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Writing National Identity:
Postmemory in Contemporary France

By

Celine Piser

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Jewish Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Robert Alter, Chair

Professor Karl Britto

Professor Debarati Sanyal

Professor Monique Balbuena

Spring 2014

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Celine Piser

Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

Designated Emphasis in Jewish Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Robert Alter, Chair

This dissertation considers the recent wave of memoir-style fiction by French Jewish authors of Ottoman and North African origin in light of current debates on immigration and French national identity. These authors were raised by immigrant parents who, eager to assimilate into French society, did not focus on transmitting their heritage to subsequent generations. However, their children later attempted to reclaim their lost heritage as adults through literature that revisited their parents' immigration stories, culture, and Judeo-Spanish language. Through the narrative reconstruction of the past, these authors explore how hybrid identity functions within contemporary French society and historiography as an alternative form of French identity. By writing the Judeo-French experience into French literature and history, they revise the nationalist view of French identity to allow for colonial and non-European influences. Through this case study, this project argues that France's new multicultural demographics break down the barrier between "French" and "Francophone" and redefine what it means to be a French national. This not only allows both immigrants in France and French speakers in other countries to claim French culture as their own, but also reconceptualizes French culture to include foreign linguistic, cultural, and national elements.

The first two chapters analyze the experience of Mediterranean Jewish immigrants in Paris in the early- to mid-twentieth century. My archival research challenges assumptions about immigrant assimilation, arguing that some immigrants developed a hybrid identity that would allow them to integrate into French society without denying their heritage. Moreover, by writing their stories into French literature, they

legitimized their claim to French's cultural capital. My analysis of this work thus urges the reevaluation of the Francophone and Jewish literary canons.

The following two chapters turn to second-generation Jewish immigrant authors who, though raised disconnected from their ancestral pasts, attempt to reconstruct their parents' immigration narratives in order to gain access to their lost heritages. I analyze this move by reconceptualizing Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory, a term that describes the relationship of the second generation to the previous generation's trauma. Through narrative techniques of temporal conflation and multilingualism, these authors rethink their previously monocultural French identities, allowing them to be in conversation with their foreign heritages even as they identify as French nationals. By producing linguistically and culturally bilingual texts, these authors are attempting to alter the current, monocultural conception of French national identity to include the cultural and linguistic traditions of France's postcolonial, post-immigration population. Working simultaneously in minor and major languages, they redefine French identity as multilingual and global, not just for immigrants but also for the dominant culture.

The conclusion reconsiders the texts discussed in the dissertation through the lens of contemporary debates in France on immigration and national identity, analyzing the politics of France's controversial new immigration museum to show the relevance of these French-Sephardic literary voices to current issues of French identity and culture. While French national identity has long been based on the idea of a shared past, France's colonial legacy and diverse demographics prove that this past in fact encompasses multiple cultures, languages, and ancestral heritages. By redefining the parameters of French national identity, France's political and cultural policies can better reflect and address its diverse population.

For Savta, who started it all

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Introduction

This dissertation rethinks French national identity through the lens of Jewish immigrant and post-immigrant literature. I argue that certain first-generation French Jewish authors mobilize the immigration narratives of the previous generation in order to contest French national identity. Unable to access a heritage lost to assimilation, they engage in a partial reconstruction of their ancestral culture and language through French literature. By looking primarily at French authors of Sephardic (Judeo-Spanish) and North African origin, this project illuminates a previously unexplored area of Judeo-French literary history. The analysis calls into question the cultural and linguistic structures that determine French literary historiography and influence French identity. Ultimately, the authors studied here redefine what it means to be French to allow for the fragmented identity created by colonialism and immigration. Through this case study, this dissertation argues that France's new multicultural demographics break down the barrier between "French" and "Francophone" and redefine what it means to be a French national. This not only allows both immigrants in France and French speakers in other countries to claim French culture as their own, but reconceptualizes French culture to include foreign linguistic, cultural, and national aspects. The immigrant experience is a key issue in French literature and contemporary culture and politics, and this project addresses in a new way how literature and language work as instruments of political change in French society.

Long before postcolonial waves of immigration spurred debates on race, language, and culture in national identity, European society gave birth to the concept of a continuous, cohesive expression of nationhood. This early nationalism engendered what Benedict Anderson has described as "imagined political communit[ies]" (Anderson 6). Imagining these communities as homogenous entities was essential to the concept of nationalism; Anderson argues that "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each [community], the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" that erases any heterogeneity (7). One of the main tools of homogenization was language; Anderson traces the origins of national consciousness from the rise and spread of the printed vernacular in the post-Gutenberg era print culture. The circulation of printed vernacular encouraged speakers to form linguistically-based imagined communities. Yet community formation was not always organic. Nationalist movements combatted regional languages and identities in an attempt to unify countries such as Italy, France, Spain, Canada, China, Israel, and the former Yugoslavia.

In France, the 1789 Revolution marked the beginning of nationalism, with the establishment of cultural unifiers such as the tricolor flag, the concepts of "patrie" (fatherland) and "citoyen" (citizen), and the new status of French as the nation's

official language (despite the fact that in 1789, half the population did not speak French at all).¹ The tensions of French regionalism slowly gave way to, and were compounded by, those of colonization. As France conquered, ruled, and lost colonies over the next two centuries, further ethnic, national, cultural, and linguistic mixing exacerbated the divisions that French regionalism had once imposed. France's current population is extremely diverse, with a high percentage of immigrants, although French law forbids recording the population by race or ethnicity. Most estimates place the number of people of foreign ancestry in metropolitan France (either immigrants or second-generation immigrants) at between one-third and one-fifth of the population (Koop and Vermette 160). In a country devoted to assimilating new residents, these large immigrant groups have had difficulty integrating. Immigrants and, in particular, second-generation immigrants are caught between their home and host cultures and languages; they struggle to find a balance in a country that advocates losing the former entirely in favor of the latter.²

In a discussion of the myth of linguistic nationalism, Mikhail Bakhtin argues that artificially monolingual societies must eventually confront their true heterogeneous compositions. He sees literature – specifically novelistic discourse – as the site of this confrontation. By displacing the canonic language or culture, minority discourse can destabilize the established paradigms of national identity and linguistic belonging. However, Bakhtin notes that “[t]his verbal-ideological decentering will occur only when a national culture loses its sealed-off and self-sufficient character, when it becomes conscious of itself as only one among *other* cultures and languages” (Bakhtin and Holquist 370). Although it arguably never possessed a “sealed-off” character, France's official discourse of national identity operates on the myth of a monolingual, monocultural society. This dissertation explores the ways in which one group of immigrants and their descendants are fighting against this stance.

In the early-to-mid twentieth century, France became the new adopted home for a group of Sephardic Jews who had been living in the Ottoman Empire and North Africa since their expulsion from Spain in 1492. Although most of these immigrants were intent on assimilating into French culture, some of their children, raised with little knowledge of their heritage, returned to their ancestral pasts by exploring Sephardic language and culture through literature. This study analyzes this literary project as an attempt to write a new definition of French identity, one that is inclusive of the heterogeneity of French society. In order to better understand this move in the

¹ For a detailed analysis of the role of language in establishing unified nations, see E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nation and Nationalism Since 1800: Problems, Myths, Realities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). The special chapter, *Identity, 1900-1945*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992, especially the introduction (pp. 1-11).

context of this particular population, it is necessary to briefly trace the history of Sephardic Jews.

At the end of the fifteenth century, the Inquisition incited a massive expulsion of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula. Most of these Jews settled in the Ottoman Empire and North Africa (later waves of immigration sent many to the Americas and the Netherlands). Those in the Ottoman Empire continued speaking fifteenth-century Spanish, but over time, the language evolved to include words borrowed from the host communities. The result, known as Judeo-Spanish or Ladino, is linguistically influenced by Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, Turkish, French, Greek, Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, and other languages, depending on where the speakers lived; the language has slight variations, even from one city to the next (for example, between Istanbul and Izmir). Although in this dissertation I refer to the language as Judeo-Spanish, it is also known as Judezmo, Spanyolit, Djudio, Muestro Spanyol, and by other names; in scholarship, the more widely recognized term “Ladino” often refers to the calque used for the translation of religious texts.³ As this study focuses on secular, rather than religious, literary language, I adhere to this convention, particularly because the authors I analyze refer to the language as “judéo-espagnol,” or Judeo-Spanish.

Regardless of nomenclature, Judeo-Spanish is an essential part of the project I am exploring. In tracing the patterns of assimilation and resistance in immigrant and second-generation literature, language choice is an obvious marker of either the host or ancestral cultures. The creative solutions the second-generation authors find to constructing multicultural identities often hinge on linguistic choice, favoring the incorporation of Judeo-Spanish into French. This technique is not unique to French-Sephardic authors, but can be seen in minority and immigrant literature around the world. Examples of multilingual texts include Turkish-German Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s *Mutterzunge* [*Mother Tongue*], Algerian-Israeli Erez Biton’s poetry, Eastern European immigrant Henry Roth’s *Call It Sleep*, and Dominican-American Junot Diaz’s novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and short stories. *Call It Sleep* is a particularly apt example of the kind of multilingualism I study in this dissertation: Roth manipulates his language to best portray the perspective of a Jewish immigrant child, representing Yiddish in fluent English, and English through drastic orthographic variations

³ Haïm-Vidal Sephiha, a linguist and native speaker of Judeo-Spanish, argues that Ladino refers to the language Sephardic Jews used to translate liturgical texts, which, through word-by-word translations, followed the grammar and syntax of the original Hebrew or Aramaic. He contends that the vernacular, which he refers to as Judeo-Spanish, evolved in the generations after exile. See Haïm-Vidal Sephiha, *Le Ladino (judéo-espagnol calque): Deutéronome, versions de Constantinople (1547) et de Ferrare (1553)* (Paris: Institut d’Etudes Hispaniques, 1973). However, many scholars still refer to the vernacular as Ladino. For an excellent and exhaustive discussion of the evolution of the language and debates about the terminology, see Monique Balbuena, “Diasporic Sephardic Identities: A Transnational Poetics of Jewish Languages” (Diss. University of California, Berkeley, 2003), especially pages 13-22.

reflecting accents and street slang.⁴ Certain scenes highlight the alienation language can cause, such as when the protagonist cannot find his house because he cannot properly pronounce his street name, having only heard it pronounced by other immigrants.

It is no accident that many of the authors known in diverse national contexts for their multilingual writing – Erez Biton, Henry Roth, Mordecai Richler, Cynthia Ozick, Abraham Cahan, Margalit Matitiah – are Jewish. In an edited volume on multilingual American literature, for example, six essays are devoted to Jewish authors – more than to any other subject, ethnic group, or nationally-influenced literature or language.⁵ Why would Jews exemplify so well the elements that lead to multilingual writing? As an ethnic, racial, or religious group, Jews have long been subject to persecution that has led to forced migration. In fact, the concept of migration is deeply ingrained in Jewish culture; during biblical times, Jews were dispersed following the destruction of the first temple (6th century BCE) and lived in a culturally and religiously vibrant diaspora, in contact with the religious center but strongly tied to their adoptive communities. This and subsequent dispersals led to a transnational community connected through religious and cultural traditions and liturgical and vernacular languages, producing individual communities with their own combinations of Jewish and non-Jewish languages. At the same time, this migration prompted a sense of deracination that was both internal – felt by its participants – and external – clear to those outside the community. By the nineteenth century, this image contrasted with the construction of nationalism that was rapidly gaining force in Europe. In “nineteenth- and twentieth-century European philosophical and political discourse [the Jew was] a figure for deracination, for a disruption of the structure of belonging” (Hammerschlag 12). While some argue that this idea of the Jew is “a by-product of the construction of European nationalist myths” (12-13), it is clear that this image predates modern nationalism, but might have been mobilized later for nationalist purposes. For example, Maurice Barrès’s logic in accusing Alfred Dreyfus of betraying France is based on this image, and summed up as follows: “[T]o be a Jew is to lack roots in France; to lack French roots is to lack loyalty to France; to lack loyalty to France is to be the enemy” (38).⁶ As permanent outsiders, Jews are (for Barrès and his political allies) automatic enemies. But above all, whether rootless or in possession of multiple roots, Jews do not fit into fixed categories of national identity.

⁴ For an excellent analysis of Roth’s language, see Hana Wirth-Nesher, *Call It English: The Languages of Jewish American Literature* (Princeton UP, 2008).

⁵ Werner Sollers, ed. *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature*. NY: NYU Press, 1998.

⁶ See Maurice Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme* (Félix Juven, 1902).

While Jews have long been outsiders in their host societies, Sephardic Jews have been subject to a continuous uprooting that has become an integral part of their cultural heritage. Their exile from Spain complicates traditional definitions of the Jewish diaspora; scholars have called Sephardic Jews' particular brand of dispersal a "double diaspora."⁷ Post-expulsion, the ties they express in their art show a stronger bond to the Iberian Peninsula than to Israel. This project traces Sephardic communities that have been uprooted yet a third time: either from the Ottoman Empire or from North Africa. In the late nineteenth century, the French organization Alliance Israélite Universelle established schools throughout the Ottoman Empire and North Africa, where they taught French language, culture, and literature to local Jewish children. As a result, when the Ottoman Empire dissolved in the early twentieth century, many Sephardic Jews chose France as their new homeland. France was an even more natural choice for North Africa's Jews, who lived under French colonial rule for generations, before decolonization forced (or encouraged) them to emigrate.⁸ Once in France, the immigrant generation assimilated into French society, raising their children to speak French, not Judeo-Spanish, and to follow French culture rather than adhere to Sephardic traditions. The second generation, however, at least in some prominent instances, returned to their heritage, seeking out their Sephardic roots and exploring the language and culture through literature, claiming, for the first time, a Sephardic-French identity. This dissertation examines authors from both generations and explores the ways in which they attempt to forge a Sephardic identity across the obstacles of migration.

What does it mean to claim a Sephardic identity? This question is particularly salient in an era when the term "Sephardic" has come to lose its original meaning – Jews who originated in pre-Inquisition Spain (*Sepharad* is Hebrew for Spain). "Sephardic" tends to oppose "Ashkenazi" (Eastern European Jews) in an overly-simplified dichotomy that ignores Jews' many origins. North African Jews in France, often of Berber or other roots, are considered Sephardic regardless of their ancestral connection to Spain. This terminological crisis has caused confusion, as well as angry responses, such as Ilan Stavans's review of Antonio Muñoz Molina's novel *Sepharad*, which he calls "utterly annoying, even infuriating":

⁷ David Wacks's current project, *Double Diaspora in Sephardic Literature 1200-1550*, examines this "second layer of diasporic consciousness" (see Abstract, <http://davidwacks.uoregon.edu/books/double/>).

⁸ The majority of Algeria's Jewish community left for France with the *pid-noirs* in 1962; those who remained left during the Algerian Civil War in the 1990s. After Tunisian independence in 1956, almost all Tunisian Jews immigrated to Israel and France. Moroccan Jews, to a lesser extent, emigrated as well following Moroccan independence; the majority immigrated to Israel, although a significant population went to France.

So what makes ‘Sepharad’ exasperating? The title, of course, is a reference to the eviction in 1492 by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of approximately 200,000 Jews from Spanish soil. But the novel is only marginally about the Sephardim, who by my own estimates appear in some 5 percent of the overall content. Instead, Muñoz Molina creates a multinational, ahistorical gallery of refugees, mostly 20th-century dwellers whose plight, in his eyes, resembles that of the Sephardim. Yes, each and every one of these *desplazados* is for him *un sefardí* — an evicted soul, itinerant, homeless, permanently on the run. [...] Why a non-Jewish Spaniard like Muñoz Molina would choose to write a novel about Jews, call it ‘Sepharad’ and almost refuse to address the topic in a balanced, convincing fashion baffles me. (Stavans)

Has “Sepharad” evolved into a buzzword, divorced of its original meaning, for exile, displacement, and rootlessness? A recent edited volume, entitled *Sephardism*, explores this phenomenon. The editor, Yael Halevi-Wise, takes Muñoz Molina’s book as a point of departure, arguing that it uses the term “Sepharad” as a concept that binds the disparate elements of Muñoz Molina’s work. Halevi-Wise contends that while Sepharad might not refer to Jews from Spain, it is a tool, or trope, that authors use “to discuss their own national preoccupations at times of heightened political consciousness” (Halevi-Wise 1). By approaching the trope as a literary tool “that functions politically [...] in diverse national contexts” (5), the volume’s contributors take Sephardic Studies outside of its home context (essentially uprooting the study of the uprooted!), making it work transnationally and even transhistorically. *Sephardism* functions outside of Sephardic Studies by questioning conventional methods of identity formation through historical counterpoint, drawing connections to, for example, the Inquisition’s threat to religious pluralism, or marrano identity; by rewriting ethnic identity and national politics through a postcolonial perspective; by calling into question Orientalist methods of self-definition through ethnic or racial stereotyping; and by exploring ways to write counterhistories of neglected or misrepresented populations or historical moments. Moreover, *Sephardism* “rarely celebrates multiculturalism naïvely” (27); as a metaphor, it takes into account both the Sephardic history of persecution and the (often romanticized) *convivencia*, complicating views of multiculturalism that tend to emphasize either the threat of the other or the overly harmonious cosmopolitan model.⁹

Sephardism examines two separate iterations of the use of Sephardic culture in literature. It can be used literally or historically, as “an expression of Sephardic ethnic identity,” or metaphorically, “as a wider vehicle for representations of modern

⁹ *Convivencia* refers to the period of Spanish medieval history when Muslims, Jews, and Christians coexisted in relative peace and religious tolerance (despite the ongoing *Reconquista*, the Christian conquest of Moorish lands).

nationalism and postnationalism” (4). This dissertation engages with both uses of the trope. Most of the authors (with the exception of two in chapter three) are of Sephardic heritage, and use their art as a way to explore their ethnic identities. However, in contrast to the trend Halevi-Wise observes of Sephardic Jews writing “historical sagas about their own ‘lineage’” (3) (a trend she dismisses as in keeping with “our current cultural environment” and contrasts to the more interesting cases of non-Sephardic fascination with Sephardic history), these authors write *false* or *invented* histories of *fictional* lineages (what I call, in chapter two, “fictional genealogies”). How is this different from the self-exploration that Halevi-Wise expects? By writing fictional narratives, these authors are still engaging with their personal histories, but on both literal and metaphorical levels. Their work is at once an exploration of their own heritages and a political project to bring their particular brand of “sephardism” to the French reading public. Their project thus has both personal and universal aims, as it addresses simultaneously the gaps in the author’s identity and the place of this complex identity in French society.

