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After Colonizer and Colonized:

Algerian Jews and the Legacies of North African Literature in French

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in French and Francophone Studies

by

Rebecca Emily Glasberg

2023

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

After Colonizer and Colonized:

Algerian Jews and the Legacies of North African Literature in French

by

Rebecca Emily Glasberg

Doctor of Philosophy in French and Francophone Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Lia N. Brozgal

This dissertation reconceptualizes the place of Jews and Jewishness in French-language North African literature from the mid-twentieth century to the present day. Through both a reconsideration of foundational theoretical texts that sought to distinguish “Francophone” from “French” and historicized close reading of novels from the canonical to the little-known, I explore how Kateb Yacine, Rachid Boudjedra, Boualem Sansal, and Anouar Benmalek—all Algerian writers of Muslim heritage—have incorporated Jews and Jewishness into their cultural productions, notwithstanding political, popular, and academic discourses that promote a monolithic vision of the nation’s purported cultural and religious homogeneity. My dissertation thus interrogates how postcolonial Algerian authors mobilize Jewishness in their works, what it means for these non-Jewish authors to represent Jewish life, and how these interreligious engagements allow for the articulation of broader cultural and critical concerns.

As a study situated at the intersection of Postcolonial Studies and Jewish Studies, *After Colonizer and Colonized* offers a corrective to the trend in the academy, whereby historical, political, and disciplinary tensions have tacitly kept these two fields apart. Reconceptualizing the place of Jews and Jewishness in the field of Francophone North African literature forces us to revisit certain underlying assumptions about the relationship between Jewishness and (North African) literature, and about literary labels more broadly. Privileging literary engagements with Jewishness showcases the productive possibilities inherent in challenging the idea that it is solely the author's religion that makes a text "Jewish literature," and suggests instead that it is high time to consider the postcolonial as Jewish, and the Jewish as postcolonial.

The "writing out" of Jews and Jewishness from the theoretical framework informing scholarly approaches to postcolonial Algerian literature has created not one, but two critical blind spots in the field of North African letters. To wit, scholars have traditionally 1) overlooked the contributions of Algerian Jewish authors and 2) disregarded the role of Jews and Jewishness in works produced by Algerian authors of Muslim origin. My dissertation, while certainly informed by critical inquiry into the former, is the first rigorous study to directly address the latter.

The dissertation of Rebecca Emily Glasberg is approved.

Eleanor K. Kaufman

Laure Murat

Sarah Abrevaya Stein

Dominic R. Thomas

Lia N. Brozgal, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2023

Dedicated with love to my parents
Vic Glasberg and Cristina Leckie,
and to the residents of 1494 Casa Grande.
I couldn't have done it without you.

In honor of Nana.

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This dissertation may have been written over the past three years, but it is the product of a much longer intellectual and personal journey that would not have been possible without the support, encouragement, and guidance of a great many people. I would like to thank my teachers, most especially Lynda Gallagher, Alison Fields, and Alison Levine, for nurturing my love of learning, literature, and language. I would also like to thank Kathleen Binczewski for her mentorship and support during my years as a high school teacher. I am so very lucky that my path crossed all of theirs. I am also incredibly grateful to everyone at the *École de français* at Middlebury College for stoking the flames of my intellectual fire over the four summers I spent there, and for providing me the tools and confidence to tackle further academic study. There is a special place in my heart for summers in small town Vermont.

While at UCLA, I have been fortunate to have studied under and learned from an incredible group of scholars. I offer my most sincere thanks to my professors in the Department of European Languages and Transcultural Studies, particularly those of the French Section, for helping to shape me into the scholar I am today; to Minayo Nasiali, for teaching me about French history and life in the academy; to Aomar Boum, for the kindness and wisdom he showed me as I grew as a scholar of North African literature; and to Jessica Marglin of USC, for her guidance and encouragement as I began to forge my path in the world of Jewish Studies. Special thanks go as well to Olivia Harrison, also of USC, for sharing materials on Kateb Yacine with me that helped to round out the second chapter of the dissertation.

I owe an incredible great debt of gratitude to my committee members. Eleanor Kaufman taught me how to tackle difficult theoretical texts with confidence, helping to shape my project from its earliest days. Dominic Thomas's incisive feedback, particularly on my prospectus, enabled me to better understand my own project in a way I hadn't envisioned. The final product is much the better for it. Laure Murat has been a steady source of intellectual guidance over the years. She has continuously pushed me to think bigger and has supported me through some of the most challenging moments of the process. Sarah Stein has been an incredible teacher, mentor and interlocuter, especially as I began to make my way as a scholar of Jewish Studies. I have learned so much from her vast depth of knowledge, which she has so willingly shared with me time and again, and I am grateful for the amazing opportunities she has given me over the years. Finally, Lia Brozgal has been an extraordinary teacher, mentor, and scholarly role model to me from day one. She has been a constant and unparalleled source of guidance, encouragement, and intellectual inspiration, and has provided me opportunities to develop as a scholar that I didn't know were even possible. In short, she embodies the type of academic I aspire to become. I cannot thank her enough for the impact she has had on me, both personally and professionally. It has been the most incredibly rewarding experience working with her, one that I can only hope to pay forward as I enter the next stage of my career.

I could not have done this work without the help and support of my friends and colleagues at UCLA and beyond. Special thanks go out to the staff of Royce 212, especially Kerry Allen, for seeing me through from one end of the program to the other; and to Viv Holenbeck, Chelsea White, Reina Chung, and David Wu of the UCLA Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies for welcoming me into their amazing team. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Amber Sackett for exploring the various covers of *Le Village de l'Allemand* with me.

While that work is not a part of this dissertation, it certainly informs the fourth chapter. The members of the Zero Draft Writing Group—Tania Bride, Yangjung Lee, Laura Muñoz, Teo Wickland, and Wáng Yōu—have been with me since before I typed the dissertation’s first word. I cannot overstate how integral this little intellectual community has been to the development of this project, and to my personal growth as a scholar. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the members of the California Working Group on Jews in the Maghrib and the Middle East for both the intellectual discussions, which are a consistent source of inspiration, as well as the critical feedback they provided when we workshopped the third chapter of this dissertation. Finally, I would like to thank Laura Henderson and Dana Chen for their friendships, which have nourished me from afar, as well as Katy Chaffee and Anne Le for the moral support and solidarity throughout the last months of writing.

Support comes in many forms, and I am forever grateful to the various departments, centers, and organizations that funded this project. Whether it be French and Francophone Studies or European Languages and Transcultural Studies, my home department has been a crucial source of financial support during my time as a student. I am also incredibly thankful to the UCLA Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies, who endowed my research with numerous grants and fellowships, including the UCLA Fritz, Jenny, and Gustav Berger Fellowship in Holocaust Studies. I am also grateful to the UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies for supporting my dissertation writing during the period of Covid lockdown, and to the UCLA Center for European and Russian Studies and the Northeast Modern Language Association for supporting my trip to the Institut Memoires de l’édition contemporaine when international travel was once again possible. The UCLA Office of the Deans and the UCLA Graduate Division have

provided critical support as well. Without these grants and fellowships, I could not have produced this dissertation.

To Irene and Bernard, thank you for welcoming me whenever I come to Paris, and for your constant support of my ever-increasing interest in French over the years. To Talia, Barbara, and Jamell, thank you for always being there for me when I need it and for always believing in me. To Scarlett and Oliver, thank you for being the best niece and nephew I could ever ask for and for showing me that it is still possible to have fun while writing a dissertation. And to Hurley, thank you for being my steadfast companion for the first five years of grad school.

And last but not least, to mom and dad. I simply do not think it is possible to have better parents. Thank you for everything.

VITA

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- “Ferocious Exclusions: North African Literature and the Algerian Jews,” 2023 Modern Language Association Annual Convention, January 5-8, 2023. San Francisco, California.
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- “*Ausweis* in Algeria? *Le Village de l’Allemand*, the Holocaust, and Algeria’s Dark Decade,” Association for Jewish Studies 52nd Annual Conference, December 13-15, 2020. Zoom.
- “Malrich Schiller and the Mandatory Misuse of Language: Catachresis in Boualem Sansal’s *Le Village de l’Allemand*,” Contemporary French Civilization Conference, August 29-31, 2019. Tucson, Arizona.
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Introduction

“Madame Lill s’appelle Simone. Elle s’appelle aussi Messaouda. Messaouda, qui veut dire la bienheureuse. C’est un nom arabe. Mais madame Lill n’est pas arabe. Elle est juive” [Mrs. Lill is called Simone. She is also called Messaouda. Messaouda, which means the blessed one. It is an Arabic name. But Mrs. Lill is not Arab. She is Jewish].¹ Such is the fashion in which the young Lilas, one of the two protagonists of Algerian author Maïssa Bey’s 2006 *Bleu blanc vert*, introduces readers to her family’s new neighbor. After relocating to Algiers in July 1960 in the aftermath of her father’s death, Lilas and her family begin a new life, and their Jewish neighbors become part and parcel of their daily routine. As Lilas tells it, her mother and Madame Lill “ne passaient pas un seul jour sans se voir. Sans discuter de tout. De leurs enfants. De la guerre. De leur vie” [did not spend a single day without seeing one another. Without discussing everything. Their children. The war. Their lives], whereas her grandfather becomes great friends with Monsieur Léon, Madame Lill’s father, the day that he “a révélé à mon grand-père qu’il connaissait par cœur tout le Coran” [revealed to my grandfather that he knew the entire Coran by heart].² In the midst of the Algerian War for Independence, Lilas’s family and Madame Lill’s lives become irrevocably intertwined for myriad reasons, from the mundane—Lilas turns on Madame Lill’s lights on Saturday mornings—to the exceptional, when Madame Lill offers her neighbors refuge from an OAS attack.

¹ Maïssa Bey, *Bleu blanc vert* (La Tour d’Aigues: Aube, 2006), 54. All translations in the dissertation are mine unless otherwise noted.

² Bey, 52-53.

Even as a young child, Lilas understands that the Lill family's situation is inherently complex; after her grandfather explains to her that "les juifs sont français depuis pas très longtemps. Avant ils étaient comme nous" [the Jews have not been French for very long. Before, they were like us], Lilas remarks that Madame Lill is different from her French compatriots: "Mais Simone-Messaouda n'est pas du tout comme les Français d'ici. Ceux qui vivent dans l'immeuble. Elle parle arabe exactement comme nous, sauf qu'elle a l'accent du Sud" [But Simone-Messaouda is not at all like the French people here. Those who live in the building. She speaks Arabic exactly like us, except that she has a southern accent].³ Madame Simone Lill may be a French citizen, Lilas tells readers, but she is also, and in equal measure, Messaouda, an Arabic-speaking Algerian. Although Madame Lill and her family leave Algeria for good at the very end of the war, she lives on in the memory of Lilas, who, the day of her marriage, dons a *sirwal* made from red velvet fabric that her former neighbor had gifted her many years ago as part of a future wedding trousseau.

Although Madame Lill and her family are mentioned but a handful of times over the course of Bey's novel, their significance arguably outweighs their minimal textual presence. The novel's allegorical nature—which renders the lives of the novel's two protagonists, Lilas and Ali, a sort of *mise-en-abyme* of the social and cultural transformations in Algeria's first thirty years as an independent country—imbues the Lills' presence in Lilas's life with deep socio-cultural meaning. By including the Lill family in the vision of Algeria articulated in *Bleu blanc vert*, Bey writes Jews into the story of Algeria, all while acknowledging the realities of Algerian "repatriation" to France in 1962 and ensuing lack of Jewish cultural presence in the country. In such a way, the novel acknowledges both the realities of Algerian Jewish rapprochement to

³ Bey, 54.

French culture and their mass emigration following Algerian independence, while also suggesting that cultural bonds between Algerian Jews and Muslims remained intact through the end of the colonial period, and that an Algerian Jewish cultural presence lived on in the memory of their Muslim former neighbors and friends long after their physical presence had all but disappeared.

While many readers of postcolonial Algerian literature may assume that the Lill family is somewhat of an exception, a cursory glance at Algerian literary production throughout the decades proves this assumption false: from Idir, a Muslim Algerian who disguises himself as a Jew in order to cross colonial borders in Mouloud Mammeri's 1952 *La Colline oubliée*; to Jacob Timsit, the Algerian Jewish business associate of the protagonist's uncle in Rachid Boudjedra's 2017 *La Dépossession*, Jews and Jewishness—particularly North African Jews and Jewishness—have always been and continue to be part and parcel of Algerian literature in French.⁴ What is more, Algerian literary engagements with Jews and Jewishness are not limited to the representation of Algerian Jews; one need only turn to Nacer Kettane's 1986 *Le Sourire de Brahim*, in which the Muslim protagonist falls in love with Sophie, a Polish Jew; Leïla Sebbar's 1991 *Le Fou de Shérazade*, in which a Moroccan Jew plays the role of an "Arab" in a film production; or *Fils du Shéol*, Anouar Benmalek's 2015 multigenerational saga linking the Herero Genocide to the Holocaust, to see the variety of interfaith engagements articulated in Algerian cultural production.

Yet despite the fact that, as the aforementioned novels attest, Jews and Jewishness are woven into Algerian cultural production, literary engagements with Algeria's only modern

⁴ Furthermore, Jewish characters also populate the pages of Algerian Arabic-language literature: al-Ḥabīb Sā'ih's 2019 novel *Ānā wa-Ḥayīm* [*Me and Hayim*], for example, follows a friendship between two boys—one Jewish, one Muslim—from their childhood days in colonial Algeria through the aftermath of the Algerian War for Independence.

religious minority have often been overlooked, ignored, or dismissed by those who take for granted that Algeria is and always has been a uniquely Muslim space.⁵ What might happen if we change the way we approach this body of literature, if we reject the politically and religiously motivated assumptions that write Jews “out” of Algeria, and instead seek out the myriad ways in which Algerian authors write Jews “in?”

This question serves as the starting point for this dissertation, which seeks to elucidate the variety of ways in which Algerian authors of Muslim background have conceived of and articulated relationships between Jews, Jewishness, Algeria, and Algerians from the end of the colonial era through the present day. More specifically, the dissertation interrogates how literature, by dint of its capacity to represent not necessarily what *was*, but rather *what might have been*, allows for the articulation of interfaith and intercultural relationships that nuance, challenge, and even contradict hegemonic discourses of national and religious belonging and exclusion. I argue that postcolonial Algerian literary engagements with Jews and Jewishness create a space in which to think critically about commonly received notions of who is who and who belongs where, and about the discourses that undergird these facile assumptions. Ultimately, the dissertation underscores how literary texts allow for the articulation of intercultural and interfaith relationships that both inscribe Jews and Jewishness into Algeria and foreground their significance therein.

⁵ As Elizabeth Perego explains in her discussion of Algerian *bandes dessinées*, “Through much of this scholarship, however, the image of Algeria as a Muslim space surfaces as a given” (143). While her analysis is of *bandes dessinées*, it is arguably true of scholarly approaches to Algerian literary production writ large. See Elizabeth Perego, “Neglected Legacies: Omissions of Jewish Heritage and Muslim-Jewish Relations in Algerian *Bandes Dessinées*, 1967 through the 1980s,” in *Jewish-Muslim Interactions: Performing Cultures Between North Africa and France*, ed. Samuel Sami Everett and Rebekah Vince (Liverpool University Press, 2020), 141-60.

Narrating the Story of Algeria's Jews, a North African Religious Minority

While it is not the goal of this dissertation to intervene in historical debates about either the nature of the Jewish experiences in Algeria or the nature of the relationships between Algerians of Jewish and Muslim background, it is nonetheless useful to begin with a brief overview of the historical context of Jewish-Muslim relations in both North Africa as a whole, and in the specific case of Algeria. The only modern North African indigenous religious minority, Jews lived and prospered under Islamic rule for centuries, despite their inferior legal status of *dhimmi*.⁶ From early settlers who arrived in the sixth century BCE, to Jews who moved west following the Islamic conquests in the Middle East, to Sephardim who fled Spanish persecution, to Ashkenazim who left Europe during precolonial and colonial times, to indigenous peoples who converted to Judaism, the whole North African region has a long and deep-rooted Jewish history.⁷ Over the years, these various types of Jewishness amalgamated, creating new forms of distinctly North African Jewish identity, most often characterized by saint veneration and the legend of the Kahina.⁸

⁶ As *dhimmis*, or non-Muslims under the protection of a Muslim ruler, Jews profited from certain legal protections that, although inferior to those of their Muslim counterparts, afforded them a certain level of security while living in Islamic societies. Emily Gottreich clarifies that, following the disappearance of indigenous Christian communities in the twelfth century, Jews became the sole regional religious minority in the Maghreb. Emily Gottreich, "Historicizing the Concept of Arab Jews in the Maghrib," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98, no. 4 (2008): 443.

⁷ Gottreich, 444.

⁸ Daniel Schroeter, "On the Origins and Identity of Indigenous North African Jews," in *North African Mosaic: A Cultural Reprisal of Ethnic and Religious Minorities* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 164; Gottreich, 445. The Kahina was a seventh-century indigenous North African female leader who bested the Arab invaders. There are many variants of the story of this legendary figure; of interest in this prospectus is the widely spread notion that the Kahina was a Jewish warrior princess who led an originally Jewish North Africa in the fight against Muslim invaders. See Abdelmajid Hannoum, *Colonial Histories, Post-Colonial Memories: The Legend of the Kahina, a North African Heroine*, Heinemann Studies in African Literature (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2001) for a detailed study of this mythical figure and representations of this figure.

Jews thus lived alongside Muslims for centuries in Islamic North Africa, experiencing both periods of peace and prosperity and moments of persecution and violence.⁹ As *dhimmis*, Jews were afforded certain protections under the law in exchange for the payment of a poll tax, a system that provided them with relative stability. This system of taxation and protection, although at times abused or ignored, meant that Jews living in Islamic-ruled lands generally benefitted from religious tolerance and were afforded certain legal protections.¹⁰ Despite certain levels of residential segregation—which stemmed from the desire to live close to their religious holy places and places of worship, and not from discriminatory housing laws—Jews were firmly enmeshed in the cultural, social, and economic fabric of pre-modern North Africa; they served as integral contributors to the economy, working as merchants, traders, tanners, and money lenders, among other professions.¹¹ Indeed, Jews were significant social players in precolonial North Africa, attaining positions of both economic and political strength.¹²

Moving into the modern era, the Jewish minority accounted for less than four percent of the total North African population by the mid-nineteenth century.¹³ However, the Jews' tendency to gravitate toward cities meant that there were significant concentrations of Jewish life in North

⁹ For a concise overview of Jewish-Muslim relations in pre-modern North Africa and the Middle East, see Josef W. Meri, "Historical Themes: Muslim-Jewish Relations in the Medieval Middle East and North Africa," in *The Routledge Handbook of Muslim-Jewish Relations*, ed. Josef W. Meri (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 15–33.

¹⁰ Meri affirms that "While [Muslim] rulers and marauding troops occasionally engaged in persecution of Jews and Christians, others embraced Jewish communities who fled persecution and allowed them to reside within their realm" (15-16).

¹¹ Meri, 23.

¹² Yaron Tsur, "Dating the Demise of the Western Sephardi Jewish Diaspora in the Mediterranean," in *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa*, ed. Emily Gottreich and Daniel J. Schroeter, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 95.

¹³ Philippe Barbé, "Jewish-Muslim Syncretism and Intercommunity Cohabitation in the Writings of Albert Memmi," in *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa*, ed. Emily Gottreich and Daniel J. Schroeter, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 108.

African capital and port cities, as well as in other urban areas.¹⁴ Indeed, towards the end of the nineteenth century, Jews made up almost half the population of certain Moroccan metropolises, and by the mid-twentieth century, Jews accounted for almost one-fifth of the population of Tunis.¹⁵ As such, despite norms of residential segregation that characterized most North African cities, Jews—thanks in part to their cross-Mediterranean networks and ties to the West—were an integral and integrated part of precolonial and colonial North African society.¹⁶ As a result of their significant activity in the commercial arena and their overwhelming tendency to favor metropolitan life, it comes as no surprise that the vast majority of literary representations of North African Jews are situated firmly in urban contexts.

European intervention in North Africa brought significant changes to the status of Jews, and their relationship to their Muslim countrymen, in all three of France’s colonial territories. Although part and parcel of the same *mission civilisatrice*, the colonization of Morocco and Tunisia differed in significant ways from that of Algeria, and thus impacted Jews—and their relationships to their fellow Muslims—in different manners. Officially French from 1830-1962, Algeria gained its independence after a violent, almost decade-long civil war. Tunisia and Morocco were both colonized significantly later—1881 and 1912, respectively—and were both granted independence from France in 1956. In addition, both Morocco and Tunisia were

¹⁴ Barbé, 108.

¹⁵ Jessica Marglin, *Across Legal Lines: Jews and Muslims in Modern Morocco* (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 2016), 5; Barbé, 108.

¹⁶ In most North African metropolises, Jews lived apart from Muslims in a segregated Jewish Quarter, called the *mellah* in Morocco and the *hara* in Tunisia. A notable exception to this residential segregation is the city of Tangier, where, according to Susan Gilson Miller, “Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived together in an unregulated coexistence.” See Miller, “Making Tangier Modern: Ethnicity and Urban Development, 1880-1930,” in *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa*, ed. Emily Gottreich and Daniel J. Schroeter, Indiana Series in Sephardi and Mizrahi Studies (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 130. See also Marglin, 5. Although Marglin’s focus is the Moroccan Jewish community, her discussion of the significance of Mediterranean Jewish networks and Jewish relationships to European powers can be productively applied to the Algerian and Tunisian contexts as well.

accorded protectorate status by the French, which allowed them to retain their own political identity, and both benefited from the work of the AIU, whose actions represented, in many respects, an intrareligious iteration of the French Republic's *mission civilisatrice*.¹⁷ As a result of the outreach of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), many Moroccan and Tunisian Jews learned the language of the colonial power and assimilated French ways of life, an opportunity that was not afforded to their Muslim compatriots, who did not benefit from the same type of confessional support and education system.¹⁸

While the colonization of Algeria was part and parcel of the same imperial endeavor that impacted its neighbors to the east and west, the story of Algeria and Algerian Jews has a particular trajectory that make them worth considering independently from Morocco and Tunisia. Algeria was a French holding from 1830-1962; its colonial history thus pre-and post-dates that of Morocco and Tunisia by quite a significant amount of time. Furthermore, unlike the neighboring protectorates, or indeed any other of France's colonial holdings, northern Algerian lands were annexed in 1848 into the French state as the three administrative *départements* of Oran, Alger, and Constantine. Waves of European colonists moved to the annexed lands, rendering Algeria a settler-colony with significant concentrations of European-born *colons* and their descendants.¹⁹

¹⁷ See the introduction to Mildred P. Mortimer, ed., *Maghrebian Mosaic: A Literature in Transition* (Boulder: L. Rienner, 2001), for a discussion of political identity during the colonial period.

¹⁸ The Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) was a Paris-based Jewish philanthropic organization that aimed to educate, support, and “civilize” Jewish communities in Muslim-controlled lands. For more on the history and role of the AIU in both North Africa and the Middle East, see Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925*, *The Modern Jewish Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Aron Rodrigue, *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition: The Teachers of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, 1860-1939* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993); Aron Rodrigue, “La Mission éducative (1860-1939),” in *Histoire de l'Alliance israélite universelle de 1860 à nos jours*, ed. André Kaspi (Paris: A. Colin, 2010); and Aron Rodrigue and Jacqueline Carnaud, *De l'instruction à l'émancipation: les enseignants de l'Alliance israélite universelle et les juifs d'Orient 1860 - 1939*, *Diaspora* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1989).

¹⁹ The Algerian Sahara was also colonized by the French, although it was ruled by a different colonial regime: whereas northern Algeria was divided into three French *départements*—administrative entities on par with those in

Yet whereas Algerian lands had been incorporated into the French Republic, none of the territory's inhabitants became part of the French body politic upon the annexation of Algeria. This is not to say that the two local religious groups benefitted from the same legal status, however; beginning with the August 1834 ordinance that, as Joshua Schreier notes, "legally abolished Jews' juridical autonomy (aside from personal status issues)" and thus "[made] Algerian Jews governable as 'Europeans,'" the French authorities began to treat the legal existence of native Jews and Muslims in discrete manners.²⁰ Under the direct jurisdiction of the French, with their notables participating in municipal councils, and, as of 1845, benefitting from their own consistory, Algerian Jews became enmeshed in the colonial regime in a way that their Muslim counterparts, who were not included in these political and juridical transformations, were not.²¹

mainland France—southern Algeria was divided into four territories, which were ruled by different political structures. See Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014) for a rigorous study of the Jews of the Algerian Sahara.

²⁰ Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria* (Rutgers University Press, 2019), 32. As Schreier explains in his discussion of the French Ministry of War's attitudes towards Algerian Jews and Muslims, "In contrast to Muslims, who 'respected the effects of our protection' and were thus to have 'their laws. . . maintained and respected,' Algerian Jews were directly comparable to their French-Jewish counterparts and should not have any particularistic legal autonomy" (46; 197n114).

²¹ For more on the evolving relationship of Algerian Jews to the early French colonial endeavor, see Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith* and "The Creation of the 'Israélite indigène' Jewish Merchants in Early Colonial Oran," *The Journal of North African Studies* 17, no. 5 (December 2012): 757–72, and Pierre Birnbaum, "French Jews and the 'Regeneration' of Algerian Jewry," in *Jews and the State: Dangerous Alliances and the Perils of Privilege*, ed. Ezra Mendelsohn, Studies in Contemporary Jewry 19 (New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press, 2003), 88–103. For more on the personal status of Algerian Jews and Muslims during this time period, see Rachel Schley, "The Tyranny of Tolerance: France, Religion, and the Conquest of Algeria, 1830-1870" (PhD Dissertation, Los Angeles, University of California, Los Angeles, 2015) and Patrick Weil, "Le Statut des musulmans en Algérie coloniale: une nationalité française dénaturée," in *La Justice en Algérie, 1830-1962* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2005), 95–109. In addition, see Marglin, *Across Legal Lines* for a study of personal statuses in Morocco, and Patrick Weil, *Qu'est-ce qu'un Français? Histoire de la nationalité française depuis la Révolution* (Paris: Grasset, 2002), for a more general study. *Encyclopaedia Judaica* defines a "consistory" as the "official organization of the Jewish congregations in France established in 1808," and clarifies that "the term was borrowed from Protestant usage by the Napoleonic administration to designate the committees of rabbis and laymen responsible for the administration of the Jewish congregations at the regional and national levels. By extension, the word applies to the whole organization subject to the authority of the 'consistory.'" See Moshe Catane and Isaac Levitats, "Consistory," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 5 (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 178–80.

The situation shifted somewhat drastically in 1870 with the passing of the Crémieux Decree, which granted full French citizenship to the Jews of France's three Algerian *départements*, but not to their Moroccan or Tunisian coreligionists.²² Named for statesman Adolphe Crémieux, an important figure in the French Jewish community who served as both the AIU President and the Decree's main promoter, the Crémieux Decree represented the culmination of years-long efforts to integrate the Jews of Algeria, who were said to have "merged with the European population," into the French body politic.²³ The years following this mass naturalization of Algerian Jews saw an acceleration in both the Jewish population's assimilation to French lifestyle and their adoption of the language and values of French republicanism. Less than a century later, however, this same population saw their rights stripped away when the collaborationist Vichy government helmed by Marshal Philippe Pétain abrogated the Crémieux Decree in 1940, rendering the Algerian Jewish population stateless. Following the Decree's reinstatement in 1943, Algerian Jews became French citizens for a second time, and it was in this capacity that they were "repatriated" to France following the Algerian Revolution and its independence from France barely twenty years later.

An Overview of North African Literature and Scholarship

As this dissertation is concerned with literary engagements with Jews and Jewishness, it is useful to turn now to its object of study, namely, postcolonial Algerian literature in French.²⁴

²² The Crémieux Decree did not grant citizenship to the Jews of the Algerian Sahara. For an in-depth study of the fate of this minority, see Stein, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria*.

²³ Schley, 22. This quotation, made by the civil intendant, is quoted in translation by Schley in her dissertation on page 171.

²⁴ French is one of Algeria's two main literary languages along with Arabic. Modern Arabic-language literary production began to gain traction during the post-independence period as part of Arabization programs across North Africa. While some literature in Arabic, mainly poetry, was produced during the colonial era, the second half of the

Generally speaking, scholars date the emergence of postcolonial North African literature in French to the 1950s, when France still maintained a colonial grip on the region.²⁵ These early works, which frequently highlight the tensions between discourses about the merits of French culture and civilization and the traditional cultural practices and mores of the local populations, are often said to provide a sort of ethnographic insight into colonial society that is full of local color. One of the most well-known examples of this trend is Mouloud Mammeri's 1952 *La Colline oubliée*, which depicts the end of a centuries-old way of life in a village in the Kabyle mountains and illustrates how the French colonial project came to affect even the most remote areas of its colonial possessions. Furthermore, works such as Kateb Yacine's 1956 *Nedjma* depict resistance to the colonial system and the fight for independence. These novels, penned in the period leading up to independence, simultaneously protested French colonial rule and put North African literature in French on the map.

Following independence, North African literature in French continued to thrive, despite the predictions of many who assumed that liberation from the former colonial power would spell the end of literary production in the language of the former colonizer.²⁶ As it developed and grew, North African literature in French began to diversify in genre and to challenge the novelistic form, as writers began exploring the limits of European models. For example, postmodern novels such as Rachid Boudjedra's 1975 *Topographie idéale pour une agression*

twentieth century saw a substantial increase in Arabic-language literary output. See Farida Abu-Haidar, "Arabic Writing in Africa," *Research in African Literatures* 28, no. 3 (1997): 3. Despite this surge in Arabic-language literary production, French continues to remain a principal language of literary publication in North Africa, particularly for the novel, and it is French-language literature that forms the basis of this dissertation project.

²⁵ It should be noted that given the focus of this dissertation on Algerian literary production, the examples that I have chosen in the subsequent paragraphs emanate from the Algerian context; that being said, the developments that I discuss are indicative of broader trends across the region.

²⁶ Most notably, Albert Memmi, who opined that independence from France was the death knell of North African writing in French, and that the future of the region's literature would likely be produced in Arabic.

caractérisée eschew conventional plot structures and novelistic forms, presenting readers with dense, multilayered, often non-linear, narratives; whereas Assia Djebar's 1985 *L'Amour, la fantasia* retells the history of Algeria through a reappropriation of colonial archival documents, stories of girls and women who lived through the war for Algerian independence, and the retelling of her own experiences.

The twenty-first century has seen North African literature revisit the traditional themes for which it became so well known, as well as look towards new horizons. As for the former, recent literary production continues to interrogate the relationship of (former) colonizer to (former) colonized, and to take a critical eye to the paths forged by North African nations in the more than half-century since their independence. For example, Leïla Marouane's 2007 *La Vie sexuelle d'un islamiste à Paris* interrogates the continued (im)possibility of assimilation in modern-day Paris, recalling representations of colonial alterity in earlier literature produced prior to independence. Maïssa Bey's 2006 *Bleu, blanc, vert* allegorizes the nation-building process evoked in earlier works of North African fiction, taking a critical look at independent Algeria's first thirty years. At the same time, North African literature has begun to expand in new and exciting directions. Algerian writers such as Boualem Sansal, Salim Bachi, and Anouar Benmalek have begun to explore the Holocaust in their literature, moving in many cases away from the North African landscape and into Nazi Germany, Vichy France, and German-occupied Namibia – an aesthetic and political gesture that I take up in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

Just as trends in North African literature have evolved over time, so too has the scholarship devoted to it. In its early years, the burgeoning field of North African literary criticism focused first and foremost on the ethnographic qualities of the works, exploring a rather

limited set of often stereotypical themes, such as the relationship to language, the alienation of the colonial subject, the place of women in patriarchal societies, and cultural rifts.²⁷ This early moment in literary criticism privileged the collective voice over the individual, pitting an “I-We” against a foreign “You-Them,” and treated the novels emanating from North Africa as autobiographical and/or ethnographic documents from which to glean information about life as a formerly colonized subject, often with little to no attention paid to their literary and artistic qualities.²⁸

As the field developed, scholars began to examine the literary quality of these texts more seriously. Although continuing to privilege certain recurring themes, such as how North African literature in French represents the former colony’s relationship to its former colonizer, or the manner in which North African literary production allegorizes stories of national emergence, critics began to shift their attention to the literariness of the works in question. Réda Bensmaïda’s 2003 *Experimental nations, or, the invention of the Maghreb*, was one of the first studies to call for a more serious examination of the qualities that make Francophone North African texts “literary works *in and of themselves*” (6, emphasis in the original). In a similar vein, Deborah Kelly’s 2005 monograph *Autobiography and Independence: Selfhood and Creativity in North African Postcolonial Writing in French* looks at how autobiographical discourse in North African writing challenges European models of the genre. Alison Rice’s 2006 study *Time Signatures: Contextualizing Contemporary Francophone Autobiographical Writing From the Maghreb* examines the “creative signature styles” of three North African writers in order to show

²⁷ Marc Gontard, “Francophone North African Literature and Critical Theory,” trans. Ruthmarie Mitsch, *Research in African Literatures*, North African Literature, 23, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 34.

²⁸ Jean Déjeux, “Francophone Literature in the Maghreb: The Problem and the Possibility,” trans. Ruthmarie Mitsch, *Research in African Literatures*, North African Literature, 23, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 7.

how fiction allows for the articulation of the deeply personal, the “unaccented notes” that are often missing from official historical accounts (22). Expanding upon more conventional views of North African literary production—i.e. the lumping together of North African autobiographical writers, the focus on the collective voice, the view that these works are more documentary and thus do not contribute to a literary genre (such as fiction or autobiography)—this next generation of scholars foregrounded the literariness of French-language North African writing, etching away at the “French versus Francophone” literary hierarchy.

Even though the literary quality of North African literature in French had been firmly established during the first decade of the twenty-first century, scholarship on the corpus has nevertheless remained somewhat beholden to certain analytical trends, particularly as regards works by the more well-known writers. Criticism in the 2010s began to destabilize the hegemony of these long-held approaches. Lia Brozgal’s 2013 *Against Autobiography: Albert Memmi and the Production of Theory* serves as an example of one such approach. In her monograph, Brozgal challenges the ethnographic manner in which North African literary production has traditionally been read by focusing on how Memmi’s diverse corpus of literary works and strategies dialogue with major twentieth-century theoretical trends. In doing so, she illustrates how Memmi’s oeuvre contributes to critical discourse by “reconceptualiz[ing] theory itself and reimagin[ing] its proper location” (xv). Olivia Harrison’s 2016 monograph *Transcolonial Maghreb: Imagining Palestine in the Era of Decolonization*, is a second example of the new directions scholars of North African literary studies are taking in the twenty-first century. In her study, Harrison illustrates how North African literature mobilizes Palestine as a metaphor for discussing issues of colonization and its aftermath. Eschewing the more conventional metropole-colony dyad, Harrison privileges a horizontal axis that analyses how colonized societies interact with and play

a role in one another's cultural imaginary. In doing so, she destabilizes postcolonial power dynamics and traditional approaches to the postcolonial literary text.

The second decade of the twenty-first century also saw a turn towards the Mediterranean, with scholars such as Edwige Talbayev and Claudia Esposito foregoing a colonizer versus colonized dichotomy in favor of a "minor transnational" approach.²⁹ Esposito's *The Narrative Mediterranean: Beyond France and the Maghreb* complicates the status quo of the colonizer versus colonized, Islam versus the West, French versus Arabic, dichotomies through her focus on the Mediterranean in French and Italian-language literature emanating from France's former colonies. By privileging North Africa's relationship with the Mediterranean, instead of solely with France, Esposito offers a productive alternative to narratives of inherent civilizational incompatibility. In a similar vein, Talbayev's 2017 *The Transcontinental Maghreb: Francophone Literature across the Mediterranean* offers a webbed approach to relations among all sides of the Mediterranean, deploying the concept of "Mediterranean" as a heuristic tool able to challenge colonial binaries (28). Building on Glissant, Talbayev's analysis escapes the limitations of an antagonistic mindset and privileges a more comprehensive understanding of the various types of relationships forged in past and present on all sides of the Mediterranean.

This dissertation builds upon both traditional and newer scholarly directions in the study of North African literature in French in several distinct manners. First, the dissertation challenges the lack of attention afforded to Jews and Jewishness in the field of North African literature in French. Founded upon the seemingly straightforward binary of "colonizer" versus "colonized,"

²⁹ See the introduction to Françoise Lionnet and Shumei Shi, eds., *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). Lionnet and Shih's concept of minor transnationalism offers an alternative to binary modes of understanding of minority cultural formation (i.e., those that view minority cultural formation as always in opposition or in relation to majority culture) in order to highlight the significance of interactions with other minorities and majority cultures.

North African literary studies arguably operate according to the implicit assumption that the colonial world was comprised of two, mutually exclusive populations: “colonizers,” who were French and Catholic—or at the very least, European and Christian, and the “colonized,” who were indigenous and Muslim.³⁰ Consequently, the field of North African letters has traditionally lacked much, if any, conceptual space in which to consider North African Jews and Jewishness. This is particularly true for Algeria, where the Jewish population existed at the intersection of these two categories.³¹ Although there has been substantial historical, sociological, and political science research into North African Jews and their relationships with Muslims in and of the region, the same cannot be said for literary criticism; this dissertation, through its focus on engagements with Jews and Jewishness in Algerian letters in French from its inception through the present day, takes a much needed step towards filling in this scholarly lacuna.

Second, the dissertation argues for a broadening of scholarly approaches to the relationship between Jewishness and literature. By focusing on literary engagements with Jews and Jewishness in works composed by Algerian authors of Muslim background, the dissertation steps away from implicitly essentialist assumptions about the relationship between an author’s (religious) identity and their literary production, and instead asks readers to consider questions of Jews and Jewishness on a broader, cultural level. In so doing, the dissertation directly confronts readers with several common assumptions about the relationship between Jewishness and

³⁰ In the postcolonial era, critics such as Edouard Glissant have begun to challenge the dichotomies that underpin early anticolonial analyses. See Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007) for one such alternative.

³¹ The tendency to read North African literature in terms of national allegory is exemplified by Frederic Jameson’s affirmation that “the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.” See Frederic Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text* 15 (Autumn 1986): 69. Furthermore, the rise of new nation-states seeking to affirm their difference from France in large part through the promotion of Islam meant that there was very little place left for North African Jews in the newly-forming national narratives of independent Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.

literature, and about literary labels, more generally. What is “Jewish” literature, and, more importantly, what makes literature “Jewish”?³² Is it the religion of the author, or is it the content of the work they produce? Must a work of literature that engages with themes of Jewishness and represents the lives of Jewish characters be written by a Jew in order to be considered “Jewish?” As this dissertation demonstrates, privileging literary engagements with Jews and Jewishness over authorial religion enables readers to understand the intercultural and interfaith dynamics of (post)colonial Algeria more fully, and to appreciate how literature serves as a vehicle through which to counter the exclusion of Jews and Jewishness from official narratives of ethno-religious belonging.

The dissertation, which sits at the crossroads of Postcolonial Studies and Jewish Studies, thus offers a corrective to the trend in the academy, whereby historical, political, and disciplinary tensions have tacitly discouraged scholars—particularly literary scholars—in these two fields from engaging critically with one another.³³ This lack of attention afforded to Jews and Jewishness in studies of North African literature becomes all the more poignant when considering Jews of North African descent, and even more so when considering Algerian Jews, the sole group of colonized subjects to have received the citizenship of the colonizing power *en masse*. Reframing our understandings of North African literature in French as a vehicle through

³² This question echoes one that Lichtenstein poses in her 2017 study of North African Jewish women’s writing: “What exactly do we mean by Jewish literature, and what makes it specifically Sephardic?” See Nina B. Lichtenstein, *Sephardic Women’s Voices: Out of North Africa*, First edition (Santa Fe, NM: Gaon Books, 2017).

³³ In his article “Venetian Spaces: Old-New Literatures and the Ambivalent Uses of Jewish History,” Bryan Cheyette offers three reasons as to why mainstream postcolonial theorists often neglect to parse the relationship between Jews and the (Christian) West, and rely instead upon problematic notions of “Judeo-Christian” hegemony: first, Jews’ participation in European colonial endeavors; second, the historical and current realities of Zionism; and third, contemporary politics in the American Jewish and Black communities. One might also speculate that this is due in part to the thorny relationship between Jews and whiteness, and to the hesitation of many scholars in the field of postcolonial studies to view Jews as anything but white—and thus, inherently linked to colonial hegemony. See Bryan Cheyette, “Venetian Spaces: Old-New Literatures and the Ambivalent Uses of Jewish History,” in *Reading the “new” Literatures in a Postcolonial Era*, ed. Susheila Nasta (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 53–72.

which to interrogate interfaith and intercultural relations allows us to accomplish two separate goals: first, to escape the limitations of binary frameworks and therefore better understand how the colonial endeavor and its aftermath affected *all* North African populations who were subjected to French imperial expansion, regardless of their eventual citizenship status; and second, to avoid the pitfall of reifying all Jews into one homogenous (white, European) group linked inextricably to imperial expansion.

Structure of the Dissertation

The following four chapters reconceptualize the place of Jews and Jewishness in the field of French-language North African literature from its mid-twentieth century inception until the present day. Through historicized close reading of foundational essays that defined the field, as well as novels both canonical and little-known, I explore the various ways in which Algerian writers of Muslim origin have incorporated Jews and Jewishness into their cultural productions, notwithstanding political, popular, and academic discourses that promote a monolithic vision of the nation's purported cultural and religious homogeneity. The dissertation interrogates how postcolonial Algerian authors mobilize Jewishness in their works, what it means for these non-Jewish authors to represent or imagine Jewish life, and how these interreligious engagements allow for the articulation of broader cultural and political concerns.

In the first chapter, “‘Ferociously Excluded’: North African Literature and Algerian Jewish Writers,” I examine the conceptual framework of the field of Francophone literature by interrogating several foundational studies that sought to categorize and define the specificities of Francophone North African literature and thus distinguish it from French literary production. In doing so, I demonstrate how the exclusion of Algerian Jews—and, by extension, the idea of

Algerian Jewish indigeneity—served as an essential element of the theorization and development of the field of postcolonial North African literature.

Following this discussion of how Algerian Jews are “written out” of the field of postcolonial literature, I examine how Kateb Yacine’s first and most well-known work, the novel *Nedjma* (1956), inscribes Jews into the cultural landscape of Algeria. In this second chapter, “*Nedjma*: Algeria’s Jewish-Muslim *femme-patrie*,” I complicate hegemonic understandings of the novel’s eponymous heroine, which often consider her a straightforward symbol of Algeria, by interrogating the significance of the fact that Nedjma is, in fact, Jewish. In addition, I explore how Kateb’s incorporation of minor Jewish characters throughout the novel serves to firmly situate Algerian Jews, French citizens since 1870, within the socio-cultural world of the colonized.

Chapter three, “The Many Iterations of Henriette Gozlan: Tracing the Evolution of Rachid Boudjedra’s Recurring Jewish-Muslim Figure,” focuses on four novels written by Rachid Boudjedra, namely, *La Répudiation* (1969), *La Macération* (1984), *La Vie à l’endroit* (1997), and *La Dépossession* (2017). This chapter illustrates how Boudjedra’s decades-long pattern of incorporating the figure of Henriette, a seamstress of Jewish origins, into the families of various different Muslim protagonists allows him to represent and challenge two distinct, yet intimately related, narratives of mutual exclusivity: first, colonial-era French discourse that sought to divide Algerian Jews and Muslims into distinct ethnic groups, and second, the post-colonial Algerian national narrative that relied upon such distinctions to construct the nation’s religious and cultural identity.

The dissertation’s fourth and final chapter, “The Shoah across the Mediterranean: The Holocaust as an Algerian Experience,” analyses engagements with the Holocaust in two recent

novels: Boualem Sansal's *Le Village de l'Allemand* (2008) and Anouar Benmalek's *Fils du Shéol* (2015). In the chapter, I explore how these novels, in placing the Holocaust into conversation with other episodes of political violence (the Algerian Civil War of the 1990s and the genocide of the Herero and Nama in German Southwest Africa, respectively), weave an Algerian narrative of what is often considered to be a "European" tragedy.

This dissertation, through its focus on engagements with Jews and Jewishness in works penned by Algerian authors of Muslim background, creates a space in which to think critically about the relationship of Jews and Jewishness to the Algerian cultural imaginary, and about the assumptions that underlie our understanding of how these relationships function. Interrogating these relationships in different ways, and to varying effects, the texts that form the corpus of this project all speak to the role that Jews and Jewishness have played, and continue to play, in the cultural landscape of a country that has, for all intents and purposes, written them out of the (hi)story. The ensemble of works that inform this study thus suggest that it is time for us to reconfigure our understanding of the relationship between Algerian (North African) author and textual production, and illustrate the fruitful possibilities that can only come to light once we shift our focus away from the confession of the author and instead privilege the religious and cultural engagements of the creative writing they have produced.

Chapter 1

“Ferociously Excluded”: North African Literature and Algerian Jewish Writers

“En ces jours funestes où les haines et les guerres sacrées très sales sont devenues la culture quotidienne, banale, dans le monde arabo-musulman, et afin de lever tout amalgame politico-culturel, j’évoque la littérature judéo-algérienne d’expression française” [In these dreadful days, in which hate and dirty holy wars have become the banal daily culture of the Arabo-Muslim world, I want to do away with all cultural and political conflations and draw our attention to the case of Judeo-Algerian literature], wrote Algerian author and intellectual Amin Zaoui in a 2014 contribution to the Algerian daily *Liberté*.¹ In his brief article, the professor of literature and literary theory called attention to a plethora of lesser-known Algerian writers of Jewish background, whose literary production he qualifies as “totalement méconnue ou tabou” [totally unknown or taboo] in academic and non-academic circles alike. In contrast to the well-established and well-respected contributions of Jews to Algeria’s musical heritage, Zaoui notes, there is an utter lack of attention afforded to Algerian Jewish writers, whom he qualifies as “totalement oubliés” [totally forgotten]. Revisiting this lost aspect of Algeria’s past through the study of this particular body of literature would reveal a broader, more inclusive vision of what Algeria once was and could still become, Zaoui argues, suggesting that resurrecting this corpus

¹ Amin Zaoui, “Les écrivains judéo-algériens,” *Liberté*, August 14, 2014, sec. Culture, <https://www.liberte-algerie.com/culture/les-ecrivains-judeo-algeriens-209277/>. (Note : this article is no longer available on the *Liberté* website, but is accessible on <https://www.lacauselitteraire.fr/les-ecrivains-judeo-algeriens-par-amin-zaoui>.)

from the proverbial dustbin to which it has been relegated could serve as a possible path out of Algeria's current social-cultural climate and "réveiller l'image d'une Algérie plurielle" [awaken the image of a plural Algeria].²

It is no accident that Algerian authors of Jewish background are viewed as "totally unknown" in Algerian literary circles and by extension, in the world of French-language North African letters more broadly.³ On the contrary; as this chapter will demonstrate, the exclusion of Algerian Jews was and has remained a necessary component of the theoretical framework of the field of Francophone Maghrebi literature. In what follows, I trace the origins of the exclusion of Algerian Jewish literary production from discussions of Maghrebi literature, elucidating how scholars of French-language North African literature have—or have not—conceptualized the literary production of this particular subset of authors. I begin by focusing on Albert Memmi, Abdelkadir Khatibi, and Jean Déjeux—the three "Founding Fathers" of the field—and their respective definitions of the concept of Maghrebi literature in French. Through close reading of the essays in which they articulate their respective efforts to theorize the divergences and convergences between literature produced by local North Africans and that produced by settlers of European origin, I illustrate how they disregard writers whose positionality complicates the binary oppositions of "colonizer (of settler origin)" vs "(local) colonized." I then analyze how their respective attempts to categorize and theorize Maghrebi literature, and the writers who produce it, ultimately end up thwarting the possibility of an Algerian Jewish Maghrebi literature.

² Zaoui.

³ As Monique Balbuena argues in her compelling study of Algerian Jewish writer Sadia Lévy, "Since Algerian Jews were collectively made French citizens in 1870, scholars of francophone literature do not consider their literature "Algerian," and most often do not consider it at all. If not necessarily in limbo, these works tend to be erased from the record" (24). See Monique Balbuena, *Homeless Tongues: Poetry and Languages of the Sephardic Diaspora* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016), especially Chapter 1, "Minor Literatures and Major Laments: Reading Sadia Lévy," pp. 19-58.

Following this analysis of Maghrebi literature in French, I then turn to Guy Dugas, the author of *La Littérature judéo-maghrébine d'expression française: entre Djéha et Cagayous*, the first and only thoroughgoing study of the literary production of Jewish North Africans. Through close reading of Dugas's theorization of "Judeo-Maghrebi" writing (as opposed to "Maghrebi" writing), I demonstrate how Dugas's focus on the specificities of Jewish writing carves out a place for Algerian Jewish authors in the French-language literary landscape while simultaneously and probably wittingly, excluding Algerian Jews from broader discussions of Maghrebi literature. The last section of the chapter steps back to examine how these models, which all seek to define a field through the privileging of mutual exclusivity—"Francophone" as necessarily different from "French," Jewish as necessarily different from Muslim—have created a critical blind spot by implicitly upholding narratives of incompatibility and difference between Jewish and Muslim experiences in North Africa. The chapter ends by exploring how this approach has blinded scholars to the narratives that authors of Muslim background weave about Jews and Jewishness in their texts.

