais quand on appartient à une minorité haïe, on s’affirme comme faisant partie de cette minorité. Point ».

<sup>332</sup> « mon père était rigoureusement athée et on ne pratiquait pas à la maison ».

<sup>333</sup> Guy Dugas argues that this was common among North African Jews, who “nourished a real fascination for Western culture and civilization which brought all the way to their ghetto an opening to the universal and modernity; they never hid their admiration for the values born out of the French Revolution, which permitted their French coreligionists to enjoy all of their civil rights” (*« ont nourri une réelle fascination pour la culture et la civilisation occidentales qui leur apportaient jusque dans leur mellah une ouverture sur l’universel et la modernité; ils n’ont jamais caché leur admiration pour les valeurs nées de la Révolution Française, qui avait permis à leurs coreligionnaires français de jouir de tous leurs droits civiques ».*) (*Littérature* 15)

of his religion is still ever-present at crucial times in his life. On the eve of Marie's journey to move to Paris, the family gathers together to say a prayer. Then the narrator adds: "With these words of an atheist and a free thinker, Serge [her father] took Maya [her mother] as his company for the past and for the future, for the Tunisia that they had loved and the new Tunisia that they would love... " (346)<sup>334</sup>. Moati's novel is one of the exceptions in its emphasis on the positive influence of the mother figures on their daughters. Myriam, Maya and Marie are all strong female characters who are very present in their daughters' lives. However, their fathers play a fairly important role as well, strongly influencing their attitudes towards education, politics, and the advancement of women.

### **Societal Gender Expectations**

The oppression and ambivalence experienced by these women within their households is an obvious reflection of the larger society. The gender roles are therefore reinforced by incidents outside of their immediate families and within the Jewish and North African communities as well. According to Rachel Simon, what Sarah Lévy witnesses at the arrival of her brother has been a common phenomenon throughout the history of many Jewish communities of the Middle East and North Africa (and arguably all over the world), stating that "the birth of a boy was welcomed and always celebrated with traditional Jewish rites and particular local ones, whereas the birth of a girl was rarely celebrated, even deplored" (82). Sarah recognizes this imbalance in attitude even before the arrival of her brother, speaking

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<sup>334</sup> « Avec des mots d'athée et de libre penseur, il pria en compagnie de Maya pour le passé et pour l'avenir, pour la Tunisie qu'ils avaient aimée et pour la Tunisie nouvelle qu'ils aimeraient ».

of her own birth as a supreme disappointment for her father. “...when the kind doctor who helped my mother deliver her baby through the horrible pain that labor entails, announced to the happy father the arrival of a splendid baby girl, he thought—the happy father—that it was some kind of joke, that he’d been tricked” (22).<sup>335</sup> Since Sarah could obviously not have been cognizant of her father’s disappointment on the occasion of her birth, her ability to tell this story demonstrates how strongly she has felt this implicit hierarchy of gender power throughout her entire young life.

After the realization of her true place in the family due to her brother’s birth, Sarah Lévy is forced to recognize the expectations she must fulfill as a young Jewish woman in her society. Eventually, being a tomboy is “no longer acceptable” to her family, who strongly desires her to transform herself into a proper young woman as quickly as possible (50). In an effort to teach Sarah how to be “gentle” and “tender,” her family sends her to dance class, where she finds that her clumsy limbs are not cut out for such a “feminine” pursuit. Equally, they make her take piano lessons, but she lacks the motivation to practice regularly. She asks herself “What must one make a young girl do in order for her to truly become a young girl?” (51)<sup>336</sup> Sarah’s claim that her family is essentially “making her” become a woman reflects her resistance to become what she perceives as weak and powerless: the exact opposite of the way in which she perceives her father. Her family’s push to make her be something that she is not is very isolating for Sarah, who feels that she has nobody to turn to who will understand her plight.

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<sup>335</sup> « ...lorsque ce brave docteur, qui accoucha ma mère dans des souffrances atroces comme il se doit, annonça à l’heureux père l’arrivée d’une splendide petite fille, il crut— l’heureux père—à une énorme plaisanterie, à un coup monté ».

<sup>336</sup> « Que doit-on faire faire à une petite fille, pour qu’elle devienne vraiment une petite fille? »

Many of the characters in Kahn's text experience exclusion from their community because of the restrictions on their behaviors as women. The most significant of these characters is Sara, a young Jewish woman who falls in love with a non-Jewish French soldier Thomas, stationed in her small town in Algeria. Upon learning of this, her family forbids her and mistreat her to the extent that she ends up hospitalized due to her mental strain. She is forced into an arranged marriage while she is in the hospital. When she tries to escape, she is accidentally shot and killed by gunfire related to the war. Sara's friend Liana, who is supposedly based on Kahn herself, is horrified by this event—it is so powerful, that it becomes the subject of Kahn's first novel.

The reverence for boys within the North African community can also be seen in Kahn's novel. The first time that Liana sees Déborah after hearing the news of Sara's death, Déborah seems more concerned about the circumcision of her new baby than with the horrific implications of Sara's death. She pushes Liana to come to her son's circumcision, calling her "*ma seule amie* (my only friend)" (317). Liana decides not to attend the event, and yet must hear all about it from her mother, who returns very pleased with the entire process: "I wish you a baby like that one day, my daughter! He smiled the whole time during his circumcision" (318)<sup>337</sup>.

As Sara dies, so a male baby is born. This male baby is welcomed into the world with all of the reverence due to the possessor of such a powerful instrument—his penis—just like that of Sarah Lévy's God-like little brother. The image of the smiling male child, even while he is being physically cut, conveys the message that

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<sup>337</sup> « Un bébé comme je te souhaite d'en avoir un, ma fille! Il a souri pendant tout le temps de sa circoncision ».

male authority will persist regardless of the circumstances. Insignificant women like Sara may die, and still nothing will change. Liana expresses her horror at this realization, responding with revulsion to her mother's gleeful report:

She thought that Sara's death would deeply grieve the entire town and that their remorse would make them lower their eyes in shame. Instead, her killers who buried her alongside the plague-stricken and the whores, who had surely already denied her existence, forgotten her, and reduced her to nothing but a bad memory, were going to feast and rejoice over Déborah's baby who warbles when you cut his wee-wee! (318)<sup>338</sup>

Instead of society collectively lowering its eyes before the "truth" that Liana alone can see, it continues on in its traditions and beliefs, still seeing this system of male authority as infallible. Liana's use of the term "lower their eyes" is once again crucial, since she is referring to this common expectation of women before male authority. Here, Liana painfully learns the reality that her hope for the male authority and its adherents in her community to finally lower *their* eyes in the place of the women they attempt to oppress, can never come true.

Kahn's critique of old-world traditions and what she calls the "endogamy"<sup>339</sup> of the Jewish community in her town is manifest through Sara's story. In her essay "Identité et Acculturation des Femmes Juives," Goldmann also claims that "inside the Jewish milieu, social relationships were limited almost exclusively to their own members, mixed marriages being ruled out" (300)<sup>340</sup>. One scene shows how the cemetery at Béchar has a separate section for those girls who "love outside of their

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<sup>338</sup> « Elle pensait que la mort de Sara endeuillait la ville et que le remords lui faisait baisser les yeux de honte. Au lieu de cela, ses assassins qui l'ont enterrée avec les pestiférées et les putains, qui l'ont sûrement déjà niée, oubliée, réduite à un mauvais souvenir, vont ripailler et s'extasier devant le bébé de Déborah qui gazouille quand on lui coupe le zizi! »

<sup>339</sup> This is the practice of marrying within a social group.

<sup>340</sup> « À l'intérieur du milieu juif, les relations sociales se limitaient presque exclusivement à ses propres membres, les mariages mixtes étant exclus. ».

community” which is “the farthest possible from the other graves” (135). Sara explains this to Thomas and comments about the girls who marry young French soldiers: “But those girls... nobody ever speaks to them again. Their families live in shame. They spend the rest of their lives all alone” (79).<sup>341</sup> When he responds disgustedly at these girls’ terrible fate, Sara replies “No, this is how it is. This is our religion!” (79).<sup>342</sup> With Sara’s claim that this is her “religion,” she demonstrates the ways in which patriarchal tradition is masked in religion, resulting in many of these young women following certain rules because they believe that they come from the ordinance of God, not man.

Kahn states in her interview that this story of Sara is based on a reality that she experienced growing up in Colomb-Béchar: “When we went to the cemetery to bury someone and I saw the tombs a kilometer away from the ‘good’ people, I asked : ‘Who is that there?’ and they told me: ‘Those are the girls who messed up.’ It’s terrible. It’s terrible” (Interview)<sup>343</sup>.

Kahn does not see her critique of this oppression as a value judgement, because they “had no choice,” but, after all,

...it’s true that it was a world controlled by men and I couldn’t lie about that. I was traumatized by Sara’s story, one that I lived through. It’s

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<sup>341</sup> Ces filles « aiment en dehors de leur communauté ». Le cimetière est « le plus loin possible des autres tombes... » ; « Mais ces filles.... Personne ne leur parle plus. Leurs familles vivent dans la honte. Et elle finissent leur vie toutes seules ».

<sup>342</sup> « Non, c’est normal. C’est notre religion! (It is important to note that while the word “normal” in French can have a similar meaning to the word “normal” in English, the emphasis is more on “commonplace” than on “not going against the grain,” as it often means in English.)

<sup>343</sup> « Quand on allait au cimetière enterrer quelqu’un et que je voyais des tombes à un kilomètre des gens « bien », je demandais: « C’est qui là-bas ? » et on m’a dit: « C’est les filles qui ont fauté. » C’est terrible. C’est terrible ».

true that it profoundly affected me. But at the same time it's a report, it's not a value judgement. It's a difficult report. All I told was the truth (Interview)<sup>344</sup>.

Part of being a proper young girl is upholding the family's honor. With this honor comes a great double standard, one that the males do not have to live up to. Sara's story illuminates the question of women's honor, which is crucial in Kahn's novel. If the women violate this honor, they are shunned from their families and society at large, as the cemetery scene demonstrates. When Sara's family learns of her affair with Thomas, they feel that she must be punished for her defilement of their honor. Although girls may not be honored when they are born or after they have died, the honor that they bring upon their families during their lifetime is as crucial as life and death. The burden of maintaining family honor inevitably falls upon the actions of the women, while the men involved are not implicated. For example, in a conversation with Thomas, Sara's brother Simon says: "My sister acted like a little slut only a few meters away from her father's room. But it's not your fault. You, you are a man. She's the guilty one" (Kahn 197).<sup>345</sup> Here it is obvious that the burden of the male of the family is to recuperate the honor that his female relative has tarnished, even by extreme measures if necessary. Kahn's depiction is a harsh one, but as Kahn herself maintains, she "could not lie" about the reality of such occurrences in her community.