The place of immigrant identity in French society is a long-contested subject that is particularly relevant today. The questions of national identity raised earlier in the context of nationalism are especially salient in the postcolonial, transnational, globalized world, and while it may not be the most numerous or most visible minority, France’s Jewish population offers an excellent view into the complex politics surrounding the issue. Sephardic French scholars like Elaine Marks, H el ene Cixous, Shmuel Trigano, and Jacques Derrida have claimed that “Jewish identity in France has always been a ‘Marrano’ identity, in the sense that although everything was granted to the Jews as individuals, modern liberalism was deemed incompatible with a continued allegiance to their ancient national identity” (25). In other words, despite France’s long-venerated position as the first country to emancipate its Jews, French Jews were never fully absorbed into their adopted society. Instead, in the eyes of others and in their own minds, they were permanently suspended between their ancestral heritage (an allegiance to either Israel or Spain, or both) and France.

Mobilizing the metaphors linked with Sephardic culture can be useful for French Jews without legitimate historical claims to Sephardic identity. For Sephardic Jews, the concept of a “portable homeland” is essential to cultural survival. Folk literature and song thematize the transnational nature of Sephardic identity, and novels like Eliette Ab ecassis’s *S epharade*, analyzed in chapter three, focus on talismans as embodiments of the past, physical connections to the lost homeland. One scholar argues that the ability to carry one’s homeland across national borders makes Sephardic Jews the quintessential postmodernists: “as perennial exiles, experiencing the pain of expulsion from several homelands, Sephardim [Sephardic Jews] can also see themselves as archetypal postmodern individuals” (Roumani 234). If postmodernism is characterized

by questions of ontology and the loss of traditional cultural referents and identity markers, Sephardic Jews are particularly suited to both embody and address the problems of transnationalism.

Recent work on Sephardic literature highlights both its unique ability to address these very topical literary and sociopolitical issues and the current lack of scholarship in the field. Ruth Wisse's *The Modern Jewish Canon*, an ambitious attempt to produce an updated canon of modern Ashkenazi Jewish literature in the context of 20th-century history, notes casually the omission of Sephardic authors, made conspicuous by the mention of Albert Memmi (whose novel *La Statue de Sel* is analyzed here in chapter two). Wisse acknowledges her inability to address Sephardic literature despite its "mushrooming since the Second World War": "It is my hope," she writes, "that this book, which highlights Ashkenazic Jewish culture, will soon be complemented by those that present the Sephardic and Latin side of the Jewish canon" (Wisse 349-50). However, Wisse also notes that "Ladino did not generate anything like the Yiddish literature of Europe"; does Wisse's omission, therefore, suggest that Sephardic authors are too marginal, even within the already-marginalized space of Jewish literature, to be canonical? Yet Jewish literature in general, and Sephardic literature in particular, is often defined by its peripheral nature. In his book on peripheral modernism in Yiddish, Anglophone, and Francophone literatures, Marc Caplan argues that the authors Wisse discusses "are central to the Jewish cultural canon precisely because they articulate the *peripherality* of Jews in relation to the experience of Western modernity" (Caplan 248-49). Thus the marginality of Sephardic authors in general – and indeed many of the authors analyzed in this project fall outside the boundaries of mainstream literature or the academic canon – is not an obstacle to their relevance.

In fact, peripheral literature, produced on the margins of major national or linguistic literary circuits, can draw attention to its own relevance both by negotiating between existing spaces and creating new spaces. The negotiation between center and periphery is expressed through the tension between cultures and languages, articulated in the literature of this dissertation through the mixing of languages, time periods, and geographic locations. The use of multilingualism, in particular, is a key tenant of peripheral modernism:

[T]he multilingual character of life on the periphery, typically confined in belletristic discourse to a monolingual mode of expression, is a fundamental characteristic of modernist literature, and in this tension a series of conflicts, between tradition and modernity, official discourse and subversive vernaculars, finds expression. (134)

By manipulating the language of expression, the peripheral author can better express competing cultural and linguistic influences while mimicking the alienating experience of being on the margins (and especially of migration). As peripheral authors – both on

the margins of Jewish and French cultures, and as immigrants – the authors in this study are not only mediating between center and periphery, but between tradition and modernity, past and present, and two often-competing cultures. Grappling with these issues through the very structures of their narratives, they create “an autonomous cultural space,” which, Caplan argues, is “ideally independent from both the confines of the tradition and the coercive or repressive aspects of the imperial order” (120). I would argue that this autonomous space is the goal; whether full independence is achieved remains to be seen.

The search for independence from both tradition and from the colonizing or host culture is a theme that is particularly visible in literature written by Sephardic immigrants or second-generation immigrants who are acutely aware of what there is to “lose” or “gain” in migration and assimilation. Recent and forthcoming studies of contemporary Sephardic literature often look at the space between cultures to determine how Sephardic identity has developed and what the future of Sephardic literature and its study may bring. These studies go beyond national boundaries, attempting to make connections between transnational Sephardic identities but also to engage with the stakes of Halevi-Wise’s *Sephardism* – the use of Sephardic identity as transnational, transhistorical metaphor. Monique Balbuena’s forthcoming book, *Homeless Tongues: Sephardic Literary Identities in Diaspora* (Stanford University Press), will be one of the first to analyze contemporary Sephardic literature. Balbuena focuses on multilingual poetry by an Algerian writing in French and Hebrew, an Israeli writing in Hebrew and Ladino, and an Ashkenazi Argentinian writing in Spanish and Ladino. A recent edited volume, *Contemporary Sephardic Identity in the Americas* (NY: Syracuse UP, 2012), looks at Sephardic communities across the Americas, but only two essays focus on literature – Monique Balbuena’s on “Ladino in Latin America” and Yael Halevi-Wise’s on Mexican author Rosa Nissán’s interweaving of Judeo-Spanish into modern Spanish narrative. One chapter in Adolfo Campoy-Cubillo’s *Memories of the Maghreb: Transnational Identities in Spanish Cultural Production* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) looks at representations of Sephardic Jews in contemporary Spanish literature; another analyzes Muñoz Molina’s contentiously-titled novel. Yet despite the transnational reaches of these academic works, not one truly focuses on Francophone Sephardic Jews, which is particularly surprising given the fact that France boasts the world’s largest Sephardic population next to Israel’s.¹⁰

¹⁰ Another notable contribution to Sephardic Studies that might act as a preface to work on contemporary literature is Olga Borovaya’s *Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Lettres, and Theater in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2011). Borovaya explores the advent of Ottoman Judeo-Spanish literary production in the 19th century, focusing on the press, early literature (much of it adapted from European sources), and theater as tools of cultural production. Sephardic Studies has been otherwise dominated by historians, ethnographers, folklorists, musicologists, and linguistics. Some of

In order to analyze Francophone Sephardic literature, yet engage with Sephardic and French literary histories, this project spans both Jewish and French Studies. Writing from the perspective of Comparative Literature allows me to study texts of national experience when those experiences encompass plural nationalisms, such as French, Francophone, Jewish, Sephardic, and Mediterranean, and even when these categories are not clearly delineated on national lines. This project thus treats, from a transnational perspective, a relatively small population, but its conclusions reach beyond Francophone Sephardic Jewry to address, more generally, Sephardic identity; Mediterranean identity; second-generation immigrants in France; identity and immigration politics in France; the nebulous border between French and Francophone literatures; and false or borrowed memory (also called “postmemory”).

As these are extremely broad fields of study, it may be useful to show briefly how this project can go in two very different disciplinary directions. Productive comparative analyses of this literature can be made within both Jewish and French Studies. Sephardic literature in Hebrew exhibits many of the same features as the work analyzed here – a search for missing memories, the use of multiple languages, the suppression of the marginalized Sephardic voice, and the struggle to integrate into a new culture without losing one’s roots. For example, in A.B. Yehoshua’s novel *מר מאני* [*Mr. Mani*] (1990), the story of five generations of a Sephardic family, the Sephardic voice is conspicuously absent; the Sephardic characters are, for the most part, marginalized, their stories appropriated by non-Sephardic narrators to serve other purposes. Brigitte Peskine’s work, analyzed in chapter four, seems to pick up where Yehoshua leaves off; Peskine literally finds her Sephardic voice by learning Judeo-Spanish, and through her protagonist, mobilizes the language to give voice to a Sephardic woman burdened by the weight of tradition. Erez Biton’s poetry also emphasizes the silence of Sephardic voices in the space of Israeli nationalism. *תקציר שיחה* [“Summary of a Conversation”] (*Tsipor ben yabashot: shirim*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1990) calls into question the idea of an “authentic” identity when the speaker is an outsider – in this case, a Moroccan Jew in Tel Aviv. Both generations of authors studied in this project engage in a search for authentic identity (while

the most important contributions include Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue’s *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th-20th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) and Aron Rodrigue’s *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990). It is also interesting to note current efforts to bring Sephardic source materials to light, such as *The Schocken Book of Modern Sephardic Literature*, edited by Ilan Stavans (Schocken, 2005); the recently published memoir, *A Jewish Voice from Ottoman Salonica: The Ladino Memoir of Sa’adi Besalel a-Levi*, edited by Aron Rodrigue and Sarah Abrevaya Stein and translated by Isaac Jerusalemi (Stanford UP, 2012); and the forthcoming anthology *Sephardic Lives: A Documentary History of the Ottoman Judeo-Spanish World & its Diaspora, 1700-1950*, edited by Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein (Stanford UP).

simultaneously trying to define the term). The immigrant generation strives to find footing in French society while maintaining some connection to their home culture; the second generation searches for the lost ancestral culture in order to find a lost sense of authenticity in their French identities.

While this project does explore some of the connections between Francophone Sephardic literature and other immigrant Francophone literatures, the most dynamic link may be between second-generation Sephardic and *Beur* literatures. *Beur* literature is writing by second-generation North African immigrants; it often emphasizes the complex ways Maghrebi youth navigate between their ancestral culture (usually experienced within the family rather than through a true connection to the Maghreb) and French society. The emphasis is on identity construction between two cultures, particularly as mediated by interactions between the individual and society. Soraya Nini's novel *Ils Disent Que Je Suis Une Beurette* [*They Say That I'm a Beurette*] (1993) underscores the reflexivity of identity formation on the margins of society; Solange M. Guenoun's article "Accueils et Ecueils Identitaires-Communautaires en France Post-coloniale: 'Ils disent que je suis sépharade...'" [Identity-Communitarian Receptions and Pitfalls of Post-Colonial France: "They Say That I'm Sephardic"] (*Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 11.2 [April 2007]: 217–230) both mimics this reflexivity by echoing Nini's title and draws a clear parallel between the Sephardic (particularly North African Sephardic) and *Beur* experiences. Guenoun argues that North African Sephardic Jews are subject to exclusion from both the Ottoman Sephardic community (in France since before World War II) and the Maghrebi community, seen as exclusively Muslim. Yet they share in the obstacles second-generation Maghrebi Muslims face: they engage in the same struggle between ancestral and adopted cultures and languages, and, as a visible minority, are subject to similar racial and religious persecution. However, there is a crucial difference Guenoun ignores. While many *Beurs* are connected to Maghrebi culture through their families – and thus their struggle is one of first rejecting this culture, and then incorporating certain aspects of it into their French identities—, second-generation Sephardic Jews were often raised assimilated, with little or no connection to their heritages. Thus the Sephardic project is unique in its mission of both *recuperation* and incorporation.

The attempt to recover a lost heritage is a key concept in the second-generation Sephardic literature analyzed here. This dissertation spans two generations in order to determine exactly how this heritage was "lost" then (partially) recuperated. Sephardic immigrants fought back against the discrimination they encountered in France by raising their children to fit the monocultural, monolingual definition of French identity promoted by official discourse. Later in life, these second-generation immigrants found themselves with little connection to their heritages, but felt something missing from their French identities. Many attempted to fill this lacuna by learning Judeo-Spanish

and studying the immigration narratives of their ancestors, and incorporating this new linguistic and cultural knowledge into narratives that focused on the process of identity formation. These narratives are often first-person accounts presented as memoirs, as if the authors themselves are channeling their parents' or ancestors' memories. But because the process of immigration and assimilation cut them off so completely from these experiences, they do not actually have memories of the experiences they narrate. Yet these authors are not just retelling family histories, but are mobilizing the past to address the obstacles of identity formation they face in the present.

My analysis of this technique takes as its point of departure the concept of "postmemory," a term coined by Marianne Hirsch to describe the relationship of the children of Holocaust survivors to the previous generation's trauma. These traumatic experiences are inherited and internalized to become memories, even though they were not experienced directly. While the cultural rupture caused by migration cannot compare with, or be treated in the same space as, the trauma of the Holocaust, the goal of postmemory is to address situations in which there is an intergenerational break in transmission that is then artistically addressed by the second generation, so that past events seem to be (if imperfectly) transmitted *despite* the rupture. This is precisely what is occurring among second-generation Sephardic authors.

Postmemory is a particularly suitable theoretical frame for my analysis because it is predicated on an impossibility. Although the second generation attempts to access the past, and indeed does to some extent through their artistic production, the past is ultimately inaccessible and will remain so due to the insurmountability of the initial rupture. The texts analyzed here are thus best described as "postmemorial attempts" at constructing a transnational, transhistorical identity – one that encompasses an inaccessible heritage. This theoretical model emphasizes a dynamic view of identity as something that is constantly in production and subject to revision, allowing second-generation immigrants to reconstruct their identity to be in conversation with the previous generation(s). By applying postmemory to the rupture caused by immigration, we can better understand how identity can be constructed through narrative.

Other theories of memory that can be usefully applied to this project do not adequately address the gap that is an essential element of both postmemory and the second-generation immigrant literary project. However, the concept of palimpsestic memory illuminates the aspect of temporal collapse that is integral to this discussion; the "superimposition" of present and past and the "interaction of different temporal traces...constitute a sort of composite structure, like a palimpsest, so that one layer of traces can be seen through, and is transformed by, another" (Silverman 3). Whether through the collapse of narrative structure (as seen in the texts analyzed in chapter three) or through linguistic mixing (seen throughout this dissertation, but particularly in chapter four), second-generation immigrant narratives access the past by collapsing

the space between past and present. This produces a spatiotemporal layering – a palimpsestic document that blurs the boundaries between ancestral and adopted homelands, old and new languages, and multiple generations, in order to facilitate access to the lost heritage. In his book on palimpsestic memory, Andreas Huyssen argues that “trauma cannot be the central category in addressing the larger memory discourse” (Huyssen 8). It is important to acknowledge that trauma, while often a prominent factor in discussions of memory, does not need to be the central concern of every analysis of memory discourse. Here, it can act as an entry point, but the true focus of the project is loss. Whereas most criticism talks about a “surfeit of memory,” here, we have an absence.

Despite its claims to “false” or “prosthetic” memory, is postmemory really so different from other types of memory? Huyssen writes that “to insist on a radical separation between ‘real’ and virtual memory strikes [him] as quixotic, if only because anything remembered – whether by lived or by imagined memory – is itself virtual” (28); but the key difference here is that, whether virtual or “real,” for the second-generation author, the postmemorial memory *never existed in the first place*. Although the cases discussed in this dissertation fulfill one of Maxim Silverman’s main requirements of palimpsestic memory – that the present is “haunted by a past which is not immediately visible but is progressively brought into view” (3) – it is essential to note that, here, this spectral past is imaginary. The concept of palimpsestic memory is productive, especially for the texts discussed in chapter three, which emphasize temporal layering, but falls short when we consider, for example, Dominique Garnier’s *Nice, pour mémoire*, where both present and past are unrealized (the major quake that never occurs maps onto the war that the protagonist never experienced). Conversely, in his analysis of Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* project, Huyssen states that by drawing the Holocaust as an animal comic, Spiegelman “escape[s] from the terror of memory – even ‘postmemory’ in Marianne Hirsch’s sense – while mimetically reenacting it” (Huyssen 128). However, whereas Spiegelman is consciously creating distance between his art and his father’s life story in order to “escape the terror,” the authors here are trying to close that same abyss in order to access the past. The troubled distance between their present and the lost past does not allow for a true mimetic reenactment of past events. As a result, the palimpsest produced is one that layers representations of representations – a *mise-en-abyme* of approximations of the past, constructed in the service of the present and, through publication, the future.

As a more complete discussion of postmemory will show in chapter three, the most interesting aspect of using postmemory to analyze immigration narratives is the fact that, regardless of whether migration can be considered a trauma, the past is never completely recovered. The transmission of Sephardic cultural heritage is necessarily incomplete, and, despite the author’s efforts to study the language and culture and

reincorporate both into his or her French identity, the permanent loss remains. Instead, there is a preservation of a symbolic heritage that occurs within the fictional narrative. As Nadine Fresco has shown in her work on Jews born after World War II, the second generation relates to the trauma they have not experienced through nostalgia and substitution.¹¹ In order to feel nostalgia for *someone else's experiences*, it is necessary to substitute those experiences with a symbolic marker. Both the first- and second-generation immigrant authors studied here produced texts that act as symbolic markers for what they have lost, either directly (in the case of first-generation immigrants) or indirectly. By writing their struggles between tradition and modernity into their work, first-generation immigrant authors create a document for future generations who inherit the legacy of that struggle; by taking up this same theme, writers of the next generation try to find a way to revitalize these questions for themselves and for the contemporary sociopolitical landscape.

As this project spans two directly related generations, it is convenient to call their members “first-” and “second-” generation immigrants. However, while “first-generation immigrant” is a generally indisputable term used to indicate someone who has migrated from one country to another, “second-generation immigrant” is politically loaded. By calling someone born in the host country a second-generation *immigrant*, we mark that person with his or her parents’ immigration status, thereby refusing him or her full belonging to the host country. In France, the implications of this move are particularly visible, as the political climate of the country encourages this distinction, especially when it falls on racial lines (for example, when the second-generation immigrant is easily identifiable as an other because of his or her race). Critical work on one of the most visible second-generation immigrant groups – *Beurs*, born in France to parents who are North African immigrants – emphasizes the fact that *Beur* writers may not belong to French or Maghrebian literature, but to a marginalized space in between the two.¹² Second-generation Sephardic immigrants, unlike their *Beur* counterparts, were raised assimilated into French society, and did not experience the same sense of discrimination.¹³ This is why it is particularly interesting that they would choose to re-label themselves as cultural others in French society. However, this move must stem

¹¹ For Fresco’s psychoanalytical reading, which falls outside the scope of this dissertation’s theoretical framework, see Nadine Fresco, “La diaspora des cendres,” *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse* 24 (1981): 206-220.