Broadly speaking, French-language writing in and of North Africa can be divided into three separate categories that roughly succeed one another in chronological waves. The first wave consists of writers of French origin, such as Gustave Flaubert, André Gide, and Henry de Montherlant, who lived in France and traveled to and through France's North African holdings, writing about their experiences in a supposedly exotic, foreign land. This wave of writers, dubbed "écrivains-touristes" [tourist-writers] by Albert Memmi, were succeeded by a second wave of writers, composed of those of European heritage who were born into settler families in colonial Algeria. As with their predecessors, this generation of writers, which includes authors such as Albert Camus, Jules Roy, and Emmanuel Roblès, wrote about Algeria from a culturally

French point of view; unlike the *écrivains-touristes*, however, their loyalties were not necessarily to France, and they felt strong ties to the land and their French Algerian heritage.⁴ This schema is typically rounded out with the final wave of Maghrebi literature in French, written by indigenous North Africans themselves, and representing the experiences of colonization from the point of view of those who were subjected to the violence of the French imperial endeavor against their own volition.⁵

If the difference between the first two generations of writers seemed a straightforward one—after all, who could argue that someone visiting a place would experience it differently than someone who was born and raised there?—the same cannot be said for the split between the second and third waves, at least not initially. Mid-century discussions of the literary production of colonized writers, whose works were beginning to achieve widespread acclaim and recognition, did not automatically consider them as constituting a separate canon. Indeed, in the 1950s and early 1960s, there was little to no discussion of the idea that the “new and vigorous element North Africa [has] recently added to contemporary French literature,” might, in fact, be a field of its own.⁶ In 1957, for example, *pied-noir* poet Jean Sénac characterized “la littérature nord-africaine” [North African literature] in the following manner:

⁴ The European settler population of colonial Algeria, often referred to by the appellation *pied-noir*, developed a distinct cultural identity during the colonial period. Repatriated *en masse* following Algerian independence in 1962, the *pied-noir* population has produced a significant corpus of memoirs and autobiographies that uncritically represent a nostalgic vision of a time lost to history. Amy Hubbell, “The Wounds of Algeria in Pied-Noir Autobiography,” *Dalhousie French Studies* 81, no. Representations of Trauma in French and Francophone literature (Winter 2007): 59–68.

⁵ Due to concerns of textual economy, I have painted this tableau with the broadest of brushstrokes. For a more detailed discussion of literature written by French writers in and of North Africa, see the introduction to Albert Memmi, ed., *Anthologie des écrivains maghrébins d’expression française* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1964), (pp. 11-19); Jean Déjeux, *Littérature maghrébine de langue française : Introduction générale et auteurs* (Naaman, 1973), especially Chapter 1: Panorama rétrospectif (pp. 14-19); and Jacqueline Arnaud, *La Littérature maghrébine de langue française* (Publisud, 1986), especially. Chapter 1: Écrivains français d’Afrique du Nord (pp. 27-32).

⁶ Georges Joyaux, “Driss Chraïbi, Mohammed Dib, Kateb Yacine, and Indigenous North African Literature,” *Yale French Studies* 24 (1959): 30.

Écrite par des autochtones ou des Européens d’Afrique, de culture française mais de formation spécifiquement locale, le plus souvent berbère ou arabe, israélite ou espagnole, cette littérature s’est trouvée engagée dans un climat d’interrogation et d’insécurité que les générations précédentes n’avaient pas connu.⁷

[Written by natives or Europeans from Africa, of French culture but with a specifically local formation, most often Berber or Arab, Israelite or Spanish, this literature has found itself engaged in an atmosphere of interrogation and insecurity that previous generations did not experience.]

For Sénac, there was no epistemological distinction between autochthonous writers and those of European extraction—and thus no distinction drawn between their respective works; they together formed a group that differed from the previous generations of writers, but nonetheless came together to form a single literary canon.

Sénac’s vision would not prevail; whereas, during the colonial era, it made a certain sense to speak of local writers and settler writers together—after all, the territory of Algeria had been fully incorporated into the French Republic, with its northern sections subdivided into three administrative *départements*—this logic broke down once the settler colony gained its independence. In “Sur les écrivains algériens d’expression française,” a short piece published just a month after Algeria became a sovereign nation, *pied-noir* writer Gabriel Audisio complicated Sénac’s position, writing: “il y a deux branches dans cette famille d’écrivains: ceux qu’on dit de souche européenne et ceux qui sont, au vrai sens du mot, des autochtones” [there are two branches in this family of writers: those who are said to be of European descent, and those who are autochthonous, in the true sense of the term].⁸ According to Audisio,

Le *contenu* des œuvres devait nécessairement s’éclairer de lumières diversement orientées, selon qu’elles avaient des Arabo-Berbères ou des Algéro-Européens pour auteurs. Ceux-ci pouvaient bien faire, dans leur œuvre, une place éminente à leurs

⁷ Jean Sénac, “Kateb Yacine et la littérature nord-africaine,” *Entretiens sur les lettres et les arts* 8/9 (February 1957): 60.

⁸ Gabriel Audisio, “Sur les écrivains algériens d’expression française,” *Les Cahiers français* 77 (September 1962): 13.

compatriotes musulmans, comme on le voit chez Emmanuel Roblès ou chez Jean Pélégri [*sic*], mais ils étaient au mieux des *témoins* et non pas des *interprètes* de la vie profonde des populations autochtones.⁹

[The *content* of the works must be understood as indicative of diversely oriented perspectives, depending on whether their authors were Arab-Berbers or Algero-Europeans. The latter may well have given an eminent place to their Muslim compatriots in their oeuvre, as one sees in Emmanuel Roblès or in Jean Pélégri, but they were at best *witnesses to* and not *interpreters of* the profound life experiences of the autochthonous populations.]

At first glance, Audisio's comment seems to draw a logical distinction between two groups of writers: those who served as witnesses to colonization, and those who served as its interpreters.

A closer look at this classification proves problematic, however. In defining the two branches of the family of Algerian letters into those written by "Arabo-Berbers" and those written by "Algero-Europeans," Audisio excludes an entire group from consideration: Algerian Jews.¹⁰

As this chapter will demonstrate, Audisio's exclusion of Algerian Jewry in his definition of North African literature is not a simple omission that would soon be corrected in scholarship. On the contrary, his lapsus anticipates a trend that would be promulgated over the following decades as scholars sought to categorize and theorize the literary production emanating from France's former North African colonies.

The Anthologies of Albert Memmi

In the 1960s, Tunisian Jewish author and intellectual Albert Memmi directed the publication of two anthologies that served as the first thoroughgoing attempts to differentiate between the two branches of the North African literary family that Audisio had mentioned in

⁹ Audisio 14; emphasis in original.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note that Sénac's vision of North African literature, which dates from the end of the colonial era, explicitly includes Jewish writers, yet in Audisio's conception, Jews are noticeably absent.

1962: to wit, the *Anthologie des écrivains maghrébins d'expression française* (1964), and the *Anthologie des écrivains français du Maghreb* (1969).¹¹ Formally, the anthologies mirror one another: they both begin with a forward and introduction written by Memmi; continue to excerpts from major works of major authors, preceded by short autobiographical introductions of the authors themselves; and finish with an appendix containing suggestions for further reading. As the twin titles suggest, the framework through which Memmi conceptualized the various literary endeavors emanating from North Africa rests upon the same binary oppositions he had previously theorized in *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du portrait du colonisateur* (1957), a framework that pitted two mutually exclusive groups—North African colonial subjects and European settler-colonizers—against one another.¹²

Lia Brozgal's work in *Against Autobiography* does much to unpack and situate Memmi's anthologies in regards to the foundation and development of the field of Maghrebi literature. As Brozgal argues, Memmi's role in the conceptualization and publication of these anthologies "afforded him a unique position as arbiter of literary categories"—a role that has been all but forgotten over the years.¹³ This position as literary referee is apparent in both the titles of his anthologies, which rely on "acrobatic circumlocutions in order to classify the authors featured in

¹¹ Memmi envisioned concluding the project with a third volume, provisionally entitled *Anthologie des écrivains maghrébins d'expression arabe*, which never made it to publication. Rounding out the trilogy in its stead is a final collection, Albert Memmi and Joëlle Bahloul, eds., *Écrivains francophones du Maghreb: Anthologie*, Collection "P.S." (Paris: Seghers, 1985). This chapter focuses solely on the first two anthologies, as they were key in establishing the field of Maghrebi literature in French. The third and final volume, published at a much later date, does not function in the field the same way as the previous two, and for this reason I have chosen not to engage with it in this chapter. For purposes of clarity and concision, I have taken a cue from Lia Brozgal's *Against Autobiography* and will henceforth refer to the *Anthologie des écrivains maghrébins d'expression française* as *Anthologie* (1964) and to *Anthologie des écrivains français du Maghreb* as *Anthologie* (1969).

¹² See Lia Nicole Brozgal, *Against Autobiography: Albert Memmi and the Production of Theory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), especially Chapter 1, "Of Authors and Archives: Albert Memmi's Francophone Postcolonial."

¹³ Brozgal, 4.

each volume,” and in their prefatory remarks, which “lay bare the difficulty not only of establishing criteria for inclusion but also of adequately defining those criteria.”¹⁴ Although Brozgal’s primary focus is on Memmi’s contributions to the debates on the meaning and uses of the term francophone, her analysis of how Memmi negotiated the various categories of author emanating from the North African cultural space reveals much about the process through which “Francophone” came to be distinguished from “French.” In what follows, I will examine these two anthologies to demonstrate how Memmi’s work as “arbiter of cultural politics in the field of francophone literary”¹⁵ handles—or doesn’t handle—the thorny situation of Algerian Jews, autochthonous populations who had been naturalized *en masse* by the 1870 Crémieux Decree.

Although the twenty-first century reader easily understands the conceptual framework that distinguishes the two collections—the first, focusing on authors of North African descent and the second, on those of French origin—at the time of publication, this difference had not yet been firmly established, and was thus a topic that Memmi explicitly addressed in the introductions to each volume. Drawing on Audisio, Memmi explained the rationale behind the selection of writers included in *Anthologie* (1964) in the following manner:

Nous nous sommes tenus *aux oeuvres écrites par des Autochtones*. [...] [P]our la première fois, l’Afrique du Nord se voit enfin assumée. Acceptée, revendiquée ou discutée, elle cesse d’être un simple décor ou un accident géographique. Ces nouveaux auteurs sont aux prises avec leur pays comme avec l’essentiel d’eux-mêmes. Autochtones, appartenant à ces populations qui n’ont pas d’autre pôle d’attraction, ils en partagent le drame. Colonisés, il leur a suffi de s’exprimer, non pour *témoigner* sur la colonisation, mais pour révéler l’univers intérieur et extérieur du colonisé.¹⁶

[We have kept to *works written by Autochthonous peoples*. (...) (F)or the first time, North Africa has come into her own. Taken on, claimed as one’s own, or challenged, it has

¹⁴ Brozgal, 4.

¹⁵ Brozgal, 1.

¹⁶ Albert Memmi, ed., *Anthologie des écrivains maghrébins d’expression française* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1964), 9, 14-15; emphasis in the original.

ceased to be a simple setting or geographic accident. These new authors are grappling with their country as they are with their innermost selves. As Autochthonous peoples, they are members of a population that has no other center of attraction, and they share in the tragedy. Colonized peoples, it was enough for them to express themselves, not so as to *bear witness* to colonization, but rather to reveal the interior and exterior universe of the colonized.]

According to Memmi, then, the category of “Maghrebi writer” describes local North Africans who experienced colonization as colonial subjects, and as a result, their literature does not just bear witness to colonization, but rather reveals the world of the colonized for all to see. Memmi’s concept of Maghrebi literature is thus inherently political and privileges the subject position of the author during the colonial era above all other considerations.

While the epistemological division between colonizer and colonized is, today, an established trope of postcolonial studies, this was not yet the case in the mid-1960s when Memmi’s first anthology was published. In fact, the situation was quite the opposite. *Anthologie* (1964) caused a commotion when it appeared on shelves, with many taking umbrage at the implications of Memmi’s categorization. A 1965 book review in *Le Monde* characterized Memmi’s decision to create two separate anthologies as “discrimination,” stating that, notwithstanding the upcoming publication of the second volume, “La ségrégation demeurera, là où auraient dû l’emporter la communauté d’expérience culturelle et la fraternité de combats politiques” [Segregation will remain, whereas the community of cultural experience and the fraternity of political struggles ought to have won out].¹⁷ *Pied-noir* writer and intellectual Jean Pélégri went so far as to accuse Memmi and his collaborators of racism due to their decision not to include writers of European origin in the anthology. In “Andalousie ou Arabie Saoudite,” an

¹⁷ J. L., “Une anothologie des écrivains maghrébins d’expression française, d’Albert Memmi,” *Le Monde*, March 25, 1965. Page 8.

article published in the French weekly *Le Nouvel observateur*, Pélégri vituperated the ideology underlying the anthologies:

Plusieurs écrivains, dont on ne mésestime pas la qualité, sont rayés d'un trait de plume. Camus, Jules Roy, Audisio, Jacques Berque, pour ne citer que ceux-là. Ne sont-ils pas nés, pourtant, en Afrique du Nord ? [...] Pourquoi dissimuler derrière un lourd appareil critique, une onction cauteleuse et toutes sortes d'à-peu-près, la vraie raison—la raison raciste. Hormis les écrivains militants, ne sont rayés que les écrivains “français”. Pourquoi... une communauté et pas l'autre ?¹⁸

[Several writers, whose quality we do not underestimate, are crossed out with the stroke of a pen. Camus, Jules Roy, Audisio, Jacques Berque, to only name these few. Were they not, however, born in North Africa? (...) Why hide behind this heavy critical apparatus, an artful anointing and all sorts of almost-but-not-quite, the real reason—the racist reason. Apart from the militant writers, only “French” writers are excluded. Why... one community and not the other?]

As Pélégri's fiery comments illustrate, the epistemological division that would, over the years, develop into the “French” vs “Francophone” literary divide was not a natural or inevitable phenomenon.¹⁹ Rather, it was the result of concerted efforts on the part of writers and scholars of French-language literature to account for the specificities of literature produced by populations who wrote in French, but were not necessarily themselves “of” France.

In response to the uproar that *Anthologie* (1964) caused, Memmi used the introduction to *Anthologie* (1969) as an opportunity to further explain his rationale for excluding writers of European descent in the earlier collection. Although he admitted that his classification system was “discutable” [debatable], Memmi doubled down on his logic, pointing out that colonial categories are inevitable when discussing literature written in a time and place in which “la

¹⁸ Jean Pélégri, “Andalousie ou Arabie Saoudite,” *Le Nouvel observateur*, February 11, 1965. Page 22. Khatibi cites this quotation on page 21.

¹⁹ Generally speaking, the term “French” is commonly used to refer to writers from France, whereas the term “Francophone” has come to represent those who write in French but are not French themselves, the vast majority of whom are from formerly colonized countries. See Charles Forsdick, “Between ‘French’ and ‘Francophone’: French Studies and the Postcolonial Turn,” *French Studies* 59, no. 4 (October 1, 2005): 523–30, among others.

colonisation a tout marqué” [colonization marked everything].²⁰ Memmi thus writes of the preceding volume:

Le tome I pourrait ainsi réunir les éléments d’une espèce de moi collectif de ce que l’on appelait naguère les *Indigènes*, leurs misères, leurs aspirations et leurs révoltes. Le tome II, que nous présentons aujourd’hui, grouperait, en un autre portrait-synthèse, les habitants européens, ou d’origine européenne, des ex-colonies.²¹

[Tome I was able to bring together the elements of a sort of collective “I” from those whom we once called the *Natives*, their miseries, their aspirations, and their revolts. Tome II, which we present today, is said to group together, in another profile-synthesis, the European habitants, or those of European origin, of the former colonies.]

As in the first anthology, Memmi’s logic posits that indigenous writers make up the group of colonized subjects, and that writers of European origin make up the group of former colonizers: “Serait-ce tellement hasardeux de supposer que la littérature des écrivains français d’Afrique du Nord traduit les impossibilités et les désespoirs *des ex-colonisateurs*, comme la littérature des Maghrébins traduisait les impossibilités et les désespoirs *des ex-colonisés* ?” [Would it really be so risky to suppose that the literature of French writers from North Africa translates the challenges and despairs of the *former colonizers*, just as the literature of Maghrebi is said to translate the challenges and the despairs of the *formerly colonized*?], he asks.²² In so framing his two anthologies, then, Memmi constructs a mutually exclusive framework through which to interpret and comprehend the literary production of writers in and of North Africa: because former colonizers are of European origin and former colonized subjects are of Maghrebi descent, their respective literary productions represent opposing experiences of colonization; instead of a Venn Diagram, he posits two separate circles that do not merge. In so doing, Memmi leaves no

²⁰ *Anthologie* (1969), 11, 13.

²¹ *Anthologie* (1969), 12 ; emphasis in the original.

²² *Anthologie* (1969), 17; emphasis my own.

opportunity to even consider the place, let alone merits, of Algerian Jewish writers, an ironic move given his status as a Tunisian Jew.

The actual content of the second anthology complicates the situation further. When we examine the authors included in Memmi's *Anthologie* (1969), we see a small but striking disconnect between, on the one hand, the logic with which Memmi frames his choices and, on the other, the actual authors he includes in the anthology. Although all the writers whose works are introduced and excerpted within the volume are of European descent, the same cannot be said of those who are chosen for inclusion in the appendix at the end of the anthology.²³ Introducing this appendix, which offers suggestions for further reading, is the following notice: "Dans la même perspective que celle de toute l'anthologie, nous ne citons ici que des textes inspirés par le Maghreb ; que leurs auteurs y soient nés, ou qu'ils y aient longuement vécu" [Following the perspective deployed for the entire anthology, we cite here only texts that were inspired by the Maghreb ; whether their authors were born there, or lived there for a long time] (359). The wording of this introduction is not trivial; in clarifying that these authors were either born in North Africa, lived there a long time, or wrote texts inspired by the land, the appendix implies that these authors, for all their links to North Africa, are not truly *of* North Africa, and therefore require a rationale for their inclusion in the volume.

However, when we look at the list of the writers included in the appendix, we notice something strange. Included within this list of French writers are Blanche Bendahan, André Chouraqui, and Irma Ychou—three Algerian Jewish writers. Bendahan, who was born in Oran to a family of Moroccan Sephardic descent, is most well known for her 1930 novel *Mazeltob*,

²³ The authors excerpted in the main body of *Anthologie* (1969) are Gabriel Audisio, Jacques Berque, Louis Bertrand, François Bonjean, Edmond Brua, Jean Brune, Albert Camus, René-Jean Clot, Roger Curel, Isabelle Eberhardt, Claude de Freminville, Gabriel Germain, René Laporte, Marcel Moussy, Musette, Jean Pélégri, Robert Randeau, Emmanuel Roblès, André Rosfelder, and Jules Roy.

which describes the oppression of the eponymous female character by the traditional Jewish society in which she lives. Themes of women's subjugation in traditional Algerian Jewish society also permeate the work of Irma Ychou, whose novel *La Famille Bensaid* tells the story of a young woman whose desire for an education is curtailed when she is pressured into marrying a local café owner. Finally, born in Aïn Témouchent to a prominent Sephardic family, André Chouraqui was a scholar, translator, and politician, whose oeuvre contains poetry, essays, fiction and exegesis of the Old Testament, New Testament, and the Quran.

One could be forgiven for wondering what these authors are doing alongside the likes of Jean Orioux, Rose Celli, and Lucienne Favre—all writers of French origin who lived in and wrote about North Africa, and who are all included in the index of *Anthologie* (1969)—yet the situation becomes all the more striking when we consider both of Memmi's anthologies together. Although there are three Algerian Jewish writers included in *Anthologie des écrivains français du Maghreb* (1969), there is but one Jewish writer included in *Anthologie des écrivains maghrébins d'expression française* (1964), and that is Memmi himself. The introduction to Memmi's section rationalizes his inclusion on the grounds that “[s]a place [...] parmi les écrivains maghrébins est singulière” [his place (...) among Maghrebi writers is unique] because he is “Juif et Tunisien” [Jewish and Tunisian] (217), before going on to clarify that, unlike the other authors included in the anthology, Memmi's oeuvre bears witness to the “double drame de Juif colonisé” [double drama of the colonized Jew] (217). Apart from the somewhat misleading nature of this remark, the fact that *Anthologie* (1964) provides Memmi with a personal introduction that comments both explicitly and implicitly on his Jewishness, indigeneity, and relationship to the colonial system, contrasts greatly with the treatment of Bendahan, Chouraqui, and Ychou, whose Jewishness and indigeneity are never explicitly mentioned and only evident to

those who know where and how to look.²⁴ Whereas the reader cannot escape Memmi's religious background—in the first paragraph of the introduction to his section of the anthology, the adjective “Jewish” is repeated three times, and mention is made of both antisemitic laws and concentration camps—she must be familiar with Jewish culture and North African Jewish patronyms in order to identify the Jewish authors included in the appendix of *Anthologie* (1969).

Taken together, then, Memmi's anthologies play into the common discourse of the time about the relationship between Algerian Jews, their native Algeria, and the French colonial power. Once having become French citizens, the story tells us, Algerian Jews assimilated to the French culture and the French language, adopted the colonizer's customs and way of life, and in doing so, left their “primitive” ways behind in favor of “civilization.” In this version of Algerian Jewish history, one that Memmi's epistemological framework implicitly supports, Algerian Jews became French not just in nationality, but in language and culture as well. Subsumed entirely into the world of the colonizer, this narrative of assimilation denies Algerian Jewish indigeneity and leaves little room for any discussion of a distinctly Maghrebi Algerian Jewishness.

Yet even a cursory look at colonial-era literary representations of Algerian Jewishness by Algerian Jews show that this narrative is far too simplistic. *Les Juifs, ou la fille d'Éléazar* (1921), a novel written by Algerian Jewish author Elissa Rhaïs, penname of Leïla Boumendil, serves as a case in point of the ways in which literature complicates this dominant discourse. From the first

²⁴ Memmi had literary predecessors in the writers of the “École de Tunis,” a 1920s and 1930s literary movement made up of Tunisian Jewish writers. For example, Vitalis Danon, Jacques Vêhel, and Raphael Lévy had published *La hara conte... : folklore judéo-tunisien*, a collection of Tunisian Jewish folktales, some thirty-five years before Memmi published his anthology. For more on Memmi's Tunisian Jewish literary predecessors, see Guy Dugas, “L'École de Tunis et l'évolution de la littérature judéo-maghrébine dans l'entre-deux-guerres,” *Cahier d'études maghrébines: Littérature judéo-maghrébine d'expression française* 3 (June 1991): 80–86; Guy Dugas, “An Unknown Maghrebian Genre: Judeo-Maghrebian Literature of French Expression,” trans. Patricia Geesey, *Research in African Literatures*, North African Literature, 23, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 21–32; and Lia Nicole Brozgal and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, “Colonial Tunisia from the Gutter Up,” in *Ninette of Sin Street: A Novella*, by Vitalis Danon, ed. Lia Nicole Brozgal and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, trans. Jane Kuntz (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2017), 1–29.

pages of the novel, which was published over fifty years after Algerian Jews were naturalized as French citizens, it is abundantly clear that the vision of Algerian Jewishness offered in *Les Juifs* is not one of assimilation to the values of the French Republic, but rather one that is deeply rooted in local cultural and religious custom. The novel opens with the building of a sukkah, and the pages that follow are peppered with Hebrew prayers and expressions, many of which are defined for the reader in footnotes. The eponymous Rabbi Éléazar has two wives, one of whom wears a headscarf and whose French is inflected by Arabic grammar and pronunciation.²⁵ When the young rabbinical student Jacob, who is in love with Rabbi Éléazar's daughter Debourah, moves to Paris to attend seminary, he is shocked by how little he has in common with the Algerian Jews he meets there, who have assimilated to better fit into their new homeland. Furthermore, the novel's paratext bears witness to the differences between North African and European Jewish culture: the novel's footnotes suggest that *shul* and *matzah*, two terms that Jacob hears during his time in Paris, originate in Alsatian patois, not Yiddish or Hebrew.

I bring up *Les Juifs, ou la fille d'Éléazar* not to discuss whether it accurately represents Algerian Jewishness, and I make no claims as to the authenticity of its vision of Jewish Algerian life.²⁶ My interest lies instead in how *Les Juifs* exemplifies the capacity of literature to counter dominant narratives about Algerian Jewish assimilation to French ways of life. Rather than

²⁵ More specifically, this character uses the Arabic vocative particle “ya” when calling out to her co-wife Rachelle, and Rachelle's daughter, Debourah: “Ya Rachelle! Ya Debourah! Senior attend pour dire le Kidouch! [Rachelle! Debourah! Senior is waiting to say the Kaddish!]” Elissa Rhaïs, *Les Juifs; ou, la fille d'Éléazar*. (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et cie, 1921), 9.

²⁶ Indeed, the controversy surrounding the novel's author makes the question of authenticity all but impossible to address. Elissa Rhaïs, an Algerian Jewish woman, was presented to metropolitan French readers as a Muslim who had escaped from a harem to become a writer. Whether Rhaïs's persona is the result of her personal desire or marketing tactics she was forced to endure is a subject of scholarly debate, as is the question of whether she wrote her own novels at all. See Patricia M.E. Lorcin, “Manipulating Elissa: The Uses and Abuses of Elissa Rhaïs and Her Works,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 17, no. 5 (2012): 903–22; and Mireille Rosello, “Elissa Rhaïs: Scandals, Impostures, Who Owns the Story?,” *Research in African Literatures* 37, no. 1 (2006): 1–15.

approach the novel as an ethnographic artifact, I approach the novel as evidence of the existence of an alternate discourse on Algerian Jewishness, a discourse that challenges—and even contradicts—the hegemonic narrative. Although ostensibly written by a “French” author about “French” people, the average metropolitan, or even *pied-noir*, reader would likely have been hard-pressed to identify with the vision of “Frenchness” offered in the novel. Indeed, it would not be a stretch to say that the novel’s “Frenchness” exists only insofar as it is the language of expression. Why then, is this novel, and so many others like it—by and/or about Jews—excluded from discussions of Francophone Maghrebi literature?

Khatibi’s Roman maghrébin

A student of Memmi’s who worked on the editorial team of *Anthologie* (1964), Moroccan writer Abdelkebir Khatibi published his doctoral thesis under the title *Le Roman maghrébin* in 1968, in Éditions Maspéro’s “Domaine maghrébin” collection (also directed by Memmi). Better known and cited by far more scholars than either of Memmi’s anthologies, *Le Roman maghrébin* occupies a prominent place in the field of Maghrebi literary studies. Indeed, even fifty years after its publication, Khatibi’s study is still considered to be “one of the most significant early studies of the Maghrebian novel” for the ways in which it interrogates the relationship of North African novels to the socio-political context in which they were conceived, developed, and written.²⁷

Khatibi makes his focus on the socio-political abundantly clear in his forward to the study: “Nous avons pourtant distingué les romans importants des romans secondaires” [We have, however, distinguished important novels from lesser novels], he states, before going on to explain the criteria used to separate the wheat from the chaff: “cette division qui se base sur ce

²⁷ Jane Hiddleston, “État Présent: Francophone North African Literature,” *French Studies* 70, no. 1 (January 2016): 82–92.

que la critique appelle l'efficacité esthétique a pour objectif de voir dans quelle mesure la 'bonne' littérature est la plus socialement significative" [this division, which is based on what criticism calls esthetic efficacy has as its objective to determine in what measure 'good' literature is the most socially significant].²⁸ For Khatibi, then, "important novels" are distinct from "lesser novels" in that the aesthetic qualities of the former serve a higher, socio-political agenda. Socially significant literature is thus necessarily "good literature," in addition to being a powerful political tool. In communicating the "mission" and "message" of their authors, Khatibi tells us, Maghrebi novels function as vehicles through which to express "le drame d'une société en crise" [the tragedy of a society in crisis] and to translate "la profonde mutation apportée par la décolonisation" [the profound transformation brought on by decolonization].²⁹

That Khatibi's study has remained a mainstay in the field of North African literature is not surprising; after all, it is one of the first book-length studies of Maghrebi literature in French, and one of the first scholarly studies of Maghrebi literature written by a formerly colonized North African scholar. I would like to suggest, however, that for far too long literary scholars have uncritically accepted the vision of Maghrebi literature that Khatibi, a trained sociologist, develops in his study, and that it is time to evaluate its shortcomings in addition to its merits. While I do not seek to "dethrone" *Le Roman maghrébin* from its status, or to question Khatibi's role in the foundation and development of the field of Maghrebi literature, I would like to suggest that we must revisit *Le Roman maghrébin* and its implications with a more critical eye. More specifically, reading *Le Roman maghrébin* with the question of Algerian Jewish

²⁸ Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Le Roman maghrébin* (Paris: Maspero, 1968), 7.

²⁹ Khatibi, 11.

indigeneity in mind allows us to see the limitations of Khatibi's study, and to appreciate how his understanding of the "Maghrebi novel" excludes Algerian Jews from the discussion.

Unlike his mentor's approach to the anthology series, which contained concerted (albeit somewhat awkward) attempts to theorize the specificities of *les écrivains maghrébins* as opposed to *les écrivains français du Maghreb*, Khatibi's study arguably takes for granted that the term "Maghrebi" signifies clearly in and of itself. Yet as the controversy surrounding Memmi's anthology series demonstrates, this was evidently not the case in the 1960s. Given the polemic that *Anthologie* (1964) raised upon publication, and the fact that Memmi felt it necessary to further clarify the theoretical framework of the first anthology in the introduction to the second, it is clear that in the 1960s, the term "Maghrebi" was a malleable one that meant different things to different people. Khatibi's deployment of the term without clearly defining how he is using it begs the question: which novels count as "Maghrebi" novels? What criteria are used to decide whether a novel is "Maghrebi" or not? Is "Maghrebi" a purely geographical term, or is it related to the colonial experience? If so, in what way?

Although Khatibi is clear about the answers to these questions, he is less clear about the methods he employs to arrive at them. Khatibi's discussion of the corpus of authors included in the study demonstrates this methodological murkiness:

Si nous avons choisi d'étudier les romanciers non-européens, ce n'est pas dans l'intention de morceler le réel ou de privilégier tel phénomène ethnique. « Est écrivain national celui qui se considère comme tel et qui assume ce choix », avons-nous dit par ailleurs. On peut se demander à juste titre si les écrivains nord-africains qui se sont installés depuis plus de dix ans en France, font encore partie de la littérature maghrébine. D'autant plus que l'origine ethnique ou géographique ne suffit pas pour définir la conscience nationale. Notre choix comporte un arbitraire, mais les limites de notre travail sont celles de l'historien quand il analyse un groupe social et son évolution.³⁰

[If we have chosen to study non-European novelists, it is not with the intention of fragmenting reality or privileging any particular ethnic phenomenon. 'National writers

³⁰ Khatibi, 16.

are those who consider themselves as such and who assume this choice,' we have said elsewhere. One may rightly ask whether North African writers who have been living in France for more than ten years are still part of Maghrebi literature. All the more so because ethnic or geographical origins are not sufficient for determining national consciousness. Our choice is somewhat arbitrary, but the limits of our work are those of the historian when he analyzes a social group and its evolution.]

This passage, which is the closest he provides to an explanation of how the term “Maghrebi” functions in *Le Roman maghrébin*, raises as many questions as it answers. Khatibi affirms that the corpus of his study includes only non-European authors, only to admit the “arbitrary” nature of this choice, and thereby to deny ethnicity any role in the theorization of Maghrebi literature. Even more striking, this passage evinces an almost complete conflation of the national with the regional (Maghrebi), as Khatibi moves back and forth from the one to the other: he begins by affirming that his study on *Maghrebi* novels is concerned with non-European writers yet denies ethnicity as a possible theoretical framework because “*national* writers are those who consider themselves as such.” Khatibi’s ping-ponging between the broader cultural concept of the “Maghreb” and the clearly delineated entity of the nation leaves readers with whiplash, wondering what exactly he is trying to say: is he attempting to develop a theory of “Maghrebi” literature, or is he using the term “Maghrebi literature” as a catch-all to refer to the combined national literatures of France’s former North African colonies? In the absence of a clearly stated methodological framework, the question goes unanswered.

In addition to the geo-political confusion surrounding Khatibi’s conflation of the “Maghrebi” with the “national,” readers also struggle to understand who exactly is included in the term “Maghrebi” itself. Discussing the role of the novel in North African society, Khatibi ponders “ce qu’est le roman pour nous, Maghrébins, maintenant en 1968, c’est-à-dire en période de décolonisation” [what the novel is to us, Maghrebis, now in 1968, that is to say, during the

period of decolonization].³¹ But who is this “nous” to whom Khatibi refers? “On peut se demander à juste titre si les écrivains nord-africains qui se sont installés depuis plus de dix ans en France, font encore partie de la littérature maghrébine” [One may rightly ask whether North African writers who have been living in France for more than ten years are still part of Maghrebi literature],³² Khatibi writes, suggesting that the place of expatriate writers in the world of Maghrebi literature is one that is up for debate. Yet Khatibi then proceeds to rely on Memmi, engaging with both Memmi’s theorizations and representations of the colonial situation, without addressing the fact that Memmi himself had moved to Paris some twelve years before the publication of *Le Roman maghrébin*. As a result, the reader is left to wonder not only what the answer to Khatibi’s question might be, but also how one might even begin going about trying to find it.

Like his mentor before him, Khatibi neglects to consider the ways in which Algerian Jews blur the supposedly neat lines that separate those who wield colonial power from those who are subjected to it.³³ “Il faut avouer qu’ écrivains autochtones et écrivains français ne formaient pas, de toute évidence, un seul groupe et ne subissaient pas la même situation en période coloniale” [It must be admitted that autochthonous writers and French writers clearly did not constitute a single group and did not endure the same problems during the colonial period], he tells readers.³⁴ Yet whereas Memmi attempted to theorize the difference between native North

³¹ Khatibi, 17.

³² Khatibi, 16.

³³ Although Memmi arguably did not afford much attention to the specificities of the Algerian Jewish situation, at least in the early postcolonial era, he had certainly written about Jews and Jewish experience, most notably in *Statue de sel* (1953), *Portrait d’un juif* (1962) and in the preface to *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du portrait du colonisateur* (1957).

³⁴ Khatibi, 21.

African writers and writers of European descent, Khatibi takes for granted that the term “Maghrebi” signifies clearly, making no such attempt to define his terms of analysis. If Memmi implicitly denies the indigeneity of Algerian Jews, Khatibi erases them from the conversation all together.³⁵

Jean Déjeux and Algerian Jewish Writers

Five years after the publication of *Le Roman maghrébin*, French scholar Jean Déjeux touched on the place of Algerian Jewish writers in the world of Maghrebi literature in his 1973 study *Littérature maghrébine de langue française*. Although his intervention on the subject is brief, Déjeux takes things further than either of his predecessors: whereas Memmi and Khatibi implicitly deny Algerian Jews a place in the word of Maghrebi literature, Déjeux explicitly and purposefully excludes Algerian Jews—but not their Moroccan or Tunisian coreligionists—from discussions of Maghrebi literature.

Déjeux makes the exclusion of Algerian Jews abundantly clear early on in his study. After informing readers that he considers North African literature to be the product of “des Maghrébins issus de sociétés arabo-berbères ou même juives” [Maghrebis descended from Arabo-Berber, or even Jewish, societies],³⁶ Déjeux goes on to clarify that only Moroccan and Tunisian Jews are included in his conception of Maghrebi literature. Déjeux provides the following definition for readers:

³⁵ Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the backmatter of *Le Roman maghrébin* solidifies the total erasure of Algerian Jews from Khatibi’s study. In the section of his bibliography entitled “Principaux romans maghrébins d’expression française (1945-1962),” Khatibi includes not a single Jewish Algerian author. Given that the thrust of Khatibi’s study is to examine how literature engages with and represents its socio-political context, the absence of novels such as Irma Ychou’s *La Famille Bensaïd* (1947) speaks to the overall invisibility of Algerian Jews in *Le Roman maghrébin*.

³⁶ Déjeux, 7.

Littérature *maghrébine*, c'est-à-dire issue de la Tunisie, de l'Algérie et du Maroc et produite par des autochtones nés dans les sociétés arabo-berbères ou juives (en ce qui concerne la Tunisie et le Maroc), même si ces Maghrébins ont pu être qualifiés de "Français musulmans", comme c'était le cas, par exemple, pour les Algériens. Elle peut aussi être le fait de Français, nés en Algérie, qui ont opté pour la nationalité algérienne.³⁷

[*Maghrebi* literature, that is to say, from Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco and produced by autochthonous peoples born in Arabo-Berber or Jewish societies (as far as Tunisia and Morocco are concerned), even if these Maghrebis could be qualified as "French Muslims," as was the case, for example, for Algerians. It can also be the work of French people, born in Algeria, who opted for Algerian nationality.]

Déjeux's definition thus provides the following criteria for authors whose works might be considered representative of "Maghrebi literature": either they must be indigenous writers of North African societies, or they must be authors of French descent who were born in Algeria and opted for Algerian citizenship upon the establishment of an independent Algerian nation.

Although at first glance this definition may seem logical, at second glance, the waters are more muddled: how, exactly, are we to interpret Déjeux's parenthetical comment concerning Morocco and Tunisia? A reader with little to no background knowledge of North African religious diversity might take it to mean that Jewish communities only existed in Tunisia and Morocco, and that, by syllogism, there were no Jewish communities in Algeria to produce literature.

Although this may be a grammatically accurate interpretation of the sentence, readers familiar with Jewish life in North African know it to be factually inaccurate. We are led, then, to a second understanding of the sentence: that there were Jewish communities in Algeria who many have produced writers, but that for some reason, according to Déjeux those writers did not produce *Maghrebi* literature.

One might be tempted to assume that Déjeux excludes Algerian Jews from his definition because they were French citizens, as per the 1870 Crémieux Decree. Yet his next comment

³⁷ Déjeux, 13.

undermines this interpretation: if Déjeux considers the *Français musulmans d'Algérie* to be producers of Maghrebi literature, why aren't Algerian Jewish authors treated the same way?³⁸ If Déjeux considers Algerian-born French authors of European descent who chose Algerian citizenship over French citizenship to be capable of producing Maghrebi literature, surely there must be a place for indigenous Algerian Jewish authors in the world of Maghrebi literature?

Before going any further, I would like to explain why the inconsistencies inherent in the logic employed by Memmi, Khatibi, and Déjeux merit the attention to which I have afforded them. Put simply, these three thinkers represent some of the first serious attempts at categorizing and theorizing the particularities of French-language literature written by populations whose exposure to French was the direct result of France's imperial expansion and colonial implantation in North Africa. The ideas put forth in their respective works, although certainly complicated by subsequent generations of scholars, laid the groundwork for the development of the field of francophone Maghrebi literature. More specifically, by dint of his work on the anthologies, Memmi laid the groundwork upon which Khatibi's *Le Roman maghrébin* and Déjeux's *Littérature maghrébine de langue française* would be built.³⁹ If Memmi's influence passes by unacknowledged in scholarly circles, the opposite is true for Khatibi: *Le Roman maghrébin* has become a "seminal" text in the field of Maghrebi literary studies.⁴⁰ Indeed,

³⁸ The *français musulmans d'Algérie* (FMA) were technically French citizens, according to the Law 47-1353, passed September 20, 1947. According to Article 2, "Tous les ressortissants de nationalité française des départements d'Algérie jouissent, sans distinction d'origine, de race, de langue, ni de religion, des droits attachés à la qualité de citoyen français et sont soumis aux mêmes obligations" [All nationals of French nationality in the departments of Algeria shall enjoy, without distinction of origin, race, language or religion, the rights attached to the status of French citizen and shall be subject to the same obligations]. However, this "citizenship" arguably existed only on paper, as the FMA were subject to discrimination and mistreatment at the hands of the French imperial powers.

³⁹ Although Memmi's anthologies are among his lesser-known works, they are cited in several foundational studies of francophone North African letters, including Khatibi's *Roman maghrébin* (1968), Déjeux's *Littérature maghrébine de langue française* (1973), and Jacqueline Arnaud's *La Littérature maghrébine de langue française* (1986).

Khatibi's essay remains so significant that in 2016 the scholarly journal *Contemporary French & Francophone Studies* opted to "[return] to Abdelkébir Khatibi's influential text *Le Roman maghrébin* (1968) nearly 50 years after its publication and [ask] where the *roman maghrébin* is now."⁴¹ As for Déjeux, upon publication, his tome *Littérature maghrébine de langue française* was said to have "filled a conspicuous void;"⁴² was heralded by critics as "a monumental reference work, essential to any serious study of North African Francophone literature;"⁴³ and was said to be destined to become the "*sine qua non* point of departure for critical study in [the field of North African literature]."⁴⁴ This praise proved prescient, as Déjeux's tome would go on serve as a foundational text in the field of Maghrebi letters, and would be cited by innumerable scholars of the field of Maghrebi literature. Providing "systematic analysis of the manifold forms of francophone literary production responding to the colonial presence,"⁴⁵ *Littérature maghrébine de langue française* became a volume to which subsequent generations of scholars would continue to turn as they traced the origins and development of North African letters in French.

I interrogate Memmi, Khatibi, and Déjeux not to debate the merits of their respective definitions of "Maghrebi literature" (or lack thereof), but as prime examples of the ways in

⁴⁰Meg Furniss Weisberg, "Clandestine Emigration as Twenty-First Century Meme in the Roman Maghrébin," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 2016): 131–40.

⁴¹ "Editors' Introduction." *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 20, no. 1 (January 2016): 1.

⁴² Gabriel V. Asfar, "*Littérature maghrébine de langue française: introduction générale et auteurs* by Jean Dejeux; *La Littérature algérienne de langue française et ses lectures: imaginaire et discours d'idées* by Charles Bonn (Book Review)," *The French Review* 49, no. 3 (February 1976): 437.

⁴³ Asfar, 437..

⁴⁴ Eric Sellin, "*Littérature maghrébine de langue française* by Jean Déjeux (Review)," *Research in African Literatures* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 83.

⁴⁵ Hiddleston, 83.

which the field of francophone North African literary studies grapples with—or not—the particularities of the Algerian Jewish situation. More specifically, Memmi’s, Khatibi’s, and Déjeux’s analyses serve as cases in point of the ways that Algerian Jews, by virtue of their simultaneous indigeneity and French citizenship, have been “written out” of the field of French-language Maghrebi literature, at times implicitly ignored, at others explicitly excluded from consideration, and still others subsumed into the category of “French writers,” despite their long-seated historical and cultural presence in North Africa.

Guy Dugas and the Recentering of Jewish Writers of the Maghreb

In 1990, Guy Dugas published *Littérature judéo-maghrébine d’expression française*, a much-needed corrective to the consistent lack of attention afforded to North African Jewish writers by scholars of Maghrebi literature.⁴⁶ In his study, Dugas argued that nationalist narratives and political considerations had impacted the field of Maghrebi literature in such a way as to exclude Jewish Maghrebi writers from the conversation, despite their contributions to the world of North African letters. *Littérature judéo-maghrébine d’expression française* is thus an attempt to shed light on the literary contributions of Maghrebi Jews, a population of writers who were, as Dugas affirms, “victimes à posteriori de l’incohérence [...] des critères sur lesquels repose [...] le concept de littérature maghrébine” [victims in retrospect of the incoherence (...) of the criteria upon which (...) the concept of Maghrebi literature rests].⁴⁷ While Dugas’s work represents a crucial step towards the recognition and valorization of North African Jewish writers, his focus

⁴⁶ Two years later, Dugas published a critical biography on the subject. See Guy Dugas, *Bibliographie critique de la littérature judéo-maghrébine d’expression française: 1896 – 1990* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1992).

⁴⁷ Guy Dugas, *La Littérature judéo-maghrébine d’expression française: entre Djéha et Cagayous* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1990), 12.

on the particularities of Jewish Maghrebi writing and writers—as necessarily different from their Muslim counterparts—stops short of integrating Jewish writers into discussions of Maghrebi literature, a concept whose epistemological existence he questions, but ultimately accepts.

One of Dugas’s main contributions in *Littérature judéo-maghrébine d’expression française* is to highlight the immense influence of political considerations on the theorization of Maghrebi literature. As Dugas explains, and as this chapter has demonstrated, the concept of “Maghrebi literature” is intimately linked with the socio-political environment in which Memmi, Khatibi, and Déjeux were working; as a result, Dugas tells us, “le concept de littérature maghrébine [...] s’est forgé sur une base essentiellement nationale et idéologique” [the concept of Maghrebi literature was constructed on an essentially national and ideological basis].⁴⁸ It therefore comes as no surprise that there is an intimate link between the “national” and the “Maghrebi,” and that politics (“Avoir choisi son camp lors des luttes d’indépendance” [Having chosen one’s camp during the struggles for independence]) and religion (“Être de religion musulmane” [Being of the Muslim religion]) are the “double critère permettant de revendiquer le titre d’écrivain national dans le Maghreb” [double criteria permitting one to claim the title of national writer in the Maghreb] and, therefore, to be thought of as a “Maghrebi” writer.⁴⁹

In his study, Dugas also speaks to the role of what we might now term “politically correct (PC) culture” in the founding of the field of Maghrebi literature in French.

À l’heure où la littérature maghrébine, en dépit de cette langue française, tend à être considérée comme l’expression d’une volonté d’émancipation face à l’ancien colonisateur et d’un refus de l’acculturation par rejet des valeurs imposées—à commencer justement par cette langue, que l’on s’ingénie à torturer, à terroriser — il peut évidemment paraître malséant de prétendre poser en concurrence une production qui

⁴⁸ Dugas, *La Littérature judéo-maghrébine d’expression française* 10.

⁴⁹ Dugas, *La Littérature judéo-maghrébine d’expression française* 10.

vient contredire ses fondements, ses convictions, son évolution historique, et même, pour une large part, les formes au travers desquelles elle s'exprime.⁵⁰

[At the time when Maghrebi literature, despite its use of the French language, tends to be considered as the expression of a desire for liberation from the former colonizer, and of a refusal to acculturate through the rejection of imposed values—starting, precisely, with the language, that (many writers) do their best to torture and terrorize—it can obviously seem improper to offer up a competing creation which contradicts its foundations, its convictions, its historical evolution, and even, for a large part, the forms through which it expresses itself.]

Here, Dugas alludes to how fears about the “malséant,” or the “improper” or “unsuitable,” have skewed approaches to the literary production of indigenous North Africans in favor of those works that clearly evince anticolonial themes and dynamics, to wit, the desire for emancipation from France, the rejection of French culture and values, and the “torture” of the French language. Significant here is the difference between the *approach* to Maghrebi literature on the one hand, and the *actual* literary production on the other: if Maghrebi literature “tends to be considered” as the expression of anticolonial sentiments, Dugas tells us, it can appear “unseemly” to affirm the existence of a potentially acculturated or assimilated competitor in the literary sphere whose works expressly challenge the foundations on which the field was built.

In phrasing the issue in these terms, namely, in affirming that bringing Jewish Maghrebi writing into the conversation would be tantamount to creating a literary competition, Dugas affirms the idea that Jewish Maghrebi writing is a literary production distinct from that which is produced by their Muslim counterparts, and thus subtly upholds the incoherent criteria upon which the field of Maghrebi literature rests. While Dugas’s efforts to bring Jewish Maghrebi writers more fully into the world of Maghrebi literature represent a laudable and needed step towards a more robust understanding of North African literary production, his approach neglects to address how bringing Maghrebi Jewish writing into the world of Maghrebi literature might

⁵⁰ Dugas, *La Littérature judéo-maghrébine d'expression française* 15.

allow us to productively reconsider the very foundations upon the field is based. By treating Maghrebi Jewish writing as a separate literary grouping, Dugas reifies the arbitrary and somewhat illogical boundaries that had theretofore defined the field of Maghrebi literature, thereby upholding the epistemological border that separates writers of Muslim background from those of Jewish background.

While it is important to recognize Dugas's contribution, which bring to light the literary production of a group that has been traditionally relegated to the margins, I would like to suggest that the framing of Dugas's study—which argues not for an ethnically inclusive vision of Maghrebi literature, but rather for “des littérature-s maghrébine-s” [Maghrebi literature-s] forecloses a conversation between these bodies of work.⁵¹ In focusing on the specificities of Maghrebi Jewish writing—“Nous tâcherons ensuite de montrer que les écrivains juifs du Maghreb partagent en différent endroits des pratiques scripturales, constituant par certains aspects une rhétorique spécifique, qui tendent à les distinguer de leurs confrères non juifs” [We will then try to show that in various locations, Jewish writers of the Maghreb share scriptural practices, certain aspects of which constitute a specific rhetoric, that tend to distinguish them from their non-Jewish brethren]—and not on incorporating Jewish authors into the conversation about Maghrebi literature, Dugas takes a needed step forward, all while maintaining the boundaries between differently-colonized North African populations.⁵² As he writes:

Pourrait donc être nommée “judéo-maghrébine” toute œuvre qui, dans le grain de l'écriture ou la paille des mots, révélerait à la fois la judéité et la maghrébinité [*sic*] de son auteur : est écrivain judéo-maghrébin tout écrivain juif né au Maghreb, d'ascendance ou de résidence maghrébine, dont l'œuvre est travaillée/fait référence, de façon plus ou moins explicite, par/à une double condition de “Juif” et d' “Arabe.”⁵³

⁵¹ Dugas, *La Littérature judéo-maghrébine d'expression française* 13.

⁵² Dugas, *La Littérature judéo-maghrébine d'expression française* 19.

⁵³ Dugas, *La Littérature judéo-maghrébine d'expression française* 19.

[Any work which, in the grain of the writing or the straw of the words, is said to simultaneously reveal the Jewishness and the Maghrebiness of its author, could thus be called “Judeo-Maghrebi”: a Judeo-Maghrebi writer is any Jewish writer born in the Maghreb, of Maghrebi lineage or residence, whose *oeuvre* is shaped by/makes reference to, in a more or less explicit way, the double condition of “Jew” and “Arab.”]