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<sup>344</sup> « Mais c'est vrai que c'était un monde qui était dirigé par les hommes et ça je ne pouvais pas mentir. J'étais traumatisée par l'histoire de Sara que j'ai vécue. C'est vrai que ça m'a marquée profondément. Mais en même temps c'est un constat, ce n'est pas un jugement de valeur. C'est un constat dur, quoi. Je ne racontais que la vérité ».

<sup>345</sup> « Ma soeur s'est comportée comme une putain à quelques mètres de la chambre de son père. Mais vous n'y êtes pour rien. Vous, vous êtes un homme. La coupable, c'est elle ».

In an attempt to save the family honor, Sara's relatives plan to marry her off to an older Jewish man, even while she lies unconscious in the nearby hospital. When Sara finally awakens and learns of this plan, she tells her future husband ("P'tit Meyer") that she would rather die than become his wife (308). Infuriated and shocked, P'tit Meyer exclaims: "I save her from dishonor, I give her my father's name, and she, she throws it in my face that she wants to run away with a soldier!" (309)<sup>346</sup> This notion of family honor is very obviously tied into the patriarchal authority of the family, since, as P'tit Meyer states, the biggest dishonor that Sara can commit is to dishonor his father's name. This can also be seen in the conversation between Sara's brother Simon and Thomas, where he seems to be most scandalized that Sara's evil-doing took place "a few meters away from her father's room."

Once Simon learns of what Sara said to her future husband, he goes into a murderous rage. He says to Meyer: "After what she has done, she should be kissing your feet night and day! But she will lower her eyes before you, you can be sure of that. If she doesn't want me to kill her with my own hands!" (309)<sup>347</sup> Exactly like Sarah Lévy's father's command to her at the start of her narrative, Simon's insistence that she will "lower her eyes" before this strange man demonstrates how pervasive the notion of male authority is within this system of family and marriage. Both women must lower their eyes before all representatives of patriarchal authority—before their brothers, before their fathers, before their husbands, before their religion, and ultimately, before God himself.

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<sup>346</sup> « Je la sauve du déshonneur, je lui donne le nom de mon père, et elle, elle me lance à la figure qu'elle va s'enfuir avec un soldat! »

<sup>347</sup> « Après ce qu'elle a fait, elle devrait te baiser les pieds matin et soir! Mais elle baissera les yeux devant toi, tu peux me croire. Si elle ne veut pas que je la tue de mes mains! »

Eventually and somewhat ironically, Sarah Lévy in Darmon's text (much like her own mother whom she resents) ends up succumbing to the "traditional model" of marriage, falling into an unhappy, subservient marriage to what Pierre Horn calls a 'tyrannical' Ashkenazi doctor (153). The fact that she ends up in this type of marriage shows very clearly how the contradictions she feels about her role as a woman influence her adult life. Once engaged, she knows that she must "change a lot to conform to the ideal image of a married woman" (160)<sup>348</sup>, such as learning to cook and acting more "feminine." Before they are even married, she experiences his first abusive moment, when he yells at her for forgetting to call him when he had asked her to. Her reaction to this, much like being yelled at by her father, is to look down at the ground ("*baisser le nez*" 167). This allusion to her father's command to "lower her eyes" earlier in the novel shows how perceptions of gender roles are passed down to each new generation and internalized by the children who model their parents, despite any intellectual resistance they may develop against them.

Sarah's husband has become her new father, and her submission to his authority appears to come "naturally" to her. Darmon's Sarah must lower herself before her soon-to-be husband, just as Sara from Kahn's novel must be taught to lower herself before P'tit Meyer, in order to establish her true place within a marriage and before patriarchal tradition. Once again, at this moment in the novel, Sarah experiences an internal conflict between her deeply embedded desire to fulfill her family's and society's wishes of her proper role and her experience of this role as oppressive and self-effacing. Sarah expresses her internal discrepancy as such: "I

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<sup>348</sup> « Je comprenais qu'il fallait que je change beaucoup pour coller à l'image idéale de la femme mariée ».

was certainly taught how to speak. Not how to *say* anything. I could make a well-rounded speech on any subject... with an introduction, development, and conclusion, but I couldn't really 'say' anything" (187)<sup>349</sup>.

What further demonstrates the all-encompassing nature of this attitude of deference towards male authority is Déborah's commentary in Kahn's novel when she learns of Sara's pending marriage to P'tit Meyer: "She won't even have the right to wear a new wedding dress! Her sister asked if I could lend her mine! Can you imagine? Then again, after what she has done, it's already a miracle that the P'tit Meyer agreed to marry her" (268)<sup>350</sup>. Déborah's comments show her participation in perpetuating the notions of honor surrounding women's behavior, stemming from attitudes that she has internalized from her society. Even Liana, who acts merely as an accomplice in arranging a rendezvous between Sara and Thomas, must answer to this patriarchal authority for having dishonored her family, and is duly punished for her actions.

Sarah Lévy also observes the double standard that stems from differences between men and women in her society. She perceives a largely imbalanced division of power between men and women and clearly outlines men and women's proper places, both literally and figuratively, in public life in Morocco:

Man. He's the café, the bus, the oppressive glance, the smile of golden teeth, the turban, the *djellaba*....He's the street, the word. Your mother the idiot, your sister the whore....The hand on your ass on the bus....Aggression. Possession. Contempt. Woman. She's Fatéma who

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<sup>349</sup> « On m'avait bien appris à parler. Pas à dire. Je pouvais improviser un discours équilibré sur un sujet ... avec introduction, développement en deux points et conclusion, mais je ne pouvais pas 'dire' ».

<sup>350</sup> « Elle m'aura même pas droit à une robe de mariée neuve! Sa soeur m'a demandé de lui prêter la mienne. Tu te rends compte! Enfin, après ce qu'elle a fait, c'est déjà un miracle que le P'tit Meyer accepte de l'épouser ».

shaves her pubic hair in the sun because she has nothing else to do. She's work....She's the pregnant belly at fifteen years old. The lowered eyelids. The veil....A body for man and for her society, covered in veils, humility, submission... (98-9)<sup>351</sup>

Once again, the role of women is very much linked here to the body, Sarah describing the women's body parts (her "ass," her eyelids, her belly) as the recipients of men's oppression. In her totality, Sarah claims that woman's body is a possession of men and of society at large, going back to the concept of woman's body as representing nationhood and identity.

When Sarah strives to integrate herself into the world of the Moroccan women, going to the public women's bath ("*bain maure*" or "Moorish bath"), she discovers the two layers of their lives: "Outside was constraint, veils, eyes lowered. Outside was submission, the master's power, men's prison. Inside... we found solidarity, speaking of our masters with respect, yet with the feeling that that very master was our enemy" (102)<sup>352</sup>. This double layer is the exact replica of what critic Susan Starr Sered identifies as a "split" that many Jewish women experience, as I discuss later on (174). It is also reminiscent of the "trichotomy of identity" that Memmi posits, where he is torn between these different layers of his being.<sup>353</sup>

Sarah's observation of the inequality in male and female roles in society is part of her rebellion against the power hierarchy that the women around her seem to

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<sup>351</sup> « L'Homme. C'est le café, l'autobus, le regard lourd, le sourire ajouré de dents en or, le turban, la djellaba....C'est la rue, le mot. Le con de ta mère, la putain de ta soeur....La main au cul dans l'autobus....Aggression. Possession. Mépris. La Femme. C'était Fatéma qui s'épilait le pubis au soleil lorsqu'elle n'avait plus rien à faire. Le travail....Le gros ventre à quinze ans....Les paupières baissées. Le voile.....Un corps pour l'homme et pour sa société, enveloppé des voiles, d'humilité, de soumissions... »

<sup>352</sup> « Au-dehors étaient la contrainte, le voile, les yeux baissés. Au-dehors étaient la soumission, la force du maître, la prison de l'homme. Au-dedans... nous nous retrouvions solidaires, parlant de nos maîtres avec respect, avec le sentiment que ce maître-là était bien notre ennemi ».

<sup>353</sup> See *La Statue du Sel*.

accept, speaking of the men in their lives as “masters,” even if they recognize such “masters” as their “enemy.” Sarah makes a link between the gender roles of the larger Moroccan society and those of her own community with an additional comment that even her own “rich and cultivated” Jewish uncle once fondled her in an elevator, and then made her swear not to tell her parents (98). This is highly ironic, considering the taboos around expression of sexuality that are enforced by her family, and yet, at the same time, not surprising.

Goldmann claims that cultural and religious factors combined contributed to restrictions on women’s behavior and as a result created a particularly difficult situation for them:

The characteristics of the Mediterranean education combined with Jewish Puritanism and the imitation of the bourgeois European model: distrust of men, always ready to lead young girls into “misfortune,” inhibition and prudishness about sexuality, social behaviors restricting spontaneity in order to conform to the model of a “good upbringing” (“Identité” 302)<sup>354</sup>.

According to Goldmann, in the 1950’s in Tunisia, the young women were much less free than their French counterparts: “Rigorous morality, absolute silence about ‘things about sex,’ conformism in social relationships, no mixed marriages, hardly any divorces...” (302)<sup>355</sup>

Cohen writes about the somewhat restricted lives of young women in Algeria, in particular as compared with young women in France. In France, women were

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<sup>354</sup> « Les caractéristiques de l’éducation méditerranéenne se combinaient avec le puritanisme juif et l’imitation du modèle bourgeois européen : méfiance envers les hommes, toujours prêts à entraîner les jeunes filles dans le ‘malheur,’ inhibition et pudeur vis-à-vis de la sexualité, comportements sociaux refrénant la spontanéité pour se conformer au modèle de la ‘bonne éducation’ ».

<sup>355</sup> « Morale rigoureuse, silence absolu sur ‘les choses du sexe,’ conformisme dans les relations sociales, pas de mariages mixtes, peu de divorces... »

“emancipated” by the feminist movement, taking off their corsets and running around topless on beaches (91). She explains: “Must be said that Algeria, even if it was France, it wasn’t completely France, the girls of the metropolis seemed to us liberated, free, sharper than us...” (91-2)<sup>356</sup>. She and her friends dream about their future marriages, “prepar[ing] to be in love, already imagin[ing] the wallpaper in our bedrooms and other domestic beauties” (92)<sup>357</sup>. Within her house, she must hide the typical desires of a teenager, wanting to smoke, go out with her friends, read certain books, and attend Zionist meetings (85). She must lie to her parents, since “at home... we could hardly speak frankly, with frankness...” (86)<sup>358</sup>.

Kahn speaks to this desire to leave for France just like Goldmann and Moati, leaving her sense of being “trapped” as a woman in a restrictive society: “For me, this departure [from Algeria], it wasn’t a tragedy like it was for many; it was a hope that things would change for us girls” (Interview)<sup>359</sup>. This is where nostalgia and a critique of women’s roles confront one another in Kahn’s novel. From this comment, it seems obvious that any nostalgia Kahn may have had for her lost homeland Algeria is overshadowed by the memory of oppression and fear.