¹² See Alec Hargreaves, “Writers of Maghrebian Immigrant Origin in France: French, Francophone, Maghrebian or Beur?” *African Francophone Writing*. Ibnlfassi and Nicki Hitchcott. Oxford: Berg, 1996: 33-43.

¹³ Guenoun asserts that this is not the case among North African Sephardic Jews, who are as racially marked as their Muslim counterparts.

from a feeling that their minority status remained unrecognized, and that they have something to gain by embracing it.¹⁴

By writing Sephardic identity into their French identities, these authors are also writing Sephardic culture into French literature. Their corpus, taken as a whole, acts as a statement that a Francophone Sephardic identity exists and, furthermore, that it is compatible with French national identity. By asserting this, these authors are promoting a revised view of national identity – one that is inclusive of minority cultures and languages. Moreover, by mixing languages and cultures within a text marketed for a French readership, these authors call into question the accepted territories of these languages and cultures. As Deleuze and Guattari have asserted, minority literatures are deterritorialized – they do not belong to the territory that acts as their adopted homeland. The French-Sephardic texts analyzed here highlight the fact that Judeo-Spanish truly has no territory of its own. For example, Joseph Benrubi’s short story collection, examined in chapter two, is divided into chapters according to the new Balkan countries; one chapter is entitled “Sepharad,” an explicit reminder of the *lack* of a country by that name, but Sephardic characters and Judeo-Spanish appear nomadically throughout the text. And, like Benrubi, many authors use code-switching (incorporating Judeo-Spanish within the French text) to deterritorialize French as well, thus disrupting the comfort zone of French within French literature. This is comparable to the deterritorialization that, Deleuze and Guattari argue, “blacks in America today are able to do with the English language” by altering it to better represent their cultural heritage (Deleuze and Guattari 17). Alongside French, Judeo-Spanish becomes a language that can offer a new and legitimate perspective; alongside Judeo-Spanish, French becomes a language of minority expression. Just as Kafka (who wrote only in German) sees Yiddish as “a nomadic movement of deterritorialization that reworks [the] German language” (25), these authors see Judeo-Spanish as reworking French. Though these and other techniques, Deleuze and Guattari claim, minority “literature finds itself positively charged with the role and function of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation” (17). This intrinsic politicization of minority literature makes the collective project of French-Sephardic authors larger than their immediate ethnic group; it acts as a statement addressing all populations in similar multi-linguistic and multicultural situations, particularly in France.

¹⁴ See Maryse Condé’s meditation on globalization and *mêtissage*, the keynote address at a joint meeting of the Comparative Literature Association and the African Literature Association, entitled “O Brave New World” (*Research in African Literatures* 29.3 [Autumn 1998]: 1-7). Condé fights against purely negative constructions of globalization to argue that it in fact is a breeding ground for productive meetings of identities, languages, and art. See especially her discussion (pp.5-6) of the “métis culturels,” second- and third-generation authors, who portray the diversity of their backgrounds in a way that disrupts the power dynamics inherent in the binary opposition of languages (such as “colonial language” and “mother tongue”) and cultures.

One obstacle to the political reach of minority literature is limited readership, whether due to minority language or small-scale publication and marketing. The authors in this study have diverse ways of confronting this challenge. Some, like Clarisse Nicoïdski, claim no real hope for the future of their work; Nicoïdski's Judeo-Spanish poetry, analyzed in chapter four, reads like a painful eulogy of the dying language. However, her work was published in a bilingual edition, and has since been republished, anthologized, further translated, and incorporated into popular music. Other authors, such as Brigitte Peskine and Marcel Cohen (both studied in chapter four), used their preexisting relationships with major publishing houses to publish and promote their new Sephardic work. However, most of the work studied here has not yet been analyzed in academic scholarship; part of the project of this dissertation is to introduce this new corpus of both first- and second-generation immigrant literatures to an academic audience. The first-generation literature is a true mix of archival discoveries, such as Abraham Navon's play and memoirs; out-of-print texts, such as Benrubi's; and well-recognized authors like Albert Memmi whose work has not been analyzed before in this context. The second-generation literature also features an array of less academically recognized authors, such as Brigitte Peskine, and more universally acknowledged authors like Henri Raczymow. However, despite claims like Deleuze and Guattari's that "talent isn't abundant in a minor literature" (17), this lack of recognition is not a question of talent or relevance. (Clearly, Deleuze and Guattari are blind to some of the common obstacles facing minority authors that might limit production, such as resources!) The authors studied here are representative of a larger corpus of French-Sephardic writers whose work displays a literary quality worthy of being read. Some of the authors directly address concerns about their works' relevance. Marcel Bénabou (chapter two), Marcel Cohen, and Eliette Abécassis (chapter three) all make explicit statements as to the collective value of their work; their texts, poised as memoirs, actually address gaps in Sephardic historiography. All of the texts analyzed in the following four chapters possess simultaneous goals of personal and universal reach; while, on a small scale, they revise their authors' or protagonists' identities through postmemory, on a larger scale they attempt to do this for the entire Sephardic and even Francophone community.

The first chapter, "Reexamining the 'Réveil juif': Ottoman Immigrants in Paris," considers the wave of Sephardic Jews who immigrated to Paris from the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century, a population that has been neglected in literary and historical studies. This work recovers and analyzes Sephardic immigrants' contribution to the Ashkenazi-dominated "Reveil Juif" movement, challenging the assumption that participants in this literary renaissance were only French-born Ashkenazi Jews, such as Jean-Richard Bloch and Gustave Kahn. Indeed, Sephardic immigrants and North African Jews made important contributions to the

literary and political debates of the time. An analysis of fiction by Sephardic immigrants Abraham Navon and Joseph Benroubi reveals that although many new immigrants were intent on assimilating into French society, some found ways to negotiate between tradition and modernity. Navon's and Benrubi's work advocates that new immigrants develop a French-Sephardic identity that would allow them to integrate into French society without denying their heritage.

Chapter two, "Fictional Genealogies: Writing the Jewish Maghreb," further explores the concept of hybrid identity by taking as its point of departure Albert Memmi's assertion that the Maghrebi Jew, under colonialism, is neither colonizer nor colonized, but a colonial "hybrid." Through the analysis of two novels by Albert Memmi and Marcel Bénabou, this study argues that the novels' narrators express their cultural hybridity linguistically and, while they explore fictive genealogies as a way to establish their identities, ultimately find their roots through literary narrative. They use the writing process as a way to assert their fragmented identities on a personal and societal level. By writing their stories into French literature, Memmi and Bénabou legitimize their claim to French's cultural capital and address the gaps in the Francophone archive. Their work asserts their own composite identities as part of a postcolonial, multilingual conceptualization of French national identity.

The following two chapters turn to the first generation of Jews born in France after the Ottoman and North African immigrations. As children of immigrants or of Holocaust survivors, the post-war generation of French Jews grew up in the shadow of their parents' experiences. Due to assimilation or the survivors' refusal to discuss the trauma of the war and the past eclipsed by the war, this generation often had little connection to their heritage. Yet through their writing, they attempt to reconstruct their parents' immigration narratives in order to gain access to their lost heritages – a move I read as exemplary of postmemory. By creatively addressing these indirect memories, the authors in chapters three and four gain partial access to a past whose lines of transmission were severed by trauma.

Chapter three, "Ces lieux imaginaires': Postmemory and Temporal Conflation," considers three authors whose work engages with their families' pasts through narrative techniques that conflate or confuse the past, present, and future. The novels I analyze in this chapter emphasize immigration as a significant break in the transmission of family heritage from both the Ashkenazi and Sephardic perspectives. The first two texts, by Ashkenazi authors Henri Raczymow and Dominique Garnier, are traditionally seen as engaging with the Holocaust; my analysis shows how they actually highlight migration as a significant component (as Eva Hoffman has argued) of wartime trauma. I thus rethink Hirsch's own analysis of Raczymow and reconceptualize postmemory by applying it to immigration narratives, arguing that its effects can be seen in non-traumatic situations. My analysis of Raczymow's, Garnier's,

and Sephardic author Eliette Abécassis's work shows how non-linear narrative structure provides a space for the protagonists' explorations of their ancestral pasts. Through temporal conflation, these protagonists literally bring their pasts into their present and reconstruct the bases of their identities. Their temporal journeys contribute new cultural and linguistic layers to their previously monocultural French identities, allowing them to be in conversation with their foreign heritages even as they identify as French nationals. This new model of transnational, transtemporal identity can be productively applied to immigrants in globalized communities, who use it to construct heritage-based identities that do not conflict with their new heterogeneous communities.

The final chapter, "'My madre wasn't a mère': Multilingual Identities and Untranslatability," analyzes work by Brigitte Peskine, Marcel Cohen, and Clarisse Nicoïdski, first-generation French Sephardic authors who use innovative techniques of multilingualism to explore their heritages. Although these authors were not raised speaking Judeo-Spanish, their work brings the language to French literature through code-switching and bilingual publication. As writers who are already part of the dominant national literature, their move to the linguistic periphery can be read as an attempt to bring the margins into the center – to force French literature to accept a multilingual, multicultural narrative. By producing linguistically and culturally bilingual texts, these authors are attempting to alter the current, monocultural conception of French national identity to include the cultural and linguistic traditions of France's postcolonial, post-immigration population. Working simultaneously in minor and major languages, they redefine French identity as multilingual and global, not just for immigrants but also for the dominant culture.

The conclusion, "From Sephardic to French: Redefining National Identity," reconsiders the texts discussed in the dissertation through the lens of contemporary French cultural debates, demonstrating the relevance of these French-Sephardic literary voices to current issues of French identity and culture, and strengthening my claim that this literature is one among many second-generation immigration literatures in France that work to change current views of French national identity. The concluding analysis centers on France's contentious new immigration museum, the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration, whose president, Jacques Toubon, is known for his anti-immigrant initiatives. I focus, in particular, on the museum's 2011 conference on France's postcolonial situation, cancelled amid controversy when the museum insisted on censoring one of the participants. My analysis shows how both particularist (*communautariste*) and Republican universalist responses to France's culturally diverse population are working to change the politics of cultural inclusion. While French national identity has long been based on the idea of a shared past, France's colonial legacy and diverse demographics prove that this past in fact encompasses multiple

cultures, languages, and ancestral heritages. By redefining the parameters of French national identity, Francophone writers and political and cultural actors can pave the way for policy and cultural reform.

Chapter One

Reexamining the “Réveil juif”: Ottoman Immigrants in Paris

When Sephardic Jews emigrated from the Ottoman Empire and moved to France in the early 20th century, many assimilated culturally and linguistically, raising subsequent generations to be French, rather than Jewish or Sephardic. However, literature written by new Sephardic immigrants shows that they recognized an alternative route. By working to construct a new homeland through French language, and preserving certain aspects of Sephardic culture within their newly developing French identities, new immigrants could form a hybrid identity that encompassed both their Sephardic heritage and their Frenchness.

This study responds to the lack of scholarship on French Sephardic immigrant literature. Although Sephardic immigration coincided with the “Réveil juif,” a period in French literary history recognized for its Jewish contributors, studies of this era do not take into account France’s new Jewish residents.¹⁵ Sephardic immigrants did not produce a large or long-lasting corpus, but their literary contribution was nonetheless significant. Certain authors were particularly prominent, such as Sam Lévy, editor-in-chief of multiple newspapers in Salonica and creator of a yearly almanac of the Sephardic diaspora; Ovadia Camhy, frequent contributor to one of Paris’s prominent Jewish newspapers and founder and editor of Paris’s only Sephardic newspaper in the 1930s; and Abraham H. Navon, author of the period’s best known Sephardic fiction. Others, particularly those with roots in North Africa, like Vitalis Danon, headmaster of the French-run Alliance Israélite Universelle schools in Tunisia, or Felix Allouche, founder of an influential Tunisian Zionist newspaper, contributed stories of life in North African Jewish ghettos that seemed to cater to the public’s love of sensationalized Orientalist literature.¹⁶

¹⁵ Nadia Malinovich and Catherine Fhima both focus on this period in French literary history. In *French and Jewish*, Malinovich only briefly mentions Salonican immigrants (Malinovich 111-12); Fhima does not mention Sephardic Jews at all (Fhima, Catherine. “Au coeur de la « renaissance juive » des années 1920: littérature et judéité.” *Archives juives* 39.1 [2006], 29-45).

¹⁶ See, for example, Félix Allouche’s memoir-style “Vision Tunisienne: Pélerinage” [“Tunisian Vision: Pilgrimage”], described as a “vision pittoresque et colorée du pays de Salâmbô” [picturesque and colorful vision of the country of Salâmbô], echoing Gustave Flaubert’s 1862 *Salâmbô*, an exoticist historical novel that takes place in Carthage (later Tunisia) during the 3rd century BCE (Allouche); see also Raphaël “Ryvel” Lévy’s prolific writing on the Tunisian ghetto, such as (with Vitalis Danon and Jacques Vehel) *La Hara conte...* [The Hara tells...] (Ivrit, Paris, 1929) and *L’Enfant de l’Oukala, et autres contes du ghetto* [The Child of the Oukala, and other ghetto tales] (La Kahéna, Tunis, 1931). Other publications retold traditional folklore, such as the popular *Le Livre de Goha le Simple* [The Book of Goha the Simple] (Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1919), written by Albert Adès and Albert Josipovici (natives of Cairo and Constantinople) and prefaced by Octave Mirbeau, who compares the work’s grandeur to that of “Gargantua et Don Quichotte, Jude l’Obscur, les chefs-d’oeuvre de Stendhal, de Flaubert et de Tolstoï”

Although there has been significant scholarship on North African Jewish authors, studies of Sephardic Ottoman immigrants are mainly historical and sociological.¹⁷ This study focuses on immigrants from the Ottoman Empire, whose literary output addresses the obstacles faced by new Sephardic immigrants in France. Initially, I look at the emergence of Sephardic literature in popular Jewish periodicals published in France during the Sephardic immigration of the 1920s and 30s. I then focus, in particular, on Abraham H. Navon, whose prolific contributions dominated the French Sephardic prewar literary scene. Navon's fiction has three main pedagogical aims: to offer his readers a model of hybrid identity; to show how language can be used to preserve culture; and to memorialize the disappearing world of traditional Sephardic culture. I also look at a collection of stories by Joseph Benrubi, both for the literary merit of his publication, and for the nature of his collection, whose structure makes a strong argument as to the place of Sephardic Jews in a post-Ottoman Empire diaspora. Navon's and Benrubi's texts explore the cultural break between tradition and modernity, and emphasize the importance of the Judeo-Spanish language to Sephardic culture and its preservation. I then analyze the language and reception history of these texts to determine their impact on the Sephardic immigrant community and on French society in general. Finally, I examine how these texts prefigure the theme of a hybrid Sephardic French identity that future generations of authors explore.

The Jewish community living in the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century was subject to heavy French cultural, linguistic, and literary influence. New generations

and describes the book as a sensory experience of the Orient: "C'est l'Orient qui étincelle sous vos yeux, l'Orient avec ses odeurs de jasmins et de friture" [It's the Orient that sparkles before your eyes, the Orient with its smells of jasmine and fried foods] (Adès and Josipovici v). *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* published posthumous excerpts of Adès's work ("Le Sphinx" in 1932 and "La Religion humaine: Le Respect de la vie" ["Human religion: Respect for life"] in 1933); these short pieces are didactic stories with religious morals.

¹⁷ On the political history of North African Jewry, see Michael Laskier's *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria* (NY: NYUP, 1997). On North African Jewish writers, see Pierre Horn's chapter "Out of North Africa: Sephardic Writers" in *Modern Jewish Writers of France* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 145-159; Joyce Block Lazarus's chapter on Albert Memmi's *La Statue de sel* in *Strangers and Sojourners Jewish Identity in Contemporary Francophone Fiction*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 17-32; and Judith Roumani's article, "The Portable Homeland of North African Jewish Fiction: Ryvel and Koskas," in *Prooftexts* 4.3 (September 1984), 253-267. For two comprehensive historical studies of Jews in France, see Esther Benbassa's *Histoire des Juifs de France* (Paris: Seuil, 2000) and Paula Hyman's *The Jews of Modern France* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1998). For a general history of Sephardic Jewry, see Aron Rodrigue and Esther Benbassa's *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th-20th Centuries* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2000). For a history of the Alliance Israélite Universelle's presence in the Ottoman Empire, see Aron Rodrigue's *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). For a sociological study of Paris's Judeo-Spanish neighborhood, see Annie Benveniste's *Le Bosphore à la Roquette: La communauté judeo-espagnole à Paris, 1914-1940* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989).

were raised in schools run by the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), established in Paris in 1860, whose “mission civilisatrice” [civilizing mission] would bring French culture to the Jews of the Middle and Near East (Rodrigue 21). At the same time, popular Sephardic literature—both in Judeo-Spanish and French—was flourishing. However, the new literary movement, even in Judeo-Spanish, had its roots in French culture. Maurice Samuels argues that French Jews were the first to produce secular Jewish fiction. While early French Jewish feuilletons date from the 1840s, the first Judeo-Spanish fiction appeared in the Ottoman Sephardic press in the 1870s (Samuels 27). As Olga Borovaya has shown, this new Judeo-Spanish fiction was largely made up of adaptations of translations, often from French originals (Borovaya 32).¹⁸ Whether in form or content, Sephardic popular literature had a strong connection to its French roots.

French culture soon became Sephardic Jews’ gateway into European modernity. One critic notes that serialized fiction, in particular, served as a French cultural introduction for Ottoman Jews: “Il apparaît donc que la publication des feuilletons littéraires aurait eu pour but, avant tout, de rapprocher la bourgeoisie salonicienne des modes parisiennes en lui faisant connaître une actualité littéraire plus conformiste qu’avant-gardiste” [It appears thus that the publication of serialized literature was aimed, above all, at bringing the Salonican bourgeoisie closer to Parisian fashions by introducing it to literary affairs that were more conformist than avant-garde] (Guillon 116). In 1922, Sam Lévy, former editor in chief of *Le Journal de Salonique*, published a book-length ode to France entitled *La France d’Aujourd’hui*. Quoting Thomas Jefferson, he writes, “Tout homme a deux patries : la sienne et la France” [Every man has two homelands: his own and France]; the book ends with the declaration, “Oui, la France est le plus beau pays du monde!” [Yes, France is the most beautiful country in the world!] (Lévy *La France* 5; 61). The combination of French influences, from education to literature, made France the obvious destination for Ottoman Jewish émigrés.