According to this definition, Judeo-Maghrebi literature is produced solely by Judeo-Maghrebi writers, or those authors of Jewish background who were born in North Africa to Maghrebi families. Conversely, if Jewish writers occupy a tenuous place in the world of Maghrebi literature, authors of Muslim background have no place in the world of Jewish Maghrebi writing, Dugas seems to suggest. Dugas’s focus on the content of the literature – namely, on the notion that Judeo-Maghrebi literature must engage “more or less explicitly” with the “double condition” of being both Jewish and Arab – is thus in some way a complementary approach to that which he derided earlier: if the field of Maghrebi literature is by and large made up of works written by authors of Muslim background that interrogate the situation of Muslim (former) colonial subjects, the field of Judeo-Maghrebi literature is thus composed of works written by authors of Jewish background that interrogate the situation of the putative Arab Jew. “La production judéo-maghrébine d’expression française est très certainement à distinguer de celle d’auteurs arabo-musulmans ou berbères d’origine nord-africaine” [Judeo-Maghrebi production of French expression is certainly to be distinguished from that of Arab-Muslim or Berber authors of North African origin], Dugas tells readers, “Au plan socio-historique, leur genèse, leur développement, leur devenir—et, que l’on nous permette d’ajouter, bientôt leur disparition—ont été, sont, ou seront, très sensiblement différents” [On the socio-historical level, their genesis, their development, their future—and, if we may add, their impending disappearance—have been, are, or will be, significantly different].⁵⁴ Conceived in such a

⁵⁴ Dugas, *La Littérature judéo-maghrébine d’expression française* 279.

manner, these fields represent mutually exclusive entities whose reliance on discourses of ethno-religious essentialization reify the boundaries between Jews and Muslims. Furthermore, in assuming that members of different religious groups are primarily engaged in thinking through the concerns and issues of the group to which they belong, this framework places a somewhat forceful and problematic emphasis on the (Jewish) author's representation of her (Jewish) experience.

As a result of his focus on the religion of the author and on the framing of his study, Dugas's approach to Maghrebi literature written by Jewish authors maintains the same categories he decried at the outset of his study. If in his introduction, for example, Dugas affirmed that "les critères de classement jusqu'ici appliqués en matière de littératures du Maghreb conduisent nécessairement à de graves aberrations, dont la plus scandaleuse pourrait être, précisément, l'exclusion de plus d'un centaine d'auteurs juif" [the classification criteria applied so far to literatures of the Maghreb necessarily lead to serious aberrations, the most scandalous of which could be, precisely, the exclusion of more than a hundred Jewish authors], his solution to the issue is not necessarily to re-envision what Maghrebi literature might be, but rather to argue for the creation of a new category composed of the authors who were so egregiously disregarded in the first place.⁵⁵ It is thus perhaps no surprise that the final chapter of his study is entitled "Conclusion générale : une littérature à part entière" [General conclusion: a literature in its own right].⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Dugas, *La Littérature judéo-maghrébine d'expression française* 13.

⁵⁶ Dugas, *La Littérature judéo-maghrébine d'expression française* 277.

Rethinking “Maghrebi” Literature

Taken together, the above analyses speak to the crucial role that the author’s religious heritage has played in discussions of Maghrebi literature.⁵⁷ Whereas Dugas focuses on the specificities of Judeo-Maghrebi writing, and thus neglects non-Jewish authors altogether, the analyses of Memmi, Khatibi, and Déjeux all illustrate the veracity of his contention that, in the field of Maghrebi literature more broadly speaking, “les écrivains juifs sont [...] tantôt retenus et tantôt écartés : on retiendra de préférence les Juifs tunisiens, un peu moins volontiers les Juifs marocains, et on exclura farouchement tous les Juifs algériens” [Jewish writers are at times included, and at others dismissed: Tunisian Jews are preferred, Moroccan Jews are held onto a little less willingly, and Algerian Jews are ferociously excluded.]⁵⁸ As a result, although all four of these critics take a regional approach, choosing to theorize either “Maghrebi” literature or “Judeo-Maghrebi” literature instead of a specifically national literary production, the particularities of the Algerian Jewish situation haunt all their texts, albeit in different manners. Furthermore, the prominent place given to questions of authorial ethnicity and religious background by all of these models forecloses the possibility of a multi-ethnic regional literature in French, leaving little room for the theorization of representation strategies that might arguably bring together works written by authors of Jewish and Muslim background. What might we learn about indigenous Maghrebi society when we read authors of Muslim background in conversation with authors of Jewish background? How might listening to an interconfessional chorus of voices broaden our understanding of Maghrebi cultural dynamics?

⁵⁷ It is interesting to note that while French citizens of Algerian Jewish origin are treated as “French” and not “Algerian” by literary scholars, Muslim Algerian authors with French citizenship were not subjected to the same treatment. See Monique Balbuena, “Minor Literatures and Major Laments: Reading Sadia Lévy” for a fascinating comparison of the treatment of Algerian Jewish author and French citizen Sadia Lévy and Algerian Muslim author and *indigène citoyen français* Mohamed Fikri (Abd el-Kader Hadj Hamou).

⁵⁸ Dugas, *La Littérature judéo-maghrébine d’expression française* 12.

As a concluding gesture, I would like to return briefly to the article that opened this chapter, as it offers a glimpse into what this new approach might look like, as well as some of the pitfalls it may present. Zaoui's sustained emphasis on the anticolonial inclinations of many of the Algerian Jewish writers he mentions – Maximilienne Heller, Myriam Ben, H  l  ne Cixous, Jean Daniel Bensa  d – offers a subtle counterargument to the narrative of Algerian Jewish assimilation and allegiance to France. Furthermore, Zaoui's emphasis on the ways in which these authors' works speak to more than just a Jewish North African experience suggest that they can, and ought to be, read as more than just indicative of a particular religious experience. Whether it be Jeanne Benguigui, whose book *Conte de Sidi Bel-Abb  s* "montre son attachement    sa ville natale et    sa riche culture populaire" [shows her attachment to her hometown and to its vibrant popular culture]; or Albert Bensoussan, in whose works "l'Alg  rie est fort pr  sente" [Algeria is very present]; or even Jacques Derrida, one of many who "ont toujours l'Alg  rie dans leur coeur et dans le verbe" [always have Algeria in their heart and words]; Algerian Jewish writers, Zaoui tells us, are as much Algerian as they are Jewish.⁵⁹

The factual errors that dot Zaoui's article speak unwittingly to the lack of knowledge about Algerian Jewishness in the world of Maghrebi letters, and of the difficulties parsing the relationship between Algerian Jews, Algeria, and the French colonial endeavor. Zaoui himself is clearly no specialist in Algerian Jewish literary production; his mistaking Sadia L  vy for a woman would not have happened were he better acquainted with L  vy's life and oeuvre. More significantly, however, is his decision to close the article with a nod to the legacy of the "martyr" Fernand Iveton:

...il faut que nous n'oublions jamais le chahid Fernand Yveton [*sic*], ce juif alg  rien, mort pour l'ind  pendance de l'Alg  rie libre. Il a   t   condamn      mort par la France

⁵⁹ Zaoui

coloniale et guillotiné en 1957. Il a écrit : « Dans la vie d'un homme, la mienne compte peu, ce qui compte, c'est l'Algérie, son avenir, et l'Algérie sera libre demain. »⁶⁰

[...we must never forget the freedom fighter Fernand Yveton [*sic*], this Algerian Jew who died for the independence of a free Algeria. He was sentenced to death by colonial France and guillotined in 1957. He wrote: “In the life of a man, mine counts little, what counts is Algeria, its future, and Algeria will be free tomorrow.”]

Zaoui's labeling of Iveton as a “juif algérien” may be correct; Iveton is often said to have been born to a Jewish father in the town of Clos-Salembier (present-day El Madania) in 1926. Yet Iveton is also known, indeed, perhaps *better* known, as the only European to be executed by France during the Algerian war for independence.⁶¹ Born to a French father and a Spanish mother, Iveton did not belong to an indigenous North African family, but rather to a settler family.⁶² As such, Zaoui's article ends as much with a tribute to a *pied-noir-cum-mujahid* as it does with an homage to a (possibly) Jewish Algerian who fought and died for his homeland.

The ending of Zaoui's article thus points, perhaps unwittingly, at the slippery relationship between France, Algeria, and the Jews who used to live there. What is more, it serves as an example of the ways in which political considerations have dominated and continue to dominate the field of Maghrebi literature in French. Ending his brief article with a nod to Iveton's sacrifice for Algerian independence thus functions as somewhat of a double-edged sword: in focusing on the authors whose works are considered anticolonial, and in ending on a call to “never forget” Iveton, the Algerian Jewish martyr, Zaoui simultaneously brings attention to the existence of anticolonial Algerian Jewish writers while also seeming to affirm the significance of political

⁶⁰ Zaoui

⁶¹ Béatrice Fleury, “Arrestation de Fernand Iveton (Éclairage),” *Indépendances*: INA Médiathèque, n.d., <https://fresques.ina.fr/independances/fiche-media/Indepe00001/arrestation-de-fernand-iveton-muet.html>.

⁶² “Une victime oubliée de la guerre d'Algérie.” *Le Monde*, 31 Jan. 1987, https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1987/01/31/une-victime-oubliee-de-la-guerre-d-algerie_4020307_1819218.html.

considerations in discussions of Algerian – and arguably by extension – Maghrebi literature.

Algerian Jews belong in discussions of Algerian literature, Zaoui seems to say, because they too supported Algerian independence.

Zaoui's article thus serves in many ways as an invitation to a broader conversation on the role and place of Algerian Jews in the world of Maghrebi literature. For too long, socio-political boundaries have delimited the field in such a way as to privilege certain indigenous voices over others. Furthermore, the lack of critical attention afforded by scholars of Maghrebi literature to the particularities of Algeria, where political categories and cultural origins do not always map neatly onto one another, has arguably written Jewish indigeneity out of the Algerian cultural space. As the current field of North African literature was conceived and has developed, Algerian Jewish means French, and French means foreign. As such, Algerian Jews have not been allowed a place at the Maghrebi literary table. The scholarly focus on the ways in which literature produced by indigenous North African authors speaks to their lived experience, combined with an emphasis on the role of Islam in North African society and a lack of consideration paid to Algerian Jews in conversations about Maghrebi literature, have resulted in an exclusion of Algerian Jews and Jewishness *tout court* from the world of Maghrebi letters, an exclusion that has been steadfastly maintained since Memmi, Khatibi, and Déjeux theorized the field some fifty years ago. As such, rather than complicating national narratives of the Maghrebi countries as inherently Muslim spaces, scholarship in the field of Maghrebi literature has reaffirmed these exclusionist discourses, particularly in the case of Algeria.⁶³ It is thus high time to incorporate Jewish Maghrebi writing into the overall field of Maghrebi literature, and to create a space in which to consider the Judeo-Maghrebi alongside the Islamo-Maghrebi.

⁶³ See Perego, "Neglected Legacies," especially pages 142-44.

Chapter 2

Nedjma: Algeria's Jewish-Muslim *femme-patrie*

Composed of reworked excerpts taken from a more than four-hundred-page manuscript written in Paris in the aftermath of World War II, Kateb Yacine's groundbreaking novel *Nedjma* appeared on French bookshelves in 1956, towards the beginning of what would become the Algerian War for Independence. At the time, the reading public didn't know quite what to do with Kateb's novel, which was unconventional in both form and content. Eschewing the trappings of realist literature while also conveying an overtly anticolonial message, *Nedjma* placed Kateb squarely into late colonial France's literary scene alongside many other great mid-century authors. As Swiss journalist Charles Ravussin wrote in a August 1956 review in the *Gazette de Lausanne*, "Yacine Kateb, par son premier roman, atteint d'emblée le rang des écrivains dont on parle, cette place enviable où figurent déjà plusieurs Algériens comme lui, les Camus, les Dib, les Robles, les Feraoun, etc. Tout comme Camus, plus encore peut-être, il semble mettre un esprit de bravade à déconcerter le public, ou même à l'irriter" [With his first novel, Kateb Yacine achieves the standing of the writers people are talking about, this enviable position where several Algerians like him, the likes of Camus, Dib, Robles, Feraoun, etc. appear. Like Camus, perhaps even more so, he seems to put on a spirit of bravado to disconcert the public, or even to irritate it].¹

¹ Ch. E. Ravussin, "'Nedjma' Roman de Yacine Kateb," *Gazette de Lausanne*, août 1956, "KATEB Yacine" Dossier de presse Nadjma [sic], Institut mémoires de l'édition contemporaine.

If critics and readers alike were in often in agreement about the “disconcerting” or perhaps even “irritating” qualities of the novel, there was less consensus on what the novel represented in terms of French-language literature. Some, such as the aforementioned Ravussin, viewed Kateb as part of a growing circle of notable “Algerian” writers, which included both descendants of settler-colonizers as well as local populations. Others, however, took the publication of *Nedjma* as an occasion to reconsider the suitability of placing indigenous writers such as Kateb, Mohammed Dib, and Mouloud Feraoun alongside Camus and Robles; as Jacques Nantet wondered in September 1956, “Somme toute, face au cas énigmatique de cette nouvelle littérature nord-africaine, dont les auteurs sont Arabes ou Berbères, mais écrivent en français, nous avons le droit et le devoir de nous poser cette question: *s’agit-il d’une extension de la littérature française, ou bien d’une littérature algérienne nouvelle?*” [All in all, faced with the enigmatic case of this new North African literature, whose authors are Arabs or Berbers, but who write in French, we have the right and the duty to ask ourselves this question: is this an extension of French literature, or a new Algerian literature?]²

Likely in an attempt to anticipate and address potential confusion on the part of the French-language lectorate, the editors of the first edition of *Nedjma* prefaced the novel with an *avertissement* that highlighted several of the ways in which Kateb’s novel shirks French literary tradition.³ In attempting to explain the reasons why this might be the case, the four-page preface ends up anticipating much of the theoretical framework of the field that would become postcolonial literature in French.⁴ To wit, the preface claims that, whereas previous works

² Jacques Nantet, “Kateb Yacine: *Nedjma*,” *Critique*, September 1956, sec. Notes: Littérature et beaux-arts, “KATEB Yacine” Dossier de presse *Nedjma* [sic], Institut mémoires de l’édition contemporaine. Emphasis my own.

³ See Seth Graebner, “Kateb Yacine and the Ruins of the Present,” *SubStance* 36, no. 1 (2007): 141-142.

⁴ Signed only by “Les Éditeurs,” the *avertissement* was written by Michel Chodkiewicz, a French Catholic of Polish heritage who converted to Islam at seventeen and would go on to become an Orientalist scholar and future head of

written by Algerian authors “portaient témoignage d’une situation” [bore witness to a situation], Kateb Yacine’s novel “porte témoignage d’un peuple” [bears witness to a people] (5, viii).⁵

Although not named explicitly, the “situation” at hand is clearly the *colonial* situation, and the “Algerian writers” to which the preface alludes are settler-colonizer writers of European lineage.⁶ In positing that these earlier “Algerian” writers were able to bear witness to the colonial situation (no matter where it might be unfolding), but that Kateb’s text was uniquely suited to bear witness to the specificities of the lived experience of colonized Algerians, the *avertissement* foreshadows what would become the “French” vs “Francophone” literary divide.

Yet if this is an important distinction to make, the editor’s rationale for doing so is problematic at best—and racist at worst—as it relies upon narratives of ethno-cultural essentialism that treat subaltern ethnic groups as concrete objects of study. To wit, the preface draws upon stereotypical images of two other racialized groups from the Global South to “prove” the point that there is some sort of innate, specifically Arabo-Algerian essence encapsulated in *Nedjma*: “Le roman de Kateb Yacine ne pourrait avoir été conçu par un patriote hindou, un révolutionnaire guatémaltèque” [Kateb Yacine’s novel could not be conceived by a Hindu

Éditions du Seuil. See Graebner “Kateb Yacine and the Ruins of the Present” 141; and Marc Gaborieau and Marie-France Mourrégot, “In memoriam Michel Chodkiewicz (1929-2020),” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, no. 196 (December 4, 2021): 9–16.

⁵ All quotations of the original editor’s preface in French (referred to in the footnotes as “*Avertissement*”) taken from Yacine Kateb, *Nedjma* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1956). All quotations of the original editor’s preface in English translation (referred to as “Preface”) adapted from Yacine Kateb, *Nedjma*, trans. Richard Howard, CARAF Books (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991). At the time of *Nedjma*’s publication, the title of “Algerian writer” was commonly used to describe writers of European settler origin who lived in Algeria, such as Albert Camus.

⁶ The *avertissement* states, “il eût suffi que fussent autre part réunies des *conditions politiques et économiques* comparables à celle auxquelles l’Algérie est soumise. Les accessoires, le décor eussent été autres ; mais le problème, réduit à son essentiel, eût été semblablement posé” [it would have sufficed for the *political and economic conditions* comparable to those to which Algeria is subjected to be repeated elsewhere. The stage properties, the setting would be different; but the problem, reduced to its essentials, would be similarly posed] (5, viii; emphasis my own).

patriot, a Guatemalan revolutionary] it affirms.⁷ “Donnez aux personnages de *Nedjma* d’autres noms, habillez-les d’autres vêtements : sous le sari ou le poncho, le lecteur attentif reconnaîtra bientôt l’arabe déguisé. Rachid ou Mokhtar sont irréductiblement algériens” [Give *Nedjma*’s characters other names, dress them in other clothes: beneath the sari or the poncho, the attentive reader will quickly recognize the Arab in disguise. Rachid or Mokhtar are irreducibly Algerian].⁸ In such a way, the preface suggests that Kateb himself intrinsically embodies a certain “Arabo-Algerianness,” and that it is this quality—not his lived experience—that ultimately distinguishes his work from the literary production of “Algerians” of European origin.

Furthermore, the editors’ insistence on Kateb as *porte-parole* of the Algerian people forecloses the possibility of generalizing his critical reflections beyond the colony’s borders. If the Algerian writers of European origin—those whose works bear witness to a “situation”—are said to have written texts that “eussent été pareillement écrites, toutes choses égales d’ailleurs, sous d’autres latitudes, par des hommes d’un autre sang” [could have been written, all things being equal, in other latitudes, by men of other races], the editors posit that the characters of Kateb’s novel can only exist within the “irreducibly Algerian” world he creates therein: “Le monde que le romancier bâtit autour d’eux s’écroule sans eux; ils meurent sans lui. Entre ce monde et ces personnages, le rapport est, pourrait-on dire, ombilical” [The world the novelist builds around them collapses without them; they die without him. One might say that the relation between this world and these characters is umbilical].⁹ Kateb’s literary accomplishments may be worth celebrating, the *avertissement* suggests, but only on a limited scale; whereas works that

⁷ “*Avertissement*,” 5; “Preface,” viii.

⁸ “*Avertissement*,” 5; “Preface,” viii.

⁹ “*Avertissement*,” 5; “Preface,” viii. Note that the “Preface” translates “ils meurent sans lui” as “they die without it.”

represent the colonial situation are generalizable, those works that represent lived experience do not rise to “universal” status, their particularities precluding any potential comparisons to other colonial endeavors or experiences of domination by European powers.

In a somewhat paradoxical move, however, the editors also refuse the specificity of the Algerian situation itself, first by disregarding the exceptional status of Algeria as France’s only settler-colony and of colonized Algerians’ status as second-class French “citizens,” and second, by focusing on the purported “Arabness” of the Algerians whom *Nedjma* is said to represent. Arguing that *Nedjma* is nothing short of “une oeuvre profondément arabe” [a profoundly Arab work], the preface doubles down on an essentialized understanding of Algerian as “Arab,” and on how this characteristic supposedly influences Kateb’s novel.¹⁰ *Nedjma* bears testament to “une attitude purement arabe de *l’homme face au temps*” [a purely Arab notion of *man in time*] the *avertissement* tells readers, before going on to explain how this “Arab” attitude supposedly differs from the European approach to time: “La pensée européenne se meut dans une durée *linéaire*” [Western thought moves in *linear* duration] the preface explains, whereas “la pensée arabe évolue dans une durée *circulaire* ou [*sic*] chaque détour est un retour” [Arab thought develops in a circular duration, each turn a *return*].¹¹ This temporal confusion is supposedly such an essential part of Arabness—and thus, Algerianness—that, the editors argue, it “correspond à un trait si constant du caractère, à une orientation si naturelle de la pensée que la grammaire

¹⁰ “*Avertissement*,” 6; “Preface,” viii.

¹¹ “*Avertissement*,” 6; “Preface,” ix. It is interesting to note that the editors of the introductory remarks undermine their own analysis through a small but not insignificant typo: the substitution of “ou” for “où” in the preceding quotation. While the explicitly essentializing nature of the preface suggests that readers ought to add in the missing accent and read the sentence as including the adverb “où,” both John Erickson and Seth Graebner have explored the possibilities of reading with the typo and thus retaining the conjunction “ou.” See John Erickson, “Kateb Yacine’s *Nedjma*: A Dialogue of Difference,” *SubStance* 69 (1992): 31 and Graebner, “Kateb Yacine and the Ruins of the Present” 142.

arabe, elle-même, en est marquée” [corresponds to so constant a feature of the Arab character, so natural an orientation of Arab thought, that Arabic grammar itself is marked by it].¹²

One would hope that the racial and cultural prejudices that inform this preface would generally no longer be acceptable academic practice, and that many of the assumptions that undergird its rationales have long been debunked and relegated to the dustbins of literary history. That being said, this preface—by dint of the attention it affords to the subject position of the author as a colonized North African—arguably anticipates several trends that would shape *Nedjma* scholarship over the coming years, and which still very much determine literary scholars’ approach to postcolonial literature today: first, that writing about the colonial situation from the vantage point of a settler-colonizer is fundamentally different from writing about the colonial situation from the vantage point of a colonized subject; second, that the novel’s narrative techniques were highly innovative for its time; and third, that the novel’s genesis and storyworld exist firmly within the “Arabo-Algerian”—and thus, Muslim—realm of the colonized.¹³

I would like to suggest that this *avertissement* is indicative of a fourth trend as well, albeit of a different sort than the previous three. Whereas the previous paragraph focuses on what the *avertissement* says and does, here I would like to focus on the opposite. To wit, when we read the *avertissement* for what it *does not* say, it becomes evident that the editors’ preface refrains entirely from acknowledging the novel’s engagement with Algerian Jews and its representation of their place in the burgeoning nation of Algeria. While *Nedjma* occupies a specific place in the

¹² “*Avertissement*,” 6; “Preface,” ix.

¹³ It is important to clarify that, while I do claim that this preface is indicative of future scholarly approaches to the novel, I do not claim any causal or teleological relationship between this preface and subsequent scholarship on *Nedjma*.

world of French-language literature due to its status as one of, if not the first, French-language anticolonial novels authored by a colonized Algerian, and remains highly regarded for both its literary innovations, as well as its trenchant anticolonial critique, I would like to suggest that the novel is significant for a fourth reason, one which is as conspicuously absent from the *avertissement* as it is from subsequent scholarship: namely, how it situates Algerian Jews firmly within the cultural landscape of the Algerian nation in the making.

It is this absence of attention afforded to *Nedjma*'s engagements with Algerian Jews and Jewishness that motivates the present chapter. In many ways, this chapter works in tandem with the previous one, which traced how the exclusion of Algerian Jewry became a defining characteristic of the field of French-language North African literary studies. In Chapter 1, I argued that the establishment of a mutually exclusive, binary framework that sought to neatly map "colonizer" onto "Algerians" of European settler origin, and "colonized" onto those of indigenous descent, resulted in the erasure of the contributions of Algerian Jews from the field of North African literary studies. In this chapter, which serves as a case-study of the ramifications of approaching Algerian literature through this exclusionary model, my focus shifts from the realm of the theoretical to the realm of the particular—that is to say, to the detail.¹⁴

One would be hard pressed to argue that *Nedjma*'s engagements with Jews and Jewishness exist in anything but the realm of the detail; indeed, all together, the word "juif," all derivations included, appears only ten times throughout the entire novel. Yet to dismiss these subtle mentions is to miss out on the critical story they tell, for details do tell stories; as Foucault

¹⁴ The detail has been the subject of much interest in the world of French literature and theory, particularly in the writings and thought of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault. See the introduction to Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 1987), for a discussion of the detail in poststructuralist French writing and thought.

reminds us in *Surveiller et punir*, “tout détail est important” [no detail is unimportant].¹⁵ And, as Naomi Schor argues in *Reading in Detail*, a feminist study of the detail’s evolving relationship to sexual hierarchies and gender dynamics, “To retell the story from the perspective of the detail is inevitably to tell *another* story.”¹⁶ What might this “other story” be, we ask ourselves, if we retell *Nedjma* from the perspective of the “Jewish” detail?

To address this question, I first provide a brief overview of Kateb’s life, politics, and publication history, before turning to *Nedjma* to demonstrate how the novel’s incorporation of minor Jewish characters inscribes Jews into the cultural milieu of the colonized populations, thereby challenging narratives of complete and total Algerian Jewish assimilation to the French culture and language in the aftermath of the 1870 Crémieux Decree.¹⁷ I then turn to the character of Nedjma herself, to examine how her family heritage inscribes Jewishness into the novel’s vision of the Algerian nation. Finally, I interrogate how reading *Nedjma* as Jewish enables readers to understand how this allegorical figure embodies the cultural and religious multiplicities of the nation.¹⁸

Background & Context

Kateb Yacine was born in Constantine, Algeria on August 6, 1929, into an educated family. His father, a Tamazight and Hebrew-speaking defense attorney [*oukil judiciaire*], was highly versed in both the French literary tradition and Quranic exegesis, and his mother had a

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*, Collection Tel 225 (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 164; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 140.

¹⁶ Schor, 4. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷ The 1870 Crémieux Decree naturalized all Jews living in the three northern *départements* of French Algeria.

¹⁸ Throughout the chapter, *Nedjma* (italicized) will be used to refer to the book title whereas Nedjma (unitalicized) will be used to refer to the character.

gift for poetry and the theater.¹⁹ Like his father, Kateb completed a double education as a child, first at Quranic school and then in the French system. Despite his mother's love of the poetic and dramatic arts, Kateb's studies in the "gueule du loup"—the "lion's den," as he referred to the French colonial school system—and his love for the French language ultimately created a wedge between him and his mother, who only spoke Arabic.²⁰ When his father was posted to Lafayette (present-day Bougaa), the family relocated and Kateb enrolled in the nearby lycée in Sétif.

It was thus that Kateb found himself caught up in the brutally repressed demonstrations of May 8, 1945 and imprisoned for three months. As Nazi Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945, and France gained back its freedom from the occupying powers, around ten thousand Algerian Muslims in the towns of Sétif and Guélma took to the streets not only to celebrate the victory over fascism, but to demand an end to French colonialism in Algeria. The demonstration devolved into a violent clash with the settler population, the repression by French forces against the burgeoning display of nationalism was swift and brutal, and the death toll remains widely debated, even today. Official French reports claimed the number of dead to be either 1,165;

¹⁹ "Modernité littéraire et politique en Algérie : entretien avec Kateb Yacine et Rachid Boudjedra." *Liber: revue européenne des livres*, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology, Supplément au numéro 101-102 de "Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales" (March 1994): 9. Institut mémoires de l'édition contemporaine. According to B Daoudi and N Abdi's article "Kateb Yacine, Conteur," *Libération*, November 30, 1989, Kateb Yacine Dossier de presse Posthume, Institut mémoires de l'édition contemporaine, Kateb's father learned Hebrew from the Jewish community of Constantine.

²⁰ In "Jardin parmi les flammes," a short piece in the November 1962 issue of *Esprit*, Kateb wrote that his father decided to send him to French school, and thus to throw him "the lion's den." Kateb writes that his father made the decision "le cœur serré" [with a heavy heart], and explained to his son that, "Tu n'iras pas plus loin en langue arabe. Je ne veux pas que, comme moi, tu sois assés entre deux chaises. Non, par ma volonté, tu ne seras pas une victime de Médersa. En temps normal, j'aurais pu être moi-même ton professeur, et ta mère m'aurait aidé. Mais où pourrait conduire une pareille éducation ? La langue française domine. Il te faudra la dominer, et laisser en arrière tout ce que nous t'avons inculqué dans ta plus tendre enfance. Une fois familiarisé avec la langue française, tu pourras sans danger revenir avec nous à ton point de départ" [You will not go any further in Arabic. I don't want you to be caught in the middle like me. No, by my will, you will not be a victim of Medersa [Quranic school]. Under normal circumstances, I could have been your teacher myself, and your mother would have helped me. But where could such an education lead? The French language dominates. You will have to dominate it and leave behind everything we taught you in your early childhood. Once you are familiar with the French language, you can safely return with us to your starting point]. See Yacine Kateb, "Jardin Parmi Les Flammes," *Esprit*, November 1962, 772.

1,340; or 1,500; according to the FLN, 45,000 Algerians were murdered.²¹ Often considered a turning point in the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, May 8, 1945 has become a metonym for the violent repression that would lead to the Algerian War for Independence.

Kateb's time in prison was fundamental to his future path as a politically engaged writer. As he explained in an interview, "C'est à ce moment-là [...] que j'ai accumulé ma première réserve poétique. Je me souviens de certaines illuminations que j'ai eues... Rétrospectivement, ce sont les plus beaux moments de ma vie. J'ai découvert alors les deux choses qui me sont les plus chères : la poésie et la révolution" [It was (...) at this time that I accumulated my first poetic reserve. I remember certain bursts of inspiration that I had... In retrospect, those were the most beautiful moments of my life. I discovered then the two things that are most dear to me: poetry and revolution].²² If his time in prison arguably set Kateb on his future path, it also irrevocably broke his mother's spirits; unaware that her son had survived the massacre, Kateb's mother suffered a mental breakdown from which she never quite recovered and was institutionalized. As for Kateb, he was kicked out of school and, upon his release from prison, sent to Bône (present-day Annaba), where he found out that a cousin of his, with whom he had been deeply in love, had gotten married in his absence. With liberation thus came irrevocable change : "Moi, je suis allé en prison. J'aimais une cousine. À ma sortie de prison, elle était mariée. La mère cinglée, la révolution assassinée, l'amour impossible" [I went to prison. I loved a cousin. When I got out of prison, she was married. Maniacal mother, murdered revolution, impossible love].²³

²¹ See Charles-Robert Ageron, "Mai 1945 en Algérie : Enjeu de mémoire et histoire," *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* N° 108, no. 4 (2012): 68.

²² Quoted in Yvette Romi, "Le Maghrébin errant," *Le Nouvel observateur*, January 18, 1967: 31.

²³ Quoted in A Zehraoui, "Kateb Yacine redouble de réocité (Interview with Kateb Yacine)," *Témoignage chrétien*, no. 1223 (December 14, 1967): 23.

The following year, Kateb began to work towards Algerian independence in earnest, and became an active supporter of the *Parti du peuple algérien* (PPA; Algerian People's Party).²⁴ He also began to write in a more systematic fashion, publishing his first poetry collection, *Soliloques*, in 1946, and serving as a journalist for the communist-leaning newspaper *Alger républicain* from 1948-1951. His play, *Le Cadaver encerclé*, was published in 1954, but performances were banned in France due to the anticolonial nature of the play, which drew from the stories recounted by those who survived the May 8 massacre. Two years later, Kateb published *Nedjma* with the prestigious Parisian publishing house Éditions du Seuil. This would be his first novel and most well-known text, and earn a place as a keystone in the nascent field of French-language North African literature.

As an adult, Kateb lived a rather nomadic life, never staying in one place for long. Between 1947 and 1962, he moved back and forth between Paris and Algeria, working at times for the newspapers, and at others as a dock worker and migrant agricultural laborer.²⁵ In 1950, he became responsible for his two sisters after the death of their father. Following the publication of *Nedjma*, Kateb set off, traveling to Italy, Tunisia, Belgium, Germany, Egypt, and the former Yugoslavia. In 1962, Kateb returned to a newly-liberated Algeria, only to be disenchanted with the independent state. More specifically, he took issue with the Arabization policies of the new nation, which promoted the use of classical Arabic at the expense of colloquial Arabic,

²⁴ In 1937, Messali Hadj, an Algerian politician and fervent nationalist, founded the Parti Populaire Algérien (PPA; Algerian People's Party), which sought to bring about the emancipation of the Algerian people all while recognizing French sovereignty. For more on the PPA, see Jacques Simon, *Le PPA: le Parti du peuple algérien, 1937-1947* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005) and Rabah Aissaoui, "Algerian Nationalists in the French Political Arena and beyond: The Étoile nord-africaine and the Parti du peuple algérien in Interwar France," *The Journal of North African Studies* 15, no. 1 (March 2010): 1–12. For further information on Messali Hadj, the founder of the PPA, see Benjamin Stora, *Messali Hadj, 1898-1974* (Paris: Sycomore, 1982) and Jacques Simon, *Messali Hadj: 1898-1974: la passion de l'Algérie libre* (Paris: Editions Tirésias, 1998).

²⁵ For a thorough study of Kateb's life and work, see Jacqueline Arnaud, *La Littérature maghrébine de langue Française*, vol. 2: Le cas de Kateb Yacine (Paris: Publisud, 1986).

Tamazight dialects and languages, and French.²⁶ A staunch opponent of both Arab nationalism and French colonialism, Kateb became disillusioned with the socio-political trajectory of his new country and left again in the mid to late 1960s, returning to France and visiting the USSR, Germany, and Vietnam. In 1970, he again returned to Algeria, where he was hoping to settle down, and formed a theater troupe, Action Culturelle des Travailleurs (Workers' Cultural Action; ACT). Yet the sharp antigovernment critiques inherent in the troupe's repertoire meant that over time, it lost both government favor and financial support, and as a result, it disbanded by the early 1980s.

In Kateb's later years, he settled in Vercheny, France, but continued to travel back and forth to Algeria. In 1987, two years before his death, he was awarded the Grand prix national des lettres for his contributions to French-language literature, and in 2003, the Comédie française honored his life and work as part of "Djazaïr 2003, une année de l'Algérie en France" [Djazaïr, a year of Algeria in France], a joint Franco-Algerian celebration of Algerian cultural heritage.²⁷ Kateb's works have been translated into numerous different languages including Arabic, yet he remains relatively little-known in his homeland of Algeria.

Although Kateb's first published work, the poetry collection *Solliloques* came out in 1946, it was arguably his first novel, *Nedjma*, that put him on the literary map. Kateb had begun

²⁶ For more on Kateb's politics, see Arnaud, *La Littérature maghrébine de langue*; Yacine Kateb, *Le Poète comme un boxeur: entretiens, 1958-1989*, ed. Gilles Carpentier (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1994); and *Kateb Yacine, Poète en trois langues*, Documentary film (France, 2010), Director Stéphane Gotti.

²⁷ It is often said that Kateb was admitted to the Comédie française in 2003. However, as Kaoutar Harchi explains in her sociological study *Je n'ai qu'une langue, ce n'est pas la mienne: des écrivains à l'épreuve* (Pauvart/Fayard, 2016), the performances that the Comédie française put on in honor of Kateb's life and work did not meet the criteria for his official acceptance into the Comédie française; as such, he does not figure amongst the list of foreign playwrights having been integrated into the prestigious repertoire. See Harchi, "Kateb Yacine : un écrivain demeuré hors repertoire" in *Je n'ai qu'une langue, ce n'est pas la mienne*, especially pages 141-144. "Djezaïr" is Algerian Arabic for "Algeria."

working on the novel in the late 1940s but reworked it for several years after being told that it was too long and complex to publish. As one editor to whom he had submitted the manuscript said to him, “C’est trop compliqué, ça. En Algérie, vous avez de si jolis moutons, pourquoi vous ne parlez pas des moutons ?” [It’s too complicated. In Algeria, you have such beautiful sheep, why don’t you talk about the sheep?]”²⁸ Broadly speaking, the published version of the novel centers around four Algerian men: Mustapha, Lakhdar, Mourad, and Rachid. As the novel progresses, readers are offered glimpses into various moments in their lives, witnessing their mistreatment at the hands of settler-colonizers and the French state, episodes from their childhoods, and their interactions with and thoughts about the object of their collective affection: the elusive, eponymous Nedjma, daughter of a French Jewish woman and an unknown Algerian Muslim father. Divided into six sections, with each section composed of either six or twelve chapters, the highly innovative and structurally complicated novel jumps back and forth in time, switches point of view, and ends with the same scene that opened it.

Reading for Nedjma’s Minor Jewish Characters

While the novel centers around the lives of its four male (Muslim) protagonists, a keen eye reveals that, interspersed throughout this complex novelistic structure, are several passing references to Algerian Jews and Jewishness. By “passing references,” I am referring to both the novel’s offhand mentions of “Jews” as a monolithic group, as well as its references to individual Jews who appear only once, are most often unnamed, and who never speak. These characters, who frequently inhabit the background of Rachid, Mourad, Lakhdar, and Mustapha’s lived experience, may seem trivial at first glance. Yet when taken all together, these minor Jewish

²⁸ Quoted in Nadia Tazi, “Kateb Yacine [Interview],” *Études et documents berbères* 1, no. 1 (1986): 15.

characters, the comments about them, and the interactions with them, come together to tell “another story” than perhaps the one we thought we were reading. More specifically, these subtle mentions weave a narrative of solidarity between local Algerian Jews and Muslims in the face of an oppressive, racist, and antisemitic French colonial power.

The first time Jews are mentioned in the novel occurs quite early on, when Monsieur Ricard, a Frenchman who oversees the construction site on which the four main characters are working, becomes incensed after a barmaid asks him when he will get married:

Cette salope croit que je suis pas capable de trouver une femme. Légende que font courir les Juifs et les Arabes. Ils savent bien que je me suis marié quand ils n'étaient pas nés, et par correspondance encore, chose qu'ils ne peuvent même pas imaginer...²⁹

[That bitch thinks I can't find a wife. The Jews and Arabs started that story. They know I got married before they were born, and by correspondence too, it's something they can't even conceive of...]³⁰

Readers are privy to Monsieur Ricard's inner monologue in this moment, and as such they witness his reaction to the barmaid's question, which is significant in the way that it portrays the relationship between Jews and “Arabs” (Algerian Muslims). When Monsieur Ricard is caught off guard by the barmaid, he immediately goes on the defensive, disparaging the barmaid and blaming the “Jews and Arabs” for spreading rumors about him. In this way, Monsieur Ricard's wording creates a binary opposition between himself, the representative of the French colonial power, and the native inhabitants of Algeria, both those who are French subjects (the “Arabs”) and those who are French citizens (the Jews). Furthermore, Monsieur Ricard's subsequent use of the third person plural pronoun “ils” [they] serves to eliminate the differences between the two

²⁹ Yacine Kateb, *Nedjma* (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1996), 12. All *Nedjma* quotations in French are taken from this edition.

³⁰ Yacine Kateb, *Nedjma*, trans. Richard Howard (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 19. All *Nedjma* quotations in English are taken directly or adapted from this edition. To avoid potential confusion, all references to this translation will be labeled “*Nedjma* (Howard translation).”

religious groups, conflating them into a singular mass of alterity. “They” know that he was married by correspondence before “they” were even born, something that “they” cannot even fathom. In this short passage, then, Jews and Muslims are denied not only individuality, but also their religious specificity, suggesting that in the eyes of the French *colons*, the native Algerian Jews are just as “other” as the native Algerian Muslims, despite their status as French citizens since 1870.

Moreover, it bears mentioning that Monsieur Ricard’s name is in itself rather significant. “Ricard” is the name of a famous brand of pastis developed in Marseille in 1932 by 23-year-old Paul Ricard, a wine merchant’s son who invented this popular aperitif.³¹ “Ricard” thus immediately recalls this anise-based liquor, much the same way a character named “Jack Daniels” would likely conjure up images of whiskey in the mind of the reader. Significantly, pastis is a close cousin to anisette, another anise-flavored liquor that was extremely popular among Algeria’s *pied-noir* population.³² I suggest, therefore, that the name “Monsieur Ricard” allows us to read this character as symbolic of the *pied-noir* population, and as such, that his attitude towards the local populations may be read as a commentary on the broader settler-colonizer population.

The second and final episode in which Jews are mentioned *en masse* also betrays significant hostility on the part of the French *colons*. This moment occurs much later in the novel, in the aftermath of the May 8, 1945, massacres in Sétif and Guélma. In this portion of the novel, written in the form of a journal entry, readers follow along with Mustapha as he

³¹ See Jean Domenichino, “Notice biographique de Paul Ricard,” *Méditerranée*, no. 106 (January 1, 2006): 33–38.

³² See Agence France-Presse, “D’Alicante à Marseille via Alger : l’histoire d’un des derniers pastis ‘Made in Marseille,’” *France24*, September 15, 2017, <https://www.france24.com/fr/20170915-dalicante-a-marseille-alger-lhistoire-dun-derniers-pastis-made-in-marseille>.

eavesdrops on a conversation between a *pied-noir* classmate, “R,” and another *pied-noir* classmate’s parents, “F” and “Mrs. F,” as they contemplate the dead bodies of several Algerians killed in the massacres:

F: La France est pourrie. Qu’on nous arme, et qu’on nous laisse faire. Pas besoin de loi ici. Ils ne connaissent que la force. Il leur faut un Hitler.

Mme. F., caressant R.: Et dire qu’ils vont à l’école avec toi, mon petit! Bien sûr, maintenant ils savent tout...

R: Oh! ça va changer! Avant on avait peur. Ils sont nombreux dans ma classe ; on n’est que cinq Français, sans compter les Italiens et les Juifs.

Mme F.: Attention, mon petit, ils sont sauvages!³³

[F: France is rotten. They should give us arms and leave us alone. No need for laws here. They don’t recognize anything but force. What they need is a Hitler.

Mme. F (caressing R): And they even go to school with you, my child! Of course now they know everything...

R: Oh, it’ll be different. Before, we were afraid. There were a lot of them in my class; only five French boys, not counting Italians and Jews.

Mme. F: You be careful, my child, they’re savages!³⁴]

There are two things of note happening in this short exchange, the first of which is F’s comment, “Il leur faut un Hitler.” In stating “What they need is a Hitler” while looking at the corpses of murdered Algerians, F articulates an utter hostility towards both Jews and Muslims. His comment suggests that, just as Hitler’s Nazi party worked toward a “Final Solution to the Jewish Question” in Europe, what is needed to restore order in French Algeria is a “Final Solution to the Muslim Question.” His reference to Hitler as a potential model for how to handle perceived social ills evinces an utter disregard for the lives of those Jews who perished due to Nazi persecution and violence, as well as his disdain for the lives of Algerian Muslims, upon whom he wishes the same fate. For F, both Muslims and Jews are problems to be dealt with, violently if necessary. What is more, R’s response to F’s violent commentary suggests that the settler-

³³ Kateb, *Nedjma* 220.

³⁴ Kateb, *Nedjma* (Howard translation) 308.

colonizer population does not necessarily accept naturalized Algerian Jews as “true” French citizens. By clarifying that in his class, “on n’est que cinq Français, sans compter les Italiens et les Juifs,” R implies that Algerian Jews are not “really” French; they may well have citizenship, but they remain second-class citizens in the eyes of those who are said to be their compatriots.

There are thus three minor French settler-colonizer characters in *Nedjma* whose thoughts and/or comments betray a clear hostility on the part of the *pied-noir* population towards Algerian Jews who, in theory, are their civic equals. In the minds of these French *colons*, Jews are either coconspirators plotting with local Muslims to make life difficult for the settlers, a social ill to be eradicated, or a sort of “neither-nor” category, existing somewhere between the civilized French and the “savage” Muslims. What Jews are not, therefore, are a socially integrated group of local North African individuals that have been fully assimilated into and accepted by French culture. They are a group to be discussed in abstract, a mass of alterity denied any sort of individuality that is to be talked about, but not interacted with.

This vision of interethnic French relations differs drastically from how the novel represents the interactions between Algerian Muslims and Jews. To wit, whereas the relationship between the *colons* and the Jewish population is colored by antisemitism and racism, the relationship between the Muslims and Jews is one of a limited, but nonetheless persistent, solidarity. The first glimpse we have of this occurs when Ameziane, a local Algerian, tells the story of how as a child, a Jewish bar owner once assisted him and his friends after they unwittingly consumed hashish. While working in the neighborhood hammam, a friend of Ameziane’s, a water carrier from the Sahara, shared some marijuana-laced jam with Ameziane and another friend Larbi.³⁵ After consuming it, the boys enjoy a raucous night out, which ends at

³⁵ It is likely that Ameziane is referring to “meidjouna,” or “cannabis jam.” Made from fatty cannabis extracts mixed with dates or preserves, meidjouna was an edible cannabis product common in colonial Algeria and was said to

a “bar juif” [Jewish bar], where they drink copious quantities of alcohol.³⁶ At the end of their escapade, the Jewish bar owner helps them back to the hammam: “A la fin on était morts. Le juif est allé chercher un taxi, et il a payé pour qu’on nous ramène jusqu’au bain. On a chanté dans le taxi” [Afterwards, we were dead. The Jew went to get a taxi and paid the driver to take us back to the baths. We sang in the taxi].³⁷ There are two significant items of note in this short passage, the first of which is the fact that the boys’ drunken escapade occurs at an establishment run by a French citizen of North African Jewish origin. In having the Jewish bar owner welcome and take care of an inebriated Ameziane and Larbi, the novel suggests that Algerian Jewish and Muslim lived experiences were intertwined on a social level. The Jewish bar is thus situated as part and parcel of the cultural milieu of the colonized, and not of the colonizer.³⁸ In addition, the actions of the Jewish bar owner suggest a certain level of caring between Algerian Jews and Muslims. At the end of the night, the bar owner finds the boys a taxi, and even pays for it to get them back to where they were beforehand. He could have kicked them out into the street, but instead he shows a certain level of concern for their wellbeing and goes out of his way to help them by paying their trip from his own pocket.

In addition, the novel also suggests that there is a sort of integration of Algerian Jews into the socio-economic landscape of colonial Muslim Algeria that is so mundane as to pass by unnoticed. In other words, the novel’s incorporation of minor details about Jews, often as part of

provide a faster and more rapid high than smoking marijuana. See Louis Livet, “Les Fumeurs de kif,” *Bulletin de la société clinique de médecine mentale* 9 (1921): 40–45.

³⁶ Kateb, *Nedjma* 20; Kateb, *Nedjma* (Howard translation) 30.

³⁷ Kateb, *Nedjma* 20; Kateb, *Nedjma* (Howard translation) 30.

³⁸ It bears mentioning that, whereas Ameziane and Larbi drink at the Jewish bar, the *colons* do not. Indeed, M. Ricard and M. Ernest both drink at the Modern Bar, a “bar prestigieux” [fashionable bar] on the outskirts of Bône (currently Annaba) (12; 19).

larger anecdotes, bears testament to the quotidian, unremarkable nature of Jewish-Muslim interactions in colonial Algeria. For example, when Rachid is talking about the havoc that Ferhat, a childhood friend, and his brother Aïssa used to raise during their youth, he mentions, “Les deux frères ont effrayé tout le quartier. Ils ont vendu l’anisette que leur père cachait en prévision des fêtes juives, et ils se sont battus pour l’argent. A la fin, le père a renoncé à son commerce, et il a regagné son pays natal où sa belle-mère n’a pas tardé à le rejoindre...” [The two brothers terrorized the whole neighborhood. They sold the anisette their father hid for the Jewish holidays, and they fought over the money. Finally, the father gave up his business and (returned to his native country) where his mother-in-law soon joined him...].³⁹ Of interest here is not necessarily the fact that the boys terrorize their neighborhood, but rather how they do so: by surreptitiously selling the anise-flavored liquor that their father had stashed away in preparation for the Jewish High Holy Days. In doing so, they disrupt their father’s economic activities to the point that he must give up his business and leave Algeria. In such a way, the novel suggests that the sale of anisette during this time of the year, ostensibly to Jewish customers, was a significant aspect of Ferhat and Aïssa’s father’s income, one that was integral to his ability to make a living for himself and his family.

Rachid’s lived experience also illustrates a certain sort of socio-economic symbiosis between Algerian Jews and Muslims. In a passage detailing Rachid’s childhood, readers learn that as a youth, Rachid made ends meet in part by selling stork eggs to a local Jewish witch: “[J]adis l’un des moyens d’existence de Rachid avait été de vendre à une sorcière juive les œufs de cigogne pris à la cime du peuplier qui paraissait, vu du balcon, s’élancer loin des cèdres

³⁹ Kateb, *Nedjma* 155; Kateb, *Nedjma* (Howard translation) 218. In order to remain as faithful as possible to the original French, I have slightly altered the official published translation, which states “Finally the father gave up his business and went back somewhere where his mother-in-law soon joined him...”

plantés en forme de légion d'honneur par la première municipalité de la ville assiégée...”

[(L)ong ago one of Rachid's means of existence had been selling storks' eggs to a Jewish witch, the eggs stolen from the top of a poplar that seemed, seen from the balcony, to rise far above the cedars planted in a star by the besieged city's first (local council)...].⁴⁰ Just as Ferhat and Aïssa's father made a living selling anisette to local Jews as they celebrated their religious holidays, here Rachid makes ends meet by selling stork eggs to a Jewish “witch.” In both instances, commercial exchange between Jews and Muslims is represented as vital to Muslim economic wellbeing. Furthermore, it is of note here *where* Rachid finds these stork eggs: they are found in a poplar tree that soars over the cedars planted by the first imperial government of Constantine. The “tree of the people” thus looms over the imperially inspired, colonially-installed arboretum of “exalted” and “prestigious” trees, imposed upon the city by its first colonial government.⁴¹

In addition to suggesting a sort of Jewish-Muslim socio-economic solidarity, *Nedjma* also suggests that Algerian Jews and Muslims are both victims of French imperial rule. Towards the end of the novel, readers are presented with a passage from Mustapha's childhood notebook in which he describes his school days. At one point in the passage, Mustapha writes, “Un excellent

⁴⁰ Kateb, *Nedjma* 171; Kateb, *Nedjma* (Howard translation) 242. Again, I have edited the published translation, which is as follows: “once one of Rachid's means of existence had been selling storks' eggs to a Jewish witch, the eggs stolen from the top of a poplar that seemed, seen from the balcony, to rise far above the cedars planted in a star by the besieged city's first municipality.”