Goldmann’s sense of being “trapped” comes from a geographical distance from centers of progressive thought as well as from the restrictive gender roles within her community. She does not see her life as that different from that of her aunt and her mother’s generation because “I lived in a small village, far away from Tunis,

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<sup>356</sup> « Faut dire que l’Algérie, même si c’était la France, ce n’était pas tout à fait la France, les filles de la métropole nous apparaissaient affranchies, libres, plus déliurées que nous... »

<sup>357</sup> Elle et ses amies « se préparaient à devenir des amoureuses, déjà imaginaient le papier peint des chambres à coucher et autres beautés conjugales ».

<sup>358</sup> « à la maison... on ne pouvait guère se parler franchement, avec franchise... »

<sup>359</sup> « Pour moi, ce départ, ce n’était pas une tragédie comme pour beaucoup, c’était un espoir que les choses allaient changer pour nous, les filles ».

where traditions had been preserved. In Tunis, they had mostly disappeared. The spatial distance somewhat canceled out the time lag” (109)<sup>360</sup>. Just like Sarah Lévy, she is unsuccessful at traditionally feminine pursuits, such as sewing. She can’t “hold a needle” even after many hours of sewing lessons and yet she devours any book that is placed in front of her. She finds that the novels she reads from the 19<sup>th</sup> century

seemed to be contemporary to me, so much did the lives and the moral and social conditions that they described come close to those of Tunis at the time. The same moral conventional constraints governed the male-female relationships of the two universes, and I saw unroll before me women’s lives not very far away from those of the romantic heroines. (115)<sup>361</sup>

She decides: “I don’t want to become Madame Bovary!” (115)<sup>362</sup> and therefore resolves to reject stereotypical female roles for her life, including the isolation that Madame Bovary experiences. It must be noted that the novels she reads are French, illuminating the important role of “Western” education in her awareness about gender roles.

The alienation that Sarah Lévy experiences through the traditional roles within her religion continues throughout her life. After her father dies, and she feels that he can no longer rule over her life and her actions, the restrictions on her role as a woman still remain. As her younger brother Lucien reads the traditional mourner’s prayer for her father, Sarah is once again reminded of her powerlessness as a woman within her traditional Jewish culture: “And I am enraged at not being allowed to read

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<sup>360</sup> « ... j’habitais un petit village, éloigné de Tunis, où les traditions avaient été préservées. A Tunis, elles avaient déjà disparu pour la plupart. L’éloignement spatial annulait en quelque sorte le décalage temporel ».

<sup>361</sup> Les romans du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle « me semblaient contemporains, tant la vie et les conditions morales et sociales qu’ils décrivaient restaient proches de celles de Tunis à l’époque. Les mêmes contraintes morales conventionnelles régissaient les rapports hommes-femmes des deux univers, et je voyais se dérouler devant moi des vies féminines pas très éloignées de celles des héroïnes romantiques ».

<sup>362</sup> « Je ne veux pas devenir Mme Bovary! »

the Kaddish over my own father's grave instead of Lucien, as if it were my right, as if I felt excluded from any affiliation with Charles Lévy, because I am a girl, because I am a woman" (229)<sup>363</sup>. This conclusion shows Sarah (much like Liana) that despite her ultimate rebellion against what others perceive to be her only fate, these notions of male authority are so enmeshed in the minds and hearts of those in her community that the reality remains the same. Even at a time of mourning for her beloved father, Sarah must be silent, lower her eyes, and cede to her brother's male authority.

Sarah's effort to determine the role of tradition in her life is similar to the struggle of many of these women with the restrictive female roles dictated by their religion, their families, and their society as a whole. For example, in Kahn's novel, while Sara rejects tradition by pursuing a love affair with a "forbidden" partner, she appears to still accept many aspects of this tradition without question. Her statement that "this is how it is" mirrors that of her friend Déborah in a previous scene, who exclaims "But it's not possible! It's the tradition!" in response to Liana's suggestion that she not participate in the virginity-determining ritual after her wedding night. Sara's indignation at the challenging of such tradition suggests that, as previously mentioned, her adherence to traditional roles and the desire to subvert such roles are inextricably intertwined within her thoughts. As these young women make decisions about their lives and futures, as well as respond to such decisions being made for them, they seem to be constantly drawing from these contradictory attitudes within themselves.

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<sup>363</sup> « Et j'enrage de ne pas pouvoir lire le Kadish sur la tombe de mon père à la place de Lucien, comme si cela me revenait de droit, comme si je me sentais exclue de la filiation de Charles Lévy, parce que fille, parce que femme ».

According to Sered, the ambivalence shown by the young women in these texts is fairly common among women of this community. In her article about Jewish women in a cross-cultural perspective, she argues that "...historically, Jewish women have been cognizant of the highly patriarchal Jewish great tradition, dedicated to preserving the great tradition, yet simultaneously critical and even subversive of the tradition" (174). The preservation of this tradition, as manifested through the patriarchal authority of these laws, both celestially and terrestrially, is central to these women's contention with Judaism. Sered identifies this struggle as the source of what she calls a "bifurcated cultural experience" that many Jewish women have developed, and sees the ways in which these women "find meaning within and around the same patriarchal textual heritage" as the most crucial aspect in examining this experience (171, 174).

In finding meaning within tradition and religion, as Sered rightly points out, many of these women encounter an ambivalence of self in determining what is their true identity or role within their communities and within the world. Goldmann also describes these young women as

at once annoyed and fascinated, rebellious and consenting, the young girl of the last generation resigned herself to these rituals, these manifestations of tenderness that seemed natural to her, owed, coming from these far-off points of intersection, more or less obscure, sometimes totally unknown to her, transmission of family memory and history. ("Identité" 301)<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> La jeune femme était « à la fois agacée et fascinée, rebelle et consentante, la petite fille de la dernière génération se résignait à ces rites, ces manifestations d'une tendresse qui lui semblait naturelle, due, et qui découlait de ces lointains points d'intersection, plus ou moins obscurs, parfois totalement inconnus d'elle, relais de la mémoire et de l'histoire familiales ».

The characters of Déborah and Sara in Kahn's novel have "resigned themselves" to the rituals and traditions of their community, whether or not they understand them. At the same time, however, Sara has the seed of rebellion within her, since a part of her is aware of the problems such rituals and traditions pose for women.

### **Emancipation and Fighting Back**

Despite the obvious ambivalence many of these women experience, they are able to find ways to fight back against the system which oppresses them. For many of the women in these texts, fighting back is only possible through the access that an education grants them. Goldmann subtitles her text *Les Filles de Mardochée* "The Emancipation of a Family," the emancipation coming primarily through progressive attitudes brought on by education. In many cases, it is the father (or sometimes another prominent male figure) who is the proponent of women's education, both formal and informal, playing a crucial role in these women's eventual "liberation." These fathers often serve as mentors for their daughters, and influence the way in which they choose to live their lives as adults.

### **Formal and Informal Education**

In Ben's text, her father's lessons about the realities of life in their society are the impetus for her life's goals. It begins when Ben is younger, and she and her father drive through the Arab ghetto. Her father reminds her once again of her identity as a Jew in an Arab country and the precarious position this puts her in. He comments that the Muslim woman who works for them lives in this neighborhood,

and that although this woman helps *their* family to get along better, she is barely able to survive herself.

To this, Ben asks her father:

-But why?

-Because she is very, very poor.

-Why is she so poor?

- Because she is Arab. Because the only work she can do is as a housekeeper; a job that pays next to nothing per hour. Listen carefully to what I am going to tell you, and, with all of your being, never ever forget it: As long as our housekeeper lives in such conditions, you will never be safe here.... Therefore, for all of your life, you must pay attention to what goes on in these poor neighborhoods, in order that they disappear. DISAPPEAR. When this is no longer a ghetto, when your mother's cleaning woman lives in a normal house, it might be possible that you, once they give you back your French citizenship, will no longer be chased out of here. (122)<sup>365</sup>

This speech is obviously very powerful and has a profound effect on the young Ben, who looks back on this event: "For my whole life, I was to never forget this lesson that would determine all of my militant activity from age 13 until the present day (124).<sup>366</sup> In fact, it is this moment in her life that is the turning point for her decision to fight for justice in her homeland of Algeria, and to do her best so that what her father advises comes to pass. Ben's mother plays a very secondary role to

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<sup>365</sup> « - Et pourquoi?

- Parce qu'elle est très, très pauvre.

- Et pourquoi est-elle très pauvre?

- Parce qu'elle est Arabe. Parce que son travail unique ne peut être que celui de femme de ménage, payé à trois fois rien l'heure du travail. Ecoute bien ce que je vais te dire et, de ta vie entière, ne l'oublie jamais : tant que notre laveuse habitera dans un endroit pareil, toi, tu ne seras jamais en sécurité ici.... Donc toute ta vie, tu devras t'intéresser à ce qui se passe dans le bidonville, pour qu'il disparaisse. QU'IL DISPARAISSE. Quand il n'y aura plus de bidonville ici, quand la laveuse de maman habitera dans une maison normale, alors toi, tu auras des chances, quand on te redonnera ta nationalité française, que personne ne te l'enlève plus ».

<sup>366</sup> « De ma vie entière, je ne devais jamais oublier cette leçon qui déterminait toute mon activité militante depuis l'âge de treize ans jusqu'à aujourd'hui ».

her father, and there is no mention at all in the text about how her mother may have influenced her.

Just like Ben's father, Cixous's narrator's father, in the short time that he is in her life, teaches her and her family about what he considers to be the "real" Algeria, as opposed to the sheltered experience of a secluded, privileged community. He had wanted her and her brother to grow up in Clos-Salembier which was surrounded by an area that was "miserable but Algerian, Algerian thus desirable and naturally miserable..." (*Rêveries* 59)<sup>367</sup>. However, her father then dies to leave her mother and them in this place, with his medical clinic where her mother now works, and with "tens of thousands of miserable people" without water or housing, and "that is where my father left us with the goal of weaving Algerian ties..." (62)<sup>368</sup>.

In *Rootprints*, Cixous describes her admiration for her father's integrity of character: "There are numerous scenes of my father behaving as a hospitable man, a generous man, a fraternal man. He was saluted by the Arabs whom he treated with love because my father placed himself beyond all racism. He was a human being who preached by example" (197). According to Marilyn Manners, Cixous idealized her father, as is demonstrated in her novel *Dedans*, which Manners calls the story of an "obsession" with her father's death (153).

Although Goldmann is also obviously greatly influenced by the women in her family (her grandmother, her aunt Juliette), her mother is only mentioned very briefly and rarely in the text. She seems to worship her grandfather Mardochee, more so than she does her female relatives. In addition, she speaks of the enormous influence

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<sup>367</sup> « [une région] misérable mais algérienne, algérienne donc désirable et naturellement misérable... »

<sup>368</sup> « [avec] des dizaines de milliers de misérables....c'est là que mon père nous dépose dans le but de tisser des liens algériens ».

her husband (whom she refers to as “Goldmann” instead of his first name) had on her. She pinpoints their meeting as a crucial moment in her life: “I would need an entire book to talk about Goldmann; I only want to say that meeting him was the luck of my life” (129)<sup>369</sup>. She describes him as having taught her a new way of “reading, thinking, doubting” (128) and that for the first time, she came into contact with a type of Marxism that was “non-dogmatic,” and “non-orthodox” (128). Despite his great influence on her, however, she claims that her feminist consciousness is not born until after he dies, allowing her the freedom to explore it (133). Perhaps this is why she concludes her narrative by calling herself “Annie” instead of “Annie Goldmann,” finally asserting her own, individual identity.