As the Ottoman Empire dissolved, its Jews emigrated in large numbers. In March 1923, Sam Lévy sent a letter to the French Jewish periodical, *Ménorah*, from his travels throughout the Jewish communities of Europe and North Africa. He writes of the “grand courant d’émigration” [great wave of emigration] caused by the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, claiming that “la communauté juive de Salonique, à elle seule, vit sa masse réduite de près de vingt mille unités et non des moindres” [the Jewish community of Salonica alone saw its population reduced by nearly twenty thousand people, most of great importance] (Lévy “A Travers” 213). Yet he notes that one of the outcomes of this mass emigration is that new communities of Sephardic Jews began to

¹⁸ Such as *La dam o kamelya*, from *La Dame aux Camélias* (Alexandre Dumas fils, 1848) and *Manon Lesko*, from *Manon Lescaut* (Abbé Prévost, 1731).

form, both to create ties among immigrants, and to maintain a collective connection to the former homeland.

By the interwar period, there was a sizable population of Sephardic Jews in France. In his 1926 *Annuaire de l'Orient*, Sam Lévy claims that there are 15,000 Sephardic Jews in Paris alone, and an additional 5,000 in southern and central France (Lévy "Israélites Espagnols" 36). One periodical, in July 1923, notes the rapid increase of the "communauté Israélite Orientale de Paris" [Oriental Israelite community of Paris], estimating the population to exceed 10,000. The article also suggests that these immigrants be seen differently from their Eastern European counterparts—they are "français d'esprit, imbus de culture française grâce aux écoles de l'Alliance en Orient" [French in spirit, steeped in French culture thanks to the Alliance schools in the Orient], and thus deserve "certains droits moraux" [certain moral rights]; moreover, "deux mille jeunes gens d'entre eux se sont enrôlés dans l'armée française" [two thousand of their young people enlisted in the French army] ("Dans la communauté orientale" 354). By their education and their military allegiance, Sephardic immigrants already belong to French society. Their "Frenchness" morally elevates them, according to this author; the implied comparison is to France's religious Ashkenazi communities that remain unintegrated. Yet despite this author's point of view, new Sephardic immigrants were far from fully integrated into French society.

New immigrants often found themselves welcomed into the neighborhood surrounding the Rue de la Roquette, which, since the early 1900s, had become a Sephardic ghetto. According to Annie Benveniste, in 1926, there were 1700 Judeo-Spanish-speaking Jews in the Roquette neighborhood; this number increased to 2600 in the next decade (Benveniste 70). Dreams of assimilation into a familiar country, spurred by the early cultural introduction of AIU schools and the French press, were far from being realized in the face of ghettoization. The pressure to assimilate that ensued had its roots in Sephardic society even before immigration. Benveniste notes that, "Pour un juif de Turquie, il fallait d'abord être « assimilé », se sentir français pour songer à émigrer, alors que la norme veut qu'on émigre avant d'adopter la nationalité du pays d'accueil" [A Jew from Turkey first had to be 'assimilated,' had to feel French in order to think of emigrating, whereas the norm is that one emigrates before adopting the nationality of the host country] (Benveniste 148). In other words, the Turkish Jew had to have already accepted French culture, and rejected tradition for modernity, before attempting to join French society. Immigrants learned that French identity was narrowly defined; despite their linguistic and cultural fluency, those residing outside of mainland France, or even in French colonies, were not considered French.

Assimilation was, therefore, particularly important to France's new Sephardic community. In 1924, the Salonican Club of Paris held a series of conferences on "la

question de l'assimilation du Juif à la société française." The conferences examined the question of whether it was possible to "devenir français en restant juif" [become French while remaining Jewish], or whether assimilation into French society necessitated a total suppression of "le particularisme juif" [a distinctive Jewish identity]. Was the Jew forced to choose "entre Israël et la France" [between Israel and France] (55)? Regardless of the outcome of these debates, all those participating had already made their decision: by choosing France as their new homeland, they were choosing to become French Jews.

A 1925 poem by Albert Cohen, entitled "Cher Orient" [Dear Orient], clearly expresses this decision. Although the poem describes, in intimate sensory detail, the elements that make up Cohen's "Orient," it ends with the definitive demise of its own poetic construction: "L'Orient mains pendantes sur les genoux fume ronronne et meurt" [The Orient hands in her lap smokes purrs and dies] (A. Cohen 553). The personified Orient is in a passive position; her actions suggest a slow descent into relaxation ("smokes," "purrs") and death, as if she is letting herself come to a natural end. This portrait of passive death both evokes a sensory nostalgia, by the poem's recollection of the sounds, smells, and tastes of the Orient, and alleviates the pain of emigration by showing that this Orient has come to its natural end. By paying homage to the former homeland, yet also showing that it no longer exists, Cohen's poem softens the immigrant's transition to his or her French Jewish identity.

Equally key to this transition was breaking with the language that marked them as immigrants. Speaking French rather than Judeo-Spanish became a priority, especially for families with children. In subsequent generations, French won the battle for mother tongue. Benveniste writes, "Aucun enfant de la deuxième génération ne fut suffisamment imprégné de la langue judéo-espagnole pour la transmettre à sa descendance" [No child of the second generation was sufficiently imbued with the Judeo-Spanish language to pass it to their descendants] (Benveniste 156).¹⁹ Even in immigrant families, the language of transmission was French.

Sephardic immigrant authors represent this process of becoming French as a negotiation between static concepts of tradition and modernity. Perhaps influenced by the AIU dogma, these authors see the opposition of tradition and modernity in a Eurocentric colonial framework. Just as French literature represented an idealized European Other for nineteenth-century Ottoman Jews, assimilation into French culture came to mean the attainment of that society's cultural capital, often at the expense of what AIU-educated Ottoman Jews saw as their own outdated ancestral culture. In an

¹⁹It is interesting to note that the community's assimilation eventually broke down the ethnic categories that once defined them—Benveniste remarks that "aujourd'hui, un Sépharade c'est un juif d'Afrique du Nord" [today, a Sephardic Jew is a Jew from North Africa] (13), whereas the true meaning of the term indicates a Jew of Spanish origin.

article on the place of “the modern” in history, Nicholas Dirks argues that the “modern not only invented tradition, it depends upon it [...and upon] the history of unfreedom” (Dirks 27-28); colonialism promoted the opposition of modernity and of tradition to justify its own existence. The immigrant authors discussed here have internalized this artificial dichotomy, mapping “tradition” as ancestral culture and “modernity” as European or Western, but primarily French, host culture. They thus buy into a system in which striving towards the latter, and suppressing the former, is necessary for assimilating into French society. The new immigrants’ experience only further cements this belief, as they find that ridding themselves of accented speech, for example, is one essential step to the “moral rights” awarded by attaining French identity. However, their work does problematize these concepts. As they attempt to break down the barriers between ancestral and host cultures, these categories become more malleable and emerge from their colonial definitions.

As new French Jews in the early 20th century, Sephardic immigrants were joining an innovative literary and cultural movement that later become known as the “Réveil Juif,” a modern renaissance of Jewish culture that strove to blend Jewishness and Frenchness, tradition and modernity, Zionism and the right to the diaspora. Nadia Malinovich and Catherine Fhima have written extensively on this movement, looking at authors such as Edmond Fleg, Jean-Richard Bloch, Gustave Kahn, and André Spire—French-born Jews with Ashkenazi roots. Samuels sees this generation’s literary project as a Jewish nationalist response to the Dreyfus Affair (Samuels 242). Yet even as existing scholarship points to issues of assimilation and acculturation as central to the movement, it ignores the origins of the Jews involved. Sephardic immigrants, particularly those from Salonica, had an important influence on French Jewish cultural life in the 1920s and 1930s (Malinovich 111-12). Despite the large wave of Sephardic immigrants during the time of the “Réveil Juif,” they seem conspicuously left out of the movement.

The periodical *Ménorah*, published twice a month from 1922 to 1933, fashioned itself as the leading cultural, political, and artistic publication serving France’s Jewish community.²⁰ The first issue states that “Le judaïsme de France n’a pas l’organe qu’il lui faut” [French Judaism does not have the mouthpiece that it needs]. It claims that the existing periodicals are either politically one-sided or not aimed at the unique needs of French Jews. Worse still, the editors urge, is the discord within the community; *Ménorah* claims to serve as a mediator, to “suspendre un pont sur lequel les idées passeraient et se croiseraient” [suspend a bridge over which ideas could pass and meet] in order to “créer une atmosphère neutre” [create a neutral atmosphere]. The mission statement specifically makes an appeal to Francophone countries, “au

²⁰ The original name was *L’Illustration Juive*; the name was changed to *Ménorah* as of the third issue.

proche Orient particulièrement où nos coreligionnaires, grâce à l'Alliance Israélite Universelle, possèdent une culture française" [particularly in the Near East where our brethren, thanks to the Alliance Israélite Universelle, are fluent in French culture]. The periodical's opening article ends with its motto: "*Au-dessus des partis*" [*Above parties*] ("Notre Programme" 1). Thus, *Ménorah* claims that one of its primary goals will be to unite disparate groups of French Jews, including new immigrants and Jews in the colonies. Yet its articles are written primarily by Ashkenazi French-born Jews—the same ones who were at the forefront of the "Réveil Juif."

In fact, *Ménorah* seems not only aware of the Jewish revival, but instrumental in its realization. In an article published in 1922, André Spire returns to Robert Dreyfus's 1906 claim that Franco-Jewish literature does not exist to assert that, now, Dreyfus's statement would be false. Spire cites the usual suspects in his brief argument: Fleg, Bloch, and even the Tharaud brothers, non-Jews who wrote popular fiction about Jews. In 1927, Gustave Kahn wrote a long article entitled "La Renaissance Juive" [The Jewish Renaissance], in which he asserts the existence of a Jewish renaissance that encompasses all forms of expression—from Yiddish, Hebrew, French, and Russian authors, to the work of Einstein and Bergson. Unlike colleagues at the more religious periodical *l'Univers Israélite*, he sees the renaissance as a secularization of Jewish culture, an "emancipation" from the synagogue. Instead of religion, this movement's binding force is "le sentiment de devoir, de défense d'une minorité intelligente" [the sense of duty, of defending an intelligent minority]—in other words, a recognition of Jewish difference and a solidarity based on that difference. Kahn believes that focusing on religion will only detract from the broadly universalizing revival he describes (Kahn 35).

Yet, despite *Ménorah*'s support of a united Jewish revival, the publication shows little evidence of following through on its promise to represent disparate elements of the Jewish community. Even when, in 1923, the editors announce that the Sephardic newspaper *Trait d'Union* will be merging with *Ménorah*, subsequent issues give little space to the new readership. In a periodical with a permanent literary column, Sephardic literature is conspicuously absent, other than Gustave Kahn's frequent "Contes d'Orient" [Tales of the Orient] which catered to the public's love of sensationalist Orientalism. In a similar vein, a brief nod to Albert Cohen and Georges Cattaui—French authors of Sephardic ancestry—calls their work "sensuelle" [sensual] and "sentimentale" [sentimental], compared to Henri Franck's "poésie élégiaque et lyrique" [elegiac and lyric poetry] and Edmond Fleg's "épique et érudite" [epic and scholarly] work ("Nouvelles Artistiques et Littéraires").

Ménorah's editors were Ashkenazi Jews whose families had had roots in France for multiple generations. They were wary of the new wave of immigrants, whose lower class, foreign language and customs, and racial differences set them apart from France's

existing Jewish community. Sephardic immigrants did not share the religious traditions of their Ashkenazi kin. They did not speak Yiddish, the language that had, until their arrival, served as the marker for France's Jewish community. Their former homelands were seen as culturally premodern, and the AIU schools intended to "civilize" them had no pretensions of fully elevating them to the level of "European" Jews, especially not within one or two generations. By relegating Sephardic literature to the sidelines, *Ménorah's* editors could mediate the representation and influence of this newly immigrated community.

Gustave Kahn's "Contes d'Orient" are exemplary of *Ménorah's* tendency to represent Sephardic themes through an Ashkenazi voice. *Ménorah* may invoke aspects of Sephardic literature, but only within the framework of Orientalism or the pre-Inquisition Golden Age of Sephardic artistic production. For example, in a foreword to an article on Max Nordau, Pierre Paraf discusses the poetic conventions of "les poètes d'Orient" [the Oriental poets], who preface their work with a musical laudatory introduction to the poem's subject (Paraf). He then proceeds to do precisely this—as an introduction to Max Nordau, the Austro-Hungarian subject of the subsequent article.²¹ Using a Sephardic poetic structure to pay homage to a non-Sephardic figure calls attention both to the merit of that structure, and to the absence of a Sephardic subject.

Similarly, a later issue of the same periodical features a long, detailed literary representation of Salonica, written by Maxa Nordau (the French-born daughter of the famous critic). Her account is dramatic, both in its detail and style. It begins: "De la neige. Les montagnes sont blanches, les vallées sont blanches, coupées par le ruban gris des rivières figées de glace" [Snow. The mountains are white, the valleys are white, cut off by the grey ribbon of rivers frozen with ice] (Nordau 132). But the bleak foreboding landscape she paints serves only as a contrast to the calm utopian Mediterranean landscape of Salonica, which only becomes clear a few paragraphs later, as "ces régions d'hiver et de pourriture" [these regions of winter and rot] give way to "la douceur du ciel d'Hellade" [the softness of the Hellenic sky] and "l'élégance parfaite d'un paysage classique" [the perfect elegance of a classic landscape]. References to Olympus, Zeus and The Graces follow. Nordau's romanticized description is clearly that of an outsider, and she seems to set up the Hellenistic ideal as a contrast to the city's Jewish residents. As her article shifts in tone to describe the

²¹ Although Nordau was born in Budapest and identified with German culture, he had Sephardic roots. However, he was not raised with Sephardic culture, language, or customs, and indeed drifted away from the Jewish community entirely until, driven by the Dreyfus Affair, he joined the Zionist movement. Despite his Sephardic-toned introduction, Paraf sees Nordau as firmly outside of the Sephardic community, calling him "ce penseur venu de Hongrie et si profondément imprégné de culture germanique" [this thinker from Hungary so deeply imbued with Germanic culture] (Paraf 115).

dirty, starving inhabitants left in the fire-ravaged city, her agenda becomes clear: “Que faire pour sauver ces infortunés ? Pour moi, Sioniste, la solution ne m’apparaît que là-bas, seul endroit au monde où, si on réunissait les fonds pour les y envoyer, ils trouveraient enfin la paix et le travail” [What can one do to save these unfortunates ? For me, a Zionist, the solution seems to me only there, the only place in the world where, if we can gather the funds to send them, they will finally find peace and work]. Nordau offers Palestine as a convenient, and of course Zionist, solution to the misery of Salonica’s Jews. Thus it becomes clear why *Ménorah* would not assign an article on Salonica to one of Paris’s many Salonican immigrants: the portrait is politically driven. Nordau’s article ends on a sentimental note, as, addressing the city in apostrophe with the familiar “tu,” she recalls her most moving moment: “c’est une copla nostalgique, sans commencement ni fin, nasillée en espagnol par un jeune homme extatique” [it’s a nostalgic *copla*, without beginning or end, sung nasally in Spanish by an ecstatic young man]. She goes on to describe the *copla* as the vehicle of transmission of pre-expulsion Sephardic history; it embodies “toute la poésie de l’âme juive, et tout l’art de la tradition, qui ne devrait vivre que de sentiment” [all the poetry of the Jewish soul, and all the art of tradition, that should live only in feeling]. Thus her article ends, the *copla* itself remaining conspicuously absent. The absence of the verse denies both Sephardic culture and language a place in the portrait of Salonica, while foreclosing the possibility of Sephardic artistic creation in the post-*copla* age.

The periodical’s other articles on Salonica present the city in an equally foreign light. A report entitled “Souvenirs de Salonique” [Memories of Salonica] might seem, from its title, to be written by one of France’s many Salonican immigrants, yet its subtitle, “Une mission du colonel Lamouche” [A Mission by Colonel Lamouche], and its content posit the account from the perspective of an outsider (“Souvenirs de Salonique” 106). Lamouche discusses the predominance of French in Salonica, as well as the large population of Jews; he notes that these are “deux phénomènes connexes” [two related phenomena]. He attributes the Jews’ willingness to embrace French to their condescending views of their own language: “à leurs yeux, [le judéo-espagnol] n’est pas une véritable langue, mais une sorte de patois, un jargon, comme ils l’appellent eux-mêmes” [in their eyes, Judeo-Spanish is not a real language, but a kind of dialect, a jargon, as they call it themselves] (107). Thus they seek out a “langue de culture qui leur assure le contact avec le monde civilisé” [cultured language that will assure them contact with the civilized world]. Although Lamouche states that he does not believe Judeo-Spanish should be seen as a jargon—in fact, he compares it favorably to Yiddish, which he calls “un jargon composé d’allemand déformé et d’hébreu du ghetto” [a jargon composed of deformed German and ghetto Hebrew]—Lamouche’s support for Judeo-Spanish seems to rest on its unique connection to uncorrupted, “parfaitement conservé” [perfectly conserved] literary Spanish. Thus, for Lamouche,

the Salonican Jews' language merits a scholarly interest that its speakers themselves cannot fathom. For this reason, he mourns the lack of Castilian instruction in AIU schools, which would have permitted the students to "profiter des richesses de la littérature espagnole ancienne et moderne" [benefit from the riches of ancient and modern Spanish literature], while helping Judeo-Spanish speakers identify any foreign loan-words that may be bastardizing their language. It is thus apparent that, like Nordau's, Lamouche's *Salonica* is motivated by a political or personal agenda that has nothing to do with *Salonica's* actual inhabitants or *Ménorah's* Salonican immigrant readership.

When *Ménorah* does mention the French Sephardic community, it chooses to focus on politics instead of art and literature. Endless short reports detail the immigrant community's inability to organize politically, socially, and economically. Multiple attempts to create umbrella organizations encompassing the various Sephardic factions fail soon after they are announced; angry letters appear, calling for the Sephardic community to join the Zionist cause; bulletins are published, in which community leaders announce their resignation. Articles oddly disconnected from current events talk about the origins of the Sephardic community, from pre-Inquisition Spain to life under Ottoman rule, as if suggesting that the community's golden age has passed. Finally, in 1929, in a long article entitled "Le Réveil du Sefaradisme" [The Awakening of Sephardism], Ovadia Camhy, one of *Ménorah's* few Sephardic contributors, discusses the community's "sommeil" [sleep] and its subsequent "réveil" [awakening]. Camhy describes the community as a belligerent child that has undergone an "adolescence" full of "ingratitude" and "imprévoyance" [silliness]; he discusses the new organization's "baptême" [baptism] (Camhy "Le Réveil" 121).²² The tone and diction of the article, especially in light of *Ménorah's* previous coverage, make the Sephardic community's second-class position clear. Despite *Ménorah's* mission, it fails to serve as more than an outsider's perspective on the Sephardic community.