⁴¹ According to François Couplan, *Les plantes et leurs noms: histoires insolites*, Guide pratique (Versailles: Éd. Quae, 2012), the name poplar [peuplier], “provient du latin *populus*, peuple, peut-être parce que ces arbres étaient fréquemment plantés par les Romains dans les lieux publics ou qu'ils poussent souvent en groupes denses, comme une foule humaine” [comes from the Latin *populus*, people, perhaps because these trees were frequently planted by the Romans in public places or because they often grow in dense groups, like a human crowd] (97). The *Encyclopédie berbère* states that, “Alors qu'en Europe et au Liban le cèdre jouit d'un prestige considérable (Clemenceau l'avait fait déclarer « arbre sacré » et Lamartine l'avait exalté), il ne semble pas qu'au Maghreb, en pays berbère, il soit aujourd'hui l'objet d'une protection et de croyances spécifiques” [While in Europe and Lebanon the cedar enjoys considerable prestige (Clemenceau had it declared a “sacred tree” and Lamartine praised it), it does not seem that in the Maghreb of today, in Berber country, it is the object of protection and specific beliefs]. See M. Gast, “cèdres: ingel, idgel, ijdel, idil ; inizel (K), ittiyel (Maroc), ārz (Ar.),” *Encyclopédie berbère*, no. 12 (February 1, 1993): 1834–36.

élève, voilà ce que je suis, je dépasse tous les Français de ma classe, et je réponds à l'inspecteur ; l'institutrice m'a donné un portrait du maréchal Pétain ; je l'ai vendu pour un taille-crayon, à Monique ; aujourd'hui j'ai été désigné pour le lever des couleurs, et Roland a pris ses affaires parce que c'est un juif" [I'm an excellent student, I do better than all the French boys in my class, and I talk back to the inspector; the teacher gave me a portrait of Marshal Pétain; I sold it to Monique for a pencil sharpener; today I was chosen to raise the colors, and Roland [packed up his belongings] because he's a Jew].⁴² Several things of note are happening in this one sentence, which opposes the mundane minutiae of primary school life with the broader political situation affecting both metropolitan and colonial France. First, the reference to Marshal Pétain clearly situates this episode during the Vichy era (1940-1944), when France's humiliating defeat by the Nazis motivated the government to collaborate with their former enemy under the auspices of Philippe Pétain, a decorated war hero from the Great War. In an effort to manage Pétain's image as savior of France, the Ministry of Education sent portraits of him to North Africa to be distributed to students.⁴³ Mustapha's journal entry articulates the utter disconnect between the government's actions and the actual cares of the colonized people. Instead of a prize to treasure, the portrait of Pétain becomes fodder to barter with classmates for necessary supplies—in this case, a pencil sharpener. While the portrait is of no interest to Mustapha, it is clearly worth something to Monique, the child of the aforementioned F and Mrs. F. In juxtaposing Monique and Mustapha's attitudes towards the portrait, the novel subtly critiques the attempted imposition of French loyalty on the colonized populations.

⁴² Kateb, *Nedjma* 199; Kateb, *Nedjma* (Howard translation) 280. Note that Howard's published translation states: "today I was chosen to raise the colors, and Roland got up and left because he's a Jew."

⁴³ In a somewhat cruel twist, portraits of Pétain were also displayed in the schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. See "Pétain's Portrait" in Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, eds., *Wartime North Africa: A Documentary History, 1934-1950* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2022).

The mention of the Jewish Roland takes this critique to another level, as it alludes to the nefarious effect of Vichy policies on Jews living in Algeria. Under Marshal Pétain’s puppet government, France persecuted thousands of Jews living in both the metropole and the colonies; since Algeria was technically “France,” the anti-Jewish statutes that affected the Jews in the mainland were applied there as well.⁴⁴ In addition to laws restricting Jews from “working in any public capacity,” Vichy first instituted a 14% cap on the percentage of Jewish students permitted in public schools, before forbidding them to attend altogether.⁴⁵ When read in light of this history, we can arguably see in the young Mustapha’s comments about his classmate Roland a subtle rebuke to the effects of Vichy anti-Semitic policies on Algerian Jews.⁴⁶

When read in light of Kateb’s 1963 comic-sketch “Le luth et la valise,” it becomes clear that this critical reading of Vichy French politics in Algeria is indeed appropriate. In this short sketch, which draws from the same original manuscript as the novel *Nedjma*, spectators watch as a different iteration of Nedjma talks with her son, Ali, about his experience in the French school system. In response to his mother’s question about his day at school, “Qu’avez-vous fait aujourd’hui ?” [What did you today?], Ali replies that “Tous les juifs sont partis” [All the Jews left] (218-219).⁴⁷ Nedjma’s confusion—“Les juifs?” [The Jews?] she asks her son, as if to check

⁴⁴ For more on Vichy politics in colonial Algeria, see Henri Msellati, *Les Juifs d’Algérie sous le régime de Vichy : 10 juillet 1940-3 novembre* (Paris: Harmattan, 1999); Dan Mikhman and Haim Saadoun, eds., *Les Juifs d’Afrique du nord face à l’Allemagne nazie* (Paris: Perrin, 2018); Jacques Cantier, *L’Algérie sous le régime de Vichy* (Paris: Jacob, 2002); Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, eds., *The Holocaust and North Africa* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019); and Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, eds., *Wartime North Africa: A Documentary History, 1934-1950* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2022).

⁴⁵ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. “Anti-Jewish Legislation in North Africa.” Holocaust Encyclopedia. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/anti-jewish-legislation-in-north-africa>

⁴⁶ While grammatically accurate, Howard’s translation—“Roland got up and left because he’s a Jew”—risks implying that Roland left in protest, and imbues the young boy with an agency that, given the historical context, was highly unlikely.

⁴⁷ Yacine Kateb, “Le luth et la valise,” *Esprit*, n° 314 (2) (1963): 218-219.

she heard him properly—prompts the chorus to interrupt the scene from offstage to explain the nefarious effects of Vichy law on the local populations:

Chœur (*invisible*) : En effet, le maréchal Pétain
Applique les lois antisémites
Et les juifs d'Algérie sont discrètement priés
D'abandonner les lieux publics.
Et ces mesures visent aussi
Les éternels indésirables
Les indigènes, comme on dit.
Et comme d'une pierre on fait deux coups,
L'instituteur a décidé
À dater d'aujourd'hui
D'exclure à tour de bras
Tous ceux qui ne sont pas de la race des maîtres.
Tout prétexte lui est bon,
A commencer par les pieds nus,
Les oreilles sales, les habits déchirés,
Bref, tous les signes particuliers
Qui permettront sans coup férir
D'épurer l'Algérie française
Et de chasser la populace
Qu'on se targuait d'instruire et de civiliser.

Nedjma: Mais pourquoi tous les juifs?

Ali: Pas seulement les juifs.

C'est une loi nouvelle. Pour un bouton décousu
On doit rester huit jours
Sans aller à l'école.⁴⁸

[Chorus (*invisible*): Indeed, Marshal Pétain
Applies anti-Semitic laws
And the Jews of Algeria are discreetly asked
To abandon public places.
And these measures also target
The eternal undesirables
The natives, as they say.
And like killing two birds with one stone,
The teacher has decided
As of today
To exclude in turn
All those who are not of the master race.
Any pretext is good enough for him,
Starting with bare feet,
Dirty ears, torn clothes,

⁴⁸ Kateb, "Le luth et la valise" 219.

In short, all the distinguishing features
That will authorize without a fight
The purification of French Algeria
And chase away the rabble
That they boasted of educating and civilizing.
Nedjma: But why all the Jews?
Ali: Not only the Jews.
It's a new law. For a missing button
You must spend eight days
Without going to school.]

Whereas the full implications of Roland's actions in *Nedjma* may be missed by a more casual reader—indeed, even the English translator seems not to have completely understood the situation—the chorus in *Le luth et la valise* leaves no room for such doubts: Jewish students were forced out of school because of Pétain's antisemitic laws. Moreover, the chorus represents Algerian Muslims as suffering a similar fate, suggesting that Vichy measures are just another iteration of the racist, discriminatory laws that have always targeted the *indigènes*, or “eternal undesirables.” Ali's professor who opts to kill two birds with one stone in ridding his classroom of all those who “are not of the master race,” thus stands in for Vichy France's racist and antisemitic desire to “purify” itself of those populations deemed inferior: Jews and local Muslims.

Returning to *Nedjma*, close reading also demonstrates how the novel situates Algerian Jews alongside their Muslim counterparts in the fight for liberation from colonial rule. Mustapha's journal recounts how he and a group of other young men used to go spend time at Si Khelifa's barber shop, where they would talk about politics and listen as Lakhdar sang satirical songs. Describing the group and its members, Mustapha writes, “Tous parlaient couramment l'arabe et le français, bien que notre groupe comprît un Juif, qui fut assassiné le 9 mai par un trafiquant mêlé à la foule, et un Italien qui venait de quitter l'école pour le chantier paternel” [Everyone spoke Arabic and French fluently, although our group included one Jew who was

assassinated on May 9 by a (dealer mixed in with the crowd), and one Italian who had just left school for his father's construction yards].⁴⁹ The fact that there is a Jewish member of the anticolonial group is significant in and of itself in that it places Jews alongside Muslims in the bloody fight for Algerian liberation.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the fact that the Jewish member of the group speaks fluent Arabic alongside French suggests a certain integration into the socio-cultural landscape of colonized Algeria. Hegemonic narratives of Algerian Jewish history often describe a complete assimilation of the Algerian Jews to the French language and culture, an assimilation in which Algerian Jews shed their "native" ways and language—Arabic or Judeo-Arabic—and took on the trapping of Frenchness.⁵¹ The presence of an Arabic-speaking Jew within this pro-independence group thus provides a subtle counter to this narrative of Algerian Jewish assimilation and support for the French colonial endeavor.

It is interesting to note as well that Mustapha's journal provides an explanation as to how the Italian learned Arabic but does not provide the same information for the Jew. As Mustapha tells us, "Élevé parmi les manœuvres de son père (entrepreneur de travaux publics), Luigi parlait l'arabe mieux que moi, et aussi bien que le coiffeur [Si Khelifa]" [Brought up among his father's workmen (his father was a public works contractor), Luigi spoke Arabic better than I did and as

⁴⁹ Kateb, *Nedjma* 221; Kateb, *Nedjma* (Howard translation) 310. Again, my translation differs substantially from Howard's, which states "one Jew who was assassinated on May 9 by a merchant."

⁵⁰ While the Jewish member of Mustapha's group was not killed by the French powers, the context of his death place him squarely in the crossfires of the French repression of burgeoning Algerian nationalism that occurred on and in the days after May 8, 1945. Situating the death of this Jewish character within this context of violence suggests that while the French may not have been the ones to pull the trigger, their actions provided the context in which it could take place.

⁵¹ While the grand narrative of the Crémieux Decree considers Algerian Jews' assimilation of the French language and culture as proof of their "conversion" to Frenchness, many Algerian Jewish thinkers and intellectuals have taken a critical eye to this narrative of "progress" towards "civilization." See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre, ou, la prothèse d'origine*, Incises (Paris: Galilée, 1996) and Benjamin Stora, *Les trois exils: Juifs d'Algérie* (Paris: Pluriel, 2011).

well as the barber].⁵² In clarifying how Luigi came to speak flawless Arabic, but in neglecting to do the same for his Jewish counterpart, Mustapha implicitly suggests that, while an explanation is needed as to how an Italian spoke fluent Arabic, a Jew speaking fluent Arabic could be taken for granted as such a common occurrence that it didn't require the same treatment.

Mustapha and Lakhdar's participation in the May 8, 1945 Sétif demonstration and its ensuing plunge into violence, serves as the context for yet another mention of Jews in the landscape of the colonized. As the protest turns bloody, the two boys are separated, and Mustapha soon finds himself in a dicey situation as he tries to escape the forces of order coming after him: "Il ne reste plus que trois étudiants autour de Mustapha ; une vieille juive lance sur l'un d'eux son pot de fleurs, plutôt pour l'éloigner de sa fenêtre que pour l'atteindre..." [There are only three students left around Mustapha; an old [Jewish lady] throws her flowerpot at one of them, more to (get him to move away from her window than to hit him)...].⁵³ What does her religion matter, one might ask. Why should we think twice about this minor reference to a Jewish woman who throws a flowerpot at some boys? I would like to suggest that the fact that we are told that the old woman is Jewish is significant as it situates Jews within the bloody narrative of May 8, 1945. This particular woman may not have taken part of the demonstration or the subsequent repression, but she was a witness to it, and it posed a tangible threat to her safety and security. In addition, whereas we might first be tempted to see some sort of hostility in the actions of the old woman—after all, instead of helping the boy, she throws a flowerpot at the group as they try and escape settler violence—we are immediately informed that she did this not

⁵² Kateb, *Nedjma* 221; Kateb, *Nedjma* (Howard translation) 310.

⁵³ Kateb, *Nedjma* 218; Kateb, *Nedjma* (Howard translation) 305. Here, my translation differs significantly from Howard's, which states that the old Jewish woman threw the flowerpot more to "get it off her windowsill than to hit anyone."

out of ill will or desire to inflict injury upon anyone, but rather to get the boys to move away from her window. Her move is thus one of self-protection, not of malice, one that shows the potential limits of Jewish-Muslim solidarity woven throughout the novel.

Reading Nedjma as Jewish

This chapter has so far focused on how the incorporation of minor Jewish characters into Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* inscribes Jews into the Algerian socio-cultural world of the colonized in late colonial French Algeria. I would like to turn now to what is arguably the most noteworthy mention of Jewishness in the entire novel: that of Nedjma's mother. As with the aforementioned instances, the religion of Nedjma's mother belongs to the realm of the detail; indeed, although her Frenchness is remarked upon with relative frequency, her Jewishness is only mentioned one time over the course of the entire novel.

That Nedjma's mother is Jewish is significant for our understanding of the novel as a whole, as it has ramifications for Nedjma herself and what she might represent. In the Jewish tradition, religion passes matrilineally. Consequently, the fact that Nedjma's mother is Jewish means that according to religious rite, Nedjma is Jewish as well. What might it mean to have the woman at the center of the novel, the linchpin around which the narrative turns and a symbol of the nation in the making, be a woman who is at once Muslim and Jewish, Algerian and French? I argue that Nedjma's embodiment of multiple religions, ethnicities, nations, and cultural backgrounds represents an inclusive vision of a multifaceted Algerian nation.

Readers learn of Nedjma's Jewish heritage during the portion of the novel that relays Rachid's malaria-induced fever dream. Describing the preparations for Kamel and Nedjma's wedding, Rachid states, "Il est vrai que Nedjma est la fille d'une Française, et plus précisément

d'une juive, d'après ce que me révélait la mère de Kamel, Lella N'fissa, par dépit de belle-mère sans doute, avant le mariage..." [It's true that Nedjma's mother was a Frenchwoman, and more precisely, a (Jew), according to what Lella N'fissa, Kamel's mother told me, out of mother-in-law's spite, probably, before the wedding...].⁵⁴ As with the previous moments in the text that deal with Jews, this moment is deceptively simple, and there is much going on that is worth unpacking. To begin, although this is not the first time readers are told that Nedjma's mother was French, it is the first time we are told that she was Jewish.⁵⁵ As such, both Judaism and Islam may claim Nedjma as one of their own: whereas mainstream Judaism considers religion to be passed down matrilineally, Islam is most often patrilineal.⁵⁶ According to religious rite, then, Nedjma is arguably as Jewish as she is Muslim—something that her adopted family knew and accepted.

Crucially, it is not just her adopted family who knows Nedjma's religious background; Rachid's dream reveals not only that Nedjma has Jewish heritage, but that her future mother-in-law "connaissait toute l'histoire de la petite fille adoptée par le défunt mari de Lella Fatma" [knew the whole story of the little girl adopted by Lella Fatma's late husband] yet nonetheless facilitated the marriage between Nedjma and her son.⁵⁷ Religiously speaking, this interfaith

⁵⁴ Kateb, *Nedjma* 97; Kateb, *Nedjma* (Howard translation) 136.

⁵⁵ Although many Algerian Jews held French citizenship due to the Crémieux Decree's naturalization of all colonized Algerian Jews in 1870, the novel explicitly states that Nedjma's mother was a "Marseillaise," originally from Marseille. Her mother is thus of European, not North African descent.

⁵⁶ With the exception of the Karaite branch of Judaism, Jewish law considers the offspring of a non-Jewish father and a Jewish mother to be Jewish. See Shaye J. D. Cohen, "The Origins of the Matrilineal Principle in Rabbinic Law," *AJS Review* 10, no. 1 (1985): 19–53, for more on matrilineal descent in Judaism. According to Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, "Gender is a central element in the transmission of membership, since the possibility of reproduction between Arab women and non-Arab men was inadmissible, seen from the logic of the system of patrilineal descent." See Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, "Are There 'Mestizos' in the Arab World? A Comparative Survey of Classification Categories and Kinship Systems," *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 1 (January 2012): 129.

⁵⁷ Kateb, *Nedjma* 97; Kateb, *Nedjma* (Howard translation) 137.

marriage should not pose a problem for Nedjma's future in-laws, as Islam permits the marriage of Muslim and non-Muslim "women of the book."⁵⁸ Despite the absence of any religious prohibition, however, the reader cannot help but ask herself: if the fact that Nedjma's mother was Jewish were really of no consequence, why would Lella N'fissa mention it "out of mother-in-law's spite" in a moment of anger? Clearly, Nedjma's religious roots are no secret, pose no threat to her marriageability, and do not prevent her from being taken in and becoming part of a Muslim family. At the same time, it is evident that Nedjma's religious heritage marks her in some indelible way. Given Nedjma's role as titular character, what might all this tell us about the novel's vision of Algeria?

Were Nedjma a simple character in any old run of the mill novel, her religious origins might remain unworthy of concern. Yet *Nedjma* is not your average low-brow best seller; it is a critical postcolonial text, one of the first novels written by a colonized Algerian author with an overtly anticolonial message. It is also highly autobiographical, drawing much on Kateb's own life, and containing characters who serve as avatars for real people.⁵⁹ Kateb himself purportedly called it an "autobiographie au pluriel" [plural autobiography] as it contains the story of Algeria through the lens of his own personal experience.⁶⁰ Nedjma is thus not a mere figment of Kateb's

⁵⁸ As Mateo Dieste notes, "Muslim patrilineality allows the marriage of a Muslim man to a non-Muslim woman, but explicitly prohibits that of a Muslim woman with a non-Muslim man. And for its part, the matrilineal Hebrew model conceives the prohibitions in the opposite way" (133).

⁵⁹ A crucial element of this story is Kateb's real-life love story with his cousin, whose name he chose for the eponymous character at the center of the novel. As Kateb affirmed in a 1967 interview, cousin Nedjma "a du sang juif dans les veines, vivant dans un milieu francisé, tout en restant profondément algérienne" [has Jewish blood in her veins, living in a French environment, while remaining deeply Algerian] (Zehraoui). Nedjma (the character), was thus inspired by Nedjma (the cousin) who herself "had Jewish blood." In other words, Jewish heritage was part and parcel of the real woman who inspired the character that is said to represent the nation of Algeria. Furthermore, Kateb fathered a child, Nadia Akkache, with a Berber Jewish woman whose family had been naturalized French by the Crémieux Decree. See Akkache's intervention on "Point de rencontres: émission du 6 février 1990," *Rencontres* (Paris: France 3, February 6, 1990), VDC16001747, Institut national de l'audiovisuel.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Jean Déjeux, *Littérature maghrébine de langue française : introduction générale et auteurs* (Sherbrooke: Naaman, 1973), 216.

imagination, but rather a stand-in for his beloved cousin and, arguably, a symbol of the Algerian nation.⁶¹

Kateb's understanding of Nedjma as a symbolic character was a constant throughout his career. In an August 14, 1956 interview on the French television show, *Lecture pour tous*, Kateb declared, "Nedjma, c'est l'héroïne du roman [...] C'est d'ailleurs le personnage symbolique de la femme orientale [...] c'est aussi une forme qui se profile, qui est à la fois la femme, le pays, l'ombre où se débattent les personnages [...] principaux du roman, qui sont quatre jeunes Algériens dont je raconte les aventures et mésaventures" [Nedjma is the heroine of the novel [...] She is also the symbolic figure of the oriental woman [...] she is also a form that emerges, which is at once the woman, the country, [and] the shadow in which the main characters [...] of the novel, the four young Algerians whose adventures and misadventures I narrate, struggle].⁶² This throughline lasted throughout Kateb's life; the year before he died, Kateb again confirmed his metaphorical understanding of the titular character in an interview with Algerian daily *Horizons*. Responding to interviewer Latifa Kharrat's question, "Nedjma est-elle la femme ou la patrie?" [Is Nedjma woman or homeland?], Kateb responded, "C'est d'abord une femme mais pas seulement une femme; c'est avant tout la mère, par extension la mère patrie. [...] Dans le cas de Nedjma, la femme représente une image du pays qui est encore à l'état de rêve" [She is first a woman, but not only a woman; she is above all the mother, and by extension the motherland.

⁶¹ As Kateb affirmed in January 1968, "Qui est Nedjma l'héroïne de mes romans ? Ma cousine!" [Who is Nedjma, the heroine of my novels? My cousin!] See "Une interview de Kateb Yacine à *Témoignage chrétien*," *Témoignage chrétien*, no. 1223 (December 14, 1967). Fonds Kateb Yacine, KTB2 14.17, Institut mémoires de l'édition contemporaine.

⁶² "Entretien avec Kateb YACINE." *Des idées et des hommes*. Paris: Radiodiffusion Télévision Française, June 23, 1956. PHD88003866. Institut national de l'audiovisuel. http://inatheque.ina.fr/doc/TV-RADIO/PH_PHD88003866/entretien-avec-kateb-yacine?rang=7. The quoted section starts approximately 80 seconds into the beginning of the recording, accessible on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldYfHNuHb0k>.

(...) In the case of Nedjma, the woman represents an image of the country that is still in a dream state].⁶³

Scholarly approaches to Nedjma

Given Kateb's comments on Nedjma's symbolic meaning, and Frederic Jameson's influential 1986 argument that, "Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory," it is perhaps not surprising that scholars have read *Nedjma* allegorically and have seen in Nedjma a symbol of the nation whose "plural autobiography" Kateb offers readers.⁶⁴ Over the decades, scholars have mobilized Kateb's comments to support this interpretation of the text: French literary scholar Georges Joyaux and Egyptian literary critic Ghali Shoukri, for example, both cite (in translation) Kateb's 1956 comment that, "Nedjma is the soul of Algeria, torn apart since its origin and ravaged by too many exclusive passions,"⁶⁵ whereas Marc Gontard cites a lecture of Kateb's from 1967 in which he is said to have stated, "Il ne faut pas pousser un symbole trop loin. Un symbole est toujours fragile ; si on veut le littéraliser, il se détruit. Nedjma, oui, finit par symboliser l'Algérie" [One should not push a symbol too far. A symbol is always fragile; if one tries to literalize it, it is destroyed. Nedjma,

⁶³ Latifa Kharrat, "Kateb Yacine: 'Le Bonheur ne se raconte pas, il se vit,'" *Horizons de l'édition*, November 7, 1988, "KATEB Yacine" Dossier de presse Articles et Entretiens, Institut mémoires de l'édition contemporaine.

⁶⁴ See Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Autumn 1986): 69.

⁶⁵ As Louis Tremaine points out, neither Joyaux nor Shoukri—occasionally transliterated into Latin letters as "Choukri"—cite the source of this quotation, which is given in English. The original French from which the English translation clearly derives can be found in an interview published in the Quebecois newspaper *Le Devoir*. See "Kateb Yacine nous dit: 'Nedjma, c'est l'âme de l'Algérie déchirée depuis ses origines,'" *Le Devoir*, September 15, 1956, "KATEB Yacine" Dossier de presse Nadjma [sic], Institut mémoires de l'édition contemporaine.

yes, ends up symbolizing Algeria].⁶⁶ However, while it is true that critics have generally accepted allegorical readings of the text, it is equally true that very few have interrogated how the allegory is constructed. As a result, many of their interpretations gloss over a major plot point—Nedjma's Jewish heritage—that significantly restructures how the allegory functions, and in consequence, transforms the vision of Algeria that Nedjma is said to represent.

Reading through the vast scholarship on the novel, the researcher finds claims that “Nedjma n’est pas une femme comme les autres... elle est l’Algérie” [Nedjma is not a woman like all the others... she is Algeria],⁶⁷ that “la femme mystérieuse, à la recherche de laquelle s’enroule le roman, masque de son visage une autre réalité, que d’abord elle incarne: l’Algérie” [the mysterious woman, in search of whom the novel is wound up, masks with her face another reality, which at first she embodies: Algeria];⁶⁸ that “Nedjma, the fugitive heroine of the novel, represents the new Algeria herself;”⁶⁹ and that “Nedjma [...] is nothing less than a symbol of the nation which is, at one and the same time, lost forever and eternally present: an independent Algeria, which must be reinvented.”⁷⁰ This line of interpretation has lasted into the twenty-first century, with Jane Hiddleston affirming in 2013 that Nedjma is “a putative symbol for Algeria”

⁶⁶ While Gontard cites this quotation as coming from a conference Kateb gave in Algiers in 1967, I have been unable to locate the exact text of this lecture anywhere. See Marc Gontard, *Nedjma de Kateb Yacine: Essai sur la structure formelle du roman*, 1975, 12.

⁶⁷ Bernard Dort, “Fascination ou métamorphose?,” *Cahiers du sud* XLIV, no. 338 (décembre 1956): 134.

⁶⁸ Olivier de Magny, “Panorama d’une nouvelle littérature romanesque,” *Esprit* 263/264, no. 7/8 (Juillet-août 1958): 9.

⁶⁹ Georges Joyaux, “Driss Chraïbi, Mohammed Dib, Kateb Yacine, and Indigenous North African Literature,” *Yale French Studies* 24 (1959): 37.

⁷⁰ Phillip Dine, “The Formal Implications of Anti-Colonialist Commitment: A Comparison of Doris Lessing’s *The Grass Is Singing* and Kateb Yacine’s *Nedjma*,” in *Literature, Language and the Nation: Proceedings of the Second General Conference of the Association of University Teachers of Literature and Language (ATOLL)* (Harare: Association of University Teachers of Literature and Language in association with Baobab Books, 1989), 35.

and, more recently, Leticia Villasenor arguing that “Nedjma can, undoubtedly, be read as a symbol of the new modernizing Algeria in its quest for autonomy.”⁷¹

While the above is indicative of a broad trend in scholarship, a closer look reveals a lack of consensus as to what version or vision of Algeria Nedjma supposedly represents. My aim in discussing these varying, and even opposing, interpretations is not to discuss their merits or to claim that one is “more correct” than another, but rather to illustrate that the concept of Nedjma-as-Algeria has been approached and understood in manifold ways, and that at the same time, these understandings have not accounted for Nedjma’s religious heritage and have therefore missed an opportunity to interrogate the nature of the national allegory itself. In other words, my aim is not to dismiss the possibility of an allegorical reading of Nedjma, but rather to explore how the novel itself—as opposed to the author’s comments on the novel—supports such an interpretation. Furthermore, I aim to investigate what happens to the allegorical understanding of Nedjma when we consider more explicitly who and what this character might represent.

If an overview of the scholarship on *Nedjma* reveals that, while many scholars posit that Nedjma is—or at the very least, can be read as—an allegorical character, a closer look suggests that relatively few scholars have taken the time to explain the rationale behind their allegorical readings, or to fully explicate the vision of Algeria that Nedjma is said to embody. While this is likely due in no small measure to the fact that Kateb himself has weighed in rather heavily and clearly on this topic, readers with a keen eye can—and should—examine how, and to what extent, the text itself supports such a vision. What is the exact vision of Algeria that Nedjma

⁷¹ Jane Hiddleston, “That Obscure Subject of Desire: France, Algeria, and the Circumscription of the Feminine in Kateb Yacine’s *Nedjma*,” *French Forum* 38, no. 3 (2013): 133; Leticia Villasenor, “Kateb Yacine’s *Nedjma*: The Dismembering of Algeria’s ‘Étoile de Sang,’” *Ufahamu: Journal of the African Activist Association* 38, no. 2 (Winter 2015): 157. It should be noted, however, that Hiddleston and Villasenor hedge more in their language, saying that Nedjma “is a *putative* symbol” who “*can* be read” as an allegory (emphasis my own).

represents, we might ask, and how does the novel craft such a vision? Which group(s) make(s) up the nation she embodies? What is the basis for an allegorical reading?

The answer to these questions, when provided, varies greatly. Certain critics, such as Mildred Mortimer and Jean Déjeux, have based their allegorical readings on the relationship of Nedjma to her four suitors, focusing not necessarily on Nedjma herself, but rather on how she might be read in relation to the men who desire her. According to Mortimer, “The myth is transparent. [...] [Nedjma] is Algeria, *la patrie perdue*. Pursued by four potential conquerors – Turk, Roman, Arab, and French – she embodies the characteristic which the Algerian poet and critic Jean Amrouche first attributed to the Maghreb, ‘le génie de l’alternance,’ the elusiveness of the captive.”⁷² For Mortimer, *Nedjma* is a symbolic retelling of Algerian history, one that highlights the various invasions of foreign powers who have succeeded in conquering the land, but not the people or their spirits. As such, the focus remains on the four male protagonists’ potential motivations for desiring Nedjma, and not on explicitly interrogating the multifaceted identity of the woman at the center of their collective pursuit.

Déjeux’s approach echoes Mortimer’s in that he, too, focuses on the four protagonists’ relationship to the elusive woman. Yet whereas Mortimer saw the four protagonists as evocations of the four empires that invaded what would become the nation of Algeria, Déjeux sees them as representatives of varying nationalist movements vying for public support:

Une approche socio-historique nous fait découvrir l’Algérie que le personnage de Nedjma finit par symboliser. Elle reste cependant mystérieuse, impénétrable. Aucun époux n’a pu apprivoiser « la femme sauvage ». Elle est cruelle et « ravagée par trop de passions exclusives ». Les quatre protagonistes de *Nedjma* sont ici comme des types personnifiant chacun différentes manières d’aimer l’Algérie : « frères ennemis » à l’image des partis politiques nationalistes d’avant 1954 qui se disputaient entre eux,

⁷² Mildred Mortimer, “Kateb Yacine in Search of Algeria: A Study of *Nedjma* and *Le Polygone étoilé*,” *L’Esprit Créateur* 12, n° 4 (Winter 1972): 284.

chacun se faisant une certaine idée de l'Algérie indépendante et chacun entendant être seul à la révéler elle-même.⁷³

A socio-historical approach allows us to discover the Algeria that the character of Nedjma ends up symbolizing. She remains, however, mysterious and impenetrable. No husband could tame “the wild woman.” She is cruel and “ravaged by too many exclusive passions.” The four protagonists of *Nedjma* function here as models, each personifying different ways of loving Algeria: “enemy brothers” in the image of the pre-1954 nationalist political parties that argued among themselves, each having a certain idea of an independent Algeria and each intending to be alone in revealing it itself.

In focusing on Nedjma’s “mysterious, impenetrable” nature—what we might term Nedjma’s “opacity,” in the Glissantian sense of the term—Déjeux sidesteps the opportunity to interrogate what the novel does tell us about Nedjma, and instead suggests that she is akin to a blank slate on which the four “enemy brothers” can each project a desired outcome. In other words, Déjeux disallows Nedjma’s ability to signify in and of herself, and instead opts to locate the meaning of the allegory the Nedjma character, but rather in *Nedjma* the novel.

Lack of consensus also characterizes the interpretations of scholars who focus on the titular character as opposed to her suitors. One common approach is to assert that Nedjma represents a specific period of time, whether past, present, or future. Nedjma has thus been said to represent varying moments in the Algerian national story, with scholars affirming that she “incarne [...] le passé de l’Algérie” [...embodies Algeria’s past];⁷⁴ “symbolise de façon beaucoup plus large diverses réalités de la société algérienne” [symbolises in a much broader way the diverse realities of Algerian society];⁷⁵ or “peut être lu entre autres significations comme le symbole de la patrie à venir” [can be read, among other meanings, as the symbol of the

⁷³ Jean Déjeux, *Littérature maghrébine de langue française : introduction générale et auteurs* (Sherbrooke: Naaman, 1973), 241.

⁷⁴ Olivier de Magny, « Panorama d’une nouvelle littérature romanesque », *Esprit* 263/264, n° 7/8 (Juillet-août 1958): 9.

⁷⁵ Monique Hennebelle, “*Nedjma* de Kateb Yacine,” *L’Afrique littéraire et artistique* (1969): 8.

homeland to come].⁷⁶ What all these claims lack, however, is a thorough exploration of what exactly is meant by “Algeria’s past,” “Algerian society,” or “the [Algerian] homeland to come.” As a result, the trope of “Nedjma as Algeria” is at once completely straightforward and utterly opaque. The signifier may be obvious, but the signified is anything but.

The lack of explanation of what is meant by “Algeria” and who is included in the national consciousness (or not) has significant ramifications for our understanding of what the novel does and the message it conveys. More precisely, the lack of specificity regarding the novel’s vision of Algeria means that readers can interpret “Nedjma as allegory” in many different, and even opposing, ways. It is my contention that, in the absence of a clear explanation of who or what Nedjma symbolizes, critics risk implying that Nedjma represents the hegemonic, homogenized vision of the Algerian national narrative, which can be neatly summed up in Abdelhamid Ben Badis’s popularized slogan, “Islam is my religion, Arabic is my language, and Algeria is my country.”⁷⁷ As such, scholars’ lack of attention to the ways that Jewishness is incorporated into *Nedjma*, especially through the central figure herself, have implicitly upheld the narrative of a uniquely Muslim nation, and have, however inadvertently, contributed to the “writing out” of Jewishness from any discussion of French-language Algerian literature.

⁷⁶ Charles Bonn, *Kateb Yacine: Nedjma* (Paris: Pr. Univ. de France, 1990), 7.

⁷⁷ While Islam gradually came to become a defining factor of the Algerian nationalist movement and keystone of the postcolonial national identity, during the late colonial era, the FLN conceivably allowed a place for Jews in the nation in the making. As Redha Malek, spokesperson for the FLN, stated in a 1961 address: “Il n’est pas question pour nous d’imposer la citoyenneté algérienne. Nous considérons les juifs comme des autochtones malgré le fait colonial mais si certains parmi eux veulent rester français, cela, évidemment, c’est un problème qui peut être résolu.” See “Pourparlers d’Evian : le FLN et le peuple algérien [Unaired Shortwave Radio Communication]” (Radiodiffusion Télévision Française, June 6, 1961), PHD98045345, Institut national de l’audiovisuel, http://inatheque.ina.fr/doc/TV-RADIO/PH_PHD98045345/pourparlers-d-evian-le-fln-et-le-peuple-algerien?rang=39. The quoted section commences at approximately 00:32:08.

Furthermore, when scholars do discuss Nedjma's mother, it is often to comment upon the fact that she is French. Very few scholars highlight, let alone mention, her Jewishness. For example, Olivier de Magny's observation that, "It is interesting to notice the role assigned to France in the making of this new personality—Nedjma is the daughter of a French woman and of an unknown native father," showcases how the allegorical vision of Nedjma incorporates the French into the nation's new "personality," yet refrains from mentioning that the novel does the same for her Jewish heritage.⁷⁸ The few scholars that do highlight Nedjma's Jewish background are often hesitant to interrogate what that means for Nedjma's symbolic role, and as such, their acknowledgment of Jewishness often stops with the birthmother, with little to no acknowledgment of how that would affect Nedjma herself. In affirming as Stefani Sevcik does that Nedjma was "born to a French Jew" for example, scholars open the door to a discussion of how Jewishness might play into Nedjma's symbolic role in the novel but refrain from walking through it.⁷⁹

I would like to suggest that, if we are to read Nedjma as allegory, and if the allegorical reading is to be productive, we must account for Nedjma's multinational, multireligious origins.

⁷⁸ De Magny, 37.

⁷⁹ Stefanie Sevcik, "Specters of Nedjma: Shifting Temporalities, Identities, and Itineraries in Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* Cycle," *Research in African Literatures* 50, no. 1 (2019): 179. To date, relatively few scholars have suggested that Nedjma herself can be read as Jewish. Two notable exceptions are Alexandra Gueydan, who states in her doctoral dissertation that, "L'héroïne éponyme, symbole de la patrie à naître, est une jeune femme au sang mêlé: juive par sa mère française, musulmane par son père de la tribu des Keblout. Nedjma, dite «l'Andalouse», incarne donc une vision synchrétique de l'Algérie, représentée à travers son présent colonial et son passé andalou, un espace à la croisée de composantes culturelles multiples et contradictoires" [The eponymous heroine, symbol of the homeland yet to be born, is a young woman of mixed blood: Jewish by her French mother, Muslim by her father of the Keblout tribe. Nedjma, known as 'the Andalusian,' thus embodies a syncretic vision of Algeria, represented through its colonial present and its Andalusian past, a space at the crossroads of multiple and contradictory cultural components], and Jarrod Hayes, who affirms that, "Because of her mixed origins (her mother was a French Jew), she could never embody an Algerian purity, free of all influence by the colonizer; for she is Jewish by Jewish definitions and Muslim by Muslim ones, as well as part French, part colonizer." See Alexandra Gueydan, "(Post)national ImagiNation of Algeria: Identity politics and practice in Algerian Francophone literature" (Doctoral Dissertation, New Haven, CT, Yale University, 2008), 1; and Jarrod Hayes, *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 152.

It is not enough to simply state that “Nedjma is Algeria,” or to find meaning in Nedjma’s suitors. Nedjma herself must signify, and an explanation must be provided as to what that entails. This is indeed a challenging undertaking, as the allegorical vision of Algeria that Nedjma embodies is a far cry from the French and Algerian national narratives, which still loom large in the field of North African literature in French. For one, Nedjma is the offspring of a French citizen and an Algerian colonial subject (identity unknown); as such, she is the product of both the colonizer and the colonized. To say that Nedjma is an allegory for Algeria is to say, therefore, that Algeria is inherently a multicultural, multi-ethnic nation that is the product of all her constituent parts. It is to staunchly contradict the national narrative of the independent state by affirming that the nation was indelibly marked by the French colonial endeavor, which Kateb himself described as “un mal nécessaire, une greffe douloureuse apportant une promesse de progrès à l’arbre de la nation entamé par la hache” [a necessary evil, a painful graft promising growth for the nation’s tree slashed by the foreign axe].⁸⁰ It is to affirm, as Kateb himself did, “non pas que le peuple français soit un peuple ennemi mais [qu’il] est enfermé dans un système ennemi. Notre révolution sans le peuple français serait incomplète” [not that the French people are an enemy people, but (that) they are locked in an enemy system. Our revolution without the French people would be incomplete].⁸¹

When we take into account the Nedjma’s religious heritage, the situation becomes all the more telling: since Nedjma is the daughter of a Jewish woman and a Muslim man, she is equally as Jewish as she is Muslim (and thus, according to colonial logic, Arab). Reading Nedjma as an

⁸⁰ Kateb, *Nedjma* 96; Kateb, *Nedjma* (Howard translation) 135.

⁸¹ Yacine Kateb, “Propos sur l’écrivain: même texte de conférence de K.Y. au Colloque d’Upsala sur les écrivains africains et scandinaves, Suède, en février 1967,” 1968, p. 30, Fonds Kateb Yacine, KTB 11.16, Institut mémoires de l’édition contemporaine.

allegory for Algeria is thus to grapple with the place Kateb articulates for both Frenchness *and Jewishness* within his vision of the burgeoning postcolonial nation. Consequently, reading Nedjma as allegory obliges us to reassess two relationships that are often taken for granted in the scholarship: namely, the relationship between “Algerian” and “Arab,” and the relationship of Islam to the Algerian cultural space.

In terms of the former, Kateb made it clear on numerous occasions that he was staunchly against the narrative of an Arab Algeria: “L’Algérie arabe est un mythe aussi pernicieux que l’Algérie française” [Arab Algeria is as pernicious a myth as French Algeria] he remarked in a conference in the late 1960s.⁸² However, this rejection of the concept of an (exclusively) Arab Algeria did not equate to a rejection of any place for Arabness in the construction of Algerian identity. Just as Kateb articulated a place for Frenchness in his vision of Algerian national identity, so too did he accept that Algeria had been inevitably marked by Arab invasions of the eleventh century.⁸³ Through the mythology of the Keblouti clan and the legendary Arab ancestor to which all of the novel’s main characters trace their roots, *Nedjma* highlights the multiplicities inherent in the cultural space of the colonized, and suggests that what was once an oppressive, foreign power can become an integrated part of the nation-in-the-making. The Keblouti ancestor may have been a violent invader, but over time, his descendants integrated into the North African cultural space.⁸⁴ By situating the clan’s ancestors within the context of the historical Arab (and

⁸² Yacine Kateb, “[Conférence Sur la littérature algérienne d’expression française],” 1967, Fonds Kateb Yacine, KTB 9.50, Institut mémoires de l’édition contemporaine.

⁸³ As Jacqueline Arnaud notes in *La Littérature maghrébine de langue Française*, vol. 2: Le cas de Kateb Yacine, the Keblouti clan are based on the Banu Hilal tribe, a group of Arab tribes that migrated westward beginning in the eleventh century as part of a military expedition.

⁸⁴ Marian Aguiar explains, “The definition of *Arab* is tricky in North Africa—after all, [...] the migration produced a hybrid culture, and the historical observer may characterize the change brought by this migration as either the Arabization of the Berber population or the assimilation of new North African traditions into the Berber identity.”

thus, Muslim) migrations to North Africa, the novel nods to the influence of Arab invaders and migrants in Algeria *without* claiming a uniquely Arab or Muslim identity for Algeria itself, implicitly suggesting that what was once foreign may become domestic, and that the identity of modern Algeria is a composite of many different entities.

Perhaps nowhere is an understanding of Algeria as inherently diverse, both ethnically and religiously, clearer than in *Kateb Yacine: poète en trois langues*, in which an interviewed Kateb argued that, while Algeria had become liberated from French rule in 1962, the country and its people were still suffering from the effects of other, previous layers of colonialism:

Est-ce que l'Algérie est réellement aujourd'hui libérée, entièrement libérée ? Non, elle est libérée du colonialisme français. Mais il y a encore d'autres formes de colonialisme, parce qu'après tout le colonialisme français a duré 130 ans, le colonialisme turc a duré quelques siècles, mais quelle est la plus épaisse couche de colonialisme ? C'est bien la couche arabo-islamique, parce que celle-là date de treize siècles. C'est treize siècles d'oppression, parce que pendant ces treize siècles, maintenant on entend nous faire croire que nous sommes devenus arabes et musulmans, comme si ça allait de soi, et comme si ça ne nous avait pas été imposé par les armes, par la violence, parce que pendant, pendant tous ces siècles on a imposé l'arabe et persécuté Tamazight et nous voyons aujourd'hui, ça continue.⁸⁵

[Is Algeria really liberated today, completely liberated? No, it is liberated from French colonialism. But there are still other forms of colonialism, because after all French colonialism lasted 130 years, Turkish colonialism lasted a few centuries, but what is the thickest layer of colonialism? It is the Arab-Islamic layer, because it is thirteen centuries old. It is thirteen centuries of oppression, because during these thirteen centuries, now they want us to believe that we have become Arab and Muslim, as if it were self-evident, and as if it had not been imposed on us by arms, by violence, because during, during all these centuries Arabic was imposed and Tamazight was persecuted, and we see today that it continues.]

For Kateb, the French colonial endeavor was just another iteration of the violent oppression to which his homeland had been subjected for centuries. France was simply the latest in a long line

See Marian Aguiar, "Banu Hilal and Banu Sulaim," in *Encyclopedia of Africa*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah (Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁸⁵ See *Kateb Yacine, poète en trois langues*. The cited portion begins at approximately 00:46:30. The film can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJ50ZccUhnY>.

of invaders who, like the Romans, Arabs, and Turks before them, “ne pouvaient que s'enraciner, otages de la patrie en gestation dont ils se disputaient les faveurs” [could not help but take root, hostages of the incipient country for whose favor they were fighting] (96). As Abdelkader Aoudjit explains,

Just as Kateb deconstructs the colonialist version of Algerian history that represses large sections of it, so does he reject the notion of a static and constraining Algerian identity associated with both colonialist and certain nativist ideologies in favor of a vision of Algeria as a nation of interdependent and overlapping identities: Amazigh, Arab, Muslim, and French. Kateb is as critical of those who are nostalgic for an Arab-Islamic golden age and who want to obliterate the transformations wrought by French colonization to justify and reinforce their power, as he is of the colonialist tendency to repress the Amazigh and Arab heritage of Algeria or to call Algerians simply Arabs.⁸⁶

Crucially, while critics such as Aoudjit have picked up on Kateb’s challenges to what is often presented as a teleological relationship between “Arabness” and “Algeria,” far fewer have explored how Kateb’s work subtly challenges hegemonic narratives of the relationship between Algeria and Islam. In many ways, this is understandable: the close relationship between Arabic, the language of the Arab invaders, and the religion of Islam make it very difficult to separate the two in the context of North Africa, where Arabic-speaking conquerors brought not only their language but their religion. However, to delineate the various “interdependent and overlapping identities” *without* including “Jewish” is to neglect a crucial part of what *Nedjma* does and the vision of Algeria that it represents. Although Kateb spoke out in support of Tamazight cultural heritage and said considerably less about its Jewish counterpart in Algeria, the fact remains that in his foundational novel, the vision of Algeria he offers is, to expand slightly on Aoudjit: Amazigh, Arab, Muslim, French, *and Jewish*.

⁸⁶ Abdelkader Aoudjit, “Nedjma: Kateb Yacine’s Deconstruction of Algeria’s Colonial Historiography,” in *Novel and Nation in the Muslim World: Literary Contributions and National Identities*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga and Daniella Kuzmanovic, Islam and Nationalism Series (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 93.

Before concluding, I would like to turn briefly to a short presentation, entitled “Monde arabe, communautés juives et état d’Israël” [Arab World, Jewish Communities, and State of Israel] that Kateb gave in November 1956, shortly after the publication of *Nedjma*. The presentation was one of several in a “Conférence-débats” session on the theme of “Les Juifs vus par les autres,” which was hosted by the Paris-based left-bank intellectual collective *Cercle Ouvert*.⁸⁷ As the title suggests, the event, which consisted of a series of brief remarks by selected individuals followed by an active exchange with the audience members, sought to explore “le problème juif” [the Jewish problem] through a variety of viewpoints, both religious and lay.⁸⁸ “Monde Arabe, Communautés Juives et État d’Israël,” is significant in that it is, to this researcher’s knowledge, the only existent intervention of Kateb Yacine’s with an explicit and sustained discussion of the situation of the Jews of Algeria.

Although Nantet’s introduction suggests that Kateb’s piece would discuss all three of France’s North African colonies in equal measure, Kateb’s remarks focus almost exclusively on Algerian Jews.⁸⁹ “Bien avant 1830, il y avait une importante communauté israélite en

⁸⁷ The collective, which was helmed by statesman and intellectual Jacques Nantet, was active from 1956-1958, and held monthly events which consisted of a panel presentation followed by questions from the audience. Over the two-year period, *Cercle Ouvert* held seventeen “Conférence-débats” on various themes, in which many notable French mid-century intellectuals participated. The November 13 event, which was the collective’s second, featured six speakers, in addition to Nantet and Kateb: François Chatelet, who spoke on “Le point de vue du philosophe marxiste;” Pastor Vergara, who spoke on “Le point de vue du protestant;” Reverend Father Jean Daniélou, who spoke on “Le point de vue du catholique romain;” Jean-Michel Royer, who spoke about “L’antisémitisme du poujadisme;” and Alioune Diop, who discussed “Le monde noir, le racisme & l’antisémitisme.”

⁸⁸ As Nantet explained in his opening remarks, “Ainsi peut-être, le CERCLE OUVERT aura-t-il apporté sa contribution à une considération impartiale, mais sympathique de ce problème, avec l’intention chez tous, marxiste, protestant, catholique, analyste politique, Nord-Africain, Noir, de prendre une vue nouvelle de la judaïcité dans une recherche favorable à une meilleure compréhension” [In this way, perhaps, the CERCLE OUVERT will have made its contribution to an impartial but sympathetic consideration of this problem, with the intention for all—Marxist, Protestant, Catholic, political analyst, North African, Black—to take a new view of Jewishness in the search for better understanding] (2).

⁸⁹ As Nantet writes, “Kateb Yacine, le jeune écrivain arabe d’Algérie, donnera sa réflexion sur les relations à établir entre les nationalistes nord-africains et les communautés juives de Tunisie, du Maroc et d’Algérie, ainsi que sur les relations du monde arabe avec l’État d’Israël” [Kateb Yacine, the young Arab writer from Algeria, will give his

Algérie” [Well before 1830, there was a considerable Jewish community in Algeria], Kateb begins, before proclaiming that, “Les Juifs sont profondément enracinés en Algérie. Ils parlent naturellement la langue arabe et les dialectes berbères. Ils ont fortement contribué à conserver notre fonds musical et nos formes artisanales, dont une grande partie, sans eux, serait aujourd’hui perdue” [Jews are deeply rooted in Algeria. They speak naturally the Arabic language and Berber dialects. They have greatly contributed to the preservation of our musical and artisanal heritage, a large part of which, without them, would be lost today].⁹⁰ By opening his remarks with a reference to Algerian Jews’ presence in precolonial Algeria, Kateb reminds spectators that no matter their legal standing as French citizens, Algerian Jews are descendants of colonized North Africans who speak the languages of the people and are an integral component of the Algerian cultural landscape.

Moreover, in his short intervention, Kateb situates Jews firmly within the Algerian fight for self-sovereignty, first historically, and then at the contemporary moment. “C’est une juive berbère, la Kahina, qui symbolisa la résistance populaire à l’invasion arabe et fut l’une de nos héroïnes nationales” [It was a Berber Jew, the Kahina, who symbolized popular resistance to the Arab invasion and was one of our national heroines], he tells the listeners, before continuing on, “Lors de l’invasion française, Abdelkader, dans la lutte pour l’indépendance, s’appuyait sur un ministre juif” [At the time of the French invasion, Abdelkader relied on a Jewish minister in the struggle for independence].⁹¹ Kateb, through the figures of the Kahina and Abdelkader’s purported Jewish minister, intimately links Jews to the Algerian struggle for self-sovereignty in

thoughts on the relations to be established between North African nationalists and the Jewish communities of Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, as well as on the Arab world's relations with the State of Israel] (1).

⁹⁰ Kateb, “Monde arabe” 6.