In a similar fashion, Ben concludes her memoir with a tribute to Henri Maillot, one of her comrades-in-arms for the struggle against colonialism, claiming that he serves as her “example” and “is part of her adolescence, her youth, and her life. He will never cease to be” (Ben 225)<sup>370</sup>. The choice to conclude her memoir with this tribute leads the reader to believe that this is perhaps the most crucial part of her childhood, that which shapes who she will go on to be as an adult.

Sarah Lévy’s father is the most influential implementer of her education, an education about Jewish laws and beliefs which is in turn highly influential in forming her own identity and dictating her behavior. Sarah informs us that her own education in this sense has been highly contradictory, as her father taught her always to question and yet at the same time lower her eyes before him without a word. Critic Rachel

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<sup>369</sup> « il faudrait un livre entier pour parler de Goldmann ; je voudrais seulement dire que sa rencontre a été la chance de ma vie ».

<sup>370</sup> Henri Maillot « fait partie de mon adolescence, de ma jeunesse et de ma vie. Il n’en sortira jamais ».

Simon speaks of this paradox that she sees in many Middle Eastern and North African Jewish girls' education and home lives as they have been traditionally carried out, stating that in these societies, "though [historically] much of the education of women was vocational, they also learned Jewish law, customs, and prayers as related to their work and life, and they had to apply the spiritual to the temporal on a daily basis" (88). In this way, women had access to an important part of Judaism. The discrepancy arrives, however, when these women's knowledge of the intricacies of Jewish practices do not translate into what they are expected to do or know in their daily lives:

Girls found out that most of the concepts and knowledge they had acquired in school were unacceptable and often useless outside. Women could use their new knowledge in the public domain much less than men, and, even when they managed to enter what was considered the 'men's world,' they realized that conceptually they were still outsiders... (92)

Many young women, like Sarah, who were beginning to be educated in more "Westernized" schools were stuck somewhere between "tradition" and "modernism," where they "continu[ed] to live in a conceptually old world, despite their spiritual metamorphosis and external evidence to the contrary" (Simon 94). Sered speaks to how "modernization has had a complex impact on the religious world of Jewish women. Formal education for girls has meant that male cultural modes are more available to them, often at the expense of traditional female cultural modes" (181). Sarah's character throughout Darmon's narrative undergoes a type of "metamorphosis" that Simon speaks about. However, just as her experience is not

simply dichotomous as Sered implies, her process of “metamorphosis” is equally complex and inconsistent, being far more variable than linear.

Bahloul emphasizes the importance of “Western” education in the role of women’s emancipation in North Africa. She claims that “modern” Sephardic Jewish women who have been educated according to “Western” ideals have been actively rejecting the antiquated restrictions on Jewish women’s behavior: “Female baby-boomers [often] boast... about giving up ‘traditional’ roles in their efforts to become ‘modern women,’ thereby challenging the ‘honour and shame’ stereotype” (“The Sephardic Jew” 205). In seeking out this “Western” education, characters like Liana and Sarah Lévy are seeking to challenge these traditional roles and reject notions of female honor and comportment. Goldmann writes about Jewish women who are now fighting for a “an equivalent place to men in religious ceremonies”<sup>371</sup> such as reading the Torah, sitting alongside the men in synagogue, being counted as part of the *minyan*<sup>372</sup> and, as Sarah Lévy desires, reading the *Kaddish* (mourner’s prayer) for their loved ones. She argues that while certain reform movements accept these changes, “they are totally excluded in the Judeo-Arab *milieu*” (“Identité” 306)<sup>373</sup>.

In her essay on the geopolitics of feminism, Alice Shalvi describes many of the younger generation of women now living in France as “having obtained a far better education than that which would have been theirs had they remained in Algeria, Tunisia, or Morocco, or even come to Israel,... are choosing to do research precisely

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<sup>371</sup> Elles luttent pour une « place équivalente à celle de l’homme dans les cérémonies religieuses ».

<sup>372</sup> A quorum of ten (generally men) required to “constitute a representative ‘community of Israel’ for liturgical purposes.... When a minyan is lacking for synagogue services, those who have gathered merely recite their prayers as private individuals. There is thus no public reading from the Torah (first five books of the Bible) and no Haftarah (selection from the prophetic books of the Bible). Such invocations as the Kaddish and *qedusha* are likewise omitted, for none of these is considered appropriate unless the “Jewish community” prays as one” (“minyan.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2007).

<sup>373</sup> « elles sont totalement exclues en milieu judéo-arabe ».

on the anthropology and sociology of their now-defunct communities” (Rudavsky 233). Shalvi’s claim that the education these women receive in France is superior to that which they would have received in North Africa rings true in many of these texts. The authors recognize the differences between education in their homelands and the education in France that leads them to their emancipation.

Goldmann significantly feels the constraints placed on a woman’s life in Tunisia, and longs to go to France in order to receive this liberating education:

I started to really feel the bad luck of being born a woman in a society where the greatest tolerance reigned for boys but the girls had to, for fear of scandal or exclusion, bend to very strict rules.... I felt in a particularly pointed manner the fact that a sea separated us from freedom, an obstacle much more impassable than a simple border. (*Filles* 121)<sup>374</sup>

She finally departs for Paris to study law, and to stop feeling “trapped” by her homeland (127). In her essay on North African Jewish women’s identity in France, Goldmann claims that once in France, many women learned of the freedom that had previously been denied them: “The big city [of Paris] liberates; women discover the necessity to reject certain taboos—sexual, among others—and encountering the non-Jewish world makes them reexamine their relationships with men, makes them evaluate the price and the dangers of freedom” (“Identité” 304)<sup>375</sup>. No matter how progressive Goldmann’s father is, he still possesses the ambivalence common to the men in these texts. He agrees that she may study in Paris with the stipulations that

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<sup>374</sup> « Je commençais de plus à ressentir la malchance d’être née femme dans une société où la plus grande tolérance régnait pour les garçons mais où les filles devaient, sous peine de scandale et d’exclusion, se plier à des règles très strictes....je ressentais de manière particulièrement aiguë le fait qu’une mer nous séparait de la liberté, obstacle bien plus infranchissable qu’une simple frontière ».

<sup>375</sup> « La grande ville [de Paris] rend libre ; les femmes découvrent la nécessité de rejeter certains tabous—sexuels entre autres—et la rencontre avec le monde non juif les amène à réexaminer leurs rapports avec les hommes, à évaluer le prix et les dangers de la liberté ».

she not marry a Parisian (*Filles* 121), and that she not become financially independent (127).

Education is also crucial to the female characters in Moati's novel, who are presented in a positive light. Myriam, for example, is a strong, determined woman who actively fights for the advancement of other women. Speaking to her husband, Mochée, she says: "My dream would be that we don't forget about the young girls, that they also learn how to read and write, like their brothers" (144)<sup>376</sup>. Subsequently, she opens a school for young women, as well as teaches her own husband how to read and write. Myriam's granddaughters, Colette and Marie, study medicine and law.

The same is true in Goldmann's text, where the advanced education of women is promoted by the family. It is crucial to note, however, that Moati's text is a work of fiction, whereas Goldmann tells the true story of women in her family. Goldmann's grandmother Élise, for example, is the first girl in her family to go to school (*Filles* 25). This was a rarity, because most mothers objected to their girls going to school, claiming that "they didn't want the young girls to go out" (25)<sup>377</sup>. Élise's father agreed to it, however, because "we were a well-to-do and very enlightened family" (25)<sup>378</sup>. It is through this education that Élise finds access to freedom, considering the restrictive roles for women within her culture and religion: "Pushed aside as a girl of Hebraic culture, as well as a Jewish girl in the Arab culture, it's in French that she became acculturated" (26)<sup>379</sup>. Spire points out, however, that

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<sup>376</sup> « Mon rêve serait qu'on n'oublie pas non plus les petites filles, qu'elles aussi apprennent à lire et à écrire, comme leurs frères ».

<sup>377</sup> « elles ne voulaient pas que les jeunes filles sortent ».

<sup>378</sup> « On était une famille aisée et très éveillée ».

<sup>379</sup> « Écartée en tant que fille de la culture hébraïque, et en tant que Juive de la culture arabe, c'est en français que se fait l'acculturation ».

Goldmann's grandmother seems to equate freedom with acculturation and Western education, therefore buying into the colonial system<sup>380</sup>: "Annie would often make fun of her grandmother about their euro centrism at the time, their idea of emancipation that was so synonymous with acculturation, truly a colonial type oppression. They didn't foresee that then" (288)<sup>381</sup>.

Élise is also educated by her husband, who deems education to be the most important part of her life. He makes her read the newspaper and then report back to him every night, stating that "cleaning, the children come after" (37)<sup>382</sup>. This process of her learning, however, was not accomplished "without screams nor tyranny" (37)<sup>383</sup>, so the level of her grandmother's agency in this educational process is indeed questionable, even though Goldmann claims that her grandfather "want[ed] to make his wife his equal" (37)<sup>384</sup> and even refers to him as a feminist (127). Her emancipation, therefore, is only possible through *his* emancipation, as he believes it is necessary for women to be educated as well.

As mentioned previously, Goldmann worships her grandfather, and praises his lack of prejudice against women: "...his concern for having his wife participate in his journalistic life, for teaching her, for bringing his second daughter to her *baccalaureat* definitely proves his absence of prejudice concerning women" (43)<sup>385</sup>. Also because of this emphasis on education, their daughter, Juliette, becomes the first female

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<sup>380</sup> For more on Western education and the *mission civilatrice*, see Chapter 3.

<sup>381</sup> « Annie... taquinera souvent sa grand-mère sur leur eurocentrisme de l'époque, leur idée de l'émancipation qui fut tellement synonyme d'acculturation, voire d'une oppression de type colonial. On n'entrevoyait pas tout cela à l'époque ».

<sup>382</sup> « le ménage, les enfants passeront après ».

<sup>383</sup> « sans cris ni tyrannie ».

<sup>384</sup> Son grand-père « veut faire de sa femme son égale ».