Some, however, did see Sephardim as an integral part of the larger movement. In 1925, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Revisionist Zionist leader and activist, argued that, regardless of the Sephardic community's political organization, the renaissance depended on them: "*L'organisation de l'élément séfaradi est une des nécessités les plus vitales de la renaissance juive. Le théâtre de notre renaissance, c'est la Méditerranée. Tous les juifs sur ses bords sont des séfaradim et sans eux la chose ne se fera pas*" [*The organization of the Sephardic element is one of the most vital needs of the Jewish renaissance. The theater of our renaissance is the Mediterranean. All the Jews on its coasts are Sephardim, and without them the thing will not happen*] ("*Organisation Sefardite Mondiale*" 309). Although Jabotinsky's

²² Jacques Derrida refers to this language as the "contamination' chrétienne" [Christian "contamination"] of French Jewry: "la 'bar mitzva' s'appelait 'communion' et la circoncision 'baptême'" [the "bar mitzva" was called "communion" and circumcision "baptism"] (Derrida 90).

argument seems to rest on geographic concerns—his Zionist agenda depends on the Mediterranean countries—this statement echoes the Sephardic press’s own rhetoric. In a 1932 article entitled “Appel aux Sépharadim” [Call to Sephardim] in the first issue of the new periodical *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*, the editors underscore the unique connection between Sephardim and France, especially in light of recent immigration. They conclude that France and its colonies have replaced the Ottoman Empire as the main Sephardic homeland, and thus Paris will be the new seat of the Sephardic community, leading “Sépharadisme” to “sa renaissance” (4).²³

Yet, at first, *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* seems reluctant to publish new Francophone literature, relying instead on translations from Hebrew, or works from the 18th and 19th centuries, such as poetry by Abraham Furtado, or memoirs by Saadi Halévy. The emphasis on the past is reminiscent of the “ghetto nostalgia” Samuels describes in 19th century Franco-Jewish literature. Samuels quotes Richard I. Cohen, who asserts that “The rapid move from the relatively slow-moving Jewish community to the pulsating life of Europe's capitals and cities tended to produce feelings of disorientation and emptiness, which certain Jews tried to counteract by re-establishing an attachment to that 'ghetto' world which they or their parents had abandoned” (Cohen, “Nostalgia and ‘Return to the Ghetto’” 131, qtd. in Samuels 203).

However, it was not long before *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* began to publish new works of literature, short pieces that spoke of the transition between past and present, and, always, looked to France as the homeland of the future. While these stories still describe life in the old country, unlike Samuels’ works of “ghetto nostalgia” that “gloss over the dirty, difficult aspects of village life” (Samuels 204-05), these portraits were rarely positive, instead choosing to focus on the stifling nature of tradition and poverty. By echoing the novelistic model of the parvenu from the provinces who is transformed by Parisian life, these texts make Ottoman Jews the equivalent of the French peasant—imbued with French culture but not yet part of it.²⁴ Like the French peasant parvenu, by moving to Paris, the immigrant can begin to inhabit a new French identity. By publishing these stories in a periodical aimed at Sephardic immigrants, the authors are suggesting that the immigrants let go of the past and adopt a French identity. Thus the move away from “ghetto nostalgia” literature and toward contemporary literary expression can be seen as the assertion of a new identity, one that breaks with the old

²³ *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* was edited by Ovadia Camhy.

²⁴ In *Inventing the Israelite*, Maurice Samuels cites Hannah Arendt’s view that “nineteenth-century French Jews were parvenus who failed to see their true status as pariahs” (Samuels 2), thus highlighting the outsider status of the parvenu and of French Jews who, Arendt argues, were so intent on assimilating that they refused to speak out against anti-Semitism during the Dreyfus Affair. While this is a concept Samuels is working against, the model of the parvenu is still a useful one for understanding the partial-outsider status of these French-speaking immigrants.

world, embraces the new, and negotiates the feelings of disorientation that immigration produces.

This new identity is in contrast to that described in a 1930 article by Camhy on a new book about Salonica by Joseph Ouziel (Camhy "La Tour Blanche"). To illustrate how much Salonican Jewry has changed, Ouziel quotes the 1900 travel narrative of Gustave Vibourg, who, while visiting Salonica, met a young Jewish man and asked him if he was Turkish. The man replied, emphatically, "Non! Je suis Juif" [No! I am Jewish]. Vibourg responded, "Tu es un Juif Turc, puisque Salonique appartient à la Turquie" [You are a Turkish Jew, since Salonica belongs to Turkey]. The man replied, "Ha ! Ha ! Juif-turc ! Comment peut-on être à la fois et Juif et Turc?" [Ha! Ha! Turkish Jew! How can one be both Turkish and Jewish?] and insists that he is "Juif, sans plus" [Jewish, nothing more]. Camhy observes: "Ce type de jeune homme ne concevant pas de dualité, de mélange, demeurant, sans effort, totalement juif, n'a pas aujourd'hui beaucoup d'exemplaires. C'est une espèce qui tend à disparaître" [This type of young man, with no concept of duality, of mixing, who remains, without effort, totally Jewish, does not have many peers in kind today. This is a fading species]. The man who was "Jewish, nothing more" no longer exists. Camhy concludes that the word "Jew" must, now, be modified by an adjective indicating nationality—for example, a French Jew.

New literature published in *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* focuses on the nature of this new identity. The "French Jew" is secular but still respects tradition; he is part of French society but does not forget his origins. He will, for example, appreciate the journal's rubric "Nos Contes" [Our Stories], in which folklore or proverbs are reprinted. He might, however, need the included lexicon to understand the "judéo-hispano-arabe" [Judeo-Hispano-Arabic] of "El Dios Spiadara," a story appearing in a 1939 issue of the journal (Nahon). These narratives seem to act out the identity politics in which the immigrant community is engaged, suggesting behavioral models for readers to follow.

One such work, the play *Les Fiançailles de Zohra* [*Zohra's Engagement*], by Abraham Haim Navon, is partially reproduced in a 1935 issue of *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* (Navon "Zohra").²⁵ Navon was already known for his 1925 novel, *Joseph Pérez*, and went on to publish *Tu ne tueras pas* [*Thou Shalt Not Kill*] in 1937. He was referred to in a later periodical as "le Tharaud juif" [the Jewish Tharaud], an ironic title given that the Tharaud brothers were non-Jewish authors celebrated for their Jewish-themed literature ("Décide" 56). Yet this moniker draws attention to Navon's evenhanded representation of Jewish characters: unlike, perhaps, other Jewish writers of the time, who emphasized positive characters in an attempt to combat anti-Semitism, or non-

²⁵ Abraham Haïm Navon was also known as Albert Haïm Navon; that he chose to sign his fiction with his Hebrew name indicates his stake in its place in Sephardic literary culture.

Jewish writers, who did the opposite, Navon's characters were complex and nuanced.²⁶ The Tharaud brothers' fictional work on Jewish life ranges from admiring (*Un royaume de Dieu*, 1920) to critical (*L'An Prochain à Jérusalem*, 1924) to anti-Semitic (*Quand Israël n'est plus roi*, 1933), whereas Jewish authors of the time tended to limit their portrayals of Jewish characters to specific political ends. For example, Gustave Kahn and André Spire wrote Zionist poetry; Jean-Richard Bloch's writing had clear Communist goals. By providing diverse portraits of Jewish characters, Navon counters biased forms of representation, allowing for a closer pairing of literature and reality.

Navon's realism goes beyond character portraits; he is invested in an accurate representation of the world he grew up in, which was fast disappearing. As he notes in his unfinished memoirs, he was born into a changing world, "au moment où une génération nouvelle apparaissant, s'évertuait à se débarrasser d'un passé épuisé et déprimant" [at the moment when a new generation appeared, and was struggling to rid itself of an exhausted and depressing past] (Navon *Une Vie de Juif*). He hopes that his memoirs, and other writing, will bring an awareness of his world to future generations. By positing his work as both memorializing and didactic, Navon assigns Sephardic literature specific roles in the contemporary Sephardic experience. Literature is both a repository for vanishing traditions and a pedagogical tool for the present and future; *Zohra* exemplifies these multifaceted goals.

The entire dramatic work of *Zohra* was never published, but Camhy's introduction to the excerpt gives a critical summary of the plot.²⁷ *Zohra*, educated in France, lives with her father, Haïm, and grandmother, Solica, in Morocco. Solica belongs to "un milieu arriéré" [a backward milieu]; her ideas are "d'un autre âge" [of another age] that have no place in the changing times. She thus feels threatened by *Zohra's* desire to marry Raymond, a French Jew. As Camhy explains: "Nous sommes à la vérité en présence de deux générations en rupture de lien. La première, représentée par la vieille Solica, incarne toute la rigidité d'un ghetto qui s'effrite, et la deuxième,

²⁶ A 1947 article about Navon discusses his literary treatment of Jews:

Il est Séfardi par toutes ses fibres et ses peintures des milieux juifs où il a vécu – souffert aussi – sont saisissantes de réalité. Je ne veux pas dire par là qu'il présente toujours le Juif sous un angle avantageux. Il ne cherche pas à plaire ou à déplaire ; ses personnages sont « nature » ; il ne « retouche » pas les situations ; ses critiques, quand il en fait, sont mesurées.

[He is Sephardic in every fiber of his body, and his paintings of Jewish areas where he lived—and suffered too—are startlingly real. I do not mean by that that he always presents the Jew in a positive light. He does not try to please or displease; his characters are "natural"; he does not "touch up" the situations; his critiques, when he makes them, are measured.] ("Conteurs Séfardis" 139)

²⁷ A completed working manuscript (typed with handwritten edits) of *Les Fiançailles de Zohra, Scènes de la Vie Juive au Maroc* (Paris, 1935) can be found at the Alliance Israélite Universelle, Archives de Moscou, collection de l'ENIO, 4.17.

celle de Zohra, représente l'émancipation, l'aspiration vers le nouveau, l'avenir" [We are indeed in the presence of two generations whose bond is breaking. The first, represented by the old Solica, embodies all the rigidity of a crumbling ghetto, and the second, that of Zohra, represents emancipation, aspiration towards the new, the future]. In Navon's story, everything Solica represents is cast in a negative light—from traditional marriage practices (such as hiring a matchmaker), to exorcising a demon, to preventing Zohra from joining the new world. Zohra's is clearly the correct path for the new Sephardic Jew: only by embracing French education and culture can the family move into modernity.

A study of the play's language sheds light on the cultural politics of this transition. The dialogue reveals not only a changing world, but a changing relationship to language, as terms and their meanings evolve. The place of religion is called into question when Solica tells her daughter-in-law, Ruihla, that "ce n'est pas la religion qui vous étouffera" [it is not religion that will suffocate you], implying that Ruihla is stifled by her desire for a more modern lifestyle. Ruihla responds, "La vôtre vous conserve" [Yours preserves you] (Navon *Fiançailles* 15), suggesting that Solica is unable to change or evolve because her religion is holding her back. Moreover, the rabbi Solica calls to cure her son's illness is portrayed as backward and ineffective, while the modern Rabbi Ch'lomo chastises Haïm and Solica for their antiquated practices and acts as an advocate for Zohra's French suitor. Navon uses Ch'lomo to promote a modern form of religion – one which eschews superstition and incorporates progressive values.

In a later scene, we witness another moment of word play, when Zohra's parents try to get her to marry a man they have chosen, whom they call "un Français" [a Frenchman]. But when Zohra asks if he is "Un Français? De France?" [A Frenchman? From France?], the matchmaker responds, "Quand nous disons un Français, nous voulons te faire entendre qu'il est question d'un jeune homme instruit, bien élevé, civilisé, comme toi..." [When we say a Frenchman, we want to make you understand that we're talking about a young man who is educated, well raised, civilized, like you...] (21). While for Zohra's family, a French-speaker is considered French, Zohra promotes the more narrow definition that mainstream French society dictates – one limited to the borders of metropolitan France. Yet to her family, Raymond is a foreigner. When Zohra insists on marrying Raymond, she forces her family to redefine the term "Frenchman." Whereas, to Zohra's family, the nationality once indicated a certain level of education or sophistication and linguistic competence, Zohra's choice literalizes the metaphor, and allows a concrete French influence into her traditional family life.

Zohra's choice of husband also reminds the characters (and reader) that while there are differences among Jews from different backgrounds or nationalities, a

common thread ties them together. Haïm's own marriage was of mixed origins; not only is Ruihla Tunisian, but, as Ch'lomo reminds Haïm, "Ruihla est Espagnole et tu es Arabe, de langue et de moeurs" [Ruihla is Spanish and you are Arab, in language and customs] (66). Although Solica's prejudice against Ruihla's Tunisian origins is emphasized, she is not the only one who is slow to accept foreigners. Raymond's assimilated father holds "idées arrêtées" [opinionated ideas] against Moroccan Jews; he insists on calling Zohra "ma petite Bédouine" [my little Bedouin], and is embarrassed by the Jewish markedness of his own last name, Levi (43). Not only does he see Moroccan Jews as fetishized, Orientalized objects, but he is also completely secularized to the point of abandoning his Jewish values. Jewish values define Jewish identity here. Ch'lomo condemns Solica's values and practices, going so far as to call her "not a Jew." Navon thus links values, behavior and identity. Jewish identity must be reevaluated in the modern world; by clinging uncritically to old traditions, the Sephardic Jew is in danger of losing his or her connection to the changing Jewish community. By presenting characters whose xenophobia, prejudices, or conservative traditions prevent them from embracing Jewish ideals, Navon is urging his readers to be open to cross-cultural influences and, especially, to a form of integration into French society that, unlike Raymond's father's, does not erase Jewish identity.

Raymond is presented as a modern Jewish ideal. His French roots assure him the sophistication and secular lifestyle to which the immigrant might aspire, while his contact with Zohra teaches him to respect tradition and take pride in his Judaism. He claims to represent a new generation of young Jews who are fighting against their immigrant parents' rejection of Jewish traditions (47). The two scenes of the play published in *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*, a conversation between Raymond and H. Yehuda, the matchmaker, assure readers that Raymond is still fully Jewish: he respects Yehuda's authority, knows how to bargain with him, and peppers his French with words that indicate specific cultural knowledge, such as "Mektoub."²⁸ Even when his Hebrew fails—Yehuda laughs at his pronunciation of "schadschans," which should be "schadkan"²⁹—his faults are portrayed sympathetically. Similarly, Yehuda, who at first appears to share Solica's rigidity, reveals himself to be a former rabbi turned world traveler, whose role as matchmaker is a reflection of his ability to understand and relate to a wide variety of people. Navon, not surprisingly, seems personally invested in a favorable representation of French Jewry – Haïm's statement that Raymond "mange du porc comme tous les juifs de France" [eats pork like all French Jews] is footnoted with a note from the author: "C'est un sot qui parle" [It's an idiot who's speaking] (65). Ultimately, through his focus on language politics, Navon sets certain characters

²⁸ Arabic, "fate"

²⁹ Hebrew, "matchmaker"

as cultural models for his readers to follow in their construction of a new form of Jewish identity.

Although Navon was born in Adrianople (now Edirne, Turkey) and later moved to France, he sets his story in Morocco, coloring his dialogue with Moroccan terms and expressions and their French translations.³⁰ In 1935, when the story was published and presumably takes place, most of the Jewish community had already left the Ottoman Empire.³¹ By choosing Morocco as the play's setting, Navon is adapting his tale to contemporary politics: there was still a considerable Sephardic population in Morocco, and, for Navon, those were the Jews who still needed to be brought to French modernity. Despite differences between communities in the former Ottoman Empire and North Africa, for Navon's purposes, AIU influence groups them en masse as a trans-Mediterranean community of Jews striving for the French metropole. France, French, and French culture collectively embody the promise of modernity that haunts the Jewish populations of France's marginalized colonies. Navon sees all Sephardic communities as lying somewhere on the trajectory of modernization, and thus sharing in a common struggle between tradition and modernity. In an article on Adrianople (Andrinople, in French), he states:

Ce que je dirai de ma ville natale pourrait aussi bien s'appliquer à presque toutes nos communautés d'Orient, et aussi d'Afrique, en ce dernier demi-siècle. Les noms et le milieu peuvent différer, les dates s'en écarter plus ou moins : les faits se ressemblent comme des frères. Partout la lutte entre le passé et l'avenir, entre un monde qui s'en allait, poussé par un autre monde impatient de le supplanter, a revêtu un caractère aigu et discordant.

[What I will say of my hometown could well apply to almost all our communities in the Orient, and also in Africa, in this last half-century. The names and the places may differ, the dates deviate more or less: the facts are the same. Everywhere, the struggle between past and future, between a world on its way out, driven by another world impatient to take its place, has taken a sharp and jarring character.] (Navon "Contribution")

Navon sees the themes he treats in *Zohra* and his other work as universal, urgent issues in the greater Sephardic community. Yet despite the fact that he portrays French culture as the obvious solution to the crumbling world of tradition, he is careful to acknowledge the merits of both sides of the struggle.

³⁰ Because the play remains unfinished, it is not clear whether Navon intended to translate all foreign terms. The manuscript features some footnoted explanations, yet some terms are underlined but unfootnoted, while others remain unmarked.

³¹ Three quarters of Turkey's Jews left after Atatürk's statement on 2 February 1923 (Stanford J. Shaw. *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*. NY: NYUP, 1991).

By condoning a certain degree of departure from traditional practices, Navon is addressing the very topical concerns of the immigrant generation. His readership is a generation educated in AIU schools and struggling to integrate into French society, even if it means abandoning Sephardic language and culture. By portraying Solica's religious beliefs as obsolete, but offering a more modern, secular form of traditional religious practice in the models of Ch'lomo and Raymond, Navon is offering his readers a way to be Jewish in secular French society. Focusing on language calls the reader's attention to the interactions of daily life; like Raymond, the reader can speak French without losing command of heritage languages such as Judeo-Arabic or Judeo-Spanish. Yet French is still favored as the language of the modern world – Raymond's linguistic blunder does not detract from his status in the narrative. Although in *Zohra*, Navon seems to focus more on the negotiation between religious traditions and modern practices, in his published work, he highlights language as a major element in cultural preservation and integration.