⁹¹ Kateb, “Monde arabe” 6.

the face of foreign powers, be they seventh-century Arab invaders or nineteenth-century French imperialist conquerors. What is more, Kateb's subsequent comments situate Jews within the then-current Algerian Revolution, not on the side of imperial France, of which they are citizens, but rather on the side of the burgeoning postcolonial nation: "Il y a actuellement des centaines de Juifs qui militent activement pour la cause algérienne" [There are currently hundreds of Jews who are active in the Algerian cause], Kateb remarks, "Je connais personnellement trois frères Juifs qui viennent d'être arrêtés l'un après l'autre, à Alger. C'est, là aussi, un fait significatif" [I personally know three Jewish brothers who were just arrested one after the other in Algiers. This, too, is a significant fact].⁹²

While Kateb's comments may be fodder for historical debate, the veracity of his remarks is not what is of interest here, for factual veracity is not the primary lens through which literary scholars approach their objects of study. Instead, what is of interest is Kateb's discourse on Algerian Jews' relationships to Algeria and France. After confirming that Algerian Jews "savent que [l'Algérie] c'est leur seule vraie patrie, et qu'ils ne peuvent vivre ailleurs" [know that (Algeria) is their only true homeland, and that they cannot live elsewhere], Kateb continues,

Cependant, et surtout depuis 1830, on a souvent utilisé le fameux "problème juif" pour diviser les Algériens. Le décret Crémieux, en faisant du Juif un citoyen français privilégié en Algérie, illustre cette politique de division et de diversion qui porta ses fruits amers lors des émeutes antisémites de 1934, à Constantine. Il est incontestable que le système colonial a corrompu nombre d'Israélites et en a fait des ennemis de la nation algérienne, et même des "contre-terroristes" assoiffés de sang.⁹³

[However, especially since 1830, the famous "Jewish problem" has often been used to divide Algerians. The Crémieux decree, by making the Jew a privileged French citizen in Algeria, illustrates this policy of division and diversion that bore bitter fruit during the anti-Semitic riots of 1934, in Constantine. It is undeniable that the colonial system corrupted many Jews and made them enemies of the Algerian nation, and even bloodthirsty "counter-terrorists."]

⁹² Kateb, "Monde arabe" 7.

⁹³ Kateb, "Monde arabe" 7.

In a staunch critique of French colonial policy, Kateb condemns the Crémieux Decree as nothing but a ruse to divide and conquer “les Algériens.” As he sees it, the presence of Algerian Jews on the side of those fighting to maintain *Algérie française* is not the result of cultural affinity or social progress, but rather the impact of a nefarious political system that worked diligently for over a century to “corrupt” Algerian Jews and turn them against their own nation. Algerian Jews are and always have been Algerians, Kateb tells his listeners, rendering explicit that which is implicit in *Nedjma*.

As this chapter has demonstrated, much of Kateb’s engagement with Algerian Jews and Jewishness in *Nedjma* exists in the realm of the detail. As such, it might be tempting to dismiss as coincidental, or even trivial. Yet when read in conversation with Kateb’s remarks, particularly those in his *Cercle ouvert* intervention, as well as his other writings, such as *Le luth et la valise*, it becomes clear that *Nedjma*’s engagements with Algerian Jews and Jewishness are indeed indicative of a broader, more inclusive national ideology that is far too often noticeably absent from discussions of the novel, and of Kateb’s work in general. Interrogating *Nedjma*’s Jewish details thus allows us to better understand the place and role of Jews in colonial Algeria first by enabling us to see how a lack of attention afforded to Jewishness in Algerian literature has perpetuated religious and national narratives predicated on a one-to-one relationship between Algeria and Islam, and second, by demonstrating how literary engagements with Algerian Jewry can and do challenge the grand narrative of Algerian Jewish life in the aftermath of the Crémieux Decree.

Chapter 3

The Many Iterations of Henriette Gozlan:

Tracing the Evolution of Rachid Boudjedra's Recurring Jewish-Muslim Figure

Reading the various novels that comprise Algerian author Rachid Boudjedra's oeuvre gives one the sense of déjà vu, or perhaps more appropriately, "déjà lu." Although certain novels, such as *Topographie idéale pour une agression caractérisée*, contain unique characters who exist in a story-world of their own, in many cases, the frontiers that separate the fictional landscapes of Boudjedra's various novels are vague at best: many of Boudjedra's protagonists are named Rachid or a truncated version thereof; many of them recount traumatic family histories in a stream-of-consciousness like narration to a female lover; and many have difficult relationships with an overbearing, polygamous father. Most, if not all, of these protagonists are extremely critical of Algerian society, and openly discuss taboo topics such as rape, incest, homosexuality, and the oppression of women, albeit in different ways and to different ends. Reading a new Boudjedra novel after having read several others can thus give one a feeling having "read this before." But details inevitably cloud the picture: the despotic father has a different name, a different number of wives, or a different occupation; the female lover is no longer "française de souche" but Franco-Algerian; the older brother is no longer in a closeted relationship with a male physics teacher but courting a female cabaret singer. What might readers make of these obsessive repetitions? How might they speak to Boudjedra's unceasing efforts to challenge the shortcomings of independent Algeria? Finally, what might they tell us about the place of Algerian Jews in the cultural landscape of the postcolonial nation?

Hailed as “quite possibly the greatest living writer from the Maghreb,” Rachid Boudjedra is a prolific author who “occupies a position at the very forefront of modern North African literature,” yet whose engagements with Jewish North Africa have been consistently overlooked in scholarship.¹ This absence is all the more striking insofar as even a cursory reading of Boudjedra’s oeuvre suggests that there is much material to be mined: to wit, the aforementioned physics teacher, an Algerian Jew nicknamed “Heimatlos” who first appears in *La Répudiation* (1969); Henriette Gozlan, a Jewish seamstress who had two children with the narrator’s father in *La Macération* (1985); and Jacob Timsit, the Jewish business partner of the narrator’s uncle in *La Dépossession* (2017). Rachid Boudjedra has consistently written Jews into independent Algeria, even as the state itself was writing them out.² Of these characters, Henriette appears with a frequency that distinguishes her from the rest: alluded to briefly and left nameless in *La Répudiation*, she goes on to play a central role in *La Macération* (1985), and makes significant appearances in *La Vie à l'endroit* (1997), *Les Figuiers de Barbarie* (2010), and, most recently, in *La Dépossession* (2017).³

Ever since his earliest published novel, then, Rachid Boudjedra has been engaging with questions of Algerian Jews and the Algerian Jewish past in minor but explicit and sustained

¹ Hafid Gafaïti, “Rachid Boudjedra: The Bard of Modernity,” trans. Patricia Geesey, *North African Literature* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 89; André Naffis-Sahley, “Who’s Afraid of Algeria? On Rashid Boudjedra,” *PN Review*, December 2012: 31.

² Boudjedra’s storyworlds also include Monsieur Cohen and Maître Lévy, a banker and a lawyer in colonial Algeria who support the burgeoning independence movement in *Fascination* (2000); Henri Cohen, a friend of the narrator’s whom his father dislikes for religious, socioeconomic, and political reasons in *Timimoun* (1994); and Samuel Timsit, the narrator’s Jewish teacher and militant nationalist who is buried in the local Muslim cemetery in *Hôtel Saint-Georges* (2011).

³ In addition to the fictional characters he invents, Boudjedra also includes references famous real-life North African Jews in his novels. It is thus that we hear about the assassination of Algerian Jewish singer and musician Raymond Raoul Leyris, aka Cheikh Raymond (1912-1961), in 1981’s *Le Vainqueur de coupe* and 2010’s *Les Figuiers de Barbarie*, and about a supposed love affair between Hana Rached (1933-2003), the Tunisian Jewish singer, and the narrator’s older brother in 1985’s *La Macération*.

ways—a trend that has been consistently overlooked in literary scholarship.⁴ In this chapter, I seek to fill this scholarly lacuna by tracing the trajectory of the recurring figure of Henriette, a Jewish seamstress-cum-stepmother, whose impending demise may—or may not—spell disaster for her family. By highlighting both the evolution of the figure of Henriette and of the attitudes towards her and her relationship with her lover/husband, I illustrate how Boudjedra’s oeuvre both represents and challenges two distinct, yet intimately related, narratives of mutual ethnic exclusivity: on the one hand, colonial-era French discourse that sought to divide Algerian Jews and Muslims into distinct ethno-racial and political groups, and on the other, the post-colonial Algerian national narrative that ironically relied upon these artificial productions to construct the nation’s religious and cultural identity. I demonstrate how Boudjedra’s work situates Algerian Jews and Jewishness within the world of the (formerly) colonized, not the (former) colonizer, a move that showcases the inadequacy of these rigid colonial categories, while also suggesting that they are inappropriate metrics through which to capture the range of attitudes towards and relationships between members of purportedly separate ethnic groups that are often said to have experienced the French colonial project in vastly different manners.⁵

Rachid Boudjedra was born to a well-to-do family in 1939 in Aïn Beïda, a small town in eastern Algeria.⁶ Due to his father’s wish that he receive a bilingual education in both Arabic and

⁴ *La Répudiation* (1969) is Boudjedra’s first published novel, yet his first publication, a poetry collection entitled *Pour ne plus rêver*, was published four years previously by Éditions nationales algériennes.

⁵ While there is significant historical literature that works against narratives of disjunction between Algerian Jewish and Muslim experiences of colonization, literary scholarship has yet to make these inroads. As the previous chapters demonstrate, Algerian Jews, by dint of their French citizenship, are frequently overlooked by scholars of postcolonial literature, or subsumed into the category of “French” authors.

⁶ In a 2000 interview, Boudjedra confirmed of his family, “Ma famille appartenait à l’élite bourgeoise, mon père était très riche, il était propriétaire terrien et en même temps un savant...” [My family belonged to the bourgeois elite, my father was very rich, he was a landowner and at the same time a scholar] (quoted in Aleksandra Kroh, *L’Aventure du bilinguisme* (Paris: Harmattan, 2000): 69). Most sources confirm that Rachid Boudjedra was born in September 1941. However, in this same interview, Boudjedra affirmed that he was in fact born two years previously: “Vous savez, selon l’état civil, je suis né en 1941; en fait, je suis né en 1939, seulement mon père m’a

French⁷—something that was practically impossible in colonial Algeria, where French was the only official language⁸—Boudjedra left his family home at ten years of age to become a boarder at Tunis’s renowned Collège Sadiki.⁹ Upon his return at the age of seventeen (that is, in either 1956 or 1958), Boudjedra joined the *maquis* and fought for liberation from French colonial rule during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962).¹⁰ After suffering a significant leg injury, he became a representative of the National Liberation Front (*Front de libération nationale*, or *FLN*) in Madrid. Following Algeria’s independence from France in 1962, Boudjedra began studying philosophy, and eventually earned a degree from the Sorbonne in Paris, writing a Master’s thesis on controversial twentieth-century French writer Louis Ferdinand Céline. After his return to Algeria, Boudjedra briefly served as an advisor in the Ministry of Culture, as the secretary-general for the Algerian Human Rights League, and as a teacher and lecturer in Algerian institutions of higher education. He has continued to write and remains a public figure through the time of this dissertation’s writing.

inscrit à l’état civil quand j’avais déjà deux ans. Il ne voulait pas m’inscrire sous la colonisation, il attendait l’indépendance. Finalement, j’ai été découvert et il a été bien obligé de me déclarer” [You know, according to civil records, I was born in 1941; in fact, I was born in 1939, only my father registered me when I was already two years old. He did not want to register me under colonial rule, he was waiting for independence. Finally, I was discovered and he was forced to register me] (Kroh 68).

⁷ Doris Ruhe, “Transgression as Program: On the Novels of Rachid Boudjedra,” in *Arabic Literature, Postmodern Perspectives* (London: Saqi, 2010): 107.

⁸ During the colonial period, French was the sole official language of Algeria, whereas the country’s indigenous languages – Algerian Arabic and Tamazight – went unrecognized. French policy largely prohibited the use of Classical Arabic in education. See Cheryl S. Le Roux, “Language in Education in Algeria: A Historical Vignette of a ‘Most Severe’ Sociolinguistic Problem,” *Language & History* 60, no. 2 (May 4, 2017): 112–28.

⁹ The Collège Sadiki, the first modern lycée in Tunisia, was established by vizerial decree on February 1, 1875, and offered a bilingual education in both Arabic and French. Many members of Tunisia’s elite attended this school, including the country’s former prime minister and first president, Habib Bourguiba. See Noureddine Sraïeb, *Le Collège Sadiki de Tunis, 1875-1956 : enseignement et nationalisme* (Tunisia: Alif, 1995).

¹⁰ See footnote 6. Furthermore, not knowing one’s birthyear was not uncommon in North Africa for members of Boudjedra’s generation and cultural background.

Boudjedra's intimate involvement with the FLN during his youth and subsequent participation in government notwithstanding, one would be hard-pressed to say that he tows any official party or religious line. Indeed, the opposite is true: an atheist communist with unorthodox political views, Boudjedra speaks out through his work against capitalist and theocratic systems of oppression, a fact that he has made clear on many occasions: "Ce que je répudie, ce n'est pas ma société, mais une classe: la bourgeoisie nationale algérienne" [What I repudiate is not my society, but a social class: the Algerian national bourgeoisie] he confirmed in an interview after the publication of his début novel, before going on to clarify, "Je voudrais que ce roman soit l'occasion de la prise de conscience, pour les femmes et pour les hommes, de la nature non pas féodale mais archaïque de notre société où la religion exerce une emprise trop forte" [I would like this novel to be an opportunity for women and men to become aware not of the feudal, but rather the archaic nature of our society, over which religion has too strong a hold].¹¹ His work, which has been deemed "revolutionary," interrogates and denounces the multifarious manners in which oppression and subjugation function in both independent Algeria and wider Maghrebi society.¹² From the "watershed moment"¹³ that was the publication of *La Répudiation*, Boudjedra has committed transgression after transgression in his oeuvre, systematically toppling the "grandes figures prises dans le marbre qui dominaient la société algérienne" [great figures set in stone who dominated Algerian society].¹⁴

¹¹ Quoted in Monique Martineau, "Rachid Boudjedra: 'La Répudiation est une critique de la société algérienne, mais de l'intérieure...,'" *L'Afrique littéraire et artistique* 8 (December 1969): 14, 17.

¹² Gafaïti, 89. Speaking about his début novel, Boudjedra commented, "[À] l'origine, je voulais appeler la ville où est censée se dérouler l'action TUN-AL-MA (TUnésie-ALgérie-MARoc) pour souligner que la situation que je dénonçais n'était pas particulière à l'Algérie mais s'étendait à tout le Maghreb" [Originally, I wanted to call the city where the action was supposed to take place TUN-AL-MO (TUnesia-ALgeria-MORocco) to underline that the situation I was denouncing was not particular to Algeria but extended to the whole Maghreb]. See Martineau, 14.

¹³ Naffis-Sahley, 28.

Boudjedra began his writing career in French for practical reasons, namely, concerns about publication and censorship; “j’ai commencé à écrire en français uniquement pour des raisons de censure” [I started writing in French only for censorship reasons] he explained in an interview. “En 1969, je ne pouvais publier ce roman [*La Répudiation*] dans aucun pays arabe, y compris le mien évidemment” [In 1969, I could not publish this novel (*The Repudiation*) in any Arab country, including my own, of course].¹⁵ In 1981, as the first wave of Algerian youth schooled in Arabic began to reach adulthood, Boudjedra switched to Arabic in an attempt to reach the younger generations: “j’ai constaté que le public était majoritairement arabophone, que les francophones étaient de plus en plus rares. Je voulais toucher les jeunes, donc il était normal que j’écrive en arabe, la langue qu’ils connaissaient” [I noticed that the public was mostly Arabic-speaking, that French-speaking people were becoming increasingly rare. I wanted to reach young people, so it was normal that I write in Arabic, the language they knew].¹⁶ Literary concerns also motivated his switch to Arabic: “Il y avait une autre raison, importante pour moi, c’était le désir de faire entrer la modernité dans le roman arabe” [There was another reason, important to me, which was the desire to bring modernity into the Arab novel], he confirmed.¹⁷ Boudjedra continued writing in Arabic up until the mid-1990s, at which point he reverted to French due to the growing weaponization of Arabic as a political and ideological tool: “Je n’ai

¹⁴ Colette Valat, “De l’irrespect. Boudjedra, refus d’hériter et dérision,” *Littératures*, no. 65 (December 1, 2011): 2-3. For more on the transgressive nature of Boudjedra’s oeuvre, see Ruhe, “Transgression as Program: On the Novels of Rachid Boudjedra.”

¹⁵ Quoted in Patrice Martin and Christophe Drevet, “Rachid Boudjedra,” in *La Langue française vue d’ailleurs: 100 entretiens réalisés par Patrice Martin et Christophe Drevet*, ed. Patrice Martin and Christophe Drevet (Casablanca: Tarik éditions, 2001), 46–47.

¹⁶ Quoted in Kroh, 127. Following Algeria’s independence from France in 1962, the country’s official language switched from French to Classical Arabic, which then replaced French as the language used in schools.

¹⁷ Quoted in Kroh, 127.

cessé d'écrire en arabe, pour n'écrire de nouveau en français que depuis 1995, c'est-à-dire à l'apogée du terrorisme chez nous, en Algérie. Mes éditeurs arabophones avaient fermé boutique ou bien n'osaient pas me publier parce qu'ils étaient menacés par l'intégrisme islamiste" [I kept writing in Arabic, only switching back to French in 1995, that is, at the height of the terrorism at home, in Algeria. My Arabic-speaking publishers had closed shop or did not dare publish me because they were threatened by Islamist fundamentalism].¹⁸ Despite the language of composition, the vast majority of Boudjedra's works have been translated—either from French into Arabic, or vice versa—reaching a much wider audience than would otherwise be the case. As a result of this rich bilingual publication history, Boudjedra is “an exception” in the world of Algerian letters, holding a “prominent position in two different camps” that “no other Algerian writer has been able to occupy.”¹⁹

Although Boudjedra does not explicitly interrogate the Algerian War of Independence in much of his work, the war that ravaged his country between 1954-1962 informs much of his writing. Algeria won independence from France after seven years of bloody warfare that pitted Algerian nationalists against supporters of French Algeria through a *de facto* civil war in which sympathies were not always easily determined: those who supported independence were found within colonized populations as well as among European settlers and mainland French, and those who fought to keep Algeria “French” were of both European and North African origin. Despite the entangled realities of war, however, the FLN relied heavily upon a “colonizer versus colonized” binary to construct an Algerian national identity.²⁰ The FLN—first, as a nationalist

¹⁸ Quoted in Martin and Drevet, 47.

¹⁹ Farida Abu-Haidar, “The Bipolarity of Rachid Boudjedra,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 20, no. 1 (1989): 40.

²⁰ The most famous of these binaries is likely that theorized by Albert Memmi in his 1957 essay, *Portrait du colonisé, précédé par portrait du colonisateur*.

movement and then as the political party at the helm of the new government—thus promoted a narrative of essential difference from France that relied upon Islam as one of the main pillars of national identity. This discourse, according to which Algeria was Arab in culture, Muslim in religion, and rooted in Berber history,²¹ left increasingly little place for Algerian Jews, whose religious background, assimilation to French culture, and adoption of the French language and citizenship, eventually served to exclude them outright from the “imagined community” of Algeria.²²

As a result, Algeria’s Jews—who, at the start of the war, numbered between 120,000 and 140,000—found themselves caught uncomfortably in the middle of opposing ideologies. At once French citizens who had never been accepted as such by the European settler population *and* colonized North Africans whose religion put them at odds with the Muslim identity that would come to underpin Algerian nationalist rhetoric, Algerian Jews began to emigrate in the late 1950s and left *en masse* following the signing of the Evian Accords. Most of the emigrants were “repatriated” to France, where they held citizenship, although several thousand chose to move to the newly-founded state of Israel. For all intents and purposes, this exodus spelled the end of the Jewish cultural presence in Algeria: eight years after independence, Algeria’s Jewish population had dwindled to barely 1,000, and by the start of the twenty-first century, there were but a handful of Jews left.²³

²¹ Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006): 6.

²² Here, I am referring to Benedict Anderson’s foundational definition of a nation. See the introduction to Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London New York: Verso, 2016).

²³ See Daniel Schroeter, “Algeria,” in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World* (Brill, n.d.), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com:443/entries/encyclopedia-of-jews-in-the-islamic-world/algeria-COM_0001380.

Establishing the Nation: La Répudiation (1969) and La Macération (1984)

Whereas in the early years of nationhood, Algeria was writing Jews out of its national narrative, up and coming Algerian author Rachid Boudjedra was writing them into it. The following section is devoted to an analysis of two of Boudjedra's earlier works: his début novel, *La Répudiation* (1969), which was originally written in French and published just seven years after Algeria gained independence, and *La Macération* (1984), which was published some fifteen years later in the original Arabic, promptly followed by the French translation.²⁴ These novels, both of which were composed during Algeria's formative years as a nation, by a man who participated in the country's fight for independence and subsequent nation-building process, represent a multi-confessional and multicultural Algerian history that stands in stark contrast to national narratives of the time and establish Boudjedra's career-long trajectory of interrogating the ways in which independent Algeria deals with (or doesn't deal with) its Jewish past.

La Répudiation broke almost all of the socio-cultural taboos of his moment. In this novel, written as a stream-of-consciousness narration, Boudjedra lays bare the ills of newly-independent Algeria for all to see through the reflections of his protagonist, Rachid.²⁵ Speaking to—or perhaps more pertinently, *at*—his French lover Céline, a passive presence who has no story of her own and does not participate in the crafting of her lover's tale, Rachid delves into the details of his tumultuous family history. Highlighting the damaging effects of his mother's repudiation by his father and the intense hatred that Rachid subsequently feels for him, the novel denounces independent Algeria's capitalist society over which tradition and religion hold a tight, oppressive

²⁴ *La Macération* was written and published in Arabic in 1984 as المرث (*al-Marath*) and was subsequently translated into French.

²⁵ Henceforth, "Rachid" shall refer to the character in the novel, whereas "Boudjedra" will refer to the author himself.

a grip. Boudjedra's explicit discussions of rape, incest, homosexuality, and the subjugation of women by patriarchal hegemony were so groundbreaking that they earned him the *Prix des Enfants Terribles*, an award established in 1961 by poet and filmmaker Jean Cocteau in recognition of "literary works that depart from generally accepted norms and confront society with its very own taboos."²⁶

Due to its shocking nature, it comes as no surprise that *La Répudiation* made waves upon its release, causing a stir in both France – where it was published – and in Algeria, where it was subjected to censorship. This lack of in-country publication did not translate into a lack of readership, however, as the novel was quick to interest the Algerian and wider Maghrebi reading public. Hailed "unanimously" by French literary critics for its stylistic innovations and its "verbal violence,"²⁷ *La Répudiation* proved much more divisive in terms of content: whereas French readership generally appreciated the "shocking" nature of the novel,²⁸ North African readers were more torn, voicing both dismay at the ways in which *La Répudiation* seemed to air their dirty laundry in front of the former colonizer, and approbation at its articulation of the frustrations felt by women (in particular) and individuals (more generally) faced with the postcolonial status quo.²⁹ This "critique from the inside,"³⁰ functioned thus as a double-edged

²⁶ Ruhe, 207.

²⁷ Kaoutar Harchi, "La création littéraire au carrefour de l'histoire intime et de l'histoire collective: Étude du cas de l'écrivain algérien francophone Rachid Boudjedra," *CONTEXTES*, no. 15 (February 27, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4000/contextes.6052>.

²⁸ Roger Allen, "Translation Translated: Rashīd Abū Jadra's *Ma 'rakat al-Zuqāq*," in *Selected Studies in Modern Arabic Narrative: History, Genre, Translation* (Lockwood Press, 2018): 182.

²⁹ Valérie Lotodé, "Le Rôle de la critique dans la réception de l'oeuvre romanesque de Rachid Boudjedra," *Présence francophone* 61 (2003): 133.

³⁰ In his interview with Monique Martineau, Boudjedra explained, "Ce que je tiens à préciser, en tout cas, c'est que si je critique ma société, je le fais de l'intérieur" [What I want to make clear, in any case, is that if I criticize my society, I do so from within] (14).

sword: on the one hand, Boudjedra explicitly denounced the ills that plagued independent Algeria, yet on the other, his representations of his native country's woes confirmed in the eyes of many European readers an essentialized idea of a supposedly authentic "Algerianness."³¹

In the years since its publication, *La Répudiation* has continued to fascinate scholars and the general public alike and has remained Boudjedra's best-known work by far. Yet for all the attention paid to the novel, most significantly to its stylistic innovations and its critique of postcolonial Algeria, as of yet, little to no attention has been paid to this novel's engagement with Algerian Jews and Jewishness. In many respects, this is understandable; there are just three Jewish characters, one of whom remains unnamed, and they appear on just a handful of the novel's 250-plus pages. Although one may be tempted to dismiss them as tangential to the novel's project, as the dearth of attention paid by past scholars would seem to imply, when considered in relation to Boudjedra's subsequent work, it becomes clear that these minor characters serve as the foundation on which Boudjedra would build his decades-long interrogation of the Algerian Jewish past.

A brief examination of the three Jewish characters in *La Répudiation* will establish Boudjedra's debut novel as the first of several attempts to narrate Algeria's multi-confessional heritage. As mentioned above, *La Répudiation* boasts three Jewish characters—an unnamed Jewish seamstress, her daughter Leïla, and a physics teacher nicknamed "Heimatlos"—all of whom are intimately linked to Rachid's family in clear cut yet transgressive ways. The least developed of these characters is the unnamed seamstress, who appears in just one line of the novel, and in many ways seems to be nothing more than a trivial detail that facilitates the discussion of broader family dynamics. Yet read in the context of Boudjedra's overall oeuvre,

³¹ Lotodé, 133.

the unnamed Jewish seamstress reveals herself to be much more: she is the first ebauche of what will come to be the recurring figure of Henriette, a character whose story Boudjedra develops and reworks over the course of his literary career, and who serves as the motivation for this chapter's analysis. In other words, the unnamed Jewish seamstress is much more than a descriptive flourish on the page; her presence in Boudjedra's foundational novel and her development in subsequent works render her a crucial, if often overlooked, aspect of Boudjedra's contributions to the *république des lettres*.

It is easy to understand how scholars have overlooked the figure of the Jewish seamstress in *La Répudiation*. Mentioned but once, she is the former lover of Rachid's father Si Zoubir, with whom she had Leïla, Rachid's "demi-sœur juive" [Jewish half-sister].³² Kept a secret for years— "Personne n'était au courant de son existence" [no one knew of her existence] Rachid tells us—Leïla is moved from the Jewish quarter into Rachid's family home as a teenager.³³ Although in the Islamic tradition, religion generally passes through the father, this does not seem to have any bearing on Leïla's reception at her father's family home, where she is seen as a strange outsider. As Rachid tells it, the arrival of a Jew in a home in which "l'Islam était l'alibi permanent" [Islam was found to be in every nook and cranny] fascinates the women of the house, who rush over to get a glimpse of "cette jeune fille sauvage" [this wild young girl] who had been "transplantée du jour au lendemain" [transplanted overnight] into the home of a father she barely knows.³⁴

³² Rachid Boudjedra, *La Répudiation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), 147; Rachid Boudjedra, *The Repudiation*, trans. Golda Lambrova, (Colorado Springs, Colo: Three Continents Press, 1995), 118.

³³ *La Répudiation* 148; *The Repudiation* 118.

³⁴ *La Répudiation* 148; *The Repudiation* 118.

If the women's reaction to Leïla is one of curiosity, Rachid's reaction echoes that of his father. The sexual attraction between the seamstress and the father is problematically reflected in the relationship between Rachid and his half-sister, whose behavior towards one another verges on the incestuous, at least in Rachid's renditions of it: "Attouchements... Je la chassais de ma chambre lorsque le bourdonnement des sens m'avertissait de l'inéluctable gaspillage dérivé du père génésique, car Leïla faisait tout pour m'exciter et devenir ma complice. Il fallait en parler au praticien : avais-je violé ma demi-sœur ?" [Fumblings... I chased her from my room when the buzzing of the senses warned me of the inevitable wastage generated by the procreative father, since Leïla was doing everything she could to arouse me and get close to me. I had to speak to the man in the know: had I raped my half-sister?].³⁵

Interestingly enough, Rachid highlights religion, not familiar relationship, as the main reason not to give into temptation: "Quelle magie, quel sortilège me possédaient tout à coup? Il ne suffisait pas de la défendre, il fallait encore invoquer nos deux sangs abasourdis par le paradoxe que les muphtis et les rabbins s'entêtaient à souligner" [What magic spell possessed me all of a sudden? It was not enough to defend her, I had to go so far as invoking the blood flowing in both our veins, devastated by the paradox stubbornly emphasized by the muftis and rabbis] he comments.³⁶ In Rachid's mind, it isn't enough to simply prohibit this incestuous relationship; he must justify the prohibition in a way that illustrates the gravity of the situation. To do this, he invokes the religious difference that Jewish and Muslim leaders doggedly point out, thereby creating a hierarchy of taboo in which Jewish-Muslim intimate relationships are considered more serious a transgression than incest.

³⁵ *La Répudiation* 149; *The Repudiation* 118.

³⁶ *La Répudiation* 148; *The Repudiation* 118.

Heimatlos's situation is somewhat different, but religious difference also plays a key role in his (lack of) acceptance into the family. An Algerian Jew with whom Rachid's older brother Zahir had an unconsummated homosexual love affair, Heimatlos returns to Algeria from Israel, the country to which he had emigrated, in order to attend the funeral of his former love interest.³⁷ Rachid's descriptions of his family's attitudes towards Heimatlos before emigration illustrate his lack of acceptance into the family. Speaking of Heimatlos's relationship to Zahir, Rachid writes, "les avunculaires nous mettaient à quarantaine à cause des amitiés louches, à double titre, de Zahir" [the avunculars gave us a wide berth because of the queer friendships, on both accounts, of Zahir].³⁸ If Zahir's aunts and uncles hold the family at a distance due to his questionable choice in friends, his mother's actions make it clear which aspect of his and Heimatlos's relationship is more problematic; as Rachid writes, "Ma mère maudissait les juifs (...) sitôt le professeur parti, [elle] aérail les chambres, lavait les verres dans lesquels le mécréant avait bu et récitait des formules" [My mother cursed the Jews (...) as soon as the teacher had left, Mother aired all the windows, washed the glasses from which the infidel had drunk and recited incantations].³⁹

Echoing Rachid's implicit suggestion that the interreligious nature of his transgression with Leïla is ostensibly a more serious offense than the fact the two share a father, the novel also suggests that the hostility Zahir's family—and especially his mother—feel towards Heimatlos is hierarchical in nature: the fact that Zahir is in a homosexual relationship is "bad," but the fact that he is in this relationship with a Jew is "worse." These reactions reflect greater social and

³⁷ That the novel never provides Heimatlos's given name, but instead refers to him solely with the moniker "stateless," suggests that neither Algeria, where he must hide his Jewish identity, nor Israel, where he has since relocated, claim him as one of their own.

³⁸ *La Répudiation* 104; *The Repudiation* 86.

³⁹ *La Répudiation* 104; *The Repudiation* 86.

cultural norms of the time period, as Boudjedra explained in a 1969 interview: “[Zahir] est aussi quelque peu exhibitionniste. Il aime choquer le gens en agissant par exemple contre les préceptes de la religion. Ainsi est-il homosexuel. Ce n’est pas tant ce qui est grave mais qu’il se livre à ces pratiques avec un Juif ! Ça c’est grave au regard de la société. C’est pourquoi Zahir le fait exprès.” [(Zahir) is also somewhat of an exhibitionist. He likes to shock people by acting, for example, contrary to the precepts of religion. Thus, he is homosexual. It is not so much that this itself poses a problem, but rather that he indulges in these practices with a Jew! That is serious in the eyes of society. That is why Zahir does it on purpose].⁴⁰ Notwithstanding Boudjedra’s instrumentalization of a marginalized sexuality for political purposes, it is clear from his comments that the attitudes and actions of Zahir’s family members toward his Jewish lover, coupled with Rachid’s interrogations of his feelings for Leïla, need to be understood as a reflection of wider Algerian norms regarding the illicit nature of intimate relationships between Jews and Muslims. In other words, this is not just a family issue, but rather a broader, socio-cultural one.

If *La Répudiation* can thus be said to represent hegemonic social attitudes regarding interreligious relationships, it also complicates the essentializing narratives that undergird said social attitudes through its representation of “passing” between Jews and Muslims. The most notable of these moments takes place at Zahir’s funeral, which Heimatlos attends at great personal risk. Wearing “un déguisement peu discret, pour ne pas être reconnu” [a rather showy disguise in order to not be recognized],⁴¹ Heimatlos joins the group of Muslim mourners and participates in Islamic funeral rituals “courant le risque de se faire lapider par l’assistance

⁴⁰ Quoted in Martineau, 15.

⁴¹ *La Répudiation* 160; *The Repudiation* 127.

sacerdotale” [running the risk of being stoned by the priestly bystanders] in order to honor his former lover.⁴² He speaks in “monosyllables inaudibles” [inaudible monosyllables] so as not to be betrayed by his Jewish accent,⁴³ and “ouvrait et fermait la bouche, donnant l’illusion aux autres qu’il dominait son texte,” [opened and closed his mouth, pretending to the others that he knew his text] in order to blend in with the other mourners of the group.⁴⁴ Despite the numerous red flags that mark Heimatlos as an outsider, his presence at the funeral does not draw any attention from the Muslim mourners even if, as Rachid remarks, “personne n’était dupe” [no one was taken in].⁴⁵ Heimatlos’s participation in the events relies on the fact that his secret, if it even is one, remains unarticulated, a fact that both he and Rachid know all too well. Annoyed with Heimatlos’s machinations, Rachid explains, “je le menaçais de le dénoncer à la foule déchaînée qui le reléguerait au niveau des autres juifs” [I threatened to denounce him to the frenzied crowd who would relegate him to the ranks of the other Jews].⁴⁶ Heimatlos is thus only accepted insofar as he attempts to assimilate without making waves, and without his religious identity being made explicit.

What is more, a short passage toward the end of the novel illustrates that religious passing goes both ways. Recounting an episode from his childhood, Rachid explains how, while walking through the Jewish quarter in his youth, he took on the accent of his Jewish music teacher, Mlle Lévy, in order to play a game of marbles with some young boys he met. Upon first seeing him, the local boys investigate, not knowing what to make of this newcomer: “Ils

⁴² *La Répudiation* 167; *The Repudiation* 133.

⁴³ *La Répudiation* 161; *The Repudiation* 128.

⁴⁴ *La Répudiation* 170; *The Repudiation* 135.

⁴⁵ *La Répudiation* 170; *The Repudiation* 135.

⁴⁶ *La Répudiation* 170; *The Repudiation* 135.

s'approchent de moi" [They are coming towards me], Rachid tells us, "Me flairent (quelle odeur, bon Dieu!). Angoisse. Le verdict est flou. Ils n'osent pas se prononcer. Mosquée? Synagogue!" [They sniff me (goodness, what a stench!). Dread. The verdict is vague. They don't dare say anything. Mosque? Synagogue!].⁴⁷ Despite the obvious differences between the local youth and himself—in addition to his lack of kippah, Rachid is more corpulent than the other boys, whose bodies he describes as "souffreteux" [sickly]—they accept him as "un drôle de juif" [an odd kind of Jew] and allow him to play with them.⁴⁸ Young Rachid does so, speaking with a fake accent and winning all the games until, as he puts it, "Mon accent me trahit" [My accent betrays me].⁴⁹ It is only at this moment when the boys turn on him, chasing him out the Jewish quarter while calling out "Musulman!" [Moslem!].⁵⁰ Rachid's experience as a youth thus anticipates Heimatlos's experience as an adult: in both cases, the majority population, be they Jews or Muslims, overlooks indications of religious difference and accepts someone who is clearly different as one of their own, at least for the time being. Although this fragile acceptance is superficial in nature, the fact that these episodes of passing can even occur at all challenges both essentializing narratives of ethnic difference between Algerian Jews and Muslims and hegemonic discourses of total Algerian Jewish assimilation to French culture, suggesting instead that the boundaries between these two religious groups may not be so clearly defined, and that during the late colonial period, Algerian Jews and Muslims were still part and parcel of one another's daily lives.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *La Répudiation* 206; *The Repudiation* 161.

⁴⁸ *La Répudiation* 206; *The Repudiation* 162.

⁴⁹ *La Répudiation* 206; *The Repudiation* 162.

⁵⁰ *La Répudiation* 206; *The Repudiation* 162.

Taken together, *Heimatlos*, Leïla, and Leïla's mother speak to varying levels of acceptance and intimacy between Algerian Jews and Muslims: they are at once covertly desired, curiously studied, superficially tolerated, and forcefully rejected. On the broader social level, they are accepted by society only insofar as they assimilate and don't draw attention to themselves or to their religious differences. Their experiences, alongside those of young Rachid, illustrate a broad range of possible interactions and relationships between Algerian Jews and Muslims that both hinge on and overlook religious difference. As such, these characters' experiences call into question hegemonic narratives of Algerian Jewish belonging—or lack thereof—in (French colonial) Algeria, and firmly establish Jews as a transgressive yet ever-present part of the Algerian family.

Fifteen years after her first appearance in *La Répudiation*, the Jewish seamstress with whom the narrator's father has a relationship takes center stage in *La Macération*. The striking similarities between *La Répudiation* and what has been called its “Arabic successor”⁵² are such that the frontier separating the two story-worlds is vague at best, with certain critics conflating them into one.⁵³ Like *La Répudiation*, *La Macération* is a stream-of-consciousness-like contemplation about the narrator's father and broader family dynamics. Having gone back to his family home for his customary summer visit, the narrator spends time reliving old memories and

⁵¹ There exists substantial historical scholarship that challenges these hegemonic discourses on the relationships between Algerian Jews and Muslims, and between Algerian Jews and France. See, for example, Pierre-Jean Le Foll-Luciani, *Les Juifs algériens dans la lutte anticoloniale: trajectoires dissidentes (1934 - 1965)*, Histoire (Rennes: Presses Univ. de Rennes, 2015) and Christopher Silver, *Recording History: Jews, Muslims, and Music across Twentieth-Century North Africa* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2022, among others.

⁵² Abu-Haidar, 48.

⁵³ For example, Roger Allen has claimed that *La Macération* “places Rashīd, the principal character (‘victim,’ perhaps) of *La Répudiation*, into a more retrospective frame of reference through a revisitation of the events and personages within his dysfunctional family” (182), seemingly implying that the narrator of *La Répudiation* and that of *La Macération* are one and the same.

sorting through old postcards that his father sent while away on various trips. As he does so, he ruminates on the impossible task that has been asked of him, namely, how to organize the funeral arrangements of one of his father's lovers, Hassiba née Henriette Gozlan, a dressmaker who ostensibly converted from Judaism to Islam in order to marry his father, yet who lacks official proof of both her conversion and her marriage. The figure of the Jewish seamstress, whose presence was quite minor in *La Répudiation*, thus becomes central in *La Macération*, for the question of "where to bury the body" is the one that drives the novel and pushes it forward.

Given this rather unorthodox *fil conducteur*, one might be tempted to think it would have aroused significant critical interest: for what reason would an Algerian author write a novel more than twenty years after Algerian independence, in an era in which the cultural and physical presence of Algerian Jews had long since ceased to be felt on Algerian soil, that focused on the body of a dying Algerian Jewish convert to Islam? Why this character, in this place, at this time? Yet the situation of *La Macération* is, in fact, quite the opposite. Indeed, this novel has been the subject of relatively little scholarly attention, and what attention is paid stops short of interrogating the figure of the Jewish seamstress. Some critics have gone so far as to discount Henriette/Hassiba all together; Hafid Gafaïti, for example, claims that, "On the surface [the narrator] is confronted by the insolvable problem of deciding whether or not he should bury his Jewish step-mother in the Muslim cemetery [...] However, this situation merely serves as a pretext that enables the narrator to settle accounts with the past and with a father who symbolizes an archaic, feudal reality."⁵⁴ Although it may very well be true that the question of "where to bury the body" enables the narrator to "settle accounts with the past," to say that Henriette/Hassiba is just a "pretext" is to gloss over the ways in which the novel, through the

⁵⁴ Gafaïti, 99-100.

figure of the dying seamstress, complicates facile (post)colonial narratives of essentialized ethno-religious Algerian identity. If *La Répudiation* establishes Jews as “part of the family,” *La Macération* questions the limits of family and the possibility of drawing hard lines between Muslim “insiders” and Jewish “outsiders,” ultimately asking readers to reconsider the socio-cultural significance they accord to these distinctions.

Before delving into the questions posed by Henriette/Hassiba's impending burial, it is important to situate her within the broader context of the narrator's family dynamics and history. Readers familiar with the Arabic language and with North African history will easily pick up on the allegorical nature of her husband's name, Hassan El-Djezaïri. To begin, Hassan has a supremely symbolic surname: “El-Djezaïri” means “the Algerian [man]” in Arabic. A linguistic midpoint between the term for Algeria “الجزائر” [al-jazā'ir] and the nisba adjective from which it is derived—“جزائري” [jazā'irī]—Hassan's last name suggests not only that he is Algerian, but that he is *the* Algerian.⁵⁵ Furthermore, his life events mirror those of Algerian and wider Maghrebi nationalism: Hassan is elected treasurer of both the *Parti du peuple algérien* (Algerian People's Party) and the *Neo Destour*, a Tunisian nationalist political party.⁵⁶ His anti-colonial convictions are such that he is sent to jail for assaulting a French colonial officer and collaborates with the Nazis, something his son makes sure to tell us was done not out of a shared ideology,

⁵⁵ A nisba adjective is “an adjective which is derived from a noun” that “is first aimed at creating adjectives related to countries, tribes, cities and persons... and thus plays an important role in personal names.” See Rene-Vincent du Grandlaunay, “Nisba” (Koninklijke Brill NV), accessed July 7, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1163/1570-6699_eall_EALL_COM_vol3_0230.

⁵⁶ Founded in Paris on March 11, 1937 by Messali Hadj, an Algerian politician and fervent nationalist, the PPA sought to bring about the emancipation of the Algerian people all while recognizing French sovereignty. For more on the PPA, see Jacques Simon, *Le PPA: Le Parti du peuple algérien, 1937-1947*, Collection CREAC-Histoire (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005) and Rabah Aissaoui, “Algerian Nationalists in the French Political Arena and beyond: The Étoile nord-africaine and the Parti du peuple Algérien in Interwar France,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 15, no. 1 (March 2010): 1–12. For further information on Messali Hadj, the founder of the PPA, see Benjamin Stora, *Messali Hadj, 1898-1974* (Paris: Sycomore, 1982) and Jacques Simon, *Messali Hadj: 1898-1974: la passion de l'Algérie libre* (Paris: Editions Tirésias, 1998).

but rather “par ressentiment envers le colonialisme français” [out of resentment towards French colonialism].⁵⁷ Taken together, Hassan Al-Djezaïri’s name and life story render him the embodiment of the modern nation of Algeria. At the same time, however, Hassan is also emblematic of “an archaic, feudal reality:” he repudiates his first wife and takes multiple subsequent ones, including a prepubescent teenager whom he rapes the night of her first menses.⁵⁸ He is the paradoxical nature of the young nation of Algeria made manifest and as such, his personal circumstances, and those of his loved ones, are transformed into a synecdoche for those of the entire Algerian people.

While there seems to be some scholarly consensus on the fact that Hassan is an allegorical figure, and that *La Macération* reads as an allegory for the modern nation of Algeria, few, if any, scholars have critically interrogated the character of Hassiba, Hassan’s common-law wife who converted from Judaism to Islam at the beginning of their relationship. Indeed, Hassiba’s presence in the novel, and the ways in which that presence is articulated, complicate what is an otherwise much more straightforward allegory of the conception and birth of an independent Algeria. More specifically, Hassiba’s centrality to both the narrator’s family and the novel as a whole places Jewishness at the heart of this narrative of Algeria. *La Macération* calls into question ethnic discourses that rely upon the reification of religious difference by confronting readers with two opposing, yet equally plausible interpretations of Hassiba’s situation: either she is a married Muslim woman who is the victim of bureaucratic red tape, or she is an unwed Jewish mother who has pulled the proverbial wool over the eyes of many. As the novel continually refers to, yet refuses to resolve, Hassiba’s ambiguous religious and civil

⁵⁷ Boudjedra, *La Macération* 281.

⁵⁸ Gafaïti, 100.

situation, readers are obliged to keep both of these options in their minds and are forced to consider difficult questions about how societies reify religious and ethnic boundaries, how much significance they allow said boundaries to have, and how they make sense of those who transgress.

In order to understand the driving force behind the narrative of *La Macération*, it is beneficial to go back and revisit the moment in which the narrator, Rachid, first explains his conundrum to the reader.⁵⁹ One day, he receives a letter from his uncle Ismaël, a retired civil servant, with some surprising news: “Je viens de me rendre compte que la deuxième épouse... de ton père n’est en vérité que sa maîtresse illégitime ou bien—si tu veux—sa concubine” [I have just realized that your father's second wife... is in fact only his illegitimate mistress or—if you like—his concubine] Ismaël explains to his nephew.⁶⁰ The shock that Hassan’s second wife is not actually a wedded spouse, but rather an “illegitimate mistress”—or even a “concubine”—pales in comparison to a larger issue that Ismaël proceeds to point out, as he exclaims, “Mais il y a pire! Il n’y a aucune trace écrite prouvant que la pauvre femme—Henriette Gozlan dite Hassiba—se fût convertie à l’islam. Que faire ? Cette femme reste aux yeux de la juridiction civile et la jurisprudence religieuse, juive et célibataire” [But it gets worse! There is no written evidence proving that the poor woman—Henriette Gozlan known as Hassiba—actually converted to Islam. What to do? In the eyes of civil jurisdiction and religious jurisprudence, this woman remains Jewish and single].⁶¹ As Ismaël’s interjection “Mais il y a pire!” suggests, the fact that Henriette/Hassiba is not legally married may be “bad,” but the fact that there is no

⁵⁹ Although the novel never explicitly confirms that the narrator’s name is Rachid, it strongly suggests that to be the case. To facilitate the analysis, I will therefore refer to the narrator of *La Macération* as “Rachid.”

⁶⁰ Boudjedra, *La Macération* 18.

⁶¹ Boudjedra, *La Macération* 18.

evidence of her conversion to Islam is even “worse.” In the eyes of the state and its official religion, therefore, Henriette/Hassiba is not the loyal Muslim wife she has presented herself to be, but rather an unwed Jewish mother.

Yet Uncle Ismaël does not write to his nephew simply to inform him of his stepmother’s legal status. Indeed, the ramifications of his discovery have the potential to ripple out far beyond the family. Ismaël goes on to suggest that, without acceptable proof that Henriette/Hassiba did in fact convert to Islam, her body is set to be buried in the dilapidated Jewish cemetery, an event that, were it to take place, would “out” Henriette/Hassiba as “Jewish” and subsequently cast Hassan’s entire family into ill repute. As such, Ismaël begs his nephew to remedy the situation: “Il faudra agir vite! Très vite! Mais surtout que ce terrible secret que je viens de te livrer reste bien gardé... Ne le trahis pas et ne l’ébruite pas, à n’importe quel prix!” [You must act quickly! Very quickly! But above all, make sure this terrible secret that I have just revealed to you remains under wraps... Don't give it away and don't disclose it, at any price!].⁶² Ismaël’s plea is thus not only to act quickly, but to act “very quickly.” The repetition of “vite” imbues a clear sense of urgency in the matter: it is not just a question of making sure that this family secret stays a secret, but of taking swift action and doing whatever it takes to ensure it remains as such.

Somewhat frustratingly for the reader, *La Macération* refuses to resolve this debacle, and instead offers support to both sides of the question, without coming down firmly on either one. To begin, Hassiba’s original given name reflects an undeniable Algerian Jewish heritage. Like many Algerian Jews, Hassiba was given a French name at birth, Henriette, which she subsequently changed upon her conversion to Islam. Her original given name is significant, as it speaks to the influence of the French language and culture on the North African Jewish

⁶² Boudjedra, *La Macération* 18-19.

populations.⁶³ That Henriette’s family gave their daughter a French name was not uncommon in Algerian Jewish communities; indeed, over the course of the twentieth century, more and more North African Jews chose French names for their children as families began to integrate French ways of life and sent their children to school in the French system.⁶⁴ Henriette’s given name can thus be read as a symbol of her family’s—and, more broadly speaking, the Algerian Jewish community’s—rapprochement to French culture during the years of French colonization, and in particular following the 1870 Crémieux Decree.⁶⁵

If her original first name marked her family’s connection to the colonial power, her last name situates her firmly within the Algerian Jewish context. More specifically, her surname of “Gozlan,” Arabic for gazelles “غزلان” [ghizlān],⁶⁶ is a common Sephardic North African Jewish last name, particularly amongst the Jews of Constantine,⁶⁷ whence she hails. What is more, the root letters of her last name—غ ز ل—point to the Arabic literary form of the *ghazal*, a “genre of lyric poem, generally short and graceful in form and typically dealing with themes of love” that, more specifically, quite often tackle themes of “hopeless, idealistic lovers pining for each other unto death.”⁶⁸ Hassiba’s surname thus fulfills two equally significant functions: on the one hand,

⁶³ Her birthname is also significant as it is the same name repeated throughout Boudjedra’s oeuvre; indeed, it is only in *La Macération* that this figure changes her name from Henriette to Hassiba.

⁶⁴ The shift towards French first names might be understood as either symbolic of North African Jews’ desire for emancipation through assimilation to French culture, as Joëlle Bahloul argues in “Noms et prénoms juifs nord-africains”, or as a strategic manipulation of a legal system based on ethno-religious categorization. See Joëlle Bahloul, “Noms et prénoms juifs nord-africains,” *Terrain*, no. 4 (March 1, 1985): 62–69, <https://doi.org/10.4000/terrain.2872>.