<sup>385</sup> « ...son souci de faire participer sa femme à sa vie journalistique, de l'instruire, de mener sa seconde fille jusqu'au baccalauréat prouve bien qu'il s'agissait chez lui d'une absence de préjugés concernant les femmes ».

lawyer of North Africa (43). Yet how much this decision was in Juliette's hands is also unclear. As Élise says, "her father wanted to give Juliette a name for herself; he decided that she would be a lawyer" (43)<sup>386</sup>. Yet society was not ready for such a progressive reality as a woman lawyer. "Mardochée [Goldmann's grandfather] didn't understand that the social conditions were not yet mature enough for the future that he envisioned for his daughter" (95)<sup>387</sup>. When Juliette sits for the exam for the bac, it was like a spectacle: "They wanted to see close up this young girl who dared to prepare the *baccalaureat* herself" (88)<sup>388</sup>. Another female lawyer of the time, Yvonne Netter maintains that it was very difficult for a woman to form a clientele (93): "The magistrates were appalling. They didn't want to hear the women: some of them even pretended to sleep when a woman [lawyer] spoke. They said that women could not succeed because of their weak voice!" (93)<sup>389</sup>.

Élise recounts that she saw Juliette as if she were a man, and this worried her, because she wondered who would marry this girl (44). Élise's worry was that she would not know how to "take care of a house, cook, clean" (45)<sup>390</sup> since she was already thirty and unmarried (45). Eventually, she finds someone to marry her, which Goldmann attributes to the "courage" of her husband who "dared to marry Juliette, the Juliette who scared people with her emancipation, whom he knew was a horrible

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<sup>386</sup> « Son père voulait faire de Juliette un nom; il a décidé qu'elle serait avocate ».

<sup>387</sup> « Mardochée n'avait pas compris que les conditions sociales n'étaient pas encore mûres pour l'avenir qu'il envisageait pour sa fille ».

<sup>388</sup> « On voulait voir de près cette jeune fille qui avait osé préparer seule le baccalauréat ».

<sup>389</sup> « Les magistrats étaient épouvantables. Ils ne voulaient pas entendre de femmes : certains faisaient même semblant de dormir quand une femme plaidait. On disait que les femmes ne pouvaient pas réussir à cause de leur faible voix! »

<sup>390</sup> Elle devrait apprendre à « tenir une maison, faire la cuisine, s'occuper d'un ménage ».

housekeeper” (96)<sup>391</sup>. Once Juliette is married, however, she stops working, as she has two children and “her husband spoiled her quite a bit, a beautiful house, the life of a socialite, jewelry, etc.” (47)<sup>392</sup>. Because of this new life as a socialite, Juliette’s daily existence changes: “In our easy bourgeois society, the woman was not kept abreast of her husband’s affairs nor of his resources” (82)<sup>393</sup>. This is unlike what her father had taught her and shown her through his own marriage, and once again illustrates the conflicted ideas about gender roles many of the women in these texts possess.

## Rebellion

Whether it is due to the influence of their fathers, their “Western” education, or something from within that drives them to resist, many of the women in these texts eventually rebel against the gender expectations placed upon them by their families, their religion, and larger society.

Throughout Darmon’s novel, Sarah Lévy’s objections to the roles of women are primarily based on religious customs. Sarah rejects the gender-based double standards and injustices she sees in the traditions her Jewish community upholds.

According to Pierre Horn in his book *Modern Jewish Writers of France*:

The height of [Sarah’s] revolt occurred upon hearing that not only had she to enter the synagogue through the door reserved for females only (‘apartheid,’ she called it) but as a girl, unlike boys with their bar-mitzvahs, she would never be admitted into the ranks of emancipated adults in the eyes of God and fellow Jews. (152)

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<sup>391</sup> Son mari « osa épouser Juliette, la Juliette qui faisait peur par son émancipation, et dont on savait qu’elle était mauvaise ménagère ».

<sup>392</sup> « son mari l’a beaucoup gâtée, une belle maison, une vie mondaine, des bijoux, etc ».

<sup>393</sup> « Dans notre société de bourgeois aisés, la femme n’était pas au courant des affaires de son mari ni de ses ressources ».

After Sarah's experiences of being disempowered by her religion—not being allowed to take part in the services like her male relatives, not being permitted to be a full Jewish “adult,” being seen only as a “*vraie jeune fille vierge* (a good young virgin girl)” whose sole purpose was to eventually procreate and nothing more, being shunned from the synagogue during her menstrual period—she swears to never forgive God or Judaism:

Never in my life, never, would anyone make me set foot again in a synagogue, never could I console myself of this betrayal, never could I resolve to forgive myself or them, for being nothing but a girl. I would not forgive this God who allows, through the mouths of his representatives and his legislators that I, Sarah Lévy, first male child of the family, be considered to be like a dirty sewer. (95)<sup>394</sup>

Again here Sarah's description is centered around the body—her foot as no longer a connection to her religion by refusing to enter a synagogue, the men's mouths as conveyors of oppressive religious mandates, and her body like a “dirty sewer,” expelling from her female genitalia that which seems to separate her from her male counterparts.

Sered claims that Moroccan Jewish women throughout time have been “excluded from the public religious ceremonies of men” and that “Jewish law demands that men and women be separate in many social contexts” (171-2). She also argues that in general, men and women in many cultures must be “physically as well

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<sup>394</sup> « Jamais de ma vie, jamais, on ne me ferait remettre les pieds dans une synagogue, jamais je ne pourrais me consoler de cette trahison, jamais je ne me résoudrais à me pardonner et à leur pardonner, de n'être qu'une fille. Jamais je n'excuserais ce Dieu qui permet par la bouche de ses représentants et de ses légistes, que je sois moi, Sarah Lévy, premier enfant mâle de la famille, considérée comme un égout impur ».

as conceptually separated in order for men to dominate women” (172). The “apartheid” of the synagogue Sarah experiences reinforces this reality, sending the message that it is the men who control any attempt Sarah makes at having a religious life.

In disavowing the authority of God—an authority that denies her access to any power within her religion—Sarah is also disavowing the paternal authority that so strongly impacts her life. As a result, Sarah decides that *her* God must be female, in order to see both herself and her fellow females as “*digne de vivre* (worthy of living)” (95)<sup>395</sup>. This moment in Sarah’s narrative is crucial to understanding her ongoing struggle with the power she desires and witnesses in the “Fathers” around her, and her realization that such power is not hers to have.

Much like her character Liana, Kahn started early fighting back against oppression towards women. As with Sarah Lévy, Kahn’s rebellion is partly against her religion, one which she sees as restrictive. As mentioned previously, “Western” education also plays a significant role in her struggle to find “emancipation”:

I was a rebel right away. But I was helped by French culture. Because if I stayed in my community, I wouldn’t have had access to culture. In so much as Algeria was French, school was obligatory, so I went to school and it gave me the tools. French was not just a language, it was also a tool to be emancipated. When you start to read books and you have teachers who explain to you what freedom is, what free will is, afterwards you can’t just obey your father when he tells you something. Yes, it’s my father and I love him, but I’m not his thing. Very quickly, I began to say no. No to religion; I was not a believer. No to practicing it, even. So I wasn’t in ambivalence anymore. (Interview)<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> According to Elliot R. Wolfson, Jewish kabalistic tradition depicts God as “comprising male and female,” as opposed to traditional Jewish practice in which God is represented as male. (“On Becoming Female.” *Gender and Judaism*. Ed. T.M. Rudavsky. New York: NYU Press, 1995. 211.)

<sup>396</sup> « j’étais rebelle tout de suite. Mais j’étais aidée par la culture française. Parce qu’au fond si je restais dans ma communauté, je n’aurais pas accès à la culture. Dans la mesure dont l’Algérie était

Kahn maintains that her rebellious attitude was mainly due to her exposure to French culture, language, and ideology. Goldmann corroborates, arguing that many of the oppressive traditions within the Jewish community left many Jewish women with an “emptiness that was easily filled by European culture” which contributed to their detachment from Jewish culture (“Identité” 303)<sup>397</sup>. Kahn’s detachment from her religion obviously left her much more open to the influence of French culture, leading to her further critique of these traditions.

Sarah Lévy in Darmon’s novel is a prime example of the conflicts of identity many of these women experience, ending up in a traditional, abusive marriage, and yet eventually fighting back. She is unable to tolerate her painful, degrading relationship for very long. After she and her husband have their baby, Adrien (a boy, no less), and things do not improve, she begins to refuse, as Horn puts it, “to play a role dictated by society and the brotherhood of omnipotent sovereign-husbands, whether it be sewing a missing shirt button or having sex every time he demanded it” (Horn 154). As Horn rightly points out, this role expected of her as a woman is not simply enforced or determined by one man in her life, but rather by an entire system of authority, made up of what he calls this “brotherhood” of not only tyrannical husbands, but brothers, fathers, and God as well.

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française, l’école était obligatoire, donc j’allais à l’école et on m’a donnée les outils. Le français n’était pas seulement une langue, c’était aussi un outil pour s’émanciper. Quand vous commencez à lire des livres et que vous avez des professeurs qui vous explique ce que c’est que la liberté, ce que c’est que le libre arbitre, après vous ne pouvez plus obéir comme ça à votre père quand il vous dit quelque chose. D’accord c’est mon père et je l’aime, mais je ne suis pas sa chose. Moi, très vite, j’ai commencé à dire non. Non à la religion; je n’étais pas croyante. Non à la pratique même. Donc je n’étais plus dans l’ambivalence ».

<sup>397</sup> Elles avaient un « vide qui fut facilement comblé par la culture européenne ».

Much like Kahn who says “no” to the constraints on her as a woman, Sarah finally reaches a breaking point and reacts to her tyrannical husband’s demands on her. After an argument over a button that she forgot to sew, Sarah can take it no longer, and begins to say “no” as well:

Yes, I could have been the woman that everyone wanted me to be! Yes, I could have. But I didn’t want to be. My trouble-making gut, born to make trouble, refused it all and screamed silently, in a post-prandial rumble- NO! My sex<sup>398</sup> screamed no. My brain cried no. The now bristled hair on my arms, it too, bawled no. No all around. No to everything, all together, without taking time to examine it, study it, or discuss it....No, I didn’t want to be devoured! I want to exist, me, Sarah, and no longer be conquered ground, occupied territory, who must pay tribute to the Master. (Darmon 216-219)<sup>399</sup>

First of all, this passage is noteworthy because it harks back to the initial scene with her father where she refuses to lower her eyes as he speaks to her. In that scene, he responds by calling her an “*emmerdeuse*” (“troublemaker”), which is the same term she uses here to describe what she sees as her innate rebellious nature, or her “*tripe d’emmerdeuse*” (“gut of a trouble-maker”). Sarah’s description of this internal uprising is highly relevant to the discussion of Sered’s notion of a “bifurcated experience.” Sarah’s conflicted notions of self as related to her womanhood are not simply divided (or ‘bifurcated’) into internal and external factors, but rather into multiple facets of her own *self*. Not only is the physical embodiment of her womanhood (her sexual organ) screaming “no,” but her brain, the hairs on her arm,

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<sup>398</sup> The original French term “sexe” has a dual meaning—both “sex” and the sexual organ.