Navon's first novel, *Joseph Pérez* (1925), also examines the transition from tradition to modernity, and shows how language acts as a marker of an evolving identity. The novel is a Jewish version of the 19th century French *bildungsroman* – like Flaubert's Frédéric Moreau, Joseph falls in love with an older Parisian woman on the journey from his hometown to Paris, and this unrequited infatuation prevents him from pursuing a more appropriate path in life. Yet Navon's story is firmly rooted in a Sephardic Jewish milieu. Joseph Pérez is raised in the closed community of Constantinople's Sephardic Jews, but soon, prompted by his increasingly secular education, his frustration with his family's traditions, and his love of French literature, goes to Paris, where he tries to shed his previous life and fully assimilate into secular French society.

Joseph's move to Paris is prefigured by the narrator's treatment of language. Judeo-Spanish, acting as metonym for the Sephardic community, is portrayed as primitive and linguistically limited, an insufficient tool for communication. Often it is not referred to by name, but simply called a "jargon": Joseph's father "savait lire et écrire en son jargon" [knew how to read and write in his jargon] (17). The possessive "son" [his] emphasizes both the narrator's own dissociation from Judeo-Spanish and the language's limited use; it belongs only to its individual speakers. Although he rarely refers to the language by name, at times Navon qualifies it by its connection to Spanish: "il traduisait Télémaque en son jargon espagnol" [he translated Telemachus in his Spanish jargon] (57). When the language is named, it is in unfavorable comparison to others. Joseph's bar mitzvah speech is described as a "[v]éritable mosaïque de jargon judéo-espagnol, de turc, de grec, il était, en plus, émaillé de citations hébraïques, venues là telles des gemmes sur des haillons" [true mosaic of

Judeo-Spanish jargon, of Turkish, of Greek, it was, in addition, enameled with Hebrew citations, which were cast there like gems on rags] (22).

However, despite its negative representation, Judeo-Spanish does not just mark the closed community, but also serves to establish further communal ties. When a stranger arrives, he addresses Joseph's cousin and mother in Judeo-Spanish, immediately establishing his Sephardic Jewish identity and lending the interaction propriety:

– Que brodes-tu là, jeunesse ? lui demanda-t-il, en son jargon.

– Puisque vous êtes Juif, vous devez le savoir, lui répliqua la jeune fille, en lui souriant.

[“What are you embroidering there, youth?” he asked her, in his jargon.

“Since you are Jewish, you must know,” replied the young girl, smiling at him.]

(103)

Although the dialogue is not presented directly in Judeo-Spanish, and the language is only identified as “his jargon,” the language of the exchange is clear to any reader familiar with the Sephardic community. Thus the insider reader's understanding of the text mimics the closed community of Judeo-Spanish within the narrative, creating an intimacy between the text and the outside world.

The informal nature of Judeo-Spanish also serves to cross barriers of class and propriety; aided by the language, Joseph grows close to a girl who is already engaged: “Entre jeunes gens, pour différentes que soient les conditions, le *tu* espagnol, léger et caressant, a tôt fait de supprimer les distances” [Between young people, no matter how different their conditions, the Spanish *tu*, light and caressing, quickly eliminated distances] (114). Navon seems to suggest here that Judeo-Spanish has an intimate quality that French lacks.

French, in contrast, is a language of universal communication, modernity, and secularism. Joseph's Hebrew school teacher sees French and French pedagogy as direct threats to his religion and community. Even teaching Hebrew grammar (as opposed to using traditional methods of recitation) can be dangerous. Speaking of a fellow teacher, he says,

Du *Moré* il a glissé au « dikdouk », la grammaire ! comme ils disent. La grammaire !... Et où l'a-t-elle mené, cette fameuse grammaire ? Droit aux langues des nations, autant dire à la géhenne ! [...] Aujourd'hui, c'est un dévoyé : il enseigne la langue sainte avec méthode ! à la française !!!

[From the *Moré* he slipped to “dikdouk,” grammar! as they say. Grammar!...

And where has it led, this famous grammar? Straight to the languages of the

nations, which is to say, to hell! ... Today, he's a rogue: he teaches the holy tongue with method! French-style!] (40)³²

To those members of the community who cling to tradition, the teaching of French is as much an assault on tradition as the language itself. Although Zionists condoned teaching Hebrew “French-style” – as a spoken language for daily use – for nationalist language revival, Zionists and religious Jews alike criticized the AIU’s promotion of French as a threat, either to modern Hebrew or religious traditions.³³ Yet Navon subtly represents French education as not only the path to modernity, but also the only road to critical thought and progress. Joseph, once devoted to religious education, begins to deviate. He recognizes that he has a need that his previous schooling cannot fill: “[Joseph] avouait son impuissance à s’assimiler un enseignement qui ne satisfaisait plus son besoin de comprendre” [Joseph confessed his inability to assimilate an education that no longer satisfied his need to understand] (41). Soon, he gives himself over to what French education (and French language in particular) can offer:

La plume à la main, aidé du Larousse et de quelques ouvrages classiques à cinq sous le volume, Joseph apprenait à penser. Il notait sur un carnet les idées, les tours de phrase, les expressions, pour lui, nouvelles, et, le champ de ses connaissances s’élargissant, des horizons inconnus se déroulaient devant lui. [Pen in hand, aided by the Larousse and a few classic works at five cents apiece, Joseph learned to think. He noted in a notebook the ideas, turns of phrases, and expressions that were, for him, new, and, his field of knowledge expanding, unknown horizons unfolded before him.] (70)

³² This is a nod to Navon’s own work as a Hebrew instructor at L’Ecole Normale Israélite Orientale (l’ENIO) in Paris, where he wrote and published Hebrew grammar and language guides for his students. L’ENIO was an institute of higher learning for students brought up in AIU schools abroad. Successful students were then sent back to AIU schools as instructors.

³³ Joseph’s teacher fears what will, historically, happen to Hebrew education, especially in Palestine, as the language becomes mobilized for nationalist purposes. This attitude, in fact, mirrors the AIU’s own reverence for French language education as a template for new nationalism – only in the case of the AIU, the goal is allegiance to the French nation. Despite the fact that AIU schools taught French across the Ottoman Empire and North Africa, at this time in Palestine, efforts to teach Modern Hebrew ran counter to the AIU program of French education. However, some cooperation continued in the Jerusalem AIU school, which taught Hebrew language and speech in addition to French. For more on the Language Wars (Milhemet Ha-Safot) in Palestine, see Arieh B. Saposnik, *Becoming Hebrew: The Creation of a Jewish National Culture in Ottoman Palestine* (NY: Oxford UP, 2008), pp.232-233; on cooperation with the AIU, see p.270 fn.24. For more on Hebrew language revival and the movement against the language’s secularization, see Galili Shahar’s article on Shershom Scholem’s 1926 letter on Hebrew language revival: Gailili Shahar, “The Sacred and the Unfamiliar: Gershom Scholem and the Anxieties of the New Hebrew.” *The Germanic Review* 83.4 (Fall 2008): 299-322. Scholem sees a crisis in the secularization of the holy language; by refiguring Hebrew for daily use, he claims that we profane the deep sacred and unrepresentable aspects of the language.

Although his religious education would have led him to become a *hakham*, a learned man in a position of high status in Sephardic traditional society, he no longer sees worth in this position. He tells his teacher, “Je veux devenir homme de mérite [...] et, non *hakham*” [I want to become a man of merit, and not a *hakham*] (56), suggesting that the *hakham* has no place in modern society.

It is through French education that Joseph’s world expands, and that he is able to break free of the stifling closed community in which he was raised. After rejecting his religious education, he finds a job working as a carpet salesman, where he meets Françoise Delombre, the older woman with whom he will become infatuated. Her name alone, “Françoise,” signifies her place in the text as a cultural marker of Frenchness for Joseph. When Joseph introduces himself, Mme Delombre responds, “J’aime ce nom de Pérez... Joseph... beaucoup moins” [I like this name, Perez... Joseph... a lot less] (72). He offers his other names—Elie, Samuel, and Nissim—explaining that Nissim means “miracle,” which in French would be “René.” Thus Joseph adopts a French name, and becomes René Perez, preserving the Spanish component of his identity while ridding himself of the Jewish marker, Joseph. René literally means “reborn,” and carries the connotations of Christian spiritual rebirth. As Joseph’s transformation from Sephardic Jew to French Christian occurs, he becomes estranged from his past but struggles to fit into his new identity.

Mme Delombre approaches Joseph because she sees him reading La Bruyère’s *Les Caractères*. La Bruyère’s text focuses on social types and their roles in the same way that traditional Sephardic folklore, and Navon’s novel, do. Joseph’s journey is mapped by his passage through a series of archetypical teacher figures (cunning merchant, conservative scholar, progressive teacher, starving intellectual) who mark Joseph’s progressively modern education. His first two masters, a merchant and a scholar, represent the two options of the closed space of the Sephardic ghetto. His refusal to choose one or the other prefigures the future trajectory of his life; his third master is a modern, secular teacher whose dress, a caftan and pants, exhibits both eastern and western qualities (56). Reading La Bruyère’s *Caractères* marks Joseph’s transition from apprentice to agent. Once in Paris, he inhabits his own societal roles, as a “juif honteux” [shameful Jew] (167-178) and a “juif besogneux” [needy Jew] (179-190), a Jew ashamed of his own identity, trying to assimilate into Parisian society.

Joseph’s move to Paris, prompted by his family’s discovery of his love for the engaged Léa, marks his definitive break with the traditional world. His first impressions are of a stunning but familiar metropolis: “Paris n’était pas une ville inconnue pour Joseph. Ses lectures l’avaient familiarisé avec la plupart de ses places et de ses monuments ; leurs noms, en tout cas, ne lui étaient pas étrangers” [Paris was not an unknown city for Joseph. His readings had familiarized him with most of its plazas and monuments; their names, in any case, were not foreign to him] (137). It is

not the city that is familiar; Joseph has never actually seen the plazas and monuments before, and his familiarity with them is superficial, merely “not foreign.” His knowledge of Paris, much like his attachment to French culture in general, is linguistically and textually based.

Joseph seeks community among his fellow Jews. He attempts to connect with the Ashkenazi immigrant community of Paris (impoverished refugees fleeing Eastern European anti-Semitic violence) but their shared religion proves to be a false connection. Although at first the bond is linguistic, Hebrew is not a language of daily communication, and Joseph does not speak Yiddish: “L’hébreu fut le lien qui le rapprocha d’eux les premiers jours, non pour longtemps, il est vrai. Rien dans la conformation de son esprit ne correspondait à la leur ; et la religion n’était plus une condition suffisante pour l’y retenir” [Hebrew was the link that connected them those first few days, not for long, it is true. Nothing in the structure of his mind corresponded to theirs, and religion was no longer a sufficient condition to keep him there] (137). But what baffles Joseph most about this foreign community of Jews is “l’ostracisme qui les enveloppait” [the ostracism that surrounds them] and the fact that they “ne tentaient aucun effort pour s’en libérer” [did not attempt any effort to free themselves of it] (138). Paris’s Ashkenazi Jews were content to remain in the closed community imported from their former homelands, whereas Joseph, like most AIU-educated Sephardic immigrants, wants to integrate into secular Paris. More than leveling a critique at the Ashkenazi community, Navon is emphasizing the different place that Sephardic immigrants will occupy in their adopted homeland.

Joseph fails to find a place for himself in Paris. When he receives a love letter from Léa, written in “notre langue” [our language] (182), the letter’s Judeo-Spanish, the linguistic symbol of his old life, brings him back to his past. Navon translates the Sephardic song, from the Biblical Song of Songs (2:14), that runs through Joseph’s head: “Ma colombe, chanta-t-il en la langue de ses pères, ma colombe nichée aux trous de la pierre, qui te caches dans les fentes du rocher, montre-moi ton regard, fais-moi entendre ta voix ; car ta voix est douce et ton regard ardent !” [My dove, he sang in the language of his forefathers, my dove nesting in the holes of the stone, you who hide in the crevices of the rock, show me your eyes, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet and your eyes passionate!] (184-5). The song, a symbol of the Sephardic community, marks a turning point in the narrative: Joseph is thrown back to his linguistic and cultural roots by the language and genre of his thoughts, and the song’s biblical origin reminds him of his religion. Léa’s letter leads Joseph into the intimate space of Sephardic language and culture that he can only access in his mind.

Caught in this space of nostalgia, Joseph abandons his attempts at Parisian life, succumbs to spiritual and physical malaise, and ends up almost dying on the streets of Paris. The man who finds him discovers Mme Delombre’s address on him, and almost

a month later, Joseph wakes up to find her caring for him. Her husband insists that, as a Jew, he is a “commerçant-né” [a born merchant] (198) (a stereotype Navon does not attempt to dispel), and offers him a job that will return him to the first archetype he experienced early in his education, the merchant. But this turn of luck is not Joseph’s long-awaited entry into French society. He remains “ce civilisé de date trop fraîche, de cet Oriental trop hâtivement occidentalisé” [this too newly civilized man, this too hastily westernized Oriental] (201). Navon’s focus on the temporal elements of assimilation (“too newly,” “too hastily”) suggests that it is only through subsequent generations that the Sephardic immigrant community will fully integrate. Moreover, Joseph’s categorization of “Oriental” conflates his Ottoman Empire origins with his future in North Africa, suggesting that, as a non-Western francophone, he will always be an outsider, subject to the Orientalizing gaze of the French. Navon himself may be internalizing the power dynamics of Orientalism when he advocates that Sephardic Jews strive to become “Western” by adopting French culture.

The job M. Delombre offers is, like Joseph’s last, as a carpet merchant, and not in France, but in Algeria. In Algeria, Joseph finally feels at home. As a Sephardic Jew, he feels more of an affinity for the Mizrahi Jews of Algeria than the Ashkenazi Jews in France: “Au milieu de ces Juifs africains, quelle joie de se livrer tout entier ! [...] Il redevenait lui, Joseph, le fils d’Abraham et de Rébecca Pérez, et il n’en rougissait pas !” [Amidst these African Jews, what a joy to give oneself completely!... He became himself again, Joseph, son of Abraham and Rebecca Perez, and he did not blush over it!] (225). His comfort is specifically a reclaiming of his roots; he acknowledges his heritage for the first time since leaving Constantinople. But his new identity is not simply a return to his pre-immigrant self. Despite his affinity for the Algerian Jews, he does not share their attachment to tradition: “il n’épousait ni leurs préjugés ni leurs préventions” [he did not adopt their prejudices or biases] (225). However, neither does he despise the traditional milieu as he did before leaving Constantinople. He begins to view traditional practices as nostalgic artifacts, “desséchées et jaunies” [withered and yellowed], and understands that they continue to have worth as “les vestiges ou les témoins douloureux de la volonté deux fois millénaire d’une peuple qui s’entête à ne pas vouloir mourir” [the vestiges or painful witnesses of the two thousand year will of a people that insists on not wanting to die] (226). By presenting tradition as an artifact, and recognizing the Sephardic community’s preservation of their traditions in the face of persecution, Navon is offering a way to memorialize, and thus continue to preserve, Sephardic culture. Joseph’s new, complex relationship to Jewish tradition and identity, informed by his experiences in France and Algeria, is not in conflict with his desire to integrate into French culture.

Joseph’s connection to Algeria is established through a linguistic encounter. Joseph helps a man hurt in an anti-Jewish demonstration. He meets the man’s uncle,

ribbi Nathan. Nathan wants to thank Joseph but they have no language in common. Through signs, Nathan says, “Je ne parle pas français, je le regrette... vous ne comprenez pas l’arabe. Comment faire pour échanger des paroles d’amitié ?” [I don’t speak French, I am sorry... you don’t understand Arabic. How can we exchange friendly words?] (220). At that moment, Nathan realizes that Joseph is a Jew, and understands Hebrew: “Tu parles la langue sainte!... Moi aussi” [You speak the holy tongue!... Me too] (220). Unlike in Joseph’s encounter with the Ashkenazi Jews of Paris, where cultural and religious differences were an additional barrier, here Hebrew acts to establish communal ties. It is this linguistic connection that allows Joseph to be accepted by the family, and thus formally enter Algeria’s Jewish community.

The Jews of Algeria occupied a marginalized position in the early 20th century. As French citizens (as of the Crémieux Decree of 1870), they were despised by Algerian Muslims, but never accepted as equals by the French Pieds-Noirs.³⁴ Navon portrays a Jewish community that is ghettoized by politics, economics, and religion. Algeria’s Jews occupied a middle space—they did not fit into the country in which they lived, nor were they accepted by the country of citizenship. Albert Memmi describes the North African Jew’s position as neither colonizer nor colonized, an “espèce de métis de la colonisation” [kind of hybrid of colonization] (Memmi *Portrait* 25); the Jews are “éternels candidats hésitants et refusés à l’assimilation” [eternally hesitant candidates refused assimilation] (53), barred from fully becoming part of French society, yet also not completely willing to assimilate. Thus, although Joseph’s trip to Algeria mimics the colonial encounter of the French colonizer going to the colony, his position is problematized by his identity as an Ottoman Jew. He arrives from Paris, but he is not French. In fact, he identifies more with the Algerian Jews than he had with any person or community in France. This places him in a marginal position not only in relation to metropolitan or colonial French societies, but also in relation to the Algerian Jewish community. Joseph participates in the colonial exercise of traveling from the metropole to the colony, but he is neither colonizer nor Pied-Noir. However, this peripheral position offers him the opportunity to develop and hone a new identity.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha argues that “‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood” (Bhabha 1). Joseph, caught between the traditions he tried to leave behind in Turkey and the modern world of France that he strives to call his own, finds himself at home in Algeria, a manifestation of his hybrid identity. As a colony, Algeria is closer to being part of France than the Ottoman Empire is, but it is marked as subordinate to France by its colonial status, lack of autonomy, and political oppression. Intent on becoming part of the French empire by

³⁴ For a discussion of Algerian Jews and colonialism, see the chapter “Repatriation Rather Than Aliyah: The Jews of France and the End of French Algeria” in Todd Shepard’s *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (NY: Cornell UP, 2006), 169-182.

any means necessary, Joseph chooses to ignore these conditions. Yet they work in his favor: Algeria's position on the periphery of French society, and Algerian Jews' further marginalized place within that periphery, paradoxically allow Joseph to inscribe himself in a new iteration of French identity. Unable to stake a claim to the metropolitan identity offered by Paris, he can still share in France's cultural capital through his participation in the colony. His reluctance to fully identify with Algerian Jews by focusing on differences in religious tradition and language suggests that he still sets himself apart in a separate space, in between the colony and the metropole. Although French society does not allow him to be French, the colonial framework gives him agency to assert a French colonial identity in opposition to that of the Algerian Jews. Joseph's heroic participation as savior of the Algerian Jew hurt in the demonstration asserts his position as a privileged outsider, but the reader never forgets his rejection from Parisian society. He is thus perennially in the state of "becoming" French, yet never fully attains his goal.