⁶⁵ The 1870 Crémieux Decree, named after French Jewish statesman Adolph Crémieux who spearheaded the effort, bestowed automatic French citizenship upon all Algerian Jews living in the three northern *départements*. It did not extend to those populations living in the unincorporated Saharan territories, however. See Stein, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* (2014) for a rigorous study of this often-overlooked population.

⁶⁶ Indeed, in *al-Marath*, her last name is spelled as “غزلان” (10).

⁶⁷ Bahloul, n.p. Paragraph 11.

⁶⁸ “Ghazal,” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, n.d., <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ghazal>.

it firmly roots her in the Algerian Jewish context by signifying her family's religious and geographic roots, and on the other hand, it alludes to her complicated love story with Hassan.

If Hassiba's name signifies her Jewish origins, her actions—as recounted to us by the narrator—suggest that she has embraced Islam.⁶⁹ The most obvious evidence of this is that, in accordance with Muslim tradition and upon converting, Hassiba changes her name from the French-Jewish “Henriette” to “Hassiba,” an Arabic name meaning “respected, esteemed; noble, of noble birth, highborn.”⁷⁰ Her choice of new, Arabicized name is noteworthy as it inverts her place in the social hierarchy, moving her from the bottom to the top and allying her phonetically with her husband Hassan through the consonance of the first two root letters. Furthermore, Hassiba's dying actions evince her embrace of Islam. On her deathbed, she acts in accordance with Muslim ritual, praying over her *misbaha*:⁷¹ “...elle était sur son lit de mort, ne cessant pas d'égrener son chapelet et répéter de manière aphone des formules incantatoires et dévotes, sans cesser d'implorer Dieu et son prophète (le musulman)” [she was on her deathbed, incessantly ruminating over her prayer beads and voicelessly repeating incantatory and devout formulas, continuously pleading with God and his prophet (the Muslim one)].⁷² Hassiba's use of Islamic prayer beads and the narrator's clarification that she is praying to God and his prophet – the

⁶⁹ At this point, it is important to note that according to Islamic doctrine, all that is required to convert — or revert — to Islam is to say the *shahada* before two or more Muslim witnesses (Abourabia 1). Hassiba has thus completed all the actions necessary for religious conversion. In addition, Hassiba completes several other related actions which, although they are not required by Islam, are recommended for new converts: she changes her first name from the Jewish-French “Henriette” to the Arabic “Hassiba” and keeps the company of other Muslims. For a discussion of recommended actions upon converting to Islam, see Khalil Abourabia, “Conversion to and from Islam,” in *Jews and Muslims in the Islamic World*, ed. Tsevi Zohar and Bernard Dov Cooperman, Studies and Texts in Jewish History and Culture ;Vol. 21 xii, 384 pages (Bethesda, Md.: University Press of Maryland, 2013), 1–12.

⁷⁰ “حسيب Ḥasib,” in *Hans Wehr 4th Ed. Arabic Almanac v6.1 - Powered by Mawrid Reader v3.1*, n.d., <https://ejtaal.net/>. Page 206.

⁷¹ The *misbaha* are a set of prayer beads that aid Muslim worshippers to keep track of counting while performing the repetitive prayers of the *tasbīh*.

⁷² Boudjedra, *La Macération* 12.

Muslim one – signify her Islamic faith. Furthermore, Hassiba’s embrace of Islam stands in stark contrast to her disinterest in Jewish rite. Commenting on his mixed feelings for his father’s wife, Rachid writes: “Je la [...] surprenais brusquement, m’enfonçant dans sa sensibilité à fleur de peau, la criblant de versets judaïques, afin de la faire réagir. J’étais à l’affût; mais elle n’eut aucune réaction” [I would (...) suddenly surprise her, digging into her raw sensibilities, riddling her with Judaic verses, trying to get her to react. I was on the lookout; but she had no reaction whatsoever].⁷³ Notwithstanding his efforts to taunt Hassiba with evidence of her previous religious affiliation, the narrator is unable to solicit any response whatsoever from the dying woman, suggesting that despite the lack of official “proof,” she has indeed embraced her newfound religion.

Unfortunately for Rachid’s family, Hassiba’s lived experience as a Muslim is meaningless in the eyes of the state, and the lack of official documentation of her conversion means that she is never fully accepted as Muslim. In addition, the ways in which the various characters refer to and talk about Hassiba demonstrate that she lacks social as well as administrative acceptance. For example, Tante Fatma, the family housekeeper, remarks on the impossible nature of Jewish conversion to Islam using two related expressions: “un juif est un juif et le restera jusqu’à la fin des temps, comme la pierre ne peut fondre et ni la putain se repentir” [a Jew is a Jew and will remain so until the end of time, just as a stone cannot melt and a whore cannot repent] and, a few pages later, “le juif ne se convertit jamais, comme la pierre ne fond pas et la putain n’a jamais le temps d’aller pisser!” [the Jew never converts, just as the stone never melts and the whore never has time take a piss].⁷⁴ Comparing the conversion of Jews to

⁷³ Boudjedra, *La Macération* 14.

⁷⁴ Boudjedra, *La Macération* 21, 24.

Islam to rocks melting and prostitutes repenting, Tante Fatma's proverbs illustrate an entrenched, essentializing attitude regarding the difference between Jews and Muslims.

This understanding of Jews as fundamentally distinct from Muslims does not necessarily translate into a negative attitude towards Jews as a whole, however. As such, while it is true that throughout the novel, Hassiba's main distinguishing characteristic, highlighted time and again, is her Jewishness—or, more precisely, others' perception thereof⁷⁵—it is also true that this term is often used often in a purely descriptive fashion, and not necessarily in a pejorative manner.⁷⁶ For example, the narrator refers to Hassiba as “l'épouse (amante juive de mon père)” [wife (my father's Jewish lover)] and “la vieille marâtre juive” [the old Jewish stepmother], while his lover refers to Hassiba as “la femme juive” [the Jewish woman].⁷⁷ As for the narrator's mother Baya, she refers to Hassiba simply as “Jew,” yet even this stark sobriquet comes from a place of caring: “Elle n'a jamais désigné ou appelé celle qu'elle prenait pour l'épouse de son mari que par le mot ‘Juive,’ sans aucune connotation raciste mais avec un mélange de pitié et de chagrin, parce qu'elle l'aimait bien et voulait lui éviter le feu éternel de l'envers du monde où elle croyait ça sentait le cramaisi!” [She only ever referred to or called the one she took to be her husband's wife using the word “Jew,” without any racist connotation but with a mixture of pity and sorrow, because she liked her and wanted to save her from the eternal fire of the underworld where she believed her shame would make itself felt!].⁷⁸ Baya thus “really likes” her husband's Jewish

⁷⁵ It is interesting to note that the scant scholarship on this novel functions in a similar manner. Despite all of the indications in the text that Hassiba lives her life as a Muslim woman, criticism of this novel also refuses to see Hassiba as a Muslim convert. To wit, Farida Abu-Haidar refers to Hassiba as Hassan's “Jewish concubine” (51); Hafid Gafāiti refers to her as the narrator's “Jewish step-mother” (99); and reviewer Pierre-Robert Leclercq calls her Hassan's “épouse juive” [Jewish spouse]. See Pierre-Robert Leclercq, “Review of *La Macération*,” *Études : revue fondée en 1856 par des Pères de la compagnie de Jésus* 364, no. 2 (February 1986): 269.

⁷⁶ In both French and Arabic, “Jew” has a history of being used as an ethnic slur.

⁷⁷ Boudjedra, *La Macération* 21, 39, 86.

wife, and pities her the unfortunate afterlife that awaits her as a Jew. As the narrator's explanation of his mother's actions suggests, Hassiba may well be seen as a religious other, but her otherness can peacefully coexist within the family, and by extension, within the framework of the nation more broadly.

The ambiguity of Hassiba's situation is made all the more apparent by the fact that the novel also refuses to clarify who is aware of her background, and who isn't. On the one hand, Hassiba's Jewish origins are regarded as a shameful secret by many; a secret so shameful, in fact, that uncle Ismaël begs his nephew not only to find a solution, but to refrain from speaking to Hassiba's children about it, out of fear that "une telle nouvelle ne les traumatise gravement et ne leur cause des dégâts tant physiques que mentaux..." [such news might severely traumatize them and cause them both physical and mental damage...].⁷⁹ If her children are unaware of their mother's circumstances, however, the same cannot be said for other characters in the novel, such as Baya, Rachid's mother, who refers to Hassiba as the "Juive," and Tante Fatma, the servant who refuses to accept Hassiba's conversion to Islam. The knowledge of Hassiba's Jewish origins is known even outside the family home; discussing his experience at Quranic school, the narrator writes that his "bougre de maître" [jerk of a teacher] knew about "l'existence d'une juive parmi les épouses de mon père" [the existence of a Jew among my father's wives].⁸⁰ Readers are then left to wonder just how secret this "secret" is, and why in some cases, it seems to make waves, while in others, it causes barely a ripple.

⁷⁸ Boudjedra, *La Macération* 16.

⁷⁹ Boudjedra, *La Macération* 18.

⁸⁰ Boudjedra, *La Macération* 84.

Unfortunately for readers, Hassiba herself is in no shape to help us navigate her situation, as she has no voice, neither physical nor metaphorical. Already on her death bed at the novel's opening, Hassiba remains perpetually unable to defend herself or to engage in any of the conversations surrounding her religious and marital status, or her impending burial, due to throat cancer: "...elle n'avait plus de voix depuis l'ablation de ses cordes vocales corrodées par le cancer de gorge" [she had had no voice since the removal of her vocal cords, which had been corroded by throat cancer] Rachid tells us.⁸¹ Hassiba's ability to speak (for herself) was thus first affected by the natural progression of disease, and subsequently by the physical removal of her voice box. The fact that she is suffering from throat cancer and has lost the ability to speak is thus doubly significant. On the one hand, the excision of her voice box means that her accent, "l'accent des juifs de Constantine" [the accent of the Jews of Constantine], one of the few—perhaps the only—lasting indicator of her Jewish origins, is physically taken from her.⁸² What is more, the medical intervention leaves her physically unable to tell her own story or to describe her understanding of and experience with Judaism and Islam. This is all the more meaningful as Hassiba has retained her mental capacities; as Rachid notes after he tries, in vain, to get her to react to Jewish prayers, "elle n'[a] rien perdu de sa lucidité" [she was as clear-headed as ever].⁸³ Present of mind in a moribund body, Hassiba is a silenced relic of the past who must be dealt with, and whose story, if it will be told at all, will be told by others.

In many ways, then, Hassiba's story simultaneously reinforces and casts doubt upon the feasibility of basing legal and social order upon ethnic and religious distinctions that distinguish

⁸¹ Boudjedra, *La Macération* 14.

⁸² Boudjedra, *La Macération* 13.

⁸³ Boudjedra, *La Macération* 14.

Algerian Jews from Muslims. By presenting readers with a character who exists at the intersection of Judaism and Islam, who can be read as both Jewish and Muslim, and whose presence within a prominent Muslim family is, if not necessarily embraced, then at the very least, peaceably tolerated, *La Macération* suggests the need to take a more critical eye to hegemonic discourses of ethno-religious difference and socio-cultural segregation in (post)colonial Algeria, and to pay more attention to the complex lived experiences of the actual people whom these discourses supposedly describe.

Through their exploration of intimate relationships and transgressive interactions between Algerian Jews and Muslims, *La Répudiation* and *La Macération* challenge the essentialization and othering of Algerian Jews as fundamentally different from and incompatible with independent, majority-Muslim Algeria. What is more, although they rely upon hegemonic discourses of Jewish/Muslim difference, these novels problematize the very binaries that undergird them: how different are Muslims and Jews, really, *La Répudiation* asks readers, if they can “pass” for one another, like Heimatlos and young Rachid? How different do Muslims and Jews really consider one another to be, if they are willing to overlook signs pointing to the presence of religious Others in their midst, as do the Muslim funeralgoers and the youngsters of the Jewish quarter? What do we do with those who defy easy categorization, *La Macération* asks us? What matters more: one’s origins, or one’s actions? And who gets to decide? These two novels, through their interrogation of religious difference and the ways in which it is taken up or ignored, situate Jews firmly within the socio-cultural life of early independent Algeria, as tolerated – if not necessarily accepted – religious others.

Blurring the Battle Lines: La Vie à l'endroit (1997)

Written during the Algerian Civil War of the 1990s, *La Vie à l'endroit* introduces readers yet again to the figure of the moribund Jewish convert to Islam with an uncertain future, albeit under somewhat different conditions. In this novel, whose form and content recall those of the previous two, Boudjedra presents readers with a male protagonist (Rac) and his French lover (Flo), and eschews a conventional plotline in favor of a stream-of-consciousness-like series of ruminations on family history that involve new iterations of many of the same figures who populate his previous novels: the repudiated mother, the despotic father, and the dead older brother, to name a few.⁸⁴ The similarities only go so far, however; *La Vie à l'endroit* differs substantially from both *La Répudiation* and *La Macération* in that it takes place in Algeria during the Algerian Civil War of the 1990s and presents readers with a protagonist who is no longer at his family home, but rather in hiding as he attempts to escape the violent forces engulfing his country.

As with *La Répudiation*, critics of *La Vie à l'endroit* have tended to overlook the Jewish presence in this novel, favoring instead the novel's more obvious thematic elements, including but not limited to terrorism, soccer culture, and the carnivalesque.⁸⁵ Some have gone so far as to criticize the novel's forays into the family histories that provide the opportunity to engage with Jews and Jewishness; for example, in his 1998 review of *La Vie à l'endroit*, Jamal En-nehas

⁸⁴ The protagonist's name Rac recalls both the narrators of *La Macération* and *La Répudiation*, as well as Boudjedra himself. Interestingly, this abbreviation in French has no corollary in Arabic, as the "ch" sound in French is written with one letter in Arabic. To date, *La Vie à l'endroit* has yet to be translated into Arabic, supposedly due to difficulties locating a publisher.

⁸⁵ See Lynne D. Rogers, "Rachid Boudjedra's Representations of Terrorism: *Le Vainqueur de Coupe* and *La Vie à l'endroit*," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* 25, no. 2 (June 1, 2001): 477-507; Christa Jones, "Kourat el Kadem: Soccer Culture and Fandom in Postcolonial Francophone Algerian Texts," *The Journal of North African Studies* (July 4, 2020): 1-17; and Carla Calargé, "Le Carnaval ou l'ultime tentative de remettre *La Vie à l'endroit*," *Cincinnati Romance Review* 26 (2007): 10-23.

admonished the novel for what he viewed as too many digressions into unnecessary territory, stating, “the journey back into Algerian history and Flo and Rac's families could easily have been bracketed, as it frequently impedes the flow of the narrative and undermines the real story.”⁸⁶ Yet criticizing Boudjedra’s narrative digressions as undermining the “real story” leads to a significant question: what is the “real story” in this novel, and how can one tell? Is the “real story” that of Yamaha, the soccer mascot whose defiance of fundamentalist terrorism and resulting murder fascinate Rac? Or is it the story of Rac’s life in hiding, of existing almost exclusively within the four walls of his apartment? Why can’t minor storylines be the “real story”? As we have seen, the significance of characters in Boudjedra novels cannot be determined solely based on the number of pages they occupy within a novel, and much can be gleaned from seemingly anecdotal episodes.

Although *La Vie à l'endroit* echoes the preceding novels in many respects, one of the striking features that distinguishes it from *La Répudiation* and *La Macération* is the fact that the protagonist’s French companion has a backstory, and that this backstory functions as a foil to that of her Algerian lover. Whereas in the previous two works, the narrators’ lovers serve mostly as passive listeners to whom they can recount their family stories and with whom they work through their complicated family dynamics, in *La Vie à l'endroit*, significant space is given to the development of Flo’s rocky family history, a history that closely mirrors that of Rac’s own family. This similarity is established by Flo at the novel’s outset, when she comments to Rac: “Je te ressemble. Nos histoires familiales, aussi, se ressemblent, s’imbriquent, se superposent” [I am like you. Our family histories, too, are like one another; they intertwine, overlap].⁸⁷ As the story

⁸⁶ Jamal En-nehas, “*La Vie à l'endroit* by Rachid Boudjedra,” *World Literature Today* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 667.

⁸⁷ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l'endroit* 16.

unfolds, readers come to see just how true this statement is: Rac and Flo are both grandchildren of overbearing matriarchs, children of disgraced mothers, and have complicated relationships with their respective fathers. For Rac's part, he declares that he "avait toujours haï" [always hated] his father but admits that he "éprouvait pour lui une sorte de fascination" [felt a sort of fascination for him].⁸⁸ As for Flo, she stopped talking to her father—whom she admired for being "le héros de la résistance contre l'occupation allemande" [the hero of the resistance against the German occupation]—because he was a "fervent partisan de l'Algérie française" [fervent supporter of French Algeria].⁸⁹

The resemblances between Flo's family and Rac's family converge in the discussion of their two miserly uncles, Gustave and Hocine. "Un être odieux. Mesquin. Desespéré" [An odious being. Petty. Desperate], Gustave is a sterile, intolerant, and lazy Breton with a protruding jaw.⁹⁰ As for Hocine, he is an "ignoble oncle" [despicable uncle], an "imbécile, rusé et fourbe comme un cafard" [imbecile, cunning and deceitful like a cockroach], who, like Gustave, was his mother's favorite child.⁹¹ On four separate occasions, Gustave and Hocine are described as one another's doppelgängers. During a conversation with Hocine, Rac affirms, "C'est le sosie de Gustave, l'oncle de Flo. Incroyable cette ressemblance!" [He is the spitting image of Gustave, Flo's uncle. What an incredible resemblance!].⁹² Flo also sees the uncanny resemblance between the two, remarking to Rac, "as-tu remarqué qu'ils se ressemblent physiquement... des sosies presque" [have you noticed that they resemble one another physically... almost spitting images

⁸⁸ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l'endroit* 58.

⁸⁹ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l'endroit* 76.

⁹⁰ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l'endroit* 52.

⁹¹ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l'endroit* 54, 49.

⁹² Boudjedra, *La Vie à l'endroit* 52.

of one another].⁹³ What is more, the likeness between the two men has more to do with just looks; from the first time Flo met Hocine, she realized that he and her uncle were kindred spirits in both body and mind: “Dès qu’elle connut l’oncle Hocine, Flo fit aussitôt le rapprochement avec son oncle Gustave. Presque son sosie physique et moral!” [As soon as she met Uncle Hocine, Flo immediately made the connection with her uncle Gustave. Almost his physical and moral doppelgänger!].⁹⁴ Gustave and Hocine are thus more than just lookalikes; they are two iterations of the same person, miserly mirror images of one another.

These close parallels the novel establishes between Rac’s and Flo’s families allow Boudjedra not only to further the interrogation of the limits of facile postcolonial binaries he began in *La Macération*, but also to problematize, and ultimately contrast, Algerian and French attitudes towards Jews. Indeed, for all that Flo’s and Rac’s families have in common, they differ greatly in this regard. By now, the story of Henriette is quite familiar: a Jewish seamstress who had a two-year idyll with Rac’s father, Henriette is now on her death bed, dying of—but not yet dead from—a slow yet pernicious cancer. Just as in *La Macération*, the Henriette of *La Vie à l’endroit* is in a juridical and religious no-man’s-land, as she has no proof of either her conversion to Islam or her marriage to Rac’s father and, as a result, fears being buried in the Jewish cemetery.⁹⁵ Her body is even described using the same exact language, as a mailbag stuffed full of letters, postcards, money orders, and checks.⁹⁶ Yet unlike *La Macération*, which

⁹³ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l’endroit* 136.

⁹⁴ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l’endroit* 185.

⁹⁵ Whereas in *La Macération*, it was only uncle Ismaël who worried over Hassiba’s burial ground, in *La Vie à l’endroit*, Rac informs readers that Henriette “sanglot[ait] parce qu’elle a peur d’être enterrée dans le cimetière israélite” [would sob because she was afraid of being buried in the Jewish cemetery] (169).

⁹⁶ In *La Macération*, the narrator writes of Henriette/Hassiba, “... je me l’imaginai sous cette forme cellulosique paperassière et aussi – son corps – sous forme de structure osseuse – ou plutôt – un sac postal bourré de lettres de cartes postales de mandats-cartes de chèques etc” [I imagined her in this paper-like cellulosic form and also - her

focuses almost exclusively on the narrator's family dynamics, *La Vie à l'endroit* presents readers with another Jewish figure, that of Sarah, a Jewish woman with whom Flo's uncle Jean is "follement amoureux" [madly in love].⁹⁷ Mentioned but twice over the course of the 200-plus page novel, Sarah nonetheless serves the crucial role of Henriette's foil: whereas Henriette was able to pursue her relationship with Rac's father despite religious difference, Sarah was actively prevented from marrying Jean because of her faith. Both times Sarah is mentioned in the novel, readers are reminded of this difference, being informed first that Jean's mother Jeanne "avait tout fait pour qu'il ne se marie pas avec Sarah parce qu'elle était juive" [had done everything to prevent him from marrying Sarah because she was Jewish], and then later that Jeanne "l'avait empêché d'épouser Sarah dont il était follement amoureux, parce qu'elle était une youpine, disait-elle" [had prevented him from marrying Sarah, with whom he was madly in love, because she was a kike, she said].⁹⁸

These minor forays into the backstory of Flo's uncle may seem insignificant on the surface, or even in the context of the novel itself. However, when we put them into conversation with what we know so far of Boudjedra's engagement with Jews and Jewishness, the story of Sarah and Jean takes on another dimension. The twin of Flo's mother, Jean is an exception in Flo's family. Whereas his brother Gustave represents an essentially European version of Frenchness—Gustave is a staunch Catholic from Brittany who has a perfect mastery of Latin—Jean represents a version of orientalist adventurism that blurs the boundaries between cultural

body - in the form of a bone structure - or rather - a postal bag stuffed with letters, postcards, money orders, checks etc.] (217), and in *La Vie à l'endroit*, we are told that Rac "imaginait la peau de cette belle-mère juive sous cette forme cellulosique et paperassière, comme un sac postal bourré de lettres, de cartes postales, de mandats-cartes et de chèques" [would imagine the skin of this Jewish stepmother as this cellulosic and bureaucratic form, as a postal bag full of letters, postcards, money orders and checks] (57).

⁹⁷ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l'endroit* 185.

⁹⁸ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l'endroit* 137, 185.

appreciation and cultural appropriation.⁹⁹ After fleeing to Tunisia to get away from his vicious mother, “l’horrible haridelle qui ne cessait de dire partout qu’elle avait perdu son mari à Verdun parce que les jumeaux qu’elle portait dans son ventre à ce moment-là lui avait jeté un mauvais sort” [the horrible nag who kept saying everywhere that she had lost her husband at Verdun because the twins she was carrying in her belly at that time had put a bad spell on her], Jean returns years later with “un diplôme d’ingénieur agronome, un fennec, un luth, une chéchia et une parfaite connaissance de la langue arabe” [a degree in agricultural engineering, a fennec, a lute, a fez and a perfect knowledge of the Arabic language].¹⁰⁰ For Jean, then, North Africa is a refuge, a place to which he escapes and in which he flourishes, mastering the language, taking on the local sartorial customs, and learning the skills necessary to combat common agricultural pests.¹⁰¹ It is his way out of the stifling climate in which he grew up, his escape from a cruel mother who senselessly blames him for the death of her husband. Jean in turn becomes a refuge for his niece Flo, who looks to him for guidance after breaking with her parents over their opposing views on the Algerian fight for independence from France. Jean would fascinate Flo when he would come for visits during her childhood : “tu attendais son retour de Tunis, de Rabat et d’Alger comme le messie qui apporte avec lui une bouffée d’air frais,” [you would wait for his return from Tunis, Rabat and Algiers like the messiah who brings with him a breath of fresh air] Rac says to Flo.¹⁰² As Flo grows older, her relationship with Jean only gets stronger. He becomes

⁹⁹ While readers may bristle at Jean’s clear orientalist inclinations, it is significant to note that Rac does not take issue with them, and indeed speaks very highly of Jean. Rac affirms that, “[Jean] connaît l’Afrique du Nord mieux que moi,” [Jean knows North Africa better than I do] before going on to exclaim “ah! ton oncle Jean! Phénoménal, Jean!” [ah! your uncle Jean! Phenomenal, Jean!] (137).

¹⁰⁰ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l’endroit* 76, 77.

¹⁰¹ The novel specifies that Jean is a specialist in “la lutte anti-acridienne,” or locust control.

¹⁰² Boudjedra, *La Vie à l’endroit* 137.

her “complice” [accomplice], the only family member who supports her decision to move to Algeria in the wake of its independence from France.¹⁰³

Bringing Sarah, the Jewish woman with whom Jean falls madly in love, into the discussion, elucidates the novel’s discussion of the acceptance (or lack thereof) of Jews even further. In Flo’s family, there is no confusion or gray area whatsoever: Jeanne refuses to allow her son to marry a Jew, because she is a Jew. No other information is necessary. Her utter lack of acceptance stands in stark contrast to the complex variety of feelings that Henriette elicits in Rac’s family. To begin, whereas Sarah was treated with nothing but contempt by Jean’s mother because of her religious background, religion does not pose the same constraint for the members of Henriette’s family. Rac’s father marries and spends two wonderful, loving years with Henriette, despite their religious differences. These positive feelings are replicated in Rac himself, whom, the narrator tells us, “préférerait [Henriette] à toutes les autres épouses de son père” [preferred (Henriette) over all his father’s other wives].¹⁰⁴ On the other end of the spectrum are Uncle Hocine and Tante Fatma, both of whom view Henriette, and her place in the family, in a far less rosy light. As in *La Macération*, the Tante Fatma of *La Vie à l’endroit* remarks upon Henriette’s status as religious outsider during Rac’s childhood by repeating proverbs that verged on the vulgar.¹⁰⁵ She also refuses to enter the room in which Henriette used to live, fearing that the “actes obscènes et dégoûtants” [obscene and disgusting acts] that took place therein would contaminate her.¹⁰⁶ As for Uncle Hocine, he takes things one step further: according to him,

¹⁰³ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l’endroit* 77.

¹⁰⁴ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l’endroit* 56.

¹⁰⁵ Namely, “Un Juif est un Juif et le restera jusqu’à la fin des temps, comme la pierre ne peut fondre, ni la putain se repentir” [a Jew is a Jew and will remain so until the end of time, just as a stone cannot melt and a whore cannot repent] (148). Tante Fatma also says this same refrain in *La Macération* (21).

Rac's father committed a "terrible erreur! une faute grave, un vrai péché horrible, impardonnabe, difficile à réparer" [terrible error! a serious mistake, a real horrible sin, unforgivable, difficult to repair] in taking up with Henriette.¹⁰⁷ Although he admits that Henriette is, "une femme gentille" [a nice woman] at the end of the day, Hocine can't get past her background, reminding his nephew that she "n'est qu'une pauvre couturière après tout et... une Juive surtout! une Juive! rien que cela!" [is only a poor seamstress after all and... above all, a Jew! a Jew! and nothing but!].¹⁰⁸

Hocine's subsequent comments complicate things, as he implies that Henriette's religious background is not necessarily what is at issue – or at least, not all of it. Immediately after affirming that Henriette is "nothing but a Jew," Uncle Hocine explains:

Avant de l'épouser, c'est ce qu'on a prétendu, elle a eu un tas d'amants, tu vois ce que je veux dire... (il hésitait et Rac se demandait s'il allait avoir le culot de prononcer le mot) c'est-à-dire... que... c'est une putain ! excuse ce mot vulgaire mais... (il se mit à glousser) il n'y en a pas d'autre quoi ! oui une putain et tout le monde le savait... un secret de polichinelle... sauf lui ton père qui n'était au courant de rien...¹⁰⁹

[People said that before marrying him, she had a lot of lovers, you know what I mean... (he hesitated and Rac wondered if he would have the nerve to say the word) that is to say... that... she's a whore! excuse the vulgarity but... (he began to chuckle) there's no other word for it! yes, a whore, and everyone knew it... an open secret... except your father, who didn't know anything about it.]

In Uncle Hocine's articulation, Henriette's being a "Jew" seems to have for explanation the fact that she was (supposedly) promiscuous in her youth. He conflates Henriette's religion with rumors about her sexual endeavors: she is promiscuous because she is a Jew, and since she is a Jew, she must be promiscuous. He has nothing against her personally – after all, he confirms that

¹⁰⁶ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l'endroit* 149. Yet again, *La vie à l'endroit* repeats almost word for word from *La Macération*.

¹⁰⁷ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l'endroit* 141.

¹⁰⁸ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l'endroit* 140.

¹⁰⁹ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l'endroit* 140-141.

she is a “nice woman” – but he cannot stand the fact that his brother tarnished the family name by marrying a woman whom, he implies, everyone knew to be a whore.

Considering Rac and Flo’s families alongside one another shows how the two storylines can productively be read as critical commentary on France’s and Algeria’s respective dealings with and attitudes towards Jews. As for Flo’s family history: on a purely superficial level, a woman is rejected by a potential suitor’s mother due to her religious difference. Delving deeper into this seemingly minor storyline suggests that there is more than what first may appear. To begin, the names of two women in question are significant in and of themselves: Flo’s grandmother Jeanne bears the name of Jeanne d’Arc, the patron saint of France whom the Catholic Church burned at the stake for heresy in 1431. Declared innocent in 1456, beatified in 1908, and canonized in 1920, Joan of Arc was first venerated by the proto-fascist political movement *Action française*,¹¹⁰ and has since continued to be revered by ultra-rightwing groups, including the *Front National*,¹¹¹ for her “purity, Catholicism, and “Frenchness””.¹¹² As for Sarah, her biblical name harkens back to the wife of Abraham, and clearly connotes her Jewish background.

Reading Jeanne and Sarah allegorically allows us to uncover the social and political commentary that Boudjedra makes about French and Algerian attitudes towards Jews in *La Vie à l’endroit*. Jeanne, through her name and her actions, embodies a specifically French ultra-rightwing ideology that rejects Jews as interior enemies of the nation. A widow who lost her husband in the trenches at Verdun and a collaborator who threatened to denounce her own

¹¹⁰ Miller, Allison. “Joan of Arc, for Fascists and Feminists.” *JSTOR Daily*, 14 May 2020, <https://daily.jstor.org/joan-of-arc-for-fascists-and-feminists/>.

¹¹¹ This was already the case when *La vie à l’endroit* was published. See Peter Davies, “The Political Symbolism of Joan of Arc in Front National Discourse,” *Politics* 13, no. 2 (October 1993): 10–17.

¹¹² Miller, n.p.

daughter to the Gestapo, Jeanne is a staunch supporter of French Algeria who predicted that her granddaughter would be “dévorerée par les Arabes” [devoured by the Arabs] were she to try and make a life in the newly independent nation.¹¹³ Were there other French characters in the story, were Jeanne and her descendants but one of several representations of Frenchness, the question of what she or her family represents would be much more complex. As it stands, however, Flo’s family are the only French characters represented in the novel and, as a result, they become a synecdoche for the nation whence they hail.

As opposed to Sarah, Henriette’s situation is somewhat more nuanced. On the one hand, Henriette is never entirely accepted by Rac’s family: her Jewishness is cause for concern in the eyes of more than one family member. Yet when compared to Jeanne’s attitude towards Sarah, it becomes clear that the misgivings and concerns about Henriette’s (unofficial) marriage to Rac’s father are arguably less the result of racist attitudes towards Jews, and have significantly more to do with the fact that her marriage, which unites a Jew and a Muslim, is culturally taboo. Unlike for Jeanne, for Tante Fatma, the issue is not so much that Jews are innately inferior beings, but rather that Jews are religiously other, and no matter what they may do—convert to Islam, or marry into a respectable Muslim family—they are always going to carry with them the mark of their confessional origins. This attitude is echoed by Rac’s Quranic school teacher. Recalling Rachid’s experience in *La Macération*, Rac’s teacher “se méfiait de sa foi et de sa sincérité religieuse, cela parce que, comme toute la ville, il était au courant de la vie de débauche frénétique que menait son frère aîné et de l’existence d’une femme juive parmi les multiples épouses de son père” [distrusted his faith and religious sincerity, because, like the whole town, he was aware of the frenzied debauchery of his older brother and the existence of a Jewish

¹¹³ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l’endroit* 136

woman among his father's many wives].¹¹⁴ The instructor thus suspects Rac of being a heretic due not only to his brother's debauched lifestyle, but to Henriette's marrying into the family as well.

Far from "imped[ing] the flow of the narrative and undermin[ing] the real story" of *La Vie à l'endroit*, Rac's and Flo's family histories allow Boudjedra to subtly comment on the various levels of religious (in)tolerance in both his home country and mainland France. Contrasting straightforward anti-Jewish rhetoric with more complex expressions of unease at the thought of intimate interreligious relations, *La Vie à l'endroit* suggests that European antisemitism is too rigid a framework to understand negative attitudes displayed towards Jews in independent Algeria. Through Rac's and Flo's family histories, the novel articulates a distinct difference in hegemonic attitudes towards Jews in France and Algeria. In doing so, it asks readers to rethink the suitability of a Eurocentric theoretical model for understanding the tensions between two autochthonous religious groups that were both subject to the French colonial endeavor.

Henriette, or Jewish-Muslim symbiosis: La Dépossession (2017)

Rachid Boudjedra's most recent novel, *La Dépossession* (2017), again interrogates the relationship of Algeria to Algerian Jews, in part via the figure of Henriette, who reappears anew in what is to date her fifth and final iteration. In this novel, Boudjedra again presents readers with a male protagonist, Rac, who ruminates on his family's and country's history; yet in this latest version, it is not only intimate partners, but also art, more specifically, Wacity's 12th-century tableau *La Prise de Gibraltar* and Fauvist painter Albert Marquet's 1927 *La Mosquée de la*

¹¹⁴ Boudjedra, *La Vie à l'endroit* 201.

Place du gouvernement, that serve as the impetus for reflection. Over the course of the novel, Rac reflects on the multiple invasions and conquests that characterize Algerian history, as well as the government corruption that currently plagues it, and relates these violent pasts and presents to his own life and family.

It is within this new articulation of Algerian past and present that Boudjedra presents readers for the fifth time with the figure of Henriette. Although the broad brushstrokes remain the same—she is, yet again, one of Rac’s father’s wives, with whom he had a two-year idyll that resulted in two offspring—this latest incarnation differs in several significant ways from her previous iterations. Perhaps the most significant shift between Henriette in *La Dépossession* and all previous versions of the figure of the Jewish seamstress is that unlike in previous novels, where her religious status was a metaphorical question mark—did she convert to Islam or is she still a Jew?—in *La Dépossession*, Henriette’s religious practices do not pose a question. As the narrator explains, Henriette was “une juive [...] ramenée du ghetto de Constantine et qui ne s’était jamais convertie à l’Islam” [a Jew (...) brought back from the Constantine ghetto, and who had never converted to Islam], who married her husband “contrairement à la tradition” [against tradition].¹¹⁵ Whereas the Henriette of *La Macération* prayed according to Muslim rite, repeating the shahada over her prayer beads, the Henriette of *La Dépossession* “fréquentait assidûment la synagogue du quartier” [paid keen and frequent visits to the neighborhood synagogue] and “respectait scrupuleusement le Chabbat” [scrupulously observed Shabbat].¹¹⁶ The narrator’s repetition of the fact that Henriette did not, nor made any pretense to, convert to Islam echoes in

¹¹⁵ Rachid Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2017), 80.

¹¹⁶ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 105, 94.

reverse the previous novels' insistence on her religious ambiguity: every time Henriette is mentioned in *La Dépossession*, her Jewishness and her non-conversion to Islam are highlighted.

Furthermore, the ways in which the family approaches the question of “where to bury the body” differ drastically from previous representations of this same scenario. For one, the missive Rac receives from his uncle Ismaël about Henriette’s impending funeral no longer begs him to find a discrete solution to an explosive secret, but rather asks his advice as to whether “on devait enterrer la femme juive de [s]on père dans un cimetière musulman... ou dans un cimetière juif” [they should bury his father’s Jewish wife in a Muslim cemetery... or in a Jewish cemetery], before clarifying that Henriette’s children, “avaient préféré le cimetière musulman” [preferred the Muslim cemetery].¹¹⁷ As uncle Ismaël’s formulation suggests, the circumstances surrounding Henriette’s upcoming burial have shifted quite significantly from *La Macération*: in *La Dépossession*, Henriette’s Jewish origins are a given, and the question is no longer how to hide them, but instead which cemetery to choose to best honor a beloved member of the family. “Ce serait un péché que d’enterrer la pauvre femme dans le cimetière juif qui est, comme tu le sais, dans un très mauvais état, à l’abandon” [It would be a sin to bury the poor woman in the Jewish cemetery which is, as you know, in a very bad state, abandoned], uncle Ismaël writes to his nephew, before going on to remark that, despite Henriette’s observance of Ramadan, she never converted to Islam, and knowingly frequented the local synagogue and observed Shabbat.¹¹⁸ A far cry from the “terrible secret” of *La Macération*, Henriette’s Jewishness in *La Dépossession* is a known and accepted part of her identity, and the questions surrounding her

¹¹⁷ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 202.

¹¹⁸ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 203.

burial are no longer for the civil and religious authorities to deal with, but rather for her family to handle as they see fit.

Furthermore, although the novel never explicitly clarifies whether or not Henriette is still alive, the use of past tense in discussions surrounding her funerary arrangements suggests that she has already passed, and that the question of where to bury her has already been dealt with. As such, whereas the previous novels were concerned with whether or not Henriette would be buried in the Jewish cemetery due to her lack of official documents, in *La Dépossession*, the question is no longer one of state intervention but one of family preference. Indeed, Uncle Ismaël's use of the conditional tense in his letter to his nephew – “Ce serait un péché” [It would be a sin] – suggests that there is perhaps another option. Henriette's children are seemingly of this same opinion; as the narrator comments to his lover, Céline, “Tu te souviens de cette lettre de l'oncle Ismaël qui me demandait si on devait enterrer la femme juive de mon père dans un cimetière musulman... ou dans un cimetière juif ? Je pensais à l'époque que cela n'avait pas beaucoup d'importance ! ... Mais ses deux enfants avaient préféré le cimetière musulman !” [Do you remember that letter from Uncle Ismaël asking me if we should bury my father's Jewish wife in a Muslim cemetery... or in a Jewish cemetery? I thought at the time that it didn't matter much! ... But her two children preferred the Muslim cemetery!].¹¹⁹ At issue is no longer what the state will permit, but what the family would prefer, even if this means skirting the law: “Je répondis à mon oncle que je saurais trouver un imam et le soudoyer et avoir tous les certificats les tampons et les signatures que nous voudrions” [I told my uncle that I could find an imam and bribe him and get all the certificates, stamps and signatures we wanted], Rac tells Céline, highlighting the corruption endemic to postcolonial Algerian politics and society.¹²⁰ Although it

¹¹⁹ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 202.

may go against his personal convictions, the narrator accedes to his family's wishes, as in his mind the difference between a Muslim and a Jewish cemetery is negligible: "Tout cela se vaut: de la terre et des vers et des racines et du silence" [It's all the same: dirt and worms and roots and silence].¹²¹ In this latest engagement with Henriette, the issue of her religion is one that is dealt with at the family, not state, level.

The fact that Henriette's Jewishness is a known and accepted given means that her role within the family and wider society shifts significantly from previous novels. Whereas Henriette was a suspected convert in *La Macération* and *La Vie à l'endroit*, in *La Dépossession*, she remains Jewish, a fact that people know and that her family openly accepts. In describing his grandmother, for example, Rac comments, "elle n'avait jamais été très portée sur la religion et avait approuvé le mariage de son fils aîné, mon père, avec une juive non convertie" [she had never been very religious and had approved of the marriage of her eldest son, my father, to an unconverted Jew].¹²² The marriage may have bucked tradition, it is true, but that was not enough to prevent it from taking place. What is more, in a bid to legitimize his upcoming nuptials, Rac's father attempts to establish precedence for his interreligious union by relating his situation to that of the prophet Mohammed:

Mon père arguant qu'elle [Henriette] était d'une religion du Livre et monothéiste, se référant au prophète qui s'était marié à une chrétienne de Nubie : Marie, qui avait refusé de se convertir à l'Islam, ce que le Prophète, amoureux fou, accepta allégrement. Malgré la pression sociale, mon père tint bon et vécut avec Henriette Gozlan dont il eut deux enfants, un garçon et une fille.¹²³

[My father argued that she (Henriette) was of a religion of the Book and monotheistic, referring to the prophet who had married a Christian woman from Nubia: Marie had

¹²⁰ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 202.

¹²¹ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 202.

¹²² Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 105.

¹²³ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 80.

refused to convert to Islam, something that the Prophet, madly in love, gladly accepted. In spite of social pressure, my father stood firm and lived with Henriette Gozlan, with whom he had two children, a boy and a girl.]

If cultural traditions and social pressures would seek to separate the union of a Jew and a Muslim, the novel suggests, Rac's father rationalizes his actions through those of the ultimate power, Islam. Rac appreciates his father's open mindedness, commenting, "Quand je connus cet épisode de sa vie, j'en fus très fier. Il était donc tolérant et considérait que les trois religions monothéistes se valaient, absolument" [When I found out about this episode of his life, I felt very proud. So, he was tolerant, and considered the three monotheistic religions to be absolutely equal].¹²⁴

Even more telling is the fact that the novel depicts Judaism and Islam as inherently compatible with one another. "Tradition" may prevent intimate unions of Jews and Muslims, but the lived experience of Rac's family suggests that the two religions can exist in a state of productive symbiosis. Commenting on his childhood interactions with Henriette, Rac writes, "[elle] n'allumait pas le feu le samedi soir, ce dont je me chargeais avec beaucoup de bonne volonté mais ce rituel m'intriguait quand même !" [(she) didn't light the fire on Saturday nights, a task I took on with great goodwill, but this ritual intrigued me, even so!].¹²⁵ His lack of understanding of Jewish ritual—he does not understand why Henriette cannot light her own fire on Shabbat, and even mixes up the corresponding evening—does not affect his willingness to assist her in her observance of Jewish religious rite. Furthermore, Henriette's Jewishness seems to have incorporated elements of Islam, creating "une sorte de synthèse entre les deux religions"

¹²⁴ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 80.

¹²⁵ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 105.

[a sort of synthesis between the two religions].¹²⁶ Uncle Ismaël explains that Henriette “fréquentait la synagogue du quartier, respectait les rites du Chabbat, faisait le ramadan, etc. Elle était sincère, passionné” [She attended the local synagogue, respected Shabbat rites, observed Ramadan, etc. She was sincere, passionate].¹²⁷ In this latest iteration, Henriette thus embodies an Algerian Jewishness that harmoniously exists within an Algerian Muslim world.

The novel suggests that this is the case in part due to Algeria’s deep Jewish roots. Indeed, *La Dépossession* draws upon the myth of the Judaized Berbers to highlight the long-rooted history of Jews in Algeria, insisting on the fact that the land that would become Algeria was home to Jews for centuries before the arrival of Islam.¹²⁸ Describing the Algerian Jewish population at the beginning of World War II, Rac writes, “les juifs algériens... comptaient 130 000 personnes dans tout le pays, tous des Berbères judaïsés bien avant l’arrivée de l’Islam au VIII^e siècle” [Algerian Jews... numbered 130,000 throughout the country, all Berbers who had been Judaized long before the arrival of Islam in the 8th century].¹²⁹ The novel doubles down on this point a bit further on, in a section devoted to “Notes supposés de Mme Marcelle Martinet,” or notes supposedly written by the wife of Albert Marquet, the artist whose painting Rac so admires.¹³⁰ In these notes, Martinet calls the Crémieux Decree an “[e]rreur catastrophique qui dérouta la communauté juive dont la plus grande partie était d’origine berbère judaïsée bien

¹²⁶ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 203.

¹²⁷ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 204.

¹²⁸ For more on the historical debates about Judaized Berbers, see Hirschberg, H. Z. (J. W.). “The Problem of the Judaized Berbers.” *The Journal of African History*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1963, pp. 313–39. and Schroeter, Daniel. “La Découverte des juifs berbères.” In *Relations judéo-musulmanes au Maroc*, edited by Michel Abitbol, Stavit, 1997.

¹²⁹ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 143.

¹³⁰ This is a fictionalized iteration of the real-life wife of Albert Marquet. Marcelle Martinet (1877-1944) was a French writer, socialist and pacifist.

avant l'arrivée de l'Islam" [catastrophic error that bewildered the Jewish community, most of whom were of Berber origin and had been Judaized long before the arrival of Islam].¹³¹ The factual veracity of Martinet's assertions is a topic for historical debate and is somewhat tangential to the discussion at hand; what is of interest here is precisely the fact that both Rac and Martinet refer to an unproven theory about North Africa's Jewish heritage in such a way as to suggest that North Africa was "Jewish" far longer than it has been "Muslim." In other words, it does not necessarily matter (to the literary scholar) whether Rac's or Martinet's statements are "true" or not; on the contrary, what matters is that they are both weaving a narrative of North African history that renders Jews as equally, if not more, grounded in Algerian history than their Muslim counterparts. Rac's description of Jacob Timsit, his uncle's Jewish associate, transforms this abstract relationship into a personal one: "il était un nationaliste algérien avec un nom berbère (Timsit = pierre) venu du fond des âges, d'avant la conquête musulmane du Maghreb par Okba Ibn Nafaa en 210 de l'Hégire" [He was an Algerian nationalist with a Berber name (Timsit = stone) that came from the depths of the ages, from before the Muslim conquest of the Maghreb by Okba Ibn Nafaa in 210 A.H.] Rac explains.¹³² By linking the Timsit name with both the Algerian nationalist movement and Algeria's ancient history, Rac renders Algeria's Jewish history an integral part of both his country's national and his family's personal history.

In addition to these repeated references to Judaized Berbers, the novel also weaves a narrative of cultural sameness between Algeria's Jewish and Muslim populations via the inclusion of Martinet's notes. As she writes, "Ces Algériens de confession juive étaient des

¹³¹ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 170.

¹³² Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 167. Timsit is a common Maghrebi Jewish last name with Berber origins. See Taïeb, J. "Juifs du Maghreb : onomastique et langue, une composante berbère ?" *Encyclopédie berbère*, no. 26, May 2004, pp. 3969–75, for more information.

autochtones au *même* titre que les musulmans : *mêmes* coutumes, *même* gastronomie, *même* habillement, *mêmes* langues : l’arabe et le berbère” [These Algerians of the Jewish faith were natives in the *same* way as the Muslims: *same* customs, *same* gastronomy, *same* clothing, *same* languages: Arabic and Berber].¹³³ Through the repetition of the word “*même*,” the text minimizes religious difference and instead privileges all that is the “same” between Algerian Jewish and Muslim communities. For both Martinet, who authored this assessment, and Rac, who saw fit to include it in his first-person narrative, the two constitute one basic ethnic group with two separate, yet intimately related, religions. The novel thus presents the tensions between Algeria’s Jewish and Muslim communities as stemming not from indigenous sources, but rather from European intervention.

The novel’s description of the Crémieux Decree illustrates the extent to which French colonialism is perceived to be at fault for the deterioration of Algerian Jewish-Muslim relations. According to Martinet’s notes, the Decree “avait fait des juifs algériens des super-citoyens” [rendered the Algerian Jews supercitizens], despite the fact that “La plupart de ces juifs n’ont jamais entendu parler du décret Crémieux, ni de la nationalité française. Seuls quelques Algériens de culture juive et urbanisés avaient profité effectivement de ce décret qui déchaîna la haine des Européens d’Algérie” [Most of these Jews had never heard of the Crémieux Decree, nor of French nationality. Only a few urbanized Algerians of Jewish culture had actually benefited from this decree, which unleashed the hatred of the Europeans in Algeria].¹³⁴ Although we might take Martinet, or perhaps Boudjedra himself, to task for the factual inaccuracy of her statement—given that the Crémieux Decree naturalized *en masse* all of the Jews in Algeria’s

¹³³ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 170. Emphasis my own.

¹³⁴ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 170.

northern *départements*, it is somewhat misleading to say that only “a few” Jews benefitted from it—her comments are worth noting even so. While we could dismiss them as ill-informed nonsense, a stance made all the more tempting by Martinet’s citing the wrong date for the proclamation of the Crémieux Decree,¹³⁵ such a move would cause us to miss out on the work the novel is doing to establish the close relationship between Algerian Jews, Algerian Muslims, and the land they both historically shared. Through the blending of Rac’s and Martinet’s voices, the novel articulates an alternative narrative of Algerian Jewishness that directly challenges assimilationist narratives and instead speaks to the feelings, emotions, and relations between people of a different religion who share a common culture. Furthermore, their differing subject positions—Martinet is *pied-noir*, whereas Rac is Algerian Muslim—suggest that there were and always have been voices of all kinds, colonizer and colonized alike, who took a critical eye to the narrative of the Crémieux Decree.

Crucially, Rac’s seamless incorporation of Martinet’s critical commentary into his first-person narrative suggests that he implicitly agrees with her evaluation of socio-cultural and interreligious relations in colonial Algeria—especially as regards her analysis of antisemitism in the settler colony. It is thus through Martinet’s description of the *pied-noir* reaction to the Crémieux Decree that Rac—and, by extension, the novel itself—endorses a narrative of European destruction of indigenous interreligious relations and suggests that it was the actions of Europeans, not Algerian Muslims, that began to make Algeria inhospitable to Jews. Discussing *pied-noir* reactions to the Crémieux Decree, Martinet writes, “Des pogromes eurent lieu dans toutes les villes et les violences contre les juifs firent des centaines de morts. Les insultes: youpins et pédérastes fleurirent à cette époque” [Pogroms occurred in all the cities and the

¹³⁵ Although the Crémieux Decree became official in 1870, Rac comments that it was proclaimed in 1875 (170).

violence against Jews resulted in hundreds of deaths. Insults such as “kike” and “faggot” flourished at that time].¹³⁶ What is more, in a description of an anti-Jewish riot in Algiers,¹³⁷ Martinet highlights the violence that Algerian Jews faced at the hands of the European population, and underscores the reactions of their Muslim neighbors:

À l’annonce de cette nouvelle inattendue, les petits Blancs s’enflammèrent dans les grandes villes, et début 1941 eut lieu le pogrome d’Alger qui ravagea les quartiers juifs situés en bas de la Kasba. Incendies. Massacres. Viols. Humiliations, etc. Les musulmans algériens sont atterrés et cachent les familles juives comme ils peuvent [...] et sont révoltés par le sort fait à leurs concitoyens d’obédience juive, au nombre de 130 000 personnes. D’autant plus qu’ils avaient eux-mêmes un statut rétrograde et dégradant.¹³⁸

[At the announcement of this unexpected news, the *petits Blancs* unleashed their fury in the big cities, and at the beginning of 1941 the Algiers Pogrom occurred, and it ravaged the Jewish quarters located below the Kasbah. Fires. Massacres. Rapes. Humiliations, etc. The Algerian Muslims were appalled and hid the Jewish families as best they could (...) and were revolted by the fate of their fellow citizens of Jewish faith, who numbered 130,000. All the more so since they themselves had a retrograde and degrading status.]