<sup>399</sup> I have used Pierre Horn’s translation (154) of the last sentence of this passage. « Oui...j’aurais pu être la femme qu’on attendait que je fusse! Oui, j’aurais pu. Mais je ne le voulais pas. Ma tripe d’emmerdeuse, née pour emmerder, s’y refusait et hurlait silencieusement, dans un gargouillis intestinal post-prandial- NON! Mon sexe disait non. Mon cerveau criait non. Tout hérissés, les poils de mes bras gueulaient, eux aussi, non. Non en totalité. Non à tout, en bloc, sans me donner la peine d’examiner, d’étudier ou de discuter....Non, je ne veux pas être dévorée! Je veux exister, moi, Sarah, et ne plus être le terrain conquis, le territoire occupé, qui doit payer tribut au Maître ».

and her entire being are as well. We can see her sexual organ as signifying what are perceived to be her “natural” instincts as a woman, her brain as the possessor of the intellect and knowledge that can challenge these “instincts,” and the rest of her body as symbolic of the extreme integration of both aspects into her entire being.

In this passage, any discrepancy between her clashing “instincts” has disappeared, and she is now united, body, mind and soul, into one person: Sarah. Her fragmented self can also be interpreted as being the conflicting aspects of her identity, as a Jew, as a Moroccan, as a woman. Declaring that she wants to exist as “Sarah,” she has shed the identity of “woman” and declared herself to be a human being, first and foremost. Spire calls Darmon’s work “the settling of affairs of a Sephardic woman who is looking for herself, who wants her body and spirit to live and refuses to keep her eyes lowered forever” (284)<sup>400</sup>.

This passage also speaks to the body as a site of resistance, as is discussed at length in post-colonial feminist theory. According to McClintock, Sarah’s body would signify national culture, and therefore Sarah’s rejection with her entire body is in turn a rejection of this national culture which has been reflected unto her. She embodies all aspects of her identity, including those which make her Moroccan and those which make her Jewish. In the end, Sarah Lévy begins having an affair on her husband, showing her newfound desire not to have her actions dictated by anyone, particularly her husband.

Liana’s rebellion represents a changed future for new generations of women. Algerian Independence being imminent, the Jewish community of Béchar is

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<sup>400</sup> « le règlement de compte d’une femme sépharade à la recherche d’elle-même, qui veut faire vivre son corps et son esprit et refuse de garder éternellement les yeux baissés ».

preparing to leave their homes. Although very attached to her homeland Algeria, Liana's dream is to go to France, to finally live a "liberated" life. Her only option is to try to start a new life there, away from the community and the culture that has become so deeply engrained with these attitudes. To symbolize this hope, when her mother gives birth to her newest little sister, the French woman who assisted with the birth suggests that they name her "Sara" (328). In naming her this, Liana is commemorating a young woman who defied traditions and was punished for it. Instead of shunning her, Liana pushes the boundaries of acceptable behavior for women by honoring Sara as someone to be admired.

Goldmann in her narrative begins to reclaim her strength as a woman when she realizes that the patriarchal society she has grown up in has made a large mark on her being and her behavior: "I think that paternal authority and oriental tradition affected us for a long time in the sense of a certain passivity. It took me years to get rid of this handicap, to dare to say and above all do" (127)<sup>401</sup>. As with Sarah Lévy, Goldmann must shed this "curtain of judgement" that she carried with her from her father's authority. Joelle Bahloul speaks to this reality for many young women like Goldmann: "...the authority of the father and elder sons exercised over several generations of female relatives is viewed as unconditional, unchallenged in traditional Sephardic families" (203). Despite her feminist ideology, Goldmann does not truly discover her liberty until after her husband dies, just as Sarah Lévy's father's death is the final step to her true freedom. Goldmann's "*prise de conscience* [awakening],"

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<sup>401</sup> « Je crois que l'autorité paternelle et la tradition orientale nous a longtemps marquées dans le sens d'une certaine passivité. Il m'a fallu des années pour me débarrasser de ce handicap, pour oser dire et surtout faire ».

just like that of her grandmother, she claims, only truly happened once this male influence was out of her life.

### **Parental Connection to the Homeland**

While the mothers and fathers in these texts can serve both to perpetuate tradition and to embody the ambivalence towards this tradition, they can also function as a connection to or alienation from the homeland. Subsequently, the loss of a parent, in most cases the father, often represents a rupture with the homeland and the sense of “home.” One of the few exceptions to the overpowering influence of the father figure in these texts is Cohen’s *Le Marabout de Blida*. In it, Cohen’s *mother* represents a warm, connective element to her past and her origins. Cohen’s father is somewhat of an absent figure; he is away at war when she is born. She meets him for the first time in a train station of Blida upon his return. Cohen reflects on this young memory of walking towards him: “How many steps between the child who just learned how to walk and this wounded man who came from the war, leaving behind so many cadavers and widows?” (83)<sup>402</sup>. She mentions him very rarely in her text, and when she does, it is often in an abstract manner. For example, at one point she says: “I mused on my father who, every day, contemplated a fig tree, a fig tree of Guelma<sup>403</sup>, an old fig tree with a hundred-year-old trunk, labyrinthine, enormous” (126)<sup>404</sup>. As usual, Cohen relates images and connections to people to nature, in

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<sup>402</sup> « Combien de pas entre l’enfant qui savait tout juste marcher et cet homme blessé qui revenait de la guerre, laissant ailleurs tant de cadavres et de veuves? »

<sup>403</sup> This refers to the capital of Guelma Province in north-east Algeria. Sétif, the site of a famous massacre that marked the beginning of the Algerian insurrection following World War II (which Cohen mentions in Chapter 3), is located in this province.

<sup>404</sup> « Je songeai à mon père qui, tous les jours, repensait à un figuier, un figuier de Guelma, un vieux figuier au tronc centenaire, tortueux, énorme ».

particular to trees—very old trees with deep roots. Her use of the term “mused on” implies that Cohen’s father is an imaginary figure in her life, existing primarily in her mind.

Cohen refers numerous times in her text to her mother as “*madre mía*” (Spanish for “mother of mine”) and relishes the memories of a Spanish song that her mother used to sing for her, a song that makes her cry (103). Her mother is therefore a connection to her Sephardic heritage, her mother’s family originating from Andalucía, Spain. Cohen maintains in an interview that she is very attached to her mother’s family:

We are Sephardic people, so we come from Spain in a way, and I really see my origins there. From the south of Spain you can see the Algerian coast. Basically, we must have arrived through Spain. My mother speaks Spanish, she loves Spanish. I wrote a book [about her] called *Bésame Mucho*. I will never go live in Spain, but I like the language. (Interview)<sup>405</sup>

In Cohen’s text, when she feels that she has “betrayed” her homeland by her adaptation to her new life in France, she invokes her mother, her connection to this homeland: “I am no longer my mother’s daughter! Is it the war, *madre mía*, that wrecked our orientations, our memories?” (134)<sup>406</sup>. The *marabout* then tells her that she must “drink the wine of your cask, of your father, of your mother, of your tribe, in paradoxical, mortal love, become your mother’s, your father’s daughter again...”

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<sup>405</sup> « On est les sépharades, donc on vient d’Espagne d’une certaine façon, et je les vois là plutôt mes origines. Du sud de l’Espagne on voit la côte algérienne. Au fond on a dû arriver par l’Espagne. Ma mère elle parle espagnol, elle adore l’espagnol. J’ai écrit un livre qui s’appelle *Bésame Mucho*. J’irai jamais vivre en Espagne. Mais cette langue me plaît ».

<sup>406</sup> « Je ne suis plus la fille de ma mère! Est-ce la guerre, *madre mía*, qui nous a bousillé les orientations, les mémoires? »

(135)<sup>407</sup>. Once again, the senses are a crucial link to the past, as Cohen must taste the wine of her parents, of her ancestors, in order to reconnect to her origins.

In Cixous's text, the narrator's mother represents more of an alienation from her homeland Algeria than a connection to her origins. First of all, her mother experiences alienation because of her literal alienation from her home country of Germany. From the start of her marriage to the narrator's father and her life in Algeria, her mother feels like an outsider, not belonging to this community which she had never even heard of before arriving in Algeria (*Rêveries* 101). In fact, she hadn't even heard of the word "Sephardic" before she moved there (101). Cixous's narrator claims that in Algeria, her mother was always a "foreigner (*étrangère*)" and not French, but not anything... just foreign. She describes her mother as always being an "*invitée-évitée* (avoided guest)", and by extension she and her brother were "*ininvités* (uninvited)" (108) as well. Everyone in Algeria wondered whether her mother was a friend or an ally, or perhaps an enemy, and the narrator claims that even her mother did not know the answer (110). Cixous claims that she was profoundly affected by her mother's sense of alienation, and that her childhood was thus typified by a double sense of identity:

I have a childhood with two memories. My own childhood was accompanied and illustrated by the childhood of my mother. The German childhood of my mother came to recount and resuscitate itself in my childhood like an immense North in my South. With Omi my grandmother the North went back even further. Consequently, although I am profoundly Mediterranean of body, of appearance, of *jouissances*<sup>408</sup>, all my imaginary affinities are Nordic. (*Rootprints* 181)

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<sup>407</sup> « bois le vin de ton tonneau, de ton père, de ta mère, de ta tribu, dans l'amour paradoxal, mortel, redeviens la fille de ta mère, de ton père... »

<sup>408</sup> While the term "*jouissance*" can mean "joy," it also has a the connotation of sexual pleasure or orgasm.

Despite her own experiences of exile and alienation, Cixous's narrator's mother does not understand the experience of alienation that her children feel within their own society in Algeria. The narrator states that her mother suffered from not suffering—that she had always been “an amputee, suffering from not suffering and affected by *afolie* (another neologism Cixous invents) which is an illness of those who don't know illness” (57)<sup>409</sup>. As a result, her mother can't see that she and her brother “were crazy and sick with the desire for Algeria, for the interior reality of this country that was our native country but not at all ours, for the flesh, for the place, for the arabness of arabitude, for the treasure of treasures to which we had no access... ” (57)<sup>410</sup>

The narrator claims that her mother didn't understand her children's need/desire to “at all costs enter and arrive in a country”<sup>411</sup> and to be “*malade d'amour* (lovesick)” for Algeria (58). Her mother had never experienced this “*maladie*,” regardless of how many times she had experienced “exiles exclusions expulsions exactions” (58). The comparison of her and her brother's longing to an illness is quite fitting, since nostalgia itself began as a medical diagnosis, rather than coming from “poetry or politics” (Boym 3). As Boym states, nostalgia was originally diagnosed in “various displaced people of the seventeenth century” whose “longing for their native land became their single-minded obsession” (3).

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<sup>409</sup> « une amputée, souffrant de ne pas souffrir et atteinte d'afolie qui est la maladie de ceux qui connaissent pas la maladie ».

<sup>410</sup> Nous « étions fous et malades du besoin de l'Algérie, de la réalité intérieure de ce pays qui était notre pays natal et pas du tout nôtre, de la chair, de l'habitat, de l'arabité de l'arabitude, du trésor plein de trésors auquel nous n'avions pas accès... »

<sup>411</sup> Ils voulaient « à tout prix entrer et arriver dans un pays ».