Navon's second novel, *Tu ne tueras pas* (1927/1937), shows the same attitude towards language as his first. Navon indicates Judeo-Spanish dialogue as being "en son jargon espagnol" [in his Spanish jargon] (Navon *Tu ne tueras pas* 25), and Hebrew is treated with reverence. A footnote early in the novel tells the reader that "Les mots entre guillemets sont dits en hébreu. Ce sont des citations de la Bible, du Talmud ou du Rituel" [The words in quotes are spoken in Hebrew. They are citations from the Bible, the Talmud, or the Ritual texts] (8). This footnote is necessary given the amount of translated prayer included in the novel. Yet the prayer is only a backdrop for the novel's intrigue: the story of Ezra Franco, a kind but uneducated widower, and his love for the young Esther Carillo, daughter of the respected Rabbi Siméon Carillo, who at first refuses Ezra's request because of his father's arrogance and lack of cultural respect. Again, the story rests on a struggle between tradition and modernity; at the end, Siméon must accept that modern love can win over ancient tradition.

The key character in Siméon Carillo's decision is Jacob Founès, who has friendly and business connections to both families and takes it upon himself to change Carillo's mind. Founès is essential to Navon's project. He embodies the ideal of modern transition, embracing modernity while asserting himself as a Jew:

Il prétendait appartenir à la catégorie des Juifs de civilisation, ce qui, affirmait-il, ne veut point dire Juifs civilisés. « Civilisés, expliquait-il, nous le sommes de date très ancienne, puisque voilà vingt-cinq siècles que nous avons renoncé à toute violence, à toute barbarie ; Juifs de civilisation ne signifie pas non plus Juifs « déjudaïsés » ; ceux-ci on les rencontre par milliers sur la vaste terre, qui n'ont de Juif que le nom ; encore le déplorent-ils assez ». Il se proclamait donc Juif d'abord, Juif par-dessus tout, Juif enraciné dans son judaïsme autant qu'Ezra Franco, sinon davantage.

[He claimed to belong to the category of Jews of Civilization, which, he affirmed, did not mean Civilized Jews. “Civilized,” he explained, “we have been since ancient times, since for twenty five centuries we have renounced all violence, all barbarism; Jews of Civilization does not mean ‘DeJudaized’ Jews either; we meet these by the thousands on this vast earth, who are only Jewish by name; and yet they complain about that enough.” Thus he proclaimed himself Jewish first, Jewish above all, Jewish rooted in his Judaism, as much as Ezra Franco, if not more.] (98)

Founès thus serves as a temporal bridge between the novel’s present and the time of its publication. Contemporary readers can relate to his respect for “Juifs de civilisation” [Jews of Civilization] as they try to retain their sense of Judaism while assimilating to the secular cosmopolitanism of France.

While *Joseph Pérez* highlighted solutions to problems its contemporary readers might face, *Tu ne tueras pas* focused on the historical underpinnings of modernity and multiculturalism. *Tu ne tueras pas* was first published in serialized form in the Parisian daily *Le Temps* in 1927, but did not attain recognition until its publication ten years later. By 1937, Adrianople had become Edirne, and, due to political changes and immigration, the community Navon describes no longer existed.³⁵ The reviews of the book in *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*, whose editing team published the novel, laud Navon for representing a society that is so completely in the past. Navon’s novel serves as a time capsule, reminding Ottoman immigrants of the lives they left behind: “*Tu ne tueras pas* est une large fresque de la vie des Juifs d’Andrinople où l’on voit, tracées de mains de maîtres, les silhouettes de types qui tendent à disparaître et que le ghetto avait conservés intacts à travers les siècles” [*Tu ne tueras pas* is a large fresco of the life of the Jews of Adrianople, where we see, traced by the hands of masters, the silhouettes of those who are disappearing, and whom the ghetto has kept intact over the centuries] (Camhy “*Tu ne tueras pas*” 148). The novel’s appeal, beyond the politically and romantically charged plot, is its ability to portray a lost world, and thus highlight the modernity of the contemporary world. A long review on the book’s publication states that “il y a là des matériaux inappréciables pour juger d’une époque-limite, d’une époque de transition où se heurtent les vieilles idées et les nouvelles, où se croisent le crépuscule qui passe et l’aube qui vient” [there is invaluable material here for judging a limited era, a time of transition in which the old ideas clash with the new, where the passing twilight and the upcoming dawn intersect] (37). Repeatedly, the author of the article reminds the reader that the world of the novel is past, and presents the novel as a window to that era. He claims that in addition to the book’s literary merit, “c’est aussi une page d’histoire, une étude de mœurs, une fine analyse psychologique d’une

³⁵ The Turkish Postal Service Law of 28 March 1930 formally changed the names of many of Turkey’s cities, including Constantinople, which became Istanbul, and Angora, which became Ankara.

époque presque révolue et qu'on ne reverra plus" [it is also a page of history, a study of manners, a fine psychological analysis of an almost-bygone era which we will never see again] (37), thus suggesting that it is not only the era that is past, but the entire way of life and its accompanying psychology.

A letter from a reader, Joseph Nehama, in response to the initial, serialized publication of the novel, also speaks to its quality as a historical document. Even in 1927, Nehama notes that the novel's world has already disappeared, and he predicts that subsequent generations will have no connection to the life the ghetto once preserved:

Tout en faisant un roman coloré et vivant, vous faites œuvre excellente de folkloriste et c'est là ce qui est particulièrement intéressant dans votre « Tu ne tueras pas », parce que, depuis quelques années, les murs de nos ghettos ont été démolis par les incendies et les guerres et nos Juifs perdent très rapidement leur cachet spécial : ils se mêlent à leurs concitoyens, apprennent leur langue, s'habillent à l'européenne, mangent teref, fument le samedi et laissent tomber dans le mépris et l'oubli toutes les prescriptions ancestrales. Vous nous conservez, par les deux romans que vous avez publiés, une image photographique d'un monde qui meurt sous nos yeux et que nos enfants ne connaîtront plus.

[While creating a colorful and lively novel, you do excellent work as a folklorist, and this is what is particularly interesting in your "Tu ne tueras pas" because, in recent years, the walls of our ghettos have been demolished by fire and war, and our Jews are quickly losing their distinctive character: they mingle with their fellow citizens, learn their language, dress in the European style, eat non-kosher food, smoke on Saturday, and let slide into contempt and oblivion all the ancestral instructions. You preserve for us, by the two novels you have published, a photographic image of a world that is dying before our eyes and which our children no longer know.] (Nehama 40)

Unlike the editors of *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*, who speak only of the novel as a static snapshot of history, Nehama focuses on the work the novel will do in the future. If the present generation, post-immigration, is distanced from the old world, future generations will be even more detached from traditional ways of life. It is up to the current generation to find artifacts, like *Tu ne tueras pas*, which will allow them to bring a bit of the past into the future and thus, as Nehama suggests, prevent future generations from total assimilation. Treating Navon's text as an artifact, Nehama unwittingly mimics Joseph's own thoughts, based on the attitude of the Algerian Jews he witnesses, on how to preserve Sephardic tradition.

A short story Navon wrote in October 1929 and published in *Ménorah* in 1930 (and republished in *Les Cahiers Séphardis* in 1947) pits tradition against modernity both

thematically and generically. Under a rubric entitled “Souvenir des temps jadis” [Memory of yore], a citation in Judeo-Spanish, accompanied by its French translation, introduces the story to follow: “El dedo que firmo esto que se llague (Que le doigt qui a signé ceci se dessèche!)” [May the finger that signs this shrivel up!] (Navon "Souvenir" 69). The Judeo-Spanish text shows up later, untranslated, at the end of the story. This form establishes the genre of the piece. By opening with a citation in Judeo-Spanish, Navon is suggesting that the citation is a proverb or traditional moral maxim that will be explicated and proven in the tale to come. In a study on the Sephardic folktale, Tamar Alexander-Frizer states that a “proverb usually remains in the original ethnic language, as it may defy translation” (Alexander-Frizer 20). Moreover, the folk legend usually features “fixed opening and closing formulae”; “the moral of the story is mentioned in the closing formula, often by way of a verse from the sources or in quoting a proverb” (169). The Judeo-Spanish citation, in contrast to the French text of the story, underscores the generic connection to the Sephardic folktale.

Navon further emphasizes the traditional nature of the genre through the characters and basic plot. There is a legal dispute between a rich notable and a rabbinical scholar and teacher in a “ville de l’Orient qu’il n’est pas indispensable de nommer” [city in the East that it is not necessary to specify]. Navon’s insistence on the universality of the city furthers the folkloric nature of the tale. The rest of the story centers on how two different rabbis try and fail to address the dispute. In a fit of anger, the rabbinical scholar (the plaintiff) curses the rabbi who ruled against him, uttering the phrase the story began with. Within a month, the accursed rabbi’s finger falls off, and, soon thereafter, the gangrene spreads and he dies. The scholar dies of remorse.

Until this point, Navon’s story reads like many Sephardic folktales, including those published frequently in *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* with moral endings condemning, for example, the pursuit of wealth or the abuse of power. But as we have seen from Navon’s other work, he only presents tradition in a positive light if tempered by modernity. As the modern voice has no place within the framework of the folktale, here, it is introduced by the narrator, as Navon steps in with an authorial, authoritative voice to force the reader to question what he has just read. He shares the reader’s potential doubts about the story’s outcome—“peut-être te demanderas-tu aussi où [l’histoire] veut en venir” [maybe you are also asking yourself where the story is going]. He then proceeds to disabuse the reader of any doubts as to the author’s own respect of modernity: “L’auteur, penseras-tu, croit donc aux malédictions, aux sortilèges et autres balivernes du temps jadis ? Rassure-toi ; en fixant sur le papier un des épisodes qui remplirent la vie de son enfance, l’auteur n’a voulu rien prouver” [The author, you will think, believes, then, in curses, spells, and other such nonsense of yesteryear? Reassure yourself; by fixing on paper one of the episodes that filled his childhood, the author did not want to prove anything]. Navon’s ridicule of superstition

is not only meant to reassure readers that he shares their modern opinions, but to firmly indicate that such messages are not to be respected. He then declares that such tales should only be retold for nostalgic reasons, since they describe a world that no longer exists—a world “que tu ne connaîtras jamais parce qu’il a disparu et qu’il ne reviendra plus” [that you will never know because it disappeared and will not return]. By using a traditional genre and form, yet scoffing at the morals of the tale, Navon encapsulates the world he describes in a distant, inaccessible past.

Through characters such as Jacob Founès, Joseph Pérez, and Zohra and Raymond, Navon charts a course for newly immigrated readers who are redefining their identities as French Sephardic Jews. He offers them new modes of self-affirmation that allow them to continue speaking Judeo-Spanish, observing Jewish holidays, and participating in the Jewish community, while mastering French and integrating into secular society. Although an important component of Navon’s work is its focus on the “old world,” as he demonstrated in both *Tu ne tueras pas* and “Souvenir des temps jadis,” it is a world that belongs to the past. By writing about it, he does not hope to revive it, but to preserve it as an historical artifact for future generations.

Navon was not the only author to write about the old world of the now-former Ottoman Empire. In 1932, Joseph Benrubi (Benroubi) published a collection of short stories entitled *Arc-en-ciel balkanique* under the pseudonym José d’Orient. Whereas Navon focuses very specifically on the Sephardic “old world” ceding to the new, Benrubi has a broader perspective that addresses the general position of Sephardic Jews in post-Ottoman Empire Europe. For Benrubi, the Sephardic Jew exists outside of political geographic boundaries. Although Benrubi advocates preserving certain Jewish values, he focuses less than Navon on the importance of traditional rituals and more on the pursuit of French language and education as the key to a successful future for Sephardic Jews in France.

Arc-en-ciel balkanique’s preface makes it clear that the stories come from a place that quite literally no longer exists, since the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire formed separate Balkan states. While the new countries are politically disparate, they share common customs, language, and lifestyle. But the strongest similarities lie among the Sephardic communities: “A vrai dire, cette population constitue une sorte d’Etat nouveau, fondu dans tous les autres” [Indeed, this population constitutes a kind of new state, dissolved in the others] (*Orient Arc-en-ciel* 8). Thus the book is organized by country, with “Sepharad” occupying an equal place among Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Serbia, and Turkey, and each country featuring between one and four short stories about that country’s residents. The subjects include family drama, romance, murder, revolution, war, childhood, and politics. Except in the “Sepharad” section, most of the stories do not feature Jewish subjects or characters.

One notable exception is the volume's longest story, "Les Rois de la Montagne" [The Kings of the Mountain], from the Greece section. The main character is a Salonican Jew named Mochon Ventura who recounts a wartime adventure in which he, through a series of random events, ends up a national hero. In the introductory frame narrative, the narrator portrays Ventura as the Sephardic Wandering Jew:

D'où vient-il? Tel quel, avec ses cheveux grisonnants, son air pas fier de camelot roulant sa bosse de village en village, une légende le précède dans ses déplacements. On le dit natif de Salonique [...] On affirme qu'il possède plus de langues qu'il n'a doigts dans la main, et l'on voit bien, quand il s'exprime, qu'il appartient à un autre monde que le petit peuple de paysans auxquels il débite son fil et ses aiguilles, et celui des nomades éleveurs avec lesquels il partage un lit de sangle dans les hôtelleries de fortune.

[Where does he come from? As is, with his graying hair, his humble manner of a street peddler dragging his hump from village to village, a legend precedes him in his travels. They say he was born in Salonica... They claim that he speaks more languages than he has fingers on his hand, and it is clear, when he speaks, that he belongs to another world than that of the simple peasant folk to whom he sells thread and needles, or than that of the nomadic herders with whom he shares a cot in makeshift inns.] (56-7)

Ventura is the perfect character to highlight the connections between the Balkan countries. He travels throughout them, he speaks all their languages, yet he belongs to a separate world—not that of the peasants who listen to his stories, nor that of his fellow travelers. However, as a Jew, he does belong in all these places, and, occupying the position of main character and narrator in the volume's central story, he serves as a bridge between each narrative section.

It is, surprisingly, in the story Ventura narrates that the reader finds the largest Judeo-Spanish presence in Benrubi's book. Ventura's speech is peppered with words and expressions that remind the reader of his Sephardic origins, perhaps in contrast to his introduction as a man of the world. He describes a girl as "belle comme la lune le quinze du mois lunaire, « la louna en quinzé » comme on dit poétiquement dans ma langue maternelle" [beautiful like the moon on the fifteenth of the lunar month, "la louna en quinzé" as we say poetically in my mother tongue] (68). Despite Ventura's multilingual command, Judeo-Spanish is his mother tongue. Yet he translates everything into French, which serves as a language of universal communication. A proverb he tells in French—"Un Turc ne malmène pas un Juif, c'est entendu. Et s'il s'en avise?" [A Turk does not mistreat a Jew, it's understood. And if he dares?] — is translated back into Judeo-Spanish in a footnote: "Tourco no aharva a Djidio!... si

aharvo?” and explained.³⁶ A dialogue between Ventura and the only other Jew of his story is similarly enhanced with its Judeo-Spanish translation. “Oui, Mochico, nous avons été au « pazar » pour tondre les autres, et c’est nous qui sortons de l’affaire tondus, en fin de compte” [Yes, Mochico, we were at the “pazar” to shave the others, and we’re the ones who come out shorn, in the end] is appended with the following footnote: “En judéo-espagnol : « Fuémos por lana salimos tresquilados. »” (82). Omitting Judeo-Spanish from the main text suggests that the story is aimed at a non-Sephardic audience; Benrubi does not want to alienate his readers. However, the footnotes are a reminder of the characters’ true origins. Benrubi is suggesting that a Sephardic narrative can have universal relevance and appeal.

For Benrubi, as for Navon, Judeo-Spanish serves as a marker of identity that can be carried beyond national and political boundaries. Its use produces a sense of nostalgia, even among non-Jews. In a story in the “Sepharad” section entitled “La Circoncision” [The Circumcision], a non-Jewish soldier saves a woman in childbirth during intense bombing, and is then invited to attend the circumcision. A stranger to the ceremony and the culture, he feels uncomfortable until the woman welcomes him in Judeo-Spanish. He tells his fellow soldiers, “Dès qu’elle m’aperçut, elle lança dans sa langue charmante: “Bienvenido mossiou!” (Soyez le bienvenu, monsieur!) qui me remua malgré moi” [As soon as she saw me, she called out in her charming language: “Bienvenido mossiou!” (Welcome, sir!) which moved me despite myself] (124). By including the Judeo-Spanish phrase and its French translation in his account, he shows that he has internalized the cultural moment through the foreign language. The warm welcome in Judeo-Spanish traverses boundaries of language, religion, and ethnicity. Just as the Sephardic Ventura in “Les Rois de la Montagne” acts as a bridge between Benrubi’s stories, in “La Circoncision,” Judeo-Spanish shows its transnational reach. By using Sephardic language and culture to connect stories from the various Balkan countries, Benrubi is highlighting the Sephardic Jews’ lack of homeland, while suggesting that they belong to the imagined nation that the Balkans still form. Judeo-Spanish is a mobile marker of culture; it persists as a nostalgic artifact even as the culture itself is destroyed by changing political boundaries and migration.

However, just as Judeo-Spanish and the Sephardic community are common elements throughout the Balkans, they act as isolating factors for those raised in AIU schools in the Ottoman Empire. In “L’Étranger” [The Stranger], Albert Pereira, though raised in Salonica, feels more of a connection to Paris, which he experienced as an AIU student in Salonica and Paris. He feels an “amour intellectuel” [intellectual love] for the French city that trumps any connection to the city of his birth. He has carefully cultivated this state, to the point where he has shed any linguistic or cultural marker of

³⁶ The text reads “Tourco no aharva a Djidio!... I aharvo?” but the typo (I vs. si) is clear both by the French translation and the meaning of the proverb.

his origins: “Très cultivé, ayant dépouillé très tôt sa mentalité d’Oriental, il ressemblait à un Occidental, et plus particulièrement à un Occidental français, au point qu’on se trompait souvent sur ses origines” [Very cultured, having stripped himself quite early of his Oriental mentality, he resembled a Westerner, and more specifically a French Westerner, to the point where people were often mistaken about his origins] (139). According to the Westernized Sephardic gaze, it is not possible to be both cultured and “Oriental,” but through Pereira’s sad case, Benrubi complicates this notion. Paris is Pereira’s “patrie intellectuelle” [intellectual homeland], leaving him without a physical homeland. Although raised in Salonica, his family is from Holland, a country he has only visited as a tourist and to which he has no connection. This only increases his distance from Salonica, and his love for Paris: “Sa situation d’étranger dans sa ville natale, avait contribué à exalter cet amour qui n’était combattu dans son cœur par aucun autre sentiment analogue” [His position as a stranger in his homeland had contributed to exalt the love that was not rivaled in his heart by any similar feeling] (138).