According to Martinet, Algerian Muslims, dismayed at the mistreatment of Algerian Jews by Europeans and revolted by the antisemitic actions of the European hordes, take their Jewish neighbors in and hide them as best they can. In Martinet’s narrative, as well as that of the novel more broadly speaking, the fact that Algerian Muslims were colonial subjects – as opposed to Algerian Jews having gained French citizenship – does not result in jealousy and rancor; instead, the oppression to which Algerian Muslims are subjected makes them all the more sympathetic to the plight of the Jews.

¹³⁶ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 170-171. It is interesting to note that just as in *La Vie à l’endroit*, the insult “youpin” [kike] is voiced by a European, not an Algerian.

¹³⁷ Although the riot in the novel is said to occur in Algiers in 1941, it is very likely a nod to the 1934 Constantine riot. See Joshua Cole. *Lethal Provocation: The Constantine Murders and the Politics of French Algeria*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019.

¹³⁸ Boudjedra, *La Dépossession* 171.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the various iterations of Henriette, the Jewish/Muslim seamstress, serve several critical functions: she establishes Jews as part of the Algerian family, illuminates the disconnect between lived experience and hegemonic discourses of religious belonging, and offers an alternative framework through which to consider Algerian Jewishness within a Muslim-majority society. Her repeated deployment over a number of different texts, representing a timespan of four decades, allows Boudjedra's oeuvre to challenge the ethnicization of discrete religious groups into separate categories, and forces readers to ask hard questions about the potential for religious difference to be reified into essentialized identities and institutionalized by national narratives. In such a way, Boudjedra's oeuvre renders Henriette an ever-possible, always-available heuristic tool for thinking through the story of Algeria, and of how Algerian Muslims and their differently-colonized Jewish counterparts might relate to one another outside of the confines of official narratives and authorized histories. At the end of the day, Boudjedra's oeuvre suggests, the biggest question may not necessarily be whether Henriette is Jewish or Muslim, but why we accord such importance to this matter to begin with.

Chapter 4

The Shoah across the Mediterranean:

A 'Holocaust Turn' in Algerian Literature

Might we speak of a “Holocaust turn” in the world of Algerian fiction in French? The past two decades suggest that there may be something to this idea. Since the turn of the millennium, Algerian francophone literature has seen contributions from numerous authors that engage in more or less explicit manners with this violent historical episode. From Maïssa Bey’s *Entendez-vous dans les montagnes* (2002), a short novella that subtly links the horrors of Nazi Germany to the torture of Algerians during the Algerian War of Independence by way of Bernhard Schlink’s *The Reader* (1995); to Salim Bachi’s *Le Consul* (2014), which tells the story of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, a Portuguese diplomat recognized as Righteous Among the Nations for helping Jews escape occupied France;¹ and Rachid Boudjedra’s *La Dépossession* (2017), which reflects on the impact of Vichy antisemitic laws and the presence of concentration camps in Algeria; these novels all produce innovative discourses that destabilize common understandings of the scope and reach of the Holocaust, which, as Michael Marrus’s famous definition suggests, has often been thought of having taken place entirely in Europe and having affected uniquely European Jews.²

¹ For more on the life and work of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, see José Alain Fralon, *A Good Man in Evil Times: The Story of Aristides de Sousa Mendes—the Unknown Hero Who Saved Countless Lives in World War II*, trans. Peter Graham (London: Viking, 2000).

² According to Marrus, the Holocaust can be defined as “the systematic mass murder of European Jewry by the Nazis.” Michael Marrus, “The History of the Holocaust: A Survey of Recent Literature,” *The Journal of Modern History* 59, no. 1 (March 1987): 114.

This chapter examines how Algerian postcolonial literature has pushed the boundaries of the Holocaust and its place in world literature through close analysis of two novels, namely, Boualem Sansal's *Le Village de l'Allemand* (2008), and Anouar Benmalek's *Fils du Shéol* (2015). As opposed to the three aforementioned novels, both *Le Village de l'Allemand* and *Fils du Shéol* mobilize common understandings of the Holocaust—as it occurred in Europe and affected European Jews—in explicit and sustained manners in order to shed light on lesser-known and understood instances of (post)colonial violence.³ Moreover, by highlighting the uncanny similarities between the violence of the Holocaust and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism (in *Le Village de l'Allemand*) and the Herero and Nama Genocide (in *Fils du Shéol*), Sansal and Benmalek expand the narrative possibilities of the story of the Holocaust beyond the confines of the European continent. Each in their own way, these novels penned by authors of North African Muslim origin implicitly suggest that this violent episode of history—whose principal victim (European Jews) stands at double remove from Sansal's and Benmalek's own geographic (Algerian) and religious (Muslim) background—can enable the articulation of unknown or obfuscated iterations of (post)colonial violence on the home front.

In order to provide necessary context in which to situate discussion of Sansal's and Benmalek's work, this chapter begins with an investigation into the status of the Holocaust—and discursive production thereon—in the Algerian context, and a critical reflection on the obstacles that one faces one when working on a country that is often uncritically catalogued as belonging to the putative Arab world, notwithstanding its long-standing ethnic pluralism. I will then turn to the novels at hand, starting with *Le Village de l'Allemand*, Boualem Sansal's much acclaimed

³ Given that *The Reader* is mentioned once—and in passing—over the course of Bey's novella, one can hardly qualify its engagement as “sustained.” Although *Le Consul* and *La Dépossession* do represent more throughgoing, book-long engagements, neither one of them mobilize common understandings of the Holocaust to bring attention to lesser understood episodes of (post)colonial violence.

novel about how two French brothers of mixed Algerian and German descent learn of and come to terms with the hidden Nazi past of their recently deceased father. Taking place over the course of a roughly three-year period during the Algerian Dark Decade, Sansal's novel grapples with questions of memory, trauma, and filial responsibility through the interweaving of the two brothers' journal entries and their respective investigations into Nazism and Islamic fundamentalism. Following this discussion of *Le Village de l'Allemand*, I will then turn to Anouar Benmalek's *Fils du Shéol*, which follows the German Jewish Aronstein family back in time over three generations, from Auschwitz to the colonization of Algeria and to the genocide of the Herero and Nama people in early twentieth-century German Southwest Africa (modern-day Namibia). In this final portion of the chapter, I will demonstrate how, through its juxtaposition of plausible, verisimilar representations of both the Holocaust and the Herero and Nama Genocide, *Fils du Shéol* argues that, in the words of Benmalek, the latter served as a “« brouillon » artisanal” [rudimentary draft] for the horrors of the former.⁴ In so doing, I will show how the novel both renders Africa and Africans part of the story of the Holocaust and suggests the Holocaust is part of a broader literary consciousness than what has traditionally been presumed.

Algerian Literature and “Arab” Narratives of the Holocaust

At this juncture, it is necessary to address certain issues that arise when dealing with cultural productions from the Arab world that engage with the Holocaust. While I have significant reservations about the uses and misuses of the term “Arab”—a slippery category that

⁴ Quoted in Mohamed Berkani, “Anouar Benmalek : «La Shoah a un peu commencé en Afrique avec les Héréros» [Interview with Anouar Benmalek],” *FranceInfo*, August 28, 2015, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/europe/allemande/anouar-benmalek-la-shoah-a-un-peu-commence-en-afrique-avec-les-hereros_3065079.html.

is far too often deployed uncritically when referring to North Africa and its multiethnic inhabitants—it is nonetheless true that, on the national level, Algeria has claimed an Arab identity since its independence from France: “Nous sommes des Arabes, des Arabes, dix millions d’Arabes. [...] il n’y a d’avenir pour ce pays que dans l’arabisme” [We are Arabs, Arabs, ten million Arabs. (...) There is no future for this country except as an Arab one] proclaimed Ahmed Ben Bella in his first official public speech after assuming his role as the first president of independent Algeria.⁵ While the past sixty years has seen an increasing overture towards Algeria’s Berber heritage,⁶ this political narrative of an Arab Algeria still holds significant sway in the present day, as evidenced by Algeria’s membership in the Arab League, and its hosting in November 2022 of the League’s first in-person summit after a three-year hiatus due to Covid.

It comes as no surprise then that Benmalek’s and Sansal’s novels have been linked in common cultural discourse to the “Arab world;” after all, Sansal was awarded the Prix du roman arabe in 2012 for his novel *Rue Darwin*, and Benmalek received death threats in the “presse arabe” [Arab press] upon the publication of his 2006 novel *Ô María*.⁷ More interesting, however,

⁵ Quoted in Jamel Zenati. “L’Algérie à l’épreuve de ses langues et de ses identités : histoire d’un échec répété.” *Mots. Les Langues du politique* 74 (March 2004): 138.

⁶ According to Jihad Hamdan and Sara Kessar, “[A]fter years of suppression and marginalization, the Berber language was officially accepted and integrated into the Algerian Constitution as a national language in 2001, as an official language alongside Arabic in 2016, and an immutable language alongside the three pillars of the nation: Islam [*sic*], Arabic and the national flag in 2020.” Jihad M. Hamdan and Sara Kessar, “Language Policy and Planning in Algeria: Case Study of Berber Language Planning,” *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 13, no. 1 (December 31, 2022): 59.

⁷ Following Sansal’s participation in the 2012 Jerusalem Writers Festival, the Council of Arab Ambassadors—the group who, alongside the Institut du monde arabe, oversees the Prix du roman arabe—overruled the jury’s verdict and revoked Sansal’s prize. See Hélé Béji, “Boualem Sansal privé du Prix du roman arabe: une décision idéologique incompatible avec la paix,” *Le Monde*, June 15, 2012, sec. Débats, https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2012/06/15/boualem-sansal-prive-du-prix-du-roman-arabe_1719231_3232.html, for a critique of the Council’s decision written by a member of the jury. For more on the controversy surrounding *Ô María*, see Mabrouk Rachedi, “Anouar Benmalek : « La Liberté de pensée dans le monde arabe est notre premier but à atteindre » [Interview with Anouar Benmalek],” *Jeune Afrique*, October 3, 2021, sec. Culture, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1240635/culture/anouar-benmalek-la-liberte-de-pensee-dans-le-monde-arabe-est-notre-premier-but-a-atteindre/>.

is that both of these writers have been touted as innovators in the world of “Arab” letters for their engagements with the Holocaust. To wit, the cover of *The German Mujahid*, the 2009 English-language translation of *Le Village de l’Allemand*, claims that it is “The first Arab novel to confront the Holocaust,” whereas a 2015 interview with Benmalek labeled him as “le premier écrivain ‘arabe’ à écrire sur la Shoah” [the first “Arab” writer to write about the Shoah].⁸ While there is obvious reason to be skeptical of these claims to “firstness”—most obviously as regards Benmalek, whose novel was published seven years after Sansal’s, but also because they patently disregard previously published works such as Lebanese author Elias Khoury’s *Bāb al-shams* (1998)⁹—the repeated focus on the Holocaust as new terrain in what might be deemed the “Arab” literary scene is worthy of note for two reasons: first, because it speaks to the perceived novelty of these literary endeavors, and second, because it demonstrates how the qualifier “Arab” continues to be uncritically deployed when talking about Algerian literary production.¹⁰

The fact that authors of Algerian Muslim background are writing about the Holocaust in such profound ways is doubly significant when we take into consideration the lack of education and resources available in Arabic. In 2014, UNESCO published *The International Status of Education About the Holocaust: A Global Mapping of Textbooks and Curricula*. The study, undertaken by researchers from the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, examined 272 educational curricula from 135 different countries, as well as 89 textbooks published in 26 different countries since the turn of the millennium. According to the authors, “The aim of the study is primarily to document information in such a way that it reflects local

⁸ See Berkani, n.p.

⁹ The English translation of Khoury’s novel, *Gate of the Sun*, was published by Archipelago Books in 2006.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note as well that these claims to “firstness” in the “Arab” literary world utterly gloss over Tunisian literary engagements with the Shoah. Though short, the Nazi Occupation of Tunisia is evoked in both Albert Memmi’s *La Statue de sel* (1953), as well as Nine Moati’s *Belles de Tunis* (1984).

understandings of the Holocaust, principally by recording concepts and narratives of the Holocaust found in educational media currently in use in schools.”¹¹ Of the three documents the team studied from Algeria, two of them made no reference to the Holocaust whatsoever, and the third referred only to the context in which it occurred: “World War II 1939-1945 (from a European war to a world war).”¹² This contrasts dramatically with the situation in most of the putatively Western countries, which have ingrained the injunctions “Never Again” and “Never Forget” into the cultural zeitgeist and in which debates rage on about how best to teach and talk about the “crime of crimes.”

Unfortunately for Arabophone readers who wish to educate themselves on the Holocaust—or investigate Jewish Studies more broadly—there is a dearth of quality resources available to fill in the gaps. One major reason for this is the fact that the preponderance of antisemitic texts available in Arabic translation—such as William Carr’s *Pawns in the Game* and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*—vastly outweighs the presence of quality scholarship available on the topic.¹³ As opposed to this linguistic gatekeeping to which rigorous scholarship is subjected, texts composed by notorious Holocaust deniers including Robert Faurisson and Roger Garaudy are available in Arabic translation and “have received wide and favorable response in the Arab media.”¹⁴ As for original Arabic-language research, the situation is hardly

¹¹ Peter Carrier, Eckhardt Fuchs, and Torben Messinger, *The International Status of Education about the Holocaust: A Global Mapping of Textbooks and Curricula* (Paris: UNESCO, 2015), 3.

¹² Carrier et. al., 50.

¹³ Slowly but surely, scholars have been working to make quality Jewish Studies scholarship available in Arabic. One such endeavor is the UCLA Moroccan Jewish Studies’ Arabic Translation Series, which has been bringing together scholars from UCLA, the Université Mohammed V, Rabat, and the Université Internationale de Rabat since 2014 with the aim to “identify, translate, and publish path breaking books on the Jews of Morocco.” See <https://uclamoroccanjewishstudies.org/portfolio/research/> for more information.

¹⁴ Me’ir Litvak and Ester Webman, *From Empathy to Denial: Arab Responses to the Holocaust* (London: Hurst, 2009), 8.

better, as much of the available Arabic-language sources portray the Holocaust as a “lie” or a “Zionist fabrication.”¹⁵ Furthermore, as Me’ir Litvak and Ester Webman explain in *From Empathy to Denial: Arab Responses to the Holocaust*, “[O]nly a few books claiming the academic mantle have been published on [the Holocaust] in Arabic. These books deal with only one narrow aspect of the Holocaust – the relations between the Zionists and the Nazis before and during the war – and they suffer from a heavily political bias, reflected in their highly problematic use of historical evidence” (8).¹⁶ As it stands, then, Algerians who wish to learn about the Holocaust must arguably do so on their own and must have the linguistic facility and material means to access texts written in other languages.¹⁷

It was a desire to combat this lack of knowledge and intercultural understanding that urged both Benmalek and Sansal to take up the Holocaust in their novels. As Sansal explains, the concept for *Le Village de l’Allemand* was born in the 1980s, when, while on a work trip, he came across a town in the Sétif region that was said to have been governed by a former SS Officer who had converted to Islam and been naturalized Algerian.¹⁸ Over the years, this figure remained on

¹⁵ Robert Satloff, “Policy Forum: Teaching the Holocaust in the Arab World,” accessed March 4, 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/teaching-holocaust-arab-world>. Barakat’s cited intervention occurs around the 00:17:30 mark. Muḥammad Nimr Madanī’s 1996 هل احرق اليهود في افران الغاز؟ [*Hal uḥriqa al-Yahūd fī afrān al-ghāz* / *Did the Jews Burn in Gas Ovens?*] (Dimashq: M.N. al-Madanī, 1996), is representative of this issue.

¹⁶ Among these problematic studies are Mahmud ‘Abbas, *The Other Side: The Secret Relations between Nazism and Zionism* (‘Amman: Dar Ibn Rushd, 1984) and ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Masiri, *Zionism, Nazism and the End of History* (Cairo: Dar al-Shurūq, 1997).

¹⁷ While there is a solid corpus of scholarship devoted to “Arab” engagements with the Holocaust, a large proportion of the existent studies focus almost exclusively on the Middle Eastern context. Furthermore, when studies do bring North Africa into the conversation, it is often only to discuss Morocco. To date, I have been unable to locate any scholarship in English, French, or Spanish that specifically examines Algerian discourses about and understandings of the Holocaust.

¹⁸ See Grégoire Leménager, “Boualem Sansal : ‘La frontière entre islamisme et nazisme est mince,’” *Le Nouvel observateur*, January 9, 2008, <https://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/romans/20080109.BIB0588/boualem-sansal-la-frontiere-entre-islamisme-et-nazisme-est-mince.html>.

Sansal's mind, as did the interactions with his fellow countrymen, who, according to Sansal, felt "une réelle admiration" [a real admiration] for the former Nazi, whom they considered as "un héros, un saint homme" [a hero, a saintly man].¹⁹ Although Sansal knew at the time that, "la geste hitlérienne a toujours eu ses sympathisants en Algérie" [The Hitlerian way had always had its sympathizers in Algeria], this interaction opened his eyes to a larger social issue:

En y pensant, je me suis avisé de quelque chose que je savais mais sans lui avoir jamais accordé plus d'importance que cela : la Shoah était totalement passée sous silence en Algérie, sinon présentée comme une sordide invention des Juifs. Ce constat m'avait choqué. Le fait est que jamais, à ce jour, la télévision algérienne n'a passé de film ou de documentaire sur le sujet, jamais un responsable n'en a soufflé mot, jamais, à ma connaissance, un intellectuel n'a écrit sur le thème.²⁰

[Thinking about it, I realized something that I knew but that I had never given more importance than that: the Shoah was totally glossed over in Algeria, when not presented as a sordid invention of the Jews. This observation shocked me. The fact is that to this day, Algerian television has never shown a film or documentary on the subject, no official has ever breathed a word about it, and never, to my knowledge, has an intellectual written on the subject.]

Sansal's comments support this chapter's suggestion that the lack of knowledge about the Holocaust and the presence of antisemitic discourse are unfortunate realities in present-day Algeria—and that literature can serve as a vehicle through which to productively address these issues.

While it may be true that the lack of education and access to quality Arabic-language Jewish Studies scholarship has created an environment in which Holocaust relativism and denialism continue to influence mainstream popular and academic discourse in many countries claiming an Arab identity, it is also true that Western cultural discourse is equally problematic in

¹⁹ Quoted in Leménager.

²⁰ Quoted in Leménager.

its assumptions about antisemitism in the “Arab world.”²¹ While Sansal’s characterization of his fellow Algerians’ admiration of a former Nazi may give one pause, we must not lose sight of the fact that there are many Algerians—including, but not limited to Bey, Boudjedra, Bachi, Benmalek, and Sansal himself—whose works bear testament to the existence of alternate “Arab” discourses about Hitler and the Holocaust, and whose literary production engages with Jews and Jewishness in empathetic manners.

The desire to fight back against hegemonic narratives of “Arab antisemitism” was a key motivating factor for Benmalek, whose impetus for writing for *Fils du Shéol* stemmed in part from a desire to challenge monolithic narratives of Arab antisemitism: “[J]e voulais répondre à cette espèce de, d’essentialisation du monde arabe qui faisait qu’on considérait tout arabe comme étant nécessairement antisémite. Alors cette accusation m’a indigné à telle point que je me suis dit qu’il fallait que j’ose écrire un livre qui évidemment n’était pas évident... et ce n’est pas” [I wanted to respond to this kind of, of essentialization of the Arab world, according to which all Arabs were necessarily antisemitic. Well, this accusation outraged me to such an extent that I said to myself that I had to dare to write a book, which was clearly not an obvious undertaking... and it is not]. Written by an “Arab” author who feels profound sympathy for the victims of the Holocaust, despite the fact that this violent episode of history “s’était produite loin de [s]on continent d’origine” [had occurred far from (his) continent of origin] and “n’avait a priori aucune relation avec celle de l’Afrique” [at first glance, had no relationship with African history],²² *Fils*

²¹ Of the 22 members of the League of Arab States, the UNESCO study was able to gain data from just over half. Of the 10 countries who provided information, 5 countries—Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates—were classified as discussing the Holocaust in “context only” (like Algeria), while the remaining 5—Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq—were classified as countries whose curricula make no reference to the Holocaust. Significantly, no data was available from the majority of the member countries of the League of Arab States, namely, Comoros, Djibouti, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan. Additionally, there is no data available from either South Sudan or Syria. See “Categorization of curricula according to status” in Carrier et al.

du Shéol, like *Le Village de l'Allemand* before it, arguably represents a significant step—first or not—towards breaking the Holocaust out of the confines of the European Jewish context, and towards seeing how empathetic approaches to foreign episodes of violence can foster cross-cultural dialogue and understanding.

As a concluding gesture for this section, I would like to note that both Benmalek's and Sansal's novels have both been taken up in recent scholarship in Algerian academic circles. To wit, *Fils du Shéol* has been the subject of three Masters theses and one academic article emanating from scholars working at Algerian institutions of higher learning.²³ As for Sansal, his novel has been gaining attention despite censorship concerns: in the past decade, *Le Village de l'Allemand* has been the subject of no fewer than five Masters theses and three published articles emanating from scholars at Algerian institutions of higher education.²⁴ While the approaches to

²² Quoted in Berkani.

²³ Namely, Nadia Ayad, "Une esthétique du tragique pour dire deux génocides dans *Fils du shéol* de Anouar Benmalek" (Masters Thesis, Béjaïa, Algeria, Université de Béjaïa, 2018); Saida Boukhalfa, "Évocation de la Shoah par Anouar Benmalek dans *Fils Du Shéol*" (Masters Thesis, Oum El Bouaghi, Algeria, Université Larbi Ben M'Hidi, 2016); Mohand Ouali Nait Abderrahmane, "Les Conditions socio-historiques du peuple juif dans le roman *Fils du shéol* d'Anouar Benmalek" (Masters Thesis, Tizi-Ouzou, Algeria, Université Mouloud Mammeri De Tizi-Ouzou, 2020); and Meriama Rahmani and Fatima Boukhelou, "Scénographie d'une justice restauratrice dans les romans d'Anouar Benmalek," *Elkhītab* 17, no. 1 (January 2022): 541–50. It is interesting to note as well that there is relatively little scholarly attention afforded to this novel by the Western academy. Olivia Harrison briefly discusses the novel in both her article "For a Transcolonial Reading of the Contemporary Algerian Novel," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 20, no. 1 (January 2016): 102–10 and her book chapter "Beyond France-Algeria: The Algerian Novel and the Transcolonial Imagination," in *Algeria: Nation, Culture and Transnationalism, 1988-2015*, ed. Patrick Crowley, Francophone Postcolonial Studies. New Series, Vol. 8 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 222–42. Diane Otosaka explores the novel in much greater detail in her recent dissertation, "Between Distance and Proximity: Contemporary French and Francophone Holocaust Literature" (PhD Dissertation, Leeds, UK, University of Leeds, 2022).

²⁴ To wit, Ahmed Ben Khetar and Ibrahim Harzallaoui, "Identité et altérité dans *Le Village de l'Allemand* de Boualem SANSAL" (Masters Thesis, Médéa, Algeria, Université de Yahia Farès de Médéa, 2017); Samia Boudaa, "Effect of Palimpsest in the Novel *Le Village de l'Allemand ou le journal des frères Schiller* by Boualem Sansal," *PALIMPSEST/ITALIIMICECT* 4, no. 7 (2019): 161–70; Zineb Chih and Chihab Besra, "Le Lieu, carrefour des identités plurielles dans *Le Village de l'Allemand* de Boualem Sansal," *مجلة الواحات للبحوث والدراسات* 15, no. 2 (2023); Meryem Fenineche, "Les Je(ux) narratifs dans *Le Village de l'Allemand ou le journal des frères Schiller* de Boualem Sansal" (Masters Thesis, Jijel, Algeria, Université Mohamed Seddik Benyahia-Jijel, 2014); Hamza Hadjar, "Quand parcourir l'espace c'est remonter le temps. Le voyage dans *Le Village de l'Allemand* de Boualem Sansal," *Multilinguales*, no. 8 (June 1, 2017); Selma Kebch and Hamza Hadjar, "La Mise en fiction de l'histoire dans *Le Village de l'Allemand* de Boualem Sansal" (MA Thesis, Université Oum El Bouaghi, 2015); Aissa Mahdeb, "La

the novels and the quality of the interventions vary greatly from one study to another, this small sample size nonetheless speaks to the fact that Benmalek's and Sansal's novels—and the narratives they produce about Jews and the Holocaust—are being read and studied not just in Western academic settings, but in their home country as well.

“Dangerous parallels”? Catachresis in Boualem Sansal's Le Village de l'Allemand

A fascinating figure with a rather unexpected life story, Boualem Sansal is an engineer with a doctorate in economics, who began writing and publishing novels during the Algerian civil war of the 1990s. In the years since, he has become a prolific author of French-language fiction and essays whose work is received with much acclaim throughout Europe and North America. The same cannot be said for Algeria, however; due to his controversial political stances, and to his unabashed criticism of his country's political and social status quo, much of Sansal's work has been censored in Algeria, and very little, if any, has been translated into Arabic. As such, although he is somewhat of a literary celebrity in certain circles, he remains relatively unknown in his home country, where he still lives, despite relatively frequent death threats from those who oppose his trenchant critiques.²⁵

Mise en fiction de la violence historique dans *Le Rapt* d'Anouar Benmalek et *Le Village de l'Allemand* de Boualem Sansal” (Masters Thesis, M'Sila, Algeria, Université Mohamed Boudiaf - M'Sila, 2018); Meriem Merzouk, “La Construction textuelle des valeurs dans *Le Village de l'Allemand* ou le journal des frères Schiller de Boualem Sansal” (Masters Thesis, Oum El Bouaghi, Algeria, Université Larbi Ben M'Hidi, 2017); Ahmed Réda Saiah, “La Subversion du personnage romanesque dans le roman *Le Village de l'Allemand* de Boualem Sansal,” *ALTRALANG Journal* 3, no. 01 (July 31, 2021): 213–21.

²⁵ Sansal's explicit criticisms of the official Algerian national narrative and the politicization of Islam have all garnered him negative attention in the media and led to threats on his life. In addition, his decision to participate in the Jerusalem Writers Festival in 2012 sparked intense outrage and led to Hamas's declaring he was guilty of “high treason.” See Christophe Ono-dit-Biot, “La fin du monde selon Sansal,” *Le Point*, November 17, 2015, sec. Culture, https://www.lepoint.fr/culture/la-fin-du-monde-selon-sansal-17-11-2015-1982243_3.php#11.

Le Village de l'Allemand begins with an unapologetic warning to readers: what you are about to encounter, the fictive acknowledgement tells us, contains “des parallèles dangereux” [dangerous parallels]. An apt prognostication, this paratextual commentary sets the stage for the controversial novel to come, a novel that begins, in a certain sense, with an ending. More specifically, *Le Village de l'Allemand* begins six months after the suicide of Rachel Schiller, one of its two protagonists. As the pages of the novel unfold, readers learn about how Rachel discovered that his father, a revered freedom fighter in his and his brother Malrich's Algerian hometown, was in fact a former Nazi chemist who actively participated in the genocide of the Jews. Unable to cope with the guilt, Rachel loses his grip on reality and takes his own life, gassing himself in his garage after shaving his head and donning striped pajamas. Following Rachel's death, his brother Malrich embarks upon his own journey of discovery into his family's past as he reads his brother's journal, the pages of which, interspersed with his own diary entries, combine to form the novel as a whole. In a certain sense, then, the novel begins *in medias res*: Rachel's journey has just ended, and Malrich's has just begun. Moving back and forth between protagonists and time periods, *Le Village de l'Allemand* takes readers on two distinct, but intrinsically connected journeys: that of Rachel, whose inability to accept and process the sins of his father cause him to lose everything—his career, his wife, even his life—and that of his younger, uneducated, unemployed brother Malrich, who is forced to learn of his father's Nazi past while processing the death of his older brother.

In the decade and a half since its publication, *Le Village de l'Allemand* has been the subject of a substantial amount of literary scholarship. In particular, scholars have focused on how the novel juxtaposes stories of Nazism with the rise of fundamentalist Islam in civil war-torn Algeria (on the one hand), and in the neglected French *banlieues* of the 1990s (on the other).

Not unsurprisingly, many critics have taken issue with what the novel itself calls “dangerous parallels;” Corbin Treacy, for example, has argued that the Schiller brothers, “in their narrow, cycloptic readings of history and the present, fail to interpret the world around them.”²⁶ Even more dismissively, Nina Sutherland has characterized Malrich’s descriptions as “the literary equivalent of the stone-throwing and the burning of cars that filled first French and then international television screens during the 2005 riots.”²⁷ Through close reading of Malrich’s rhetoric, I would like to suggest that his juxtaposition of Nazism and fundamentalist Islam in war-torn Algeria and the French *banlieues* is neither a “failure” nor a “stone throwing.” Instead, it is a way to render the lexicon of the Shoah agentic and capable of productively addressing current realities without diluting the potency of the historic events it first came to represent.

Before entering into discussion of the novel itself, it is useful to spend a moment on the prefatory remarks that Malrich includes for his readers just before the beginning of *Le Village de l’Allemand*, as within them he summarizes the stakes of the novel. In his short preface, Malrich offers his gratitude to a former schoolteacher who helped him prepare his book manuscript for publication:

Je remercie très affectueusement Mme Dominique G.H., professeur au lycée A.M., qui a bien voulu réécrire mon livre en bon français. Son travail est tellement magnifique que je n’ai pas reconnu mon texte. J’ai eu du mal à le lire. [...] Dans certains cas, j’ai suivi ses conseils [...] Dans d’autres, j’ai conservé ma rédaction, c’est important pour moi. Elle dit qu’il y a des parallèles dangereux qui pourraient me valoir des ennuis. Je m’en fiche, ce que j’avais à dire, je l’ai dit, point, et je signe : Malrich Schiller.²⁸

[Affectionate thanks to Mme Dominique G. H., my teacher at A. M. who was kind enough to rewrite my book in good French. So good I hardly recognized my own work. It

²⁶ Corbin Treacy, “The German Moudjahid and the Danish Prince: Boualem Sansal’s *Le Village de l’Allemand*,” *French Forum* 40, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 135.

²⁷ Nina Sutherland, “Trois continents, une guerre, un empire: Francophone Narratives of War and Occupation in the French Empire,” *French Cultural Studies* 22, no. 3 (2011): 195.

²⁸ Boualem Sansal, *Le village de l’Allemand ou le journal des frères Schiller* (Paris: Éd. France loisirs, 2008): n.p.

was hard for me to read it. [...] Sometimes I've taken her advice [...] Other times I've kept to my version, because it's important to me. She says there are dangerous parallels that could get me into trouble. I don't give a shit. I've said what I have to say. Full stop. Malrich Schiller.]²⁹

Though brief, this cautionary tale that Malrich gives us sets the stage for the linguistic struggle that will unfold in the pages of his journal. By attributing the notion of “dangerous parallels” to the professor and not to himself, Malrich emphasizes that it is the official narrative that finds dangers in the juxtaposition of Nazism and fundamentalist Islam. Metaphorically, this small note from the *banlieusard* Malrich, representative of the postcolonial subject, stands in opposition to the grand republican narrative, represented by the professor's commentary. Aware of potential problems, such as the alleged instrumentalization of the suffering of Jewish deportees during World War II or the corruption of the memory of the Holocaust, Malrich nevertheless chooses not to eliminate his inflammatory language because “c'est important pour moi.” He knows that his book will upset the status quo, and he takes responsibility for it because it is the only method of self-expression he has.

During the first part of the novel, Malrich merely hints at the comparisons to come. His lexical choices evoke the horrors of the Holocaust, but in a subtle way. For example, when Malrich denounces the grip that fundamentalist Islam once held over his life, as well as the lives of his friends, he states that “On ne parlait que de ça, le *djihad* [...] le sacrifice de soi, l'extermination des autres” [That was the only thing anyone talked about, *jihad* [...] noble sacrifice, exterminating the other].³⁰ Moreover, Malrich uses the term “les camps de mort” to describe Islamist training camps. Speaking of a friend of his who had undergone fundamentalist

²⁹ Boualem Sansal, *The German Mujahid*, trans. Frank Wynne (New York, N.Y: Europa Editions, 2009), n.p. Note that all quotations in English are taken directly or adapted from this edition.

³⁰ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand* 40; Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 36.

indoctrination in his past, Malrich writes “Raymond, qui se faisait appeler Ibn Abou Mossab, c’est son vieux qui l’a rattrapé in extremis, il était trempé jusqu’au cou, il avait son billet et son manuel pour les camps de la mort de Kabul” [Raymond, who’d been going round calling himself Ibn Abou Mossab—it was his old man who got him out of there at the very last minute—Raymond was in deep by then, he already had his plane ticket to Afghanistan and the manual for the death camps in Kabul].³¹ For readers familiar with the events of World War II, these terms—“l’extermination des autres” and “les camps de mort”—recall the genocide that targeted the Jews in the mid-twentieth century. That said, it is not clear at this point whether Malrich, who has not yet grasped the symbolism of his brother's death, is aware of the significance of his words.³²

The more Malrich reads his brother's diary, the more he draws connections between the discoveries of his father's Nazi past and his life in the Paris *banlieue*. What was previously allusion soon becomes concrete connection, as Malrich begins to use similes in his discussion of suburban life. “More tentative and decorative than metaphor,”³³ similes allows for a juxtaposition of two entities without conflating them, allowing Malrich to create connections between the Jewish deportees of World War II and those living under the threat of fundamentalist Islam, while acknowledging that they are two different groups. “On pratique au moins quinze langues et autant de dialectes dans la cité, comme dans les camps, on ne les connaît

³¹ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand* 41; Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 36.

³² When describing how he found his brother's dead body, Malrich writes: “Toute la nuit, il a baigné dans le gaz d'échappement de sa tire. Il portait un drôle de pyjama, un pyjama rayé que je ne lui connaissais pas et il avait la tête rasée comme au bain, tout de travers. Que c'est bizarre” [He'd been there all night, bathing in exhaust fumes. He was wearing these creepy striped pajamas I'd never seen before and his hair was all shaved off like a convict or something. It was freaky] (12, 10). Since at this point in the novel Malrich is not yet aware of the events of the Holocaust, he is unable to understand the similarity between his brother's death and that of the Jewish victims of the Final Solution. For an in-depth analysis of Malrich's reaction to his brother's death, see Mireille Rosello, “Guerre des mémoires ou ‘parallèles dangereux’ dans *Le Village de L'Allemand* de Boualem Sansal,” *Modern & Contemporary France* 18, no. 2 (2010): 193–211.

³³ Chris Baldick, “Simile,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford University Press, 2008), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272-e-1058>.

pas tous” [On the estate, just like in the camps, people speak fifteen different languages and at least as many dialects, we can’t possibly understand all of them] he explains.³⁴ A little later, he develops his line of thinking: “Nous sommes comme les déportés d’antan, pris dans la machination, englués dans la peur, fascinés par le Mal” [We’re like deportees of yesteryear, caught up in the Machine, paralyzed by fear, fascinated by evil].³⁵ Disconcerting as they may seem, these similes clearly distinguish between the two groups in question; the inhabitants of the housing estate and the victims of the Shoah remain, at least for the moment, two distinct groups. The neighborhood in which Malrich lives is only *like* a concentration camp, and its inhabitants are only *like* the deportees; they are not quite one and the same thing.

As the novel unfolds, the hesitant and decorative connections that the younger Schiller employs give way to a far more disturbing rhetorical strategy, one which confronts readers with a proliferation of layers manifesting an explicit and definitive relationship between the Holocaust and Islamic fundamentalism in both the French *banlieue* and Malrich’s home country of Algeria, which he visits around the mid-point of the novel. The moments in which he describes his departure from France and arrival in Algeria are replete with images that evoke the deportation of Jews during the Holocaust. In doing so, he creates an extended metaphor that intrinsically links him to the deportees of the Second World War. Speaking about his preparations for the trip, Malrich explains, “C’était la première fois que je prenais l’avion depuis mon arrivée d’Algérie, la première fois que je quittais la France, la première fois que j’affrontais l’inconnu, la première fois que je sentais la mort si proche. Et ce serait la première fois de ma vie que je porterais une valise. Une angoisse terrible” [This would be the first time I’d been on a plane since I left

³⁴ Sansal, *Le Village de l’Allemand* 118; Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 105.

³⁵ Sansal, *Le Village de l’Allemand* 131; Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 117.

Algeria, the first time I'd left France since then, the first time I'd faced the unknown, the first time I'd ever felt death so close. And it was the first time in my life I would ever carry a suitcase. What horrible anxiety].³⁶ In evoking the foreboding feelings of a traveler who leaves home, suitcase in hand, to face the unknown, Malrich sides with the Jewish deportees who also had to leave their family homes and head for an obscure destination. Furthermore, his repeated use of the phrase "the first time that" emphasizes the novel and exceptional nature of his trip.

The reception he receives once he arrives in Algeria only reinforces the similarities between his situation and that of the victims of the Nazi horrors. Once off the plane, Malrich and the other new arrivals find themselves in the midst of an unexpected triage: "Toi, sors, va là-bas... toi aussi... et toi... toi, là, avance... toi aussi" [You, stand over there... and you... and you... You, step forward... and you] the chief policeman tells them without explanation.³⁷ Without delay, the policemen take all their belongings: "Sur un ordre du chef, les agents spéciaux nous ont retiré nos passeports, nos billets, nos petites valises de cabine et nos sachets, et nous ont ordonné de grimper dans le camion" [The head guy gave some order and the special agents told us to hand over our passports, our tickets, our hand luggage and get into the truck].³⁸ For the reader familiar with the history of Nazi-orchestrated deportation, the similarities between the arrival of Jews at concentration camps and Malrich's arrival in Algeria could not be clearer. Notwithstanding the obviousness of this operation, as well as the descriptions of his forays into fundamentalist Islamism, it is not clear—at least initially—that Malrich is aware of the metaphor he is developing.

³⁶ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand* 144; Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 129.

³⁷ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand* 172; Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 152.

³⁸ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand* 173; Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 153.

The connections he has made through this extended metaphor are made explicit a little later, when the people designated by the chief of police at the triage are taken to a shed and questioned. Between the time of arrival in the shed and their disembarkation from the truck, the group finds themselves in the vehicle driving toward the unknown. “Certains toussaient à décrocher les poumons, d’autres étaient exsangues, moi je larmoyais de l’acide” [Some of them were hacking like they were about to cough up their lungs, others were grey and pasty, my eyes were watery with acid tears], says Malrich.³⁹ It is at this point, then, that Malrich makes the first explicit connection between what is happening to him and what happened in the camps: “Je me suis demandé si le chauffard ne voulait pas nous exterminer avec ses gaz d’échappement mais, comme il était avec nous dans le hangar, j’ai conclu que c’était innocent [...] Ne reste pas longtemps *Sonderkommando* qui s’oublie dans la chambre à gaz” [I wondered for a minute if the driver was trying to exterminate us with the exhaust fumes, but since he was in the hangar with us, I figured he probably wasn’t (...) A *Sonderkommando* who forgets to get out of the gas chamber in time doesn’t last too long].⁴⁰ It is not insignificant that it takes Malrich so long to make the connection between the two situations explicit: as Rachel gassed himself because of the actions of their father, who worked as a chemist on the development and production of Zyklon B, gas is Malrich's main point of reference in all things related to the Holocaust. Even though Malrich does not say that the truck driver is a *Sonderkommando*, this juxtaposition arguably serves as a key moment in which the lexicon of the Holocaust is mobilized in order to articulate the horrors of Algeria’s civil war, in which thousands of men, women, and children were murdered and/or disappeared.

³⁹ Sansal, *Le Village de l’Allemand* 173; Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 154.

⁴⁰ Sansal, *Le Village de l’Allemand* 174; Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 154.

Malrich ends his description of his trip to Algeria by using calques that integrate foreign and anachronistic terms into his contemporary narrative: “Inutile de dire, sortir d’Algérie n’est pas une partie de plaisir. Mon Dieu que ce fut long, ces papiers, ces *Ausweis*, ces contrôles, ces attentes, ces chicanes, on dirait qu’ils ne rêvent que de ça, les *Bonzen* d’Alger, torturer les gens. Une vraie Gestapo” [Needless to say, getting out of Algeria was no picnic. My God did it take a long time: the paperwork, the *Ausweis*, the security checks, the waiting, the petty bureaucracy, it’s as if the *Bonzen* in Algeria like nothing better than torturing people. A real Gestapo].⁴¹ If in the beginning of his trip, the truck driver simply resembled a *Sonderkommando*, at the end of it, the men in charge have become full-blown Nazis, a literary move that incorporates the Shoah firmly and explicitly into the Algerian context. Once again, Malrich’s parallel ends with a rhetorical figure in which the lexicon of the past is reincarnated and used to testify to a new reality: that of postcolonial life under Islamic fundamentalist influence.

Given the implausibility of situations such as these (there’s no real narrative motivation for the triage of the passengers, nor for the brief van ride), and the shocking lexical choices Malrich makes to describe them, it is no surprise that scholars have objected to Malrich’s language. I would like to suggest, however, that analyses that vilipend the younger Schiller’s unorthodox linguistic strategies miss an opportunity to engage a more pressing, deeper issue: namely, the inability of language to appropriately account for and express the realities of daily life in civil war-torn Algeria and in the French housing projects that many Algerian immigrants and their children call home.

Malrich and his friends’ discussion of the term “Islamist” serves as a case in point of standard language’s shortcomings. Attempting to establish the difference between “Islamic” and

⁴¹ Sansal, *Le Village de l’Allemand* 217; Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 189.

“Islamist,” Malrich’s friend Idir-Quoi—a stammering young man whose nickname playfully integrates the Arabic and French languages—searches fruitlessly in a dictionary published just a few years prior. Whereas he easily locates a definition for the former, Idir-Quoi confusedly informs his friends that the term Islamist “n’existe pas” [doesn’t exist].⁴² Despite the fact that Islamic fundamentalism was already an established phenomenon when Idir-Quoi’s dictionary was published—“il est de 90, les barbus, on les avait” [it was published in 1990, we had jihadists back then]—the reference work in question has nothing to offer but a lacuna.⁴³ Idir-Quoi’s comment that Islamists “don’t exist” thus takes on discursive weight as it lays bare the inadequacy of “proper” or “standard” language (as embodied by the dictionary) to describe lived experience. Further commentary drives the point home: “C’est sérieux le dico, il ne prend pas n’importe quoi” [Dictionaries are serious, they don’t just include any old thing] quips another friend.⁴⁴ Official discourse is thus not only inadequate; it is elitist, concerning itself solely with “important” matters and forcing that which is deemed unworthy to remain permanently unarticulated. As such, it is no surprise that Malrich finds recourse elsewhere, in the officially recognized language of the Shoah, to express his frustrations with the Islamist extremism ravaging his home country. Recalling Max Silverman’s argument that “[t]he resources for defining the indefinable have to be sought in the familiar but stretched so that they no longer resemble what we already know,” Malrich’s shocking lexical choices must be seen not simply as ignorant analogy, but rather as linguistic strategy.⁴⁵

⁴² Sansal, *Le Village de l’Allemand* 130; Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 116.

⁴³ Sansal, *Le Village de l’Allemand* 130; Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 116.

⁴⁴ Sansal, *Le Village de l’Allemand* 130; Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 116.

⁴⁵ Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 12.

I would like to suggest that Malrich's employment of Nazi terminology to describe his personal experience with fundamentalist Islam can be seen as an example of catachresis, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as the "improper use of words; application of a term to a thing which it does not properly denote; abuse or perversion of a trope or metaphor."⁴⁶ Deceptively simple, the OED's definition of this literary figure only tells half the story. Naomi Schor's article "Blindness as Metaphor" rounds out the definition of the term; according to Schor, catachresis is "a necessary trope, an obligatory metaphor, to which language offers no alternative."⁴⁷ Patricia Parker's essay "Metaphor and Catachresis" goes one step further. As understood by Parker, "catachresis is a transfer of terms from one place to another employed when no proper words exist, while metaphor is a transfer or substitution employed when a proper term does already exist and is displaced by a term transferred from another place to a place not its own."⁴⁸ For Parker, catachresis is thus a necessity, a mandatory misuse of language born from the need to express that which has no referent.

Read not as ill-suited analogy, but rather as obligatory semantic abuse necessitated by linguistic inadequacy, Malrich's inflammatory writing style bears more narrative weight than what may first be apparent. Understood as catachresis, the younger Schiller's anachronistic use of Nazi terminology enables readers to better appreciate his struggles to articulate life experiences in a language ill-suited to the task. Malrich may shock readers with his comments—after all, who would not be given pause upon reading "depuis l'arrivée du nouvel imam et du

⁴⁶ Oxford English Dictionary, "'catachresis, n.'," n.d., <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/28665?redirectedFrom=catachresis>.

⁴⁷ Naomi Schor, "Blindness as Metaphor," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 77.

⁴⁸ Patricia Parker, "Metaphor and Catachresis," in *The Ends of Rhetoric: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. John B. Bender and David E. Wellbery (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1990), 60.

nouvel émir, le Quatrième Reich s'annonce à pas de géant" [since the new imam and his emir showed up, the Fourth Reich is well under way]—but they are far more than simple fodder for the political fire.⁴⁹ His scandalous semantics underscore the uncanny resemblance between the rise of Nazism and the growing threat of Islamic fundamentalists in the French *banlieues*, whose tactics for organizing protests and imposing their worldview on unwilling citizens echo Nazi strategies for the social exclusion and subsequent rounding up of Jews. Struggling to express himself in a language that lacks the terminology necessary for him to describe that which he knows to be true, Malrich turns to catachresis, the figure of abuse and perversion, to articulate that which defies easy description. As penned by Sansal's protagonist, catachresis serves as a medium through which to comment on political realities and engage with historical and traumatic memory in France and Algeria.

In her 1990 article "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value," Gayatri Spivak asks us to ponder the following: "When a so-called Third World text speaks a post-colonial (rather than nationalist) allegory, what lexicon is, after all, most readily to hand?"⁵⁰ Highlighting the power of official discourse, Spivak argues that postcolonial writers' reappropriation of recognized terminology represents a linguistic challenge to the authority of recognized grand narratives. As Spivak explains, catachresis is a sort of "incessant re-coding of diversified fields of value" made possible by "reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding."⁵¹ The "figure of abuse" is thus a form of verbal revolt that usurps a former

⁴⁹ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand* 178; Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 157.

⁵⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value," in *Literary Theory Today*, ed. Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 230.

⁵¹ Spivak, 226, 228.

imperial power's rhetorical jurisdiction and deploys it in order to deconstruct the power relations between former colonizer and former colonized.

Returning to the novel, we see that Malrich's use of Nazi terminology is indeed an act of counter-appropriation that destabilizes the postcolonial hierarchy. Through his commandeering of the lexicon of a recognized historical narrative, Malrich retools the rhetoric of the Holocaust to expose the inadequacies of France's national mythology. His letter to the Minister of the Interior illustrates this ability to turn official discourse back against itself through the use of catachresis:

Les islamistes ont colonisé notre cité et nous mènent la vie dure. Ce n'est pas un camp d'extermination mais c'est déjà un camp de concentration, ein *Konzentrationslager* comme on disait sous le Troisième Reich. Peu à peu, nous oublions que nous vivons en France, à une demi-heure de Paris, sa capitale, et nous découvrons que les valeurs qu'elle proclame à la face du monde n'ont en réalité cours que dans le discours officiel.⁵²

Islamists have colonized our estate and are making our lives hell. It's not an extermination camp yet, but it's already a concentration camp, ein *Konzentrationslager*, as they said during the Third Reich. Gradually, people are forgetting that they live in France, half an hour from Paris, the capital, and we're finding out that the principles France talks about on the world stage only actually exist in official discourse.⁵³

In three sentences, Malrich tears apart the French Republic's grand narrative. His formulation "the Islamists colonized our estate" relegates France to the role of colonial subject, a complete inversion from her previous position as imperial power. In consequence, the *banlieue* in which Malrich lives has become a "concentration camp" in which the occupying powers have such total control that its inhabitants "forget they live in France." The reversal is complete: whereas official French discourse would posit France as having been a great imperial power whose citizens all benefit equally from the *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* inherent in her republican values,

⁵² Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand* 231.

⁵³ Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 199

Malrich's letter to the Minister of the Interior renders France a powerless hypocrite who would allow her citizens to suffer the fate of colonial subjects, who would stand by as a second Occupation unfolds. It is through his catachrestic formulations that Malrich is able to reappropriate and reformulate the republican narrative, explain his postcolonial reality, and denounce France's complicity in the degradation of its *zones sensibles*. Due to lack of governmental action, "la cité sera bientôt une république islamique parfaitement constituée" [the estate will soon be a full-blown Islamic Republic] in which French citizens are forced to live "sous juridiction islamique" [under Islamic law].⁵⁴ Although the Nazis represent for Malrich the ultimate evil, his condemnation of contemporary France's complacency in regards to the rising Islamic fundamentalism of her *banlieues* does not pass by unnoticed.