In contrast to her mother, Cixous's narrator seems to be full of this illness, while her mother shunned illness completely, and was completely horrified of it (58). Rather than hanging onto the past through nostalgic longing, her mother believed that "a tie is made to be cut, a desire severed" (58)<sup>412</sup>. As a result, her children even ponder on whether or not their mother became a midwife simply for the "*coupements de cordon* (cutting of the cord)" (58). Rather than a link to her homeland, as mothers often are, her narrator's mother actually increases her own alienation from what she so strongly desires to be a part of.

Cixous's narrator's mother experiences another layer of alienation when her husband dies, leaving her a widow who is chased by her husband's friends, who see her as a "piece of meat," and shunned by their wives, where "anti-widowism" was prevalent: "Once my father had disappeared, among the close friends of my father who all wanted to be my mother's lovers, or their wives who all without exception gave my mother and the family a cold shoulder, as a preventive measure ... " (43)<sup>413</sup>. Her mother is therefore "*mise à la porte* (shut-out)" like widows in "underdeveloped" countries, "but not in Germany" (55). This alienation is only in addition to that which her family felt when her father was alive, since her father was an atheist and a socialist, and they were "removed from any national or nationalist ideals" (82)<sup>414</sup>. According to Jennifer Yee:

The children are ... excluded from the Sephardic Jewish community itself because of the marginality of their Ashkenazi mother, to which is added

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<sup>412</sup> Leur mère croyait qu' « un lien...est fait pour être coupé, un désir sevré ».

<sup>413</sup> (With help from Brahic's translation, p. 23) « une fois mon père disparu, parmi les proches, les amis de mon père qui voulaient tous maintenant être les amants de ma mère sinon, et leurs épouses qui toutes sans aucune exception mirent ma mère et la famille à la porte préventivement... »

<sup>414</sup> « Sa famille était étrangère à tout idéal national ou nationaliste... »

the isolation of atheists living among practicing Jews and of the children of a widow in a culture working along strictly patriarchal lines. (195)

Cixous's father's death is likewise a large turning point in her young life, affecting both her and her family in numerous ways. According to Sarah Cornell, Cixous's father's death "engendered her fictional writing" and was the subject of her first novel entitled *Dedans* (32). In her article "Hélène Cixous, auteur en 'algérie,'" Christa Stevens notes that this event appears in much of Cixous's "autobiographically-inspired" fiction (78). After he dies, Cixous's narrator and her brother ask their mother to get them a bicycle, for which they seem to wait eternally, just as they wait for their father to return:

The non-realization of our wishes seemed to us a mysterious follow-up to the irreversible disappearance of our father: now that we had reached the impossible, we had been in contact with the irreparable, there are prayers that remain unanswered, the Bicycle wasn't coming, just as my father wasn't coming... (*Rêveries* 28)<sup>415</sup>.

Every time a holiday would come and go, there would still be no bicycle, and still no father: "It's (he's) not coming, it's not coming, it's not coming...",<sup>416</sup> they say about the bicycle (29).

The bicycle also represents to Cixous's narrator and her brother a way to discover and finally "arrive" in Algeria, so when the bicycle does not come, neither does Algeria. Equally their father, serving as a connection to Algeria, is gone forever, and they are left with their mother whose alienation from Algeria, as previously

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<sup>415</sup> « La non-réalisation de nos souhaits nous apparaissant comme une suite mystérieuse de la disparition irréversible de notre père : maintenant nous avons touché l'impossible, nous avons été en contact avec l'irréparable, il y a des prières qui restent sans réponse, le Vélo ne venait pas, comme mon père ne venait pas... »

<sup>416</sup> « Il ne vient pas, il ne vient pas, il ne vient pas... »

mentioned, is quite pronounced. Cixous describes her young life as being very much affected by this profound loss: “My life began with graves.... When I was little, it seemed to me that the grave of my father came out of the grave of the North. My father’s grave was also a lost grave. It is in Algeria. No one goes there any more or will ever go” (*Rootprints* 189). The fact that her father’s grave is still in a land that her family has left forever is quite fitting, considering the ways in which her father represented the true “Algeria” in the eyes of her and her brother. As with Cixous’s father’s death, Goldmann sees the loss of her father as synonymous with the loss of her connection to Tunisia. It occurs shortly after she moves to France and he joins her there. She thinks it is his body “refusing exile,” and for her his death symbolizes “a break with my native country” (132)<sup>417</sup>.

At the end of Darmon’s novel, upon her father’s death, Sarah Lévy vows to no longer allow herself to be controlled by any men in her life. As she stands there, contemplating her father’s coffin, she thinks: “My father, stretched out in this coffin, takes with him all that I lived through him and for him. His gaze, once extinguished, lowered the curtain of judgement over my life” (229).<sup>418</sup> Despite her struggle for freedom from male authority, it is not until this final chain is broken that Sarah feels truly released from its grip. His death is also the death of the oppression of her larger Jewish community in Morocco, and she is now able to pursue a new, “liberated” life in France.

As is demonstrated by Cixous’s, Goldmann’s and Darmon’s texts, the loss of a parent, as a representative and partial creator of these women’s identities, can be

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<sup>417</sup> « la rupture avec le pays natal ».

<sup>418</sup> « Mon père, étendu dans ce cercueil, emporte avec lui tout ce que j’avais vécu par lui et pour lui. Son regard en s’éteignant a baissé le rideau du jugement de ma vie ».

seen as analogous with the loss of their community in North Africa. Once the Jewish community leaves for France, it no longer exists for them to return to, a reality that must inherently destabilize their sense of self. Without a stable home, they can no longer have any semblance of a stable identity.

### **Leaving North Africa Behind**

The manner in which the Jewish community must leave North Africa, as Kahn mentions in her interview, also adds to this destabilizing of identity. Kahn speaks of having to leave from one moment to the next, never truly having time to come to terms with the departure. In Darmon's novel, she alludes to this feeling when Sarah Lévy describes her family's departure for France: "A Caravel from Air France *tore us* from the country that saw us born and live, to deposit us on the soil of the French Republic" (*emphasis added* 117-8)<sup>419</sup>. (As previously mentioned, Ben, uses the term "tear" to describe her destabilized identity as well.) As with Cohen's trees that are uprooted from her square (see Chapter 2), Sarah Lévy sees her family as being "uprooted" and redeposited onto new soil in France:

The Lévy family, vicariously through the grandmother, just did a curtain call, acknowledged and applauded for its theatrical entrance onto French territory. We had finally arrived and taken possession of this new space, unknown and hostile, with the brutal affirmation of our origins and our folklore. The proof was there: the caravansary<sup>420</sup> could reconstruct itself in France. (119)<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> « Une Caravelle d'Air France nous arracha du pays qui nous avait vus naître et vivre, pour nous déposer sur le sol de la République française ».

<sup>420</sup> "In the Middle East, and parts of North Africa and Asia, [a caravansary is] a public building used for sheltering caravans and other travellers. A caravansary is usually constructed outside the walls of a town or village" ("caravansary." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2007).

<sup>421</sup> « La famille Lévy, par grand-mère interposée, venait de faire un lever de rideau remarqué et applaudi pour son entrée sur scène sur le territoire français. Nous étions enfin arrivés et nous prenions

Part of the precarious nature of their immigration to France is uncertainty about their new lives there. Kahn's narrator describes France as "this fuzzy dream about which they knew nothing and in which they hoped everything"<sup>422</sup> (9). Cohen's depiction of Paris also conveys an ambiguity which reflects the internal conflict of identity these women feel: "No city in the world gives such an impression of familiarity mixed with strangeness, of stability and of movement, of perpetuity" (96)<sup>423</sup>.

Cixous's narrator accuses Paris, unlike her hometown of Oran, of not being a true "city":

Clos-Salebrier niche enclave captivité outings oran Algiers blood man and blood woman without me/While Paris no, Paris is without doors and thus without opposite forces without supplications without assault without horse without dog and I don't see it as *Ville*" (49)<sup>424</sup>.

This very place, therefore, that her brother had accused her of not being a real place (since it didn't have *real* trees)<sup>425</sup>, and that she appears to defend, is the place that she does not see as "*Ville*." She uses a capital "V" in this word, insinuating that Paris is not even a valid place when compared to those cities in Algeria, those that have "doors." This is quite ironic, since the "*portes* (doors)" of Paris are well known for being ways to access the city<sup>426</sup>. Yee claims that the theme of the "Door" is

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possession de cet espace nouveau, inconnu et hostile, dans l'affirmation brutale de nos origines et de notre folklore. La preuve était faite : le caravansérail pouvait se reconstruire en France ».

<sup>422</sup> ce rêve flou dont ils ne savaient rien et dont ils espéraient tout.

<sup>423</sup> Aucune ville au monde ne donne cette impression mêlée de familiarité et d'étrangeté, de stabilité et de mouvement, de pérennité.

<sup>424</sup> ...Clos-Salebrier niche enclave captivité sorties oran alger sang homme et sang femme sans moi  
Alors que Paris non, Paris est sans portes et donc sans forces opposées sans supplications  
sans assault sans cheval sans chien et je ne le vis pas *Ville*" (49)

<sup>425</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>426</sup> Paris is surrounded by a peripheral boulevard, thus the roads that lead inwards towards the city are called "doors."

“omnipresent” in Cixous’s text: “The door and the children’s position at the door reflect their false situation, waiting on the threshold of Algeria, so to speak, but refused entry” (194).

Cixous’s narrator’s statement that Paris lacks any doors can be read as an absence of windows into the past, of openings into the true core of her being, of insight into her identity. It can also be interpreted as a type of trap, where she is literally confined to her new homeland. It seems that the doors of the “true” cities of Algeria are no longer open to her, and she cannot actually go back and pass through these doors. She does not attempt a literal homecoming; these doors remain in her imagination, in her description of her past, in her recounting of her memories and reliving of these memories with her brother.

The loss of their homelands in some cases represents severing the chains that bound these women to their restrictive cultures. For many of the women in these texts, France means a progressive education, social freedom, and a hope for the future. Yet at the same time, this rupture is a traumatic one, as these texts demonstrate. The ambivalence towards the departure for France mirrors the internal conflicts about gender roles many of the characters in these texts personify. The women represented here must not only negotiate their own ideas about their place in society, but also struggle to understand the mixed messages they receive from their parental figures. As a result, the women in these texts ultimately rebel in some way, even if part of them still holds onto the tradition so deeply instilled in their minds. The complex nature of their identities as women also complicates the nostalgia reflected in these authors’ narratives, creating *algia* for an existence far from idyllic.

## Conclusion: Creating an “Imaginative Space”

Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, in *Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination*, points out that what is “remembered” through Jewish literature is “of course also imagined” and that Jewish culture “delineates diaspora in its most fundamental function as the place of replica and imitation—as *imaginative space*” (9,14). The imaginative nature of this remembrance is partly due to the perpetual state of exile experienced by the Jewish people throughout history—having no stable space, Jewish literature must *create* a space within the text. Similarly, Judith Klein claims that “Judeo-Maghrebian authors know the creative virtue of memory and of re-capturing what they have lost through literature” (127).