However, despite his strong emotional and intellectual connection to Paris, Pereira feels just as much a stranger there as he had in Salonica or in Holland. He is tormented by what he sees as a lack of nationality. Bhabha claims that figures of lack or invisibility “simultaneously mark the possibility and impossibility of identity, presence through absence” (Bhabha 52). Indeed, this feeling of something missing intensifies until Pereira feels isolated morally, ethnically, and, during the war, politically: “Et il traînait depuis deux ans, à Paris d’abord, puis à Salonique, cette sensation de « manque », qui le faisait ressembler moralement à un orphelin” [And he dragged around for two years, first in Paris, then in Salonica, this feeling of “lack,” that made him seem, morally, like an orphan] (*Orient Arc-en-ciel* 139). Without roots, Pereira suffers a crisis of identity, and becomes a stranger to himself. Despite his near-total assimilation into French culture and society, he is unable to feel fully at home; he remains, in his own mind, “irrémédiablement étranger” [irreparably foreign] (140). This feeling totally paralyzes him. Without a true homeland, he is unable to enlist in the war or ignore the war; he is unable to make a single decision or action: “Devant [...] ce « dépaysement » absolu, Albert Pereira choisit... non, il ne choisit rien” [Faced with... this total “disorientation,” Albert Pereira chose... no, he chose nothing] (141). Thus Pereira serves as a warning to Benrubi’s readers to preserve a connection to their roots, or be threatened with a “disorientation” that leaves them powerless and without national belonging.

The word “dépaysement,” though often translated as “disorientation,” can also mean “exile” or, in a positive sense, “change of scene”; it contains the word “pays,” country, and thus implies, more specifically, a disorientation caused by exile or immigration. The next story in Benrubi’s volume, “La Tête et la Queue” [The Head and

the Tail], presents another example of the paralysis caused by *dépaysement*, but with a more optimistic outlook. The story describes a family of Sephardic immigrants who have lived in Paris for nearly twelve years. Although “parfaitement assimilés aux mœurs de la patrie adoptive” [perfectly assimilated to the customs of their adopted country] (142), a more intimate look at their family life, particularly during holidays, reveals the obvious “distance existant entre une famille orientale et un ménage d’Occident” [distance between an Oriental family and a Western household] (143). During the holidays, the immigrant apartment leads a double life, becoming “une sorte de contrefort de l’Orient, au cœur de la cité dont les battement règlent la vie de l’Europe” [a sort of buttress of the Orient, at the heart of the city whose heartbeats regulate the life of Europe] (143). The hostility of this metaphor is apparent: the apartment serves to protect those inside from the outside influences of assimilation.

However, the apartment is only a temporary buttress; at all other times, it leaves its occupants open to cultural influence. As in Navon’s *Zohra*, Benrubi clearly shows the assimilation, and subsequent loss of tradition, that increases with each generation of the family. Both children are raised to be as fully French as possible; although the eldest was born in Istanbul, he immigrated as a small child, and he and, later, his sister were “élevés dans l’atmosphère de Paris” [raised in the atmosphere of Paris] (144). Juda, an inquisitive boy of thirteen, was given the more secular name Léon, while Myriam, born in Paris, is called “Marie,” a name more Catholic than secular. The grandmother is the only member to keep the family’s traditions alive in the face of Paris’s aggressive influence: “Sans la présence de la grand’mère, les liens qui rattachaient les Alvo à leurs origines n’auraient pas manqué d’être tranchés, dans une ville dont ils avaient épousé le genre de vie et les mœurs” [Without the presence of the grandmother, the ties that bound the Alvos to their origins would not fail to be cut, in a city where they had adopted the lifestyle and customs] (144-5).

Sounhoula, the grandmother, “vestale ratatinée du temple de la tradition” [shrunk vestal of the temple of tradition] (154), keeps the past alive through cooking traditional food. The narrator remarks that “il n’est pas exagéré de dire que les traditions ont dû, en partie, de survivre” [it is not an exaggeration to say that the traditions owed, in part, their survival] to the holiday food Sounhoula prepared (145). Indeed, Guy Dugas and Patricia Geesey, in an essay on French Judeo-Maghrebian literature, note that the post-immigration Sephardic community relied on food as a link to the traditional past: “If rituals of dress and religion tend not to survive the effects of dispersion and deculturation, culinary rituals often become stronger in the diaspora because they are protected by family institutions and preserved by women” (Dugas and Geesey 27). The narrator emphasizes Sounhoula’s mysterious ability to find the correct ingredients for her culinary creations against all odds.

The importance of food in the Alvo family is foregrounded as the family sits down for the Rosh Hashanah (New Year's) feast, and each member is handed a fish head. As the children prepare to eat the heads dutifully but with more indifference or disgust than interest, the grandmother says, « Séamos por cavessera y non por code » (*Orient Arc-en-ciel* 147).³⁷ These words, in Judeo-Spanish, briefly go untranslated, until they provoke David, the father, to react: “Ces paroles presque d’incantation, rappelèrent brusquement à David l’ancien rite dont il avait perdu le souvenir. Il traduisait : « Soyons toujours à la tête et ne nous confondons jamais dans les rangs de la queue »” [These words, almost an incantation, suddenly reminded David of the old rite which he had forgotten. He translated, “Let us always be at the head, and never get mixed up in the ranks of the tail”] (147).³⁸

Although the translation comes easily to David, he does not remember the annual rite or its meaning until presented with it. But the ritual sparks his son's interest, and Léon begins to quiz him on the nature of success. Léon asks if, by eating the fish head, he will automatically get good grades and be at the head of his class; he then asks about equivalent markers of success later in life, and David, a writer, reveals that he has never attained the professional success to which he aspired. David attributes his failure to immigration, and his accompanying desire to immerse himself in French culture and language. He says self-deprecatingly, “Je suis le petit Oriental épris de lumière qui, parce qu’il a défailli lorsque ses maîtres lui ont révélé Racine, n’a plus voulu écrire que dans sa langue” [I am the little Oriental in love with light who, because he fainted when his teachers revealed Racine to him, only wanted to write in his language] (152). As a result of his affinity for the world of Racine, David refuses to write in his maternal language, and, perhaps because of his flawed French, can never be comfortable in his chosen profession. Racine, whose name means “root,” and whose work is the epitome of French neoclassical tragedy, has ironically supplanted David's true linguistic and cultural roots, leaving him alienated. David describes his situation as a betrayal. He has not betrayed his origins, but the French language has betrayed him: “Il avait peut-être en lui le feu sacré qui fait l’artiste, mais élevé loin de France, ayant choisi d’écrire dans une langue qui n’était pas la sienne, souvent l’expression le trahissait” [He had in him, perhaps, the sacred fire that makes the artist, but, raised far from France, having chosen to write in a language that was not his, often expression betrayed him] (150). Living in France as an immigrant is thus inextricably linked to David's failure, both professionally and, according to the Judeo-Spanish maxim, culturally.

³⁷ “La Tête et la Queue” also appeared in *Haménora*, a periodical published in Istanbul by the Béné Bérith du District d’Orient. The introduction to the story identifies José d’Orient as Joseph Benrubi, and the Judeo-Spanish proverb is offered in Hebrew as well: שנהיה לראש ולא לזנב (Orient "Tête" 302).

³⁸ See Deuteronomy 28:13

For these same reasons, David is convinced that Léon will succeed where he has failed. He sees his son as “un autre lui-même” [another self] (149). Léon has enjoyed the benefits of a true French education, and, above all, French as a maternal language. Whereas David tries to assimilate “une culture qui lui a fait défaut” [a culture that failed him], his son has the ability “de faire du français [s]on parler naturel” [to make French his natural language] and become part of French culture (152-3). David occupies the uncomfortable middle generation shared by Navon’s Haïm, Zohra’s father: “Dans ma génération, il en est beaucoup qui me dépassent, et de loin” [In my generation, there are many who are beyond me, and by far] (151), he tells his son. Thus his hope lies in Léon who, raised to be fully French, can succeed in a world in which West dominates East.

Although “La Tête et la Queue” treats similar themes as “L’Etranger,” it ends on a much more optimistic note. This optimism, entirely based in hope for future generations, comes from immigration. Characters like Pereira, who are stuck between homelands and do not feel like they belong anywhere, or David, who are linguistically disoriented, see immigration as the solution for future generations. By raising their children to fully inhabit French life, they can be sure that their children will not share in their struggle. Although both Navon and Benrubi include elements in their stories that represent tradition, such as the grandmother (Sounhoula or the intransigent Solica), it is clear that any vestiges of tradition will be hard to uphold in the face of modernity. Thus these authors offer their writing—a “world of double inscriptions” (Bhabha 50)—as a solution to the battle between modernity and tradition. By circulating stories of characters who find a workable balance, they are offering the immigrant community members models on which to base their new identities.

But were these works reaching the community? It is difficult to determine the readership of these texts, but there are a few hints embedded in the texts themselves, as well as in the media of the time. *Arc-en-ciel balkanique*, first published in 1932, had five editions by 1933 and a partial German translation (*Abenteuerlicher Balkan: zwei Erzählungen*, Zurich). In 1928, an earlier version of “La Tête et la Queue” was published in *La Revue Littéraire Juive* (Orient “La Tête”), a monthly periodical that purported to be “une nouvelle et importante manifestation du réveil du Judaïsme français” [a new and important manifestation of the awakening of French Jewry] yet also hoped to reach the non-Jewish population: “les Français non juifs y trouveront grand profit pour leur culture” [the French non-Jews will find in it great benefit to their culture] (Godart 1).

Navon’s work, at least among Jewish readers, was equally if not more successful. The conservative Jewish periodical *Foi et Réveil* published a lengthy review of *Joseph Pérez* in 1925, in which the author lauds Navon’s ability to represent the community more intimately than other authors describing Jewish milieux. He compares Pérez’s experience in Algeria to Moses’s in Egypt, yet also asserts that the text is more than a

novel—it is also part autobiography: “L’auteur a vécu la vie décrite par lui. Et chose rare et qui mérite d’être signalée, M. Navon connaît le judaïsme” [The author has lived the life described by him. And, a rare and noteworthy point, Mr. Navon knows Judaism] (Abib 74). According to the review, Navon succeeds in producing a text that has romantic, literary, and even religious interest. The periodical’s endorsement of the novel must have helped expand readership to more conservative, and non-Sephardic, areas of the French Jewish population. By the following year, the novel was translated into Hebrew by a publishing house in Jerusalem (*Yosef Perets: roman me-haye ha-geto ha-mizrahi*. Jerusalem: Hotsaat ha-Solel, 1926).

Navon’s second novel, *Tu ne tueras pas*, seems to have met with immediate success, at least among the readers of *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*. An announcement regarding its publication led to an influx of preorders: “Nous avons annoncé dans notre dernier numéro la prochaine publication du beau roman de M. A. H. Navon : Tu ne tueras pas [...] Le succès de cette annonce est déjà magnifique. Les souscriptions (15 francs l’exemplaire) affluent de tous côtés” [We announced in our last issue the upcoming publication of the beautiful novel by Mr. A. H. Navon, Tu ne tueras pas... The success of this announcement is already magnificent. Subscriptions (at 15 francs a copy) are coming in from all sides] (“Tu ne tueras pas” 178). However, this audience is limited to the readers of Jewish periodicals.

Navon’s work was also acknowledged by non-Jewish periodicals. *Le Temps*, the French daily that would, two years later, publish *Tu ne tueras pas* as a feuilleton, mentions *Joseph Pérez, juif de ghetto* twice. The first is an editorial announcement, on April 14, 1925, of the novel’s publication. The second, on July 30, 1925, recommends the novel for summer reading, but may be a promotional piece by the novel’s publishers, Calmann-Lévy. *Le Figaro* (despite its conservative politics and anti-Dreyfusard stance) contains two similar announcements, both most likely funded by Calmann-Lévy, on April 9 and July 24, 1925, as does *Le Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* (April 10 and July 24, 1925). Other than the initial publication of *Tu ne tueras pas* in *Le Temps*, there is no mention of its final publication in the secular press. This may be due to the fact that, while *Joseph Pérez* was published by Calmann-Lévy, a well-established publishing house that produced a wide range of material, *Tu ne tueras pas* was published by *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*, a small Sephardic Jewish periodical that had only published one other book (a translation of an English-language biography of Sir Moses Montefiore, by Paul Goodman) (37).

Regardless of interest in these novels, contemporary media coverage suggests that the French public showed little interest in the Sephardic immigrant community. In 1920, *Le Mercure de France*, a French literary review, published a long article on the effects of the war on Salonica. The author, Antoine Scheikevitch, experienced the Greek city as a French soldier during the Balkans Campaign of World War I.

Scheikevitch's description of the city's Jewish community shows his hostility toward their connection to French culture. He writes, accusingly, that while they claim a kinship with France, they actually patronize Austrian and German commerce. Yet he is most critical of their relationship with the French language, perhaps because he recognizes it as the foreigner's porthole to French society:

Certes, la plupart des Juifs saloniciens parlent, avec une abondance tout orientale et un accent inimitable, un français, ou plutôt un judéo-français qui est une adaptation locale de la langue qu'on leur enseigne dans les écoles de l'Alliance israélite et au lycée de la Mission Laïque. Certes, beaucoup d'entre eux étaient allés en France. [...] Ils avaient rapporté quelques calembours et quelques mots d'argot que, sans en comprendre parfois bien exactement le sens, ils aiment placer dans la conversation.

[Certainly, most Salonican Jews speak, with a totally Oriental frankness and an inimitable accent, French, or actually a Judeo-French that is a local adaptation of the language taught in the AIU schools and the MLF high school. Certainly many of them have been to France... They brought back a few puns and a few slang words that, often without really understanding the meaning, they like to insert into conversation.] (Scheikevitch 683-4)

Scheikevitch claims that, through a crude and deficient command of the French language, the Jewish community lays false claim to French culture, French humanitarian principles, and even French literature – he says of the Salonican women: “Elles avaient feuilleté quelques vagues romans français et avaient recueilli quelques échos lointains et déformés de petites histoires mondaines de la grande ville, d'ailleurs défraîchies et d'une véracité douteuse” [They have leafed through some vague French novels and have collected some distant and deformed echoes of little society stories of the great city, stories that were, in any case, dated and of a dubious veracity] (684). He concludes that the community's “francophilie” [Francophilia] is “très superficielle et toute verbale” [very superficial and totally verbal] (684); even if they do speak French, he discounts any connection that that might create between Salonican Jews and France.

Homi Bhabha's description of mimicry provides a useful framework with which to analyze Scheikevitch's attitude. Mimicry, in the colonial or postcolonial context, occurs when the colonized subject imitates aspects of the colonizer's culture as a possibly subconscious attempt to gain the power represented by that culture. Scheikevitch focuses on discrete aspects of the Salonican Jews' mimicry of French culture—language, fashion, literature. These aspects are metonyms for French society as a whole. Bhabha states:

In mimicry, the representation of identity and meaning is rearticulated along the axis of metonymy. As Lacan reminds us, mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization or repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that

differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically. (Bhabha 90)

Mimicry can be unintentionally subversive, and be seen as mockery or menace; in this case, “the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double” (86). Scheikevitch feels threatened by the Salonican Jews’ appropriation of his dominant French culture. Yet this specific situation is further complicated by the addition of a third party. Salonican Jews were not colonized by the French; French culture was brought to them by the French Jewish agents of the AIU. Given the anti-Semitic atmosphere of France in general, and of the *Mercure* article in particular, Scheikevitch, a French non-Jew and a soldier, is in a position of further dominance, and thus feels doubly threatened—by the Salonican Jews, and by their “colonizers,” French Jews who were once immigrants themselves. By calling into question the community’s connection to French culture, Scheikevitch denies mimicry’s mobilization as colonial appropriation and discredits French Jews’ place as colonizers.

If the *Mercure* article is exemplary of the French public’s attitude toward its Jewish immigrant population, perhaps the Jewish immigrant literature of the 1920s and 1930s can be read as an attempt to confront that attitude. First, it is necessary to determine the intended readership of these works. Were they aimed at a general French public, at a Franco-Jewish public, or only at the Sephardic Jewish community? The nuanced language of the works may shed some light on this question. Most works, although written in French, contain words or expressions in Judeo-Spanish, Arabic, Hebrew, or other languages. Sometimes, foreign words are footnoted—a sure sign that the intended reader may not be familiar with the language and culture in question. Yet a multilingual text with no explanatory notes may also aim to create a certain foreign atmosphere.

A useful comparison may be made with Navon’s contemporary, Gaston Edinger, who also uses code-switching to represent his characters’ multilingual universe. Under the pseudonym Jacob Lévy, Edinger published a series of works on Jewish “types,” entitled *Juifs d’aujourd’hui* [Today’s Jews] (1925-27). His stated goal was to introduce the “Jewish mentality” to non-Jews and Jews alike, though the series focuses on Alsatian Jews’ difficult integration into Parisian society. One volume of the series, *Les Doubles Juifs* [The Double Jews] (1927), describes the figure of the religious Jewish mystic. A review in the non-Jewish periodical *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* of *Les Doubles Juifs* applauds the author’s representation of the modern Jew. Lévy’s characters are “les Juifs intelligents qui s’attachent à l’esprit de la Bible et non à la lettre” [the intelligent Jews who attach themselves to the spirit of the Bible, and not to its every word] (“Les Doubles Juifs” 3). Yet despite their modernity, their dialogue is a mix of French and Judeo-Alsatian: “les dialogues y sont vivants et les termes judéo-alsaciens qui l’émaillent sont assez nombreux pour lui donner un caractère particulier et distribués

de telle sorte qu'on n'en soit pas fatigué trop vite" [the dialogues are lively and the Judeo-Alsatian terms that adorn it are numerous enough to give it a distinctive character and distributed so that they are not too fatiguing] (3). As long as the multilingual text is not overbearing, it is prized for its exoticism. The foreignness created by this linguistic mixing seems to be something readers are looking for in ethnic literature, just as certain features of Orientalist art satisfied the French art collector who was looking for an accessible yet exotic aesthetic.

While the language of *Les Doubles Juifs* is only subtly exotic, popular stories taking place in colonial North Africa