It is thus clear that catachresis functions not only as a necessary tool that empowers Malrich to tell his story, but in addition as a heuristic strategy that better permits readers to actively engage with the issues of memory that he addresses. More specifically, when we read Malrich's linguistic strategies as *necessary* misuses of language, we can see how his rhetoric offers an alternative to discourses of competitive memory surrounding the Holocaust, defined by Michael Rothberg as "a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources."⁵⁵ Malrich's provocative phrasing is thus productive: far from denaturing the past horrors on which his rhetoric relies, his catachreses allow for a reconfiguring of recognized terms that, as Rothberg puts it, "create new forms of solidarity and new visions of justice."⁵⁶ In the process, his rhetoric imbues language

⁵⁴ Sansal, *Le Village de l'Allemand* 231, 232; Sansal, *The German Mujahid* 200.

⁵⁵ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3.

⁵⁶ Rothberg, 5.

with the agency to overcome its semantic limitations as it reconfigures well-known terms so as to better reflect current realities.

It is not by chance that catachresis plays an important role in Malrich's expression of new solidarities. In his essay *La Mythologie blanche*, Jacques Derrida posits that catachresis

ne sort pas de la langue, elle ne crée pas de signes nouveaux, n'enrichit pas le code ; et pourtant elle en transforme le fonctionnement, elle produit, avec le même matériau, de nouvelles règles d'échange, de nouvelles valeurs. [...] [C]'est bien ainsi que la philosophie traditionnelle a traditionnellement interprété sa puissante catachrèse : *torsion de retour vers le déjà-là d'un sens, production (de signes ou plutôt de valeurs), mais comme révélation, dévoilement, mise au jour, vérité.*⁵⁷

[does not go outside the language, does not create new signs, does not enrich the code; yet it transforms its functioning: it produces, with the same material, new rules of exchange, new meanings. (...) (I)t is just so that philosophy has traditionally interpreted its powerful catachresis: *a torque turning back to a sense already present, a production (of signs, or rather of meanings), but this as revelation, unveiling, bringing to light, truth.*]⁵⁸

According to Derrida, catachresis transforms the functioning of language by uncovering existing similarities that went heretofore unnoticed. Far from denaturing the meaning of words, catachresis reveals the intrinsic relationship between seemingly distinct entities and facilitates the expression of "new values." Malrich's terms thus take on a double importance. They permit the articulation of a state of affairs that lacks linguistic referents and, in doing so, reveal the resemblances between poorly understood postcolonial realities that have yet to find a place in an official national narrative, and the well understood, commonly recognized story of the Holocaust. By highlighting the possibilities of language to overcome its own limitations, Malrich's rhetoric offers an alternative to discourses of competitive victimhood. The lexicon of

⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida, "La mythologie blanche : la métaphore dans le texte philosophique," *Poétique : Revue de théorie et d'analyse littéraires* 5 (1971): 41. Emphasis my own.

⁵⁸ Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," trans. F. C. T. Moore, *New Literary History* 6, no. 1 (1974): 59-60. Emphasis my own.

the Shoah is thus imbued with new possibilities, rendered agentic and capable of productively addressing current realities without diluting the potency of the historic events it first came to represent.

The “Rough Sketch” of the Holocaust: Fils du Shéol and the Legacy of the Herero and Nama Genocide

As with Boualem Sansal, Anouar Benmalek has a somewhat unorthodox background for a writer. Born in Casablanca in 1956 to a Moroccan mother and Algerian father, Benmalek spent his childhood in Constantine (Algeria), before going on to study at the University of Constantine and then to earn a doctorate in mathematics in Ukraine.⁵⁹ He began his literary career in 1984 with the publication of the poetry collection *Cortèges d’impatiences*, and has continued writing ever since. Having relocated to France in the early 1990s, in the midst of the Algerian Civil War, Benmalek currently serves as a professor of pharmacy at the Université Paris Saclay.⁶⁰ Over the years, his writing career has continued blossoming as well, with Benmalek’s work as journalist, poet, and author earning him the title of “Mediterranean Faulkner.”⁶¹ Notably, he is a founding member of the Comité algérien contre la torture [Algerian Committee Against Torture] and served as editor of the *Cahier noir d’Octobre*, a collection of testimonies of victims of police violence during the 1988 protests that touched several cities throughout the country. He has

⁵⁹ Amar Ingrachen, “‘La barbarie n’est pas une malédiction, elle est un choix’ (Anouar Benmalek, Écrivain),” *Algérie Cultures*, May 5, 2020, <https://algeriecultures.com/actualite-culturelle/la-barbarie-nest-pas-une-malediction-elle-est-un-choix-anouar-benmalek-ecrivain/>.

⁶⁰ Benmalek relocated to France following the 1993 assassination of his friend and “frère d’âme” Tahar Djaout at the hands of Islamic fundamentalists during the Algerian Civil War. See Tirthankar Chanda, “Au cœur des turbulences du monde contemporain, avec Anouar Benmalek,” *RFI: Chemins d’Écriture*, September 25, 2021, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/podcasts/chemins-d-%C3%A9criture/20210925-au-c%C5%93ur-des-turbulences-du-monde-contemporain-avec-anouar-benmalek>.

⁶¹ See Chanda, n.p.

authored over thirty works and has received literary prizes for several of his novels, including the Prix Rachid-Mimouni, Prix Fémina, and Prix Médicis, which he won for *Les Amants désunis* (1998); the Prix RFO for *L'enfant du peuple ancien* (2000); and the Grand prix de la fiction, which he was awarded for his recently published *L'amour au temps des scélérates* (2021).⁶²

Like *Le Village de l'Allemand*, *Fils du Shéol* begins, in many respects, with the end: “Si les gardes ont pris la peine de nous compter, c'est que nous sommes importants, que nous comptons” [If the guards have taken the trouble to count us, it means that we are important, that we count], thirteen-year-old Karl tells readers from the cattle car in which he is being transported to Poland in 1943.⁶³ As the opening chapter continues, the dire situation unfolds: a German Jewish adolescent, Karl has found himself arrested and deported to the East, where he hopes to find his parents, who had been arrested before him and from whom he has received no news. Readers accompany Karl on his treacherous journey to the death camp, where we follow him into the shower room of a “curieuse immensité” [curious immensity], and bear witness to his agony as he asphyxiates while crying out for his parents, swearing “Je veux vivre oh je veux vivre ce n'est pas ma faute si je suis juif je vous jure j'en guérirai” [I want to live oh I want to live it's not my fault I'm Jewish I swear I'll cure myself of it].⁶⁴

Although Karl's death occurs at the novel's outset (on page 43 out of 409 pages total), chronologically speaking, it marks the last event of the novel's timeline. In the 350-some pages that follow, readers accompany Karl to the *she'ol*, the realm of the dead according to Jewish

⁶² “Nouvelle distinction à Anouar Benmalek,” *Hebdo Al-Ahram*, June 29, 2022, <https://hebdo.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/32/37200/Culture/Livres/-Nouvelle-distinction-;-Anouar-Benmalek-.aspx> and “BENMALEK Anouar,” *Étonnants Voyageurs: Festival du livre & du film - Invités depuis 1990*, n.d., <https://www.etonnants-voyageurs.com/BENMALEK-Anouar.html>.

⁶³ Anouar Benmalek, *Fils Du Shéol* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2015), 13.

⁶⁴ Benmalek, 33, 42.

tradition.⁶⁵ Accompanied by a unnamed, mysterious, and disembodied presence, Karl's spirit is forced to bear witness as time travels backwards and scenes from the past play out in front of him: his father Manfred's life in the *Sonderkommando*, where he is forced to transport dead bodies from the gas chamber to the crematorium ovens; his family life in the years leading up to his deportation; his parents first meeting in 1929; and finally, his grandfather's time in the German Army. The curious structure of the novel, which intersperses time periods in reverse chronological order with ten distinct episodes of Karl's experience in the *she'ol*, enables the novel to both interrogate the scope and reach of Nazi violence, and to situate it within a broader history of racially-motivated genocide. It is thus that the novel begins with "Pologne, 1943 (Partie Zero)" [Poland, 1943 (Part Zero)], before moving backwards in time to "Berlin, 1941-1942 (Partie moins Un)" [Berlin, 1941-1942 (Part minus One)] and "Alger, 1929 (Partie moins Deux)" [Algiers, 1929 (Part minus Two)], before finally arriving in the "Sud-Ouest africain, 1904 (Partie moins Trois)" [African Southwest, 1904 (Part minus Three)].

Although, as Diane Otosaka has rightly pointed out, Anouar Benmalek's novels often explore transcultural relationships, it is not abundantly clear in the beginning of *Fils du Shéol* that this will be the case.⁶⁶ Our first clue that Karl's heritage may be more than solely *German Jewish* does not come until he is undressing in preparation for his entrance into the "showers" of the camp. As Karl is removing his clothes, a boy of about his age asks with confusion "C'est

⁶⁵ As Matthew Suriano explains, "Understood to be the biblical place of the dead, Sheol is described in various ways in biblical literature. For example, it can be a watery abode, a subterranean realm, or an area of abandonment. Yet among the different images the most prevailing is that of the tomb. Despite this, the nature of Sheol remains ambiguous even though the biblical images of death clearly reflect the empirical realities of the entombment. The perceived paradox of Sheol is due to its depiction as a dreary and dismal place for all humanity, which (seemingly) contrasts with the idea of a peaceful reunion with dead kin inside the tomb" (2-3). See Matthew Suriano, "Sheol, the Tomb, and the Problem of Postmortem Existence," *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 16 (January 1, 2016).

⁶⁶ See Otosaka, especially Chapter 2, "Vertical and Horizontal Dynamics of Memory in Marie Bardet's *À la droite du père* (2018) and Anouar Benmalek's *Fils du Shéol* (2015)" (pp. 82-138).

quoi ça? [...] Je te parle de ce dessin sur ton épaule!” [What is that? [...] I’m talking about the drawing on your shoulder!], to which Karl responds, “Ça, c’est un tatouage, une lubie de ma mère, une main de Fatma, ma mère croit à la chance” [That’s a tattoo, a whim of my mother’s, a hand of Fatma, my mom believes in luck].⁶⁷ The boy then asks again, “Et c’est qui, cette Fatma?” [And who is that, this Fatma] In response, Karl mutters that she is “une déesse d’un pays d’Afrique, l’Algérie” [a Goddess from Algeria, an African country].⁶⁸ Although the irony of the situation is not lost on the reader—at this point, it is clear that the tattoo has brought nothing if not bad luck upon its wearer—this small exchange subtly situates Algeria within the Nazi killing center, setting the stage for what is to come.

During the pages that follow, which describe Karl’s agony as he is gassed to death, the novel renders explicit the relationship between Karl’s mother, Élisabeth, and the nation of Algeria. Whereas his father’s side of the family is German Jewish, Karl’s mother is a “Juive d’Alger” [Jew from Algiers] whose German is “encrassé d’arabe et de français” [muddied up by Arabic and French] and who “pleure sans cesse son pays ensoleillé” [incessantly pines for her sun-drenched country].⁶⁹ Throughout the first half of the novel, readers are consistently reminded of Élisabeth’s Algerian heritage: whether it be her “broche bizarre (de Kabylie, disait-elle)” [bizarre brooch (from Kabylia, she would say), which she wears, Karl tells us, “les jours de nostalgie” [on nostalgic days], or her frequent use of Arabic—a language, that, the novel informs us, she “n’a pas eu le temps de lui apprendre” [didn’t have time to teach him], her southern Mediterranean roots are never far from the surface.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Benmalek, 33.

⁶⁸ Benmalek, 33.

⁶⁹ Benmalek, 40.

⁷⁰ Benmalek, 47, 175.

Crucially, it is Éliisa's cultural differences that mark her first physical presence in the novel. In a particularly poignant scene, Karl's father Manfred notices something peculiar with the body of a woman that he is transporting to the furnace while working in the *Sonderkommando*: "Ce fut l'oreille délicatement dessinée qui attire son attention: le lobe portait deux trous de boucle d'oreille – comme celui de sa femme" [It was the delicately designed ear that grabbed his attention: the lobe bore two earring holes, just like that of his wife].⁷¹ Taking a closer look, Manfred realizes that the disfigured body he is holding is, in fact, that of his beloved Éliisa. "C'est ma faute" [It's my fault] he says, "c'est moi qui l'ai convaincue de m'épouser, elle habitait en Afrique. Elle m'aimait, et je l'aimais. [...] Si elle n'avait pas accepté de me suivre en Allemagne, elle serait encore vivante, heureuse dans son Afrique ensoleillée, avec les Arabes, leur mer et les palmiers" [it was I who convinced her to marry me, she was living in Africa. She loved me, and I loved her. [...] If she hadn't agreed to follow me to Germany, she would still be alive, happy in her sunny Africa, with the Arabs, their sea and the palm trees].⁷² Over the course of the next few pages, while Manfred does what he can to honor her in death, the novel moves back and forth between his memories of their time together in Algeria, and his current situation in the death camp. It is thus while Manfred is in the crematorium, holding his wife's dead body, that we learn that he and Éliisa had their first kiss in the hills above Algiers, that he proposed to her one sunny morning at the Place du Cheval in Algiers, and that her Algiers neighbors referred to her by the supposedly Parisian-sounding name of "Fanny."

That Éliisa's Algerian heritage is explicitly and consistently present in this novel on Nazi violence is, I would argue, significant in and of itself. As historian Michael Marrus's famous

⁷¹ Benmalek, 76.

⁷² Benmalek, 78.

definition of the Holocaust as “the systematic mass murder of European Jewry by the Nazis” suggests, cultural and academic discourses have traditionally afforded very little consideration, if any, to the tentacular reach of the Shoah across the Mediterranean, and to how Nazi violence affected North African Jews. While it is certainly true that *most* Nazi antisemitic violence occurred in Europe and targeted European Jews, it is also true that North African Jews living on both sides of the Mediterranean were subjected to antisemitic measures and deported to concentration camps across Europe, and that Tunisia, Algeria’s western neighbor, was under Nazi occupation for six months.⁷³ In allotting Éliisa a significant role in the novel, *Fils du Shéol* arguably takes a first step towards writing this small but not insignificant population of Jewish victims into the story of the Holocaust.

Yet the novel does far more than simply incorporate Algerian Jewish characters into the landscape of the death camps. The novel’s reverse chronological order, which takes readers from Nazi Europe to colonial North Africa, and finally to German Southwest Africa, enables it to establish what we might arguably call “dangerous parallels” of its own. Karl’s visions of times past—specifically, of two episodes of colonial violence, French Algeria and German Southwest Africa—allow the novel to both challenge European discourses about race and religion, and to situate the Holocaust within the history of the African, not simply European, continent.

Karl’s visions of French Algeria occur slightly more than halfway through the novel, following the episode in which he is forced to rewatch how and why his family was sent to the

⁷³ There is a small but growing body of scholarship on the Holocaust as it occurred beyond the geographical confines of European. See Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, eds., *The Holocaust and North Africa* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019); Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, eds., *Wartime North Africa: A Documentary History, 1934-1950* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2022); Edward Kissi, *Africans and the Holocaust: Perceptions and Responses of Colonized and Sovereign Peoples*, Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Africa (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020); and Robert Satloff, *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust’s Long Reach into Arab Lands*, 1. ed (New York: Public Affairs, 2006), among others.

East, and before he views his grandfather's experience in sub-Saharan Africa. In the Algerian portion of the story, Manfred and his own father Ludwig (Karl's grandfather) stop in Algiers in the hopes of obtaining a visa to travel on to Sub-Saharan Africa. It is such that Karl observes his parents' first meeting, and the earliest moments of their love affair. This section of the novel is quite a bit shorter than the others (it begins on page 265, and lasts only 34 pages), and—significantly and somewhat unexpectedly—several pages are devoted to a storyline that seemingly has nothing to do with the novel or its protagonists at all.

In a bid to secure a visa to the Sub-Saharan territory now governed by the Netherlands, Ludwig and Manfred accompany a Dutch diplomat to Algiers's Arab quarter to listen to a musical concert. Upon taking in the other concert-goers—who, the novel tells us, are “habillés à l'Arabe” [dressed in the Arab style], and among whom there are “Pas d'Européens, ou d'individus au physique clairement européen” [No Europeans, or individuals with a clearly European physique]—Manfred remarks to his father, “C'est très exotique, tout ça, mais sont-ils des Juifs ou des Arabes? Ils se ressemblent tellement...” [This is very exotic, all of this, but are they Jews or Arabs? They look so much alike...].⁷⁴ It is at this concert, in which an orchestra composed of Jewish and Muslim musicians nostalgically plays Andalusian tunes about shared Jewish-Muslim experience in pre-Inquisition Spain, that Manfred and Ludwig—and readers—learn of the impending death of a young boy, a beloved member of the orchestra community who had been the victim of an intentional hit and run:

Sans père ni mère connus, on l'avait trouvé un matin de printemps, à l'âge de trois ou quatre ans, crevant de faim et errant en haillons près du local où l'orchestre avait l'habitude de se réunir. Le gamin était circoncis, mais incapable de préciser s'il était juif ou musulman. On lui demanda son prénom. Mais à cause d'un défaut d'élocution du petit vagabond, une vive dispute éclata sur le fait de décider s'il se prénomrait Abraham ou

⁷⁴ Benmalek, 279.

Ibrahim. Les Juifs de l'orchestre (et, à leur suite, ceux du quartier) penchèrent pour Abraham, les musulmans de l'orchestre (et, à leur suite, ceux du quartier, pour Ibrahim.⁷⁵

[Without a known father or mother, he had been found one spring morning, at the age of three or four, starving and wandering in rags near the place where the orchestra usually met up. The boy was circumcised, but unable to say whether he was Jewish or Muslim. He was asked for his first name. But because the little vagabond had a speech impediment, a heated argument broke out over whether his name was Abraham or Ibrahim. The Jews in the orchestra (and, in consequence, those in the neighborhood) chose Abraham, the Muslims in the orchestra (and, in consequence, those in the neighborhood) chose Ibrahim.]

Notwithstanding the paltry number of pages on which Abraham-Ibrahim appears in *Fils du Shéol*, his story does critical work for the novel as a whole. More specifically, Abraham-Ibrahim's story serves as a foil for that of Karl (and European Jews more broadly speaking), in that his incorporation into the overall narrative serves as a *mise-en-abyme* of the racial discourses pervading the European and Sub-Saharan sections of the novel. Whereas Karl's family life is completely marked by the fact that they are Jews—they must wear the yellow star, are subjected to spoliation and expropriation, and his parents are conscripted as forced laborers—Abraham-Ibrahim's origins are ambiguous and render him utterly “unknowable.” His circumcision and his speech impediment mark him equally Jewish and Muslim, and his “inability” to clarify his religion, combined with his status as an orphan, means that there is no way to know for sure. Fortunately for Abraham-Ibrahim, this does not pose an issue for his well-being; both religious communities claim the child as their own and agree not to force him to pick a side until he has reached puberty. In stark contrast to the novel's representation of Nazi Germany, where racial hierarchies determine who can live and who will perish, *Fils du Shéol* weaves a narrative of mutual understanding among Algerian Jews and Muslims, who live in a culture that accepts and even embraces the impossibility of social classifications.

⁷⁵ Benmalek, 286.

Crucially, the novel articulates Abraham-Ibrahim's story using language that actively avoids separating the orchestra along religious lines. To begin, the word choice often declines to create a stark division between Jews and Muslims, opting instead for terms that englobe both religious groups within one entity. Readers are told that "l'orchestre" adopted the boy, and that "certains assurèrent que l'ignorance du gamin était feinte" [certain people assured that the boy's ignorance was fake].⁷⁶ Furthermore, the repeated use of the indefinite personal pronoun "on"—"On lui permettait [...] de se joindre à la troupe" [*One* permitted him to join the troupe] and later, "On lui demanda son prénom" [*One* asked for his first name]—reinforces the fact that the members of the orchestra, composed of both Jewish and Muslim musicians, make up one singular group.⁷⁷

Furthermore, the only times that Jews and Muslims are separated into distinct groups even manage to highlight their mutual resemblance. When describing how the members of the orchestra first responded to the little boy, for example, we read: "The Jews in the orchestra (and, in consequence, those in the neighborhood) chose Abraham, the Muslims in the orchestra (and, in consequence, those in the neighborhood) chose Ibrahim." The syntactic repetition of "and, in consequence, those in the neighborhood" suggests similar actions and values on the part of both communities, with the visual repetition of this same phrase reinforcing the groups' similarities for the reader. Abraham-Ibrahim himself reinforces this mutual compatibility: to wit, the only two sentences that have Abraham-Ibrahim himself as the subject demonstrate the wisdom of the orchestra's decision: "Mais le gosse se plut dans les deux communautés. Alors, pendant des

⁷⁶ Benmalek, 286.

⁷⁷ Benmalek, 286. A less literal, and thus more functional, translation might be, "He was permitted to join the troupe" and "He was asked his name." These translations, while they sound more natural to a native English speaker, alter the syntax of the sentence by changing the voice from active to passive. See Frédéric Landragin and Noalig Tanguy, "Référence et coreférence du pronom indéfini *on*," *Langages* 195, no. 3 (2014): 99–115, for a discussion of the multifaceted uses of the pronoun "on."

années, demeurant au gré de son humeur chez les un ou dans la rue, Abraham-Ibrahim choisit de ne pas choisir” [But the kid was happy being part of both communities. So, for years, staying according to his whims in certain homes or in the street, Abraham-Ibrahim chose not to choose].⁷⁸ This shared attitude is again reflected in the novel’s discussion of how the two communities react to Abraham-Ibrahim’s decision: “Même si cet état de fait en irritait plus d’un, les religieux des deux camps finirent par convenir qu’on ne le forcerait à opter pour l’une des deux religions qu’une fois sa puberté atteinte” [Even though this state of affairs irritated many, the religious leaders on both sides finally agreed that he would not be forced to choose one of the two religions until he reached puberty].⁷⁹ In such a way, the novel both acknowledges the existence of distinct religious groups in colonial Algeria and refrains from reifying Jews and Muslims into separate, mutually exclusive categories.

When read in light of the novel’s 200-plus previous pages that depict Nazi Germany and the death camps, we see that Abraham-Ibrahim’s story articulates an alternative approach to dealing with difference, or perceived difference, on the social level. Whereas the local Algerians create a loving community around a boy whom they do not, and can never, “know,” the Nazis “know” the Jews, and attempt to decimate them. In this small yet impactful way, *Fils du Shéol* subtly inverts colonial and Nazi-era discourse about the place and location of so-called “civilization.” It is the inhabitants of the African continent who treat one another with dignity and respect; the “savages” are to be found in “enlightened” Europe, the so-called “heart of civilization.”

⁷⁸ Benmalek, 286.

⁷⁹ Benmalek, 286.

In the novel's final section, Karl has yet another vision of the past, this time of the early adulthood of his grandfather Ludwig, who had passed away at home several months before Karl and his parents were deported to the death camps. During this episode, which occurs in the first decade of the twentieth century, Karl witnesses Ludwig's time in the German colony of Southwest Africa, and bears witness both to his grandfather's love affair with Hitjiverwe, a Herero woman, and to his participation in the genocide that decimated her people. In what is very likely one of the first novels to represent this often-overlooked episode of colonial violence, which claimed the lives of approximately 80,000 Herero and Nama people between 1904-1907, readers bear witness to the annihilation of a people that, according to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, was "a prelude to the Holocaust in both the ideology of racial hierarchy that justified the genocide and in the methods employed."⁸⁰ Benmalek himself champions a similar view; in a 2015 interview with Leïla Slimani, he stated, "La Shoah fait aussi partie de notre horizon africain puisqu'elle a un peu commencé en Namibie" [The Shoah is also part of our African horizon since it began, a bit, in Namibia].⁸¹

As opposed to *Le Village de l'Allemand*, which integrates metaphorical engagements with the Holocaust into discussions of the realities of the Algerian Dark Decade and the underserved French *banlieues*, *Fils du Shéol* clearly distinguishes between the various episodes

⁸⁰ "Herero and Nama Genocide (Introduction)," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Herero and Nama Genocide Bibliography, n.d., <https://www.ushmm.org/collections/bibliography/herero-and-nama-genocide>. For more on the Herero and Nama Genocide, see Casper W. Erichsen, *"The Angel of Death Has Descended Violently among Them": Concentration Camps and Prisoners-of-War in Namibia, 1904-08* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2005) and Mads Bomholt Nielsen, *Britain, Germany and Colonial Violence in South-West Africa, 1884-1919: The Herero and Nama Genocide*, Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

⁸¹ Leïla Slimani, "Littérature – Anouar Benmalek : 'En Afrique, il y a un déficit de mémoire' [Interview]," August 13, 2015, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/255284/culture/litterature-anouar-benmalek-en-afrique-il-y-a-un-deficit-de-memoire/>.

of historical violence that it represents. Occurring in different time periods and on different continents, and separated by the thirty-four-page section taking place in Algeria (“Alger, 1929 (Partie moins Deux)”), the section depicting the Aronstein family’s life in Germany under Nazi rule and the section representing the German colonial endeavor are connected only through two characters, one of whom does not live to see the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps, and another who, after perishing in the gas chamber, helplessly “watches” the events of the Herero Genocide unfold. In other words, in linking the Herero Genocide and the Holocaust together through the lived experience of one individual (Ludwig) and the spiritual existence of another (Karl), the novel articulates a definitive relationship between these discrete moments of historical violence;⁸² yet in limiting their lived experience of the most extreme representations of genocidal violence—Ludwig neither works at nor is imprisoned in camps of any kind; Karl perishes in the gas chamber but is already “dead” when he witnesses the horrors of the Shark Island concentration camp—the novel places limits on this relationship, suggesting that to fully understand the connections between these two episodes of violence, we must consider more than just the actors involved. By juxtaposing verisimilar representations of the Holocaust and the Herero and Nama Genocide, the novel mobilizes fiction’s unique capacity to locate truth not in what happened, but in *what could have been*.

When we expand our focus to consider not just the involvement of individuals, but rather how the novel represents the Herero and Nama Genocide and the Holocaust, we come to appreciate the numerous uncanny similarities it articulates between the two. The novel’s discussion of the violence leading up to the Herero and Nama Genocide clearly echoes Nazi

⁸² Diane Otsaka has argued that this relationship is one of “filiation;” see Otsaka, “Between Distance and Proximity: Contemporary French and Francophone Holocaust Literature,” especially Chapter 2, “Vertical and Horizontal Dynamics of Memory in Marie Bardet’s *À la droite du père* (2018) and Anouar Benmalek’s *Fils du Shéol* (2015)” (pp. 82-138).

policy towards Jews in the years leading up to the Shoah. The Oberveterinär, the head of the German Army's veterinary service in German Southwest Africa, tells Ludwig that "l'existence des Héréros est devenue illégale au regard de nos lois" [the existence of the Herero has become illegal under our laws] before explaining that the reason for this is because "notre pays a besoin d'espace, et l'espace ici est occupé par des créatures sans utilité pour le reste du monde. Dans cette région, la mort se révèle un facteur de progrès, car elle nous débarrasse des parasites noirs" [our country needs space, and the space here is occupied by creatures of no use to the rest of the world. In this region, death has proven itself to be a means of progress, as it rids us of the black parasites].⁸³ Although the Oberveterinär's comments are about the Herero, the ideas he mentions—the outlawing of groups due to their racial background,⁸⁴ the supposed "need" for space for German expansion,⁸⁵ and the dehumanizing rhetoric that renders human beings into nothing more than subhuman parasites⁸⁶—all evoke discourse and strategies that the Nazis would come to use some thirty years later, with respect to the Jews and other so-called undesirables.

⁸³ Benmalek, 334.

⁸⁴ General von Trotha, who led the German forces during the Herero Genocide, issued the following extermination order on October 2, 1904: "I, the Great General of the German troops, send this letter to the Herero people. The Herero are no longer German subjects. They have murdered and stolen; they have cut off the ears, noses and other body-parts of wounded soldiers; now out of cowardice they no longer wish to fight. [...] The Herero people must however leave the land. If the populace does not do this I will force them with the *Groot Rohr* [cannon]. Within the German borders every Herero, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot. I will no longer accept women and children, I will drive them back to their people or I will let them be shot at. These are my words to the Herero people. [Signed:] The great General of the mighty Kaiser." Translation provided in Jan-Bart Gewald, "The Great General of the Kaiser," *The Botswana Society* 26 (1994): 68.

⁸⁵ While it is well-known that the desire to obtain *Lebensraum* (German for "living space") was an integral pillar of Nazi ideology, the concept dates further back than Hitler's regime. As Benjamin Madley notes, "[T]he Nazis were not the first modern Germans to put the idea [of *Lebensraum*] into practice. In adopting *Lebensraumpolitik* as a guiding principle, the Hitler regime borrowed an idea that [German geographer Friedrich] Ratzel had conceived with German South West Africa in mind and that modern Germans first put into practice there" (432). See Benjamin Madley, "From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe," *European History Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (July 2005): 429–64.

⁸⁶ General von Trotha, who led the German forces during the Herero Genocide, was quoted as saying, "Against 'nonhumans' [*Unmenschen*] one cannot conduct war 'humanely.'" See Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 33.

Furthermore, *Fils du Shéol*'s depiction of the Shark Island concentration camp echoes—or, perhaps, anticipates—several of the most well-known characteristics of the Nazi camps.⁸⁷ The journey to and arrival process for prisoners at Shark Island bears striking similarities to that of Auschwitz: prisoners complete the voyage “d’abord à pied, puis en wagons à bestiaux sans toit” [first on foot, then in roofless cattle cars]; new arrivals are divided into two groups, “les *Arbeitsfähige* (‘aptes au travail’) et les *Arbeitsunfähige* (‘inaptes au travail’)” [the *Arbeitsfähige* (‘capable of working’) and the *Arbeitsunfähige* (incapable of working)]; and those over the age of seven are forced to wear “une plaque de laiton ovale autour du cou arborant la couronne impériale, un numéro et l’inscription *GH* (*Gefangene Herero*, ‘prisonnier héréro)’” [an oval-shaped brass plate around their necks bearing the imperial crown, a number and the inscription *GH* (*Gefangene Herero*, ‘Herero prisoner’)].⁸⁸

These echoes are made all the more vibrant by the fact that Hitjiverwe’s work resembles that which Manfred would be forced into barely forty years later. Like Manfred, whose work in the *Sonderkommando* consists of transporting the mutilated corpses of asphyxiated victims from the gas chamber to the crematorium ovens, Hitjiverwe is forced to work with the bodies of dead: “la besogne de Hitjiverwe consiste à plonger suffisamment longtemps les têtes dans l’eau bouillante, de façon que les chairs se boursouflent et soient plus faciles à détacher, puis, au moyen de tessons de verre, à achever le nettoyage en ôtant les dernières traces de ligaments” [Hitjiverwe's job consists of immersing the heads long enough in boiling water so that the flesh

⁸⁷ While concentration camps were an integral and notorious aspect of the Nazi genocidal machine, the first German concentration camps were in fact built in German Southwest Africa at the time of the Herero Genocide, with the term *Konzentrationslager*—German for concentration camp—being coined in December 1904. See Benjamin Madley, “From Africa to Auschwitz.”

⁸⁸ Benmalek, 383. See Erichsen pp. 22-23 for a discussion of the “tagging” of Herero prisoners, and p. 24 for a rudimentary illustration of a 1904 tag from Swakopmund concentration camp.

swells and is easier to detach, and then, using shards of glass, of completing the cleaning by removing the last traces of ligaments].⁸⁹ By means of their respective work, Manfred and Hitjiverwe are forced to face the results of the medical experimentation conducted on prisoners: “Hitjiverwe a, elle aussi, entendu parler de ce docteur Bofinger qui injecte aux prisonniers de l’arsenic et d’autres substances bizarres et en étudie les effets en autopsiant leurs corps” [Hitjiverwe, too, has heard of this Dr. Bofinger who injects prisoners with arsenic and other strange substances and studies their effects by autopsying their bodies], whereas “Manfred, lui, s’est vu assigner la tâche de brûler un grand tas de morceaux humains qu’un infirmier vient de ramener sur une civière de la salle de chirurgie du docteur fou” [Manfred, on the other hand, has been assigned the task of burning a large pile of human body parts that an orderly has just brought in on a stretcher from the mad doctor’s operating room].⁹⁰

Whereas *Le Village de l’Allemand* weaves somewhat heavy-handed, perhaps even forced, parallels between the Holocaust and subsequent episodes of postcolonial violence, *Fils du Shéol* juxtaposes plausible, verisimilar representations of the Herero and Nama Genocide and the Holocaust. As such, the parallels between the Nazi treatment of Jews and the German Army’s treatment of Africans differ significantly from those articulated by Sansal’s protagonist: as penned by Benmalek, the simple juxtaposition of Hitjiverwe’s existence in Shark Island with Manfred’s experience in a Nazi camp—two experiences which, although fictive, represent in a verisimilar manner that what *could have been*—is enough to illuminate the striking similarities in ideology and practice that enabled both genocides to take place. The novel, by dint of its ability to stage not what actually happened, but rather its power to situate two plausible stories of

⁸⁹ Benmalek, 403. Hitjiverwe’s task is based on real life practices. See Erichsen pp. 141-144 for information on Herero skulls that were shipped to Germany for research.

⁹⁰ Benmalek 402, 108.

historical violence alongside one another, suggests that the story of the Holocaust cannot be completely told without interrogating its relationship to the Herero and Nama Genocide.

If Ludwig is incapable—or perhaps unwilling—to link his experience as a Jew in Nazi Germany to the experience of the Herero under German colonial rule, the opposite is true for Hitjiverwe, as it is she who first draws the link between German mistreatment of African colonial subjects and the antisemitic rhetoric that characterizes the German soldiers’ treatment of Jews.⁹¹ Offended at Ludwig’s use of the derogatory term “Hottentot,” Hitjiverwe riposts, “D’où tu viens, comment vous insulte-t-on, toi et les membres de ta tribu, quand on veut vous humilier plus bas qu’un chien?” [Where you come from, how do they insult you and the members of your tribe, when they want to humiliate you lower than a dog?].⁹² Faced with Ludwig’s confusion—“Ma tribu?” [My tribe?—Hitjiverwe explains, “Ma mère est une Nama, pas une saleté ‘d’Hottentot’, de même que toi, tu es un Juif, et non pas un... comment tu dis?... un youpin!” [My mother is a Nama, not a bloody ‘Hottentot,’ just as you are a Jew, and not a... what do you call it?... a kike!].⁹³ It is only through his conversations with Hitjiverwe that Ludwig is able begin drawing parallels between the experience of living as a Jew in Europe and the experience of living as an African colonial subject in a German colony. Overwhelmed by the knowledge that he cannot protect the woman he loves, Ludwig find that he cannot vocalize his feelings: “Il

⁹¹ Although Ludwig does hint that “something happened” during his days as a young man in German Southwest Africa, “un temps où Dieu et les hommes, comme aujourd’hui, avaient complètement perdu la tête” [a time when God and men, like today, had completely lost their minds] (137), his regrets revolve around his treatment of Hitjiverwe, not his participation in a genocide in the making. It is thus that when he tells his family that “Il y a longtemps [...] très longtemps, j’ai commis un acte dont je ne suis pas fier” [a long [...] long time ago, I did something that I am not proud of], he is referring not to the fact that he played a role in the Herero and Nama Genocide, but rather to the fact that, although he loved Hitjiverwe, “la folie m’a manqué pour la sauver et j’ai vécu ensuite une vie qui n’a mené à rien” [I wasn’t crazy enough to save her, so I then lived a life that amounted to nothing] (135).

⁹² Benmalek, 316.

⁹³ Benmalek, 317.

s'interrompt, sentant montrer en lui ses propres larmes d'impuissance: quels serments d'amour ou d'avenir opposer, en effet, au malheur de la jeune femme, à ce... (Il se raidit de stupeur devant l'évidence du terme à utiliser, le mot tuer redouté de tous les Juifs d'Europe) à ce *pogrom* élargi à l'ensemble du peuple héréro?" [He paused, feeling his own tears of impotence welling up within him. What pledge of love or of the future could he offer that might counteract the misfortune of this young woman, who was faced with a... (He stiffened with astonishment at the obviousness of the word to be used, the killer word dreaded by all the Jews of Europe) a *pogrom* targeting the entirety of the Herero people?].⁹⁴

By beginning with Holocaust and then transitioning through reverse chronological order to its precursor, the Herero and Nama Genocide, Benmalek's novel acknowledges the Holocaust as the ultimate point of reference in discussions of genocide, while simultaneously destabilizing its position as the model *par excellence* against which all other genocides are measured. The novel's structure, which moves from a verisimilar representation of a familiar genocide to the plausible staging of a much less understood one occurring forty years prior, mobilizes readers' knowledge of the Holocaust in such a way as to articulate what Diane Otosaka has called a "relationship of filiation" between it and the Herero and Nama Genocide.⁹⁵ In so doing, *Fils du Shéol* does not so much compare the two instances of genocide as it does suggest that the groundwork for the mid-century genocide against the Jews was laid forty years prior, in German Southwest Africa. Understood in this way, the novel's last lines—Hitjiverwe's plea of "Ne m'oublie jamais, Ludwig, ne m'oublie jamais" [Never forget me, Ludwig, never forget me]—become a call to action.⁹⁶ Giving the metaphorical and literal last word to the survivors of the

⁹⁴ Benmalek, 337.

⁹⁵ Otosaka, 122.

Herero and Nama Genocide, *Fils du Shéol* asks readers to “never forget” the undeniable links between these two instances of violence, and suggests that in order to understand the Holocaust more fully, we must remember what occurred in early twentieth-century Namibia.

If *Fils du Shéol* can be said to write African history into the story of the Holocaust, it must also be said that the novel writes the Holocaust into African history via the character of Éliisa and the novel’s articulation of the relationship between her native Algeria and the continent of Africa. Whereas common social, cultural, and academic discourses tend to disaggregate North African countries from Sub-Saharan countries, Benmalek’s novel patently rejects the separation of North and Sub-Saharan Africa, characterizing Algeria as simply “African.” To wit, when Karl is undressing in the gas chamber, annoyed with the boy who keeps pestering him about his tattoo, he responds that Fatma is “une déesse d’un pays d’Afrique, l’Algérie” [a goddess from an African country—Algeria]; and Manfred, upon finding his wife’s body amongst those of the other victims of the gas chamber, explains to the other prisoners that his wife “habitait en Afrique” [used to live in Africa] and “serait encore vivante, heureuse dans son Afrique ensoleillée” [would still be alive and happy in her sunny Africa] if it weren’t for him.⁹⁷ Although subtle, the novel’s articulation of Algeria as “African” (only)—as opposed to North African or Maghrebi—frames the novel’s intervention as a homecoming that, in Benmalek’s words, “rapatrie” [repatriates] the Holocaust by writing it into the (hi)story of a continent from which it has traditionally been absent.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Benmalek, 409.

⁹⁷ Benmalek, 33, 78.

⁹⁸ As Benmalek said in the previously cited interview with Leïla Slimani, “La Shoah fait aussi partie de notre horizon africain puisqu’elle a un peu commencé en Namibie. J’ai envie de rapatrier cette partie de l’Histoire chez nous [...]” [The Shoah is also part of our African horizon since it began, a bit, in Namibia. I want to bring this part of History back home (...)]. For a rigorous historical study of African experiences of and relationships with the

Conclusion

As a concluding gesture, I would like to turn back to the question that opened this chapter, and to reformulate it in a slightly more expansive manner: if there is indeed a “Holocaust turn” in Algerian postcolonial fiction, as this chapter has put forth, what are its broader implications? More specifically, how might this chapter’s analysis of *Le Village de l’Allemand* and *Fils du Shéol* speak to broader concerns about the limits of the Holocaust (both geographical and metaphorical) and the capacity of fiction to address these concerns?

First, and perhaps most obviously, *Le Village de l’Allemand* and *Fils du Shéol* both reimagine the limits of the Holocaust by pushing it beyond the geographical confines of the European continent and across the Mediterranean. Whether it be through Hans Schiller’s transformation from Nazi into mujahid, his son Malrich’s rhetorical displacement of Nazi violence onto Algerian soil, or through the death of an Algerian Jew in the gas chambers of Eastern Europe, Sansal’s and Benmalek’s novels patently refuse to delimit the violence of Nazi ideology to the continent and people of Europe. Their staging of the transnational movement of Holocaust victims and perpetrators across the Mediterranean begs readers to reassess their understandings of who was affected by the Holocaust and just how far—in space, and in time—the violence reached.

In so doing, Sansal’s and Benmalek’s novels contribute in profound ways to academic and cultural debates surrounding the uniqueness discourse of the Holocaust, which holds that it is “the preeminent atrocity in human history” and as such, cannot be compared or even put into conversation with any other episode of historical violence.⁹⁹ This hard line position has been

Holocaust, see Edward Kissi, *Africans and the Holocaust: Perceptions and Responses of Colonized and Sovereign Peoples*.

challenged in recent decades by scholars of a variety of disciplines, with historians such as Dirk Moses and Donald Bloxham, for example, arguing for an “integrated approach” that situates the Holocaust within the broader field of genocide studies.¹⁰⁰ Responding to the plethora of cultural productions that articulate relationships between the Holocaust and various other types of historical violence, the realm of literary and cultural studies has seen similar movement, most notably through Michael Rothberg’s theorization of multidirectional memory and Max Silverman’s theorization of palimpsestic memory, both of which offer productive frameworks for moving beyond the hierarchies of suffering that are the inherent byproducts of competitive approaches to the past.

In telling the story of the Herero Genocide alongside that of the Holocaust, as Benmalek does in *Fils du Shéol*, or in articulating the horrors of Islamism through the language of the Holocaust, as Sansal does in *Le Village de l’Allemand*, these novels bear testament to the unique capacity of literature—by virtue of its ability to articulate not what “was,” but rather “what might have been”—to serve as a prime location in which to foster intercultural and interfaith empathy, particularly among parties who are all too often said to be at loggerheads with one another. In so doing, Benmalek’s and Sansal’s respective novels—alongside those of Bey, Bachi, and Boudjedra—demonstrate that the Holocaust speaks to more than just a European Jewish experience, and that it has been making productive inroads into a more global cultural consciousness.

⁹⁹ Avishai Margalit and Gabriel Motzkin, “The Uniqueness of the Holocaust,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 25, no. 1 (Winter 1996), 68.

¹⁰⁰ See Daniel Blatman, “Holocaust Scholarship: Towards a Post-Uniqueness Era,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 21–43.

Conclusion

Algerian literature in French has grappled with the place of Jews and Jewishness within the Algerian cultural space, both during the colonial era and into the present day.¹ Over the years, this has taken manifold forms: from minor references to quotidian, mundane interactions among Algerian Jews and Muslims in the colonized landscape; to ruminations on the capacity of lived experience to challenge independent Algeria's institutionalization of religious differences; to explorations of how the tentacular reach of the Holocaust affected the lives of Algerians, both during the 1940s and in the postcolonial era. Yet despite the fact that interfaith and intercultural relations among Jews and Muslims have been a consistent aspect of Algerian literature in French from its very beginnings, they have traditionally been the subject of very little scholarly attention in the field of postcolonial literary studies. This dissertation, by virtue of its interrogation of literary engagements with Jews and Jewishness in novels by non-Jewish authors Kateb Yacine, Rachid Boudjedra, Boualem Sansal, and Anouar Benmalek, has taken a step towards filling this scholarly lacuna. These engagements, though often seemingly minor, are incredibly meaningful, given the "writing out" of Jews and Jewishness from both the national narrative of independent Algeria, as well as the field of postcolonial Algerian literature.

In illuminating the consistent presence of Jews and Jewishness in Algerian literary production from its inception to the present day, this dissertation offers a needed corrective to the

¹ As Lia Brozgal notes, however, the twenty-first century has seen an uptick in engagements with Jews and Jewishness in Algerian cultural production. See Lia Brozgal, "Algerian Literature and the 'Jewish Turn'" (60 Years After the Algerian War: Interculturality in the Postcolonial Age, Berlin, 2022) for a discussion of this potential "Jewish turn" in Algerian literature.

overly politicized framework that has traditionally upheld the study of North African literature, more broadly speaking, and Algerian literature, in specific. My focus on how Algerian authors of Muslim background engage with and represent the nation's only modern religious minority has proceeded from the assumption that postcolonial literature can serve as a vehicle through which to examine how the colonial endeavor affected all North Africans, including those who received French citizenship. In doing so, I call for a critical rethinking of the weight that scholars have traditionally accorded citizenship in distinguishing the "French" from the "Francophone," particularly in the Algerian context.

While it is not my contention that the Crémieux Decree and the ensuing naturalization of Algerian Jews was of no consequence, my analyses suggest that the grand narrative of the Crémieux Decree and its impact on the Algerian Jewish population have overdetermined literary scholars' understanding of interfaith dynamics during the colonial era. It is certainly true that many Algerian Jewish families did assimilate, or were assimilated into, the cultural milieu of the colonizer following their naturalization as French citizens; yet, it is equally true that naturalization affected Algerian Jews to varying degrees and in vastly different manners due to a variety of factors, including but not limited to geographical location and social class.

Interrogating the capacity of literature to reflect not only the lived experience of (post)colonial subjects, but to speak to the continued presence of Jews and Jewishness therein, has allowed for a deeper and more thorough understanding of interfaith and intercultural dynamics among Algerian Jews and Muslims, uncovering a nuance lacking in more traditional understandings of the social and cultural presence of Jews and Jewishness in post-Crémieux Algeria.

On a disciplinary level, this dissertation's focus of the place of Jews and Jewishness in the field of North African literature in French has called for a critical rethinking of the way we

approach Algerian literature not only in its relationship to Jewish Studies, but in relation to Middle East and North Africa / Area Studies and the putative Arab world. From *Nedjma*'s original prefacers to twenty-first century interviews with “écrivain ‘arabe’” [‘Arab’ writer] Anouar Benmalek, Algeria, its people, and their cultural productions are all too often subsumed—implicitly or explicitly—into discourses on the Arab world, discourses that inherently gloss over Algeria’s inherent multiplicities and rely on seemingly monolithic notions of “Arabo-Muslim” culture.² In highlighting how Algerian literary production showcases the cultural and religious diversity of the Algerian space, this dissertation has called upon scholars to take a critical eye to the ways in which we articulate the relationship between Arabness, Algeria, and Algerians, and to be more mindful of how our scholarship can participate—advertently or not—in the perpetuation of what Kateb Yacine called “le mythe de l’Algérie arabo-islamique” [the myth of Arabo-Islamic Algeria].³

Although the entire dissertation is invested in examining how scholarship has grappled with—or not—the complex relationship between Algeria and the Arab world, nowhere is this topic as urgent as in the dissertation’s final chapter, which examined the Holocaust in contemporary Algerian fiction. In researching the status of Holocaust discourse and understanding in Algeria, I was confronted with several trends in the scholarship: first, that Algeria and Algerian authors are all too often uncritically subsumed into discussions of “Arab narratives” of the Holocaust;⁴ second, that scholarship on said “Arab narratives” overwhelmingly

² Mohamed Berkani, “Anouar Benmalek : «La Shoah a un peu commencé en Afrique avec les Héréros» [Interview with Anouar Benmalek],” FranceInfo, August 28, 2015, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/europe/allemande/anouar-benmalek-la-shoah-a-un-peu-commence-en-afrique-avec-les-hereros_3065079.html.

³ Yacine Kateb, “[Conférence Sur La Littérature Algérienne d’expression Française],” 1967, Fonds Kateb Yacine, KTB 9.50, Institut mémoires de l’édition contemporaine.

⁴ In her article “The Limits of Holocaust Representation in the Arab World,” Esther Webman writes that *Le Village de l’Allemand* is “the first by an Arab author dedicated to Arab attitudes toward Nazism and the Holocaust.” See

focuses on the Middle Eastern context, and not North Africa;⁵ third, that much of this scholarship—which often betrays a clear ideological bent—focuses primarily, if not exclusively, on the relationship between the Nakba and the Holocaust;⁶ and fourth, that scholarship purporting to discuss “North African” discourses on the Holocaust by and large focus solely on Morocco.⁷ Although these issues are specific to the discussion of the Holocaust, they all evince the need for a more critical approach to the relationship between Algeria and the putative Arab world, and to the benefits and pitfalls of conceiving of the writers Algeria produces and of the literature they create as “Arab.”

Focusing on engagements with Jews and Jewishness in Algerian literature written by non-Jewish authors has thus shone a light on the limitations of the scholarly framework through which we currently approach Algerian literary production in French. More specifically, focusing on literary engagements with Algerian Jews—who, by virtue of their dual status as native North Africans and French citizens—has forced us to directly address the shortcomings of the epistemological framework through which literary scholars approach North African cultural productions. This dissertation has demonstrated what we stand to gain when we move away from

Esther Webman, “The Limits of Holocaust Representation in the Arab World,” in *Re-Examining the Holocaust through Literature*, ed. Aukje Kluge and Benn E. Williams (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pub, 2009), 97.

⁵ See, for example, Gilbert Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (London: Saqi Books, 2010) and Me’ir Litvak and Ester Webman, *From Empathy to Denial: Arab Responses to the Holocaust*, (London: Hurst, 2009).

⁶ See, for example, Ruth Linn and Ilan Gur-Ze’ev, “Holocaust as Metaphor: Arab and Israeli Use of the Same Symbol,” *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 11, no. 3 (1996): 195–206; and Nitza Davidovitch and Nissim Dana, “The Holocaust Paradox: Holocaust Denial and Its Use in the Arab World,” *Israel Affairs* 23, no. 2 (2017): 411–26.

⁷ For example, Francis R. Nicosia and Boğaç A. Ergene’s introduction to their edited volume *Nazism, the Holocaust, and the Middle East: Arab and Turkish Responses*, is entitled “Responses to Nazism and the Holocaust in the Middle East and North Africa,” but the only mention of Algeria is in a map of the region. The edited volume does include, however, a chapter entitled “Philo-Sephardism, Anti-Semitism, and Arab Nationalism: Muslims and Jews in the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco during the Third Reich.” See Francis R. Nicosia and Boğaç A. Ergene, eds., *Nazism, the Holocaust, and the Middle East: Arab and Turkish Responses* (Berghahn Books, 2022).

overly politicized categories and instead privilege an inclusive approach that considers how the colonial endeavor affected all native North Africans, including those who received French citizenship. In doing so, it has offered a way to “write Jews and Jewishness back in.”

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