The existence of Jews in the Maghreb region is estimated to span over 2000 years, although a large portion of the Jewish population arrived during the exodus from the Iberian Peninsula in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. French rule, however, only began in the nineteenth century: Algeria was a French colony from 1830 until 1962; Tunisia was a French Protectorate from 1881 until 1956; Morocco became a protectorate of France in 1912, (with parts of the country designated as the “Spanish Zone”), until Independence in 1956. Therefore, despite a strong attachment by the Jewish community to French culture and civilization, their extensive history in the region creates a connection that runs deep. The act of being “torn” from the area (as many of the authors refer to it) is thus quite painful.

The actual trauma of the ejection from their homelands in North Africa is rarely depicted in these works, which either look retrospectively at their lives prior to

this event or struggle in the present with their new lives in France. For Myriam Ben, Hélène Cixous, Rachel Kahn, Paule Darmon, Nine Moati, Annie Goldmann, and Annie Cohen, they turn to the imagination to recapture their pasts because they cannot literally return home, and even their *literary* return is a painful and ambivalent one. As Klein says, they “creatively” shape their memories in an attempt at finding what they have lost in the forced departure from their homelands. As is most evident in Cixous’s creation of the term “*inséparable*” to describe her relationship with her Muslim counterparts, the imagination is necessary in these narratives in order to allay the grief associated with their eventual expulsion from the North African community. Cixous must create this image of her relationship with her Algerian neighbors so that she can negotiate the unstable space created by her departure.

The complicated quality of their *algia*, or longing, for homeland results in equally complicated narratives. So complicated, in fact, that most of these authors delayed addressing it in their works until very late in their careers. This does not mean, however, that the desire to express their nostalgia did not exist for much of their lives. The women speaking in these texts therefore “live in the diaspora but [are] obsessed with the idea of returning to the land of [their] birth” (Dugas, “An Unknown Maghrebien Genre” 23). As many of the authors contend, they were driven by a persistent sense of obligation—much like the concept of *zakhor*, the Jewish commandment to remember. Norma Baumel Joseph discusses the survival of the Jewish community through “collective memory,” one which is not “merely the subject of history.... more than a mere recording of acts and facts” and is rather

“perceived and received as an integral, pivotal aspect of communal religious life” (179).

Part of the reason for this obligation to memory is what Ezrahi calls the eternal “homelessness” of the Jewish population, which is rooted in a “yearning for the ultimate homecoming”: a return to Palestine (7). While theories pertaining to literature of the Jewish diaspora are crucial to examine in light of these texts, it is important to note that the home these women long to return to is not the Jewish homeland of Israel, but rather their “Arab” homelands in North Africa. In this sense, they are twice-displaced; already strangers in their own land after the original expulsion of Jews from Palestine, they become outsiders once again in France.

Therefore, while it is important to locate my project among narratives of Jewish exile and diaspora, the texts I study here raise essential questions about the existence of one “true” homeland for the Jewish people. As these texts demonstrate, Jewish identity is often not the main motivator for their nostalgia, but more frequently it is an affinity for their Muslim neighbors, North African culture, and the actual “land” of their native countries.

The texts I have chosen here are only a selection among numerous other Jewish women authors of North African origin, and yet they all attempt to recapture their North African homelands using similar tropes. A connection to nature is central to many of these texts, communicating the level to which their nostalgia is *rooted* in a physical bond to the land. These authors nostalgically paint a picture of their homelands through imagery of climate, vegetation, food, landscape, and sensuality, oftentimes contrasting these images with those of their new homeland of France. The

common reliance on images of feet also exemplifies this bond to the land, as well as extending to the more metaphorical symbol of a wanderer (a frequent representation of Jewish existence), one who has no stable home or identity. The natural element of their texts is generally characterized by descriptions of the body, pointing to the “sensual” nature of the colonized cultures from which they originate. At the same time, this plays into the colonial rhetoric of “primitive” peoples as being driven by physical impulses, more viscerally connected to the land, and thus “dirty,” “backwards,” and uncivilized. In this sense, the body serves as a marker of difference, distinguishing Jew and Arab from Christian, rich from poor, and civilized from primitive.

These texts also share a fascination (as Kahn describes it) with Muslim-Jewish relationships through which many of these women identify themselves. The relationships depicted vary from hostile to codependent, conveying the overall ambivalence inherent in the connection of the Jewish community to the dominant Arab society. An overwhelming desire for a closeness with their Muslim counterparts pervades these texts more strongly than a desire for identification with their Jewish community. This stems from an uncertainty of self-definition as Jews, partly due to the great influence of French culture and identity, particularly in Algeria. The women in these texts grapple with the eternal question not only of what it means to be Jewish, but what it means to be an Arab Jew, a French Jew in North Africa, and ultimately a woman in all of these communities.

The nostalgia fundamental to these texts is intriguing to examine, considering some of the ways in which the society (the one for which they are nostalgic) is

represented. This is most salient in the depiction of women's restrictive roles within both the Jewish community and the larger Arab culture. The restrictions placed on them as women are transmitted not only through the patriarchal figures in their lives, but also through their mothers and fellow women, whose ambivalence about traditional gender roles is clearly outlined in these texts. At the same time, many of the influential men in their lives serve as mentors, encouraging the women's emancipation through education. For many, France is the symbol of liberation, complete with a progressive Western education and a more "civilized" mind-set. However, once there, the women long for their lost homelands, despite the knowledge that their lives were limited in significant ways. This demonstrates the extremely complex nature of nostalgia, once again stressing the "imaginative" nature of exilic remembrance. Does the desired homeland, as portrayed in these texts, truly exist? If it did at one time, does it still? The lack of a literal homecoming answers this question, confining these authors' return home to within the text itself.

In order to complete this project, it was necessary to translate large portions of these texts into English, as only Cixous's texts exist in translation. One of my aims is therefore to increase accessibility and visibility of these authors, so as to commemorate a community that risks being forgotten. While commemoration does not seem to be the motivating factor for all of these authors, *remembering* certainly is, whether it is their own personal journey or that of a larger community. Klein says that texts by Judeo-Maghrebian authors "can become the most essential way to overcome the grief of exile and let it flow through their collective memory" (115). These texts thus serve both as individual attempts to cope with the loss of their exile

from North Africa, as well as a desire to document the story of their communities. This desire is complex, however, in that these texts reflect a certain level of alienation from the larger Jewish community, as well as a disconnect from personal Jewish identity.

I use the term “story” rather than “history” because it is crucial to recognize that these are not historical documents. Although some of the authors, such as Goldmann, declare the purpose of these texts as recording the history of a certain people in a certain time period, the imagination inevitably comes into play. At the same time, the importance of these texts should not be invalidated, as they give voice to a community whose story has been largely overlooked. This voice is also comprised of other Jewish women of North African origin writing in the same time period whose works I did not examine here, such as Katia Rubinstein, Chochana Boukhobza, Paula Jacques, and Annie Fitoussi. The genres of the texts I have chosen are also limited to novels and memoirs, omitting poetry, drama, and non-fiction prose. At the same time, some of the authors have a unique style; Cixous and Cohen play with language and imagery, Darmon relies on a sarcastic tone, and Goldmann combines orality (the bulk of her text is allegedly a transcription of interviews with her family members) with personal commentary. Many of the authors I discuss have written other texts dealing directly with their North African past, and thus a more comprehensive study would be a useful contribution to this emerging field. A comparison with non-Jewish women writers of North African origin who address similar themes would also be a worthwhile study.

This group of women authors is one that I have compiled myself, to create a category which I believe to be essential in many fields. The authors themselves do not declare their work to be part of an established tradition of Judeo-Maghrebian writers, nor do they appear to be speaking in dialogue with one another. Yet I believe that, read both individually and collectively, these works raise pertinent questions about the nature of self and identity as they relate to Women's Studies, French and Francophone Literature, Jewish Studies, and African Literature as a whole. In each of these categories, as Memmi points out, these women are marginalized. Memmi's claim that, as a Tunisian Jew, he is "a native in a colonized country, a Jew in an anti-Semitic universe, an African in a world in which Europe triumphs" (*Statue de Sel* 109) is highly pertinent here, although Memmi does not experience the added exclusion of being female.

As both Jews and North Africans, these women are excluded from the field of African Literary studies, since most of the work in this field is concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, even within the texts themselves, it is very rare to hear the women refer to themselves or others in their community as "African." As mentioned previously, although North African literature has become a significant area of study on its own, the focus is primarily on Muslim writers. Within the field of Women's Studies, the focus on women from the Arab world largely ignores the presence of Jewish Arab<sup>427</sup> women, whose position is quite unique. "Recovering" women's voices being a mission of Women's Literary Studies, this project is an essential contribution to the discipline. Furthermore, as is evident by Loolwa Khazzoom's

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<sup>427</sup> Again, the term "Arab" is quite controversial; in most criticism, including many parts of my dissertation, it is used to mean "Muslim," and yet writers like Cixous and Memmi have referred to themselves as "Arab" at points in their texts.

collection of essays *The Flying Camel: Essays on Identity by Women of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish Heritage*, Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews, and by extension Jewish women, are marginalized within Jewish Studies. Francophone Jewish women are also generally neglected<sup>428</sup>. Khazzoom sums up these varying levels of exclusion of North African Jewish women:

In a world where Jewish is synonymous with Central and Eastern European, where North African/Middle Eastern is synonymous with Arab Muslim, where “of color” is synonymous with “not Jewish,” and where communities are generally represented through their men, our mere existence threatens to destroy the foundation of numerous identity constructs as society knows them today. (xi)

Finally, due to the authors’ complicated status as citizens and residents of France, these works could also be included not only in Francophone Literary Studies, but in the field of French Literature *tout court*. The fact that the texts are written in French, rather than a native language of the region, as Ngugi wa Thiong’o and many others have argued, points to an essential problem in post-colonial literature. Would the feelings towards their homelands be better expressed in an “indigenous” language? Perhaps, yet these women do not have another language in which to describe their experiences in North Africa, a reality which reflects the ambiguous position of the Jewish community of this region. Does their adaptation to French culture supersede their North African roots? The constant conflict between French and North African identity is thus central to these texts.

My project is especially apt at a time when France endeavors to establish its identity as a diverse nation. With the government’s efforts at secularization after the

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<sup>428</sup> The publication of the anthology *Daughters of Sarah*, edited by Eva Martin Sartori and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage, is one recent exception.

veil controversy, the commemoration of the Franco-Algerian war (in 2001 and 2002), and more recently the establishment of an annual Slavery Remembrance Day (May 2006), the opening of the Musée Quai Branly (June 2006), and the release of the film *Indigènes* (October 2006), France's colonial past has recently become the topic of a nation-wide conversation and heated debate. Left out of this past is the story of the North African Jews, whose role as part of the colonizer and yet one of the colonized is also integral to the documentation of this era in France's history.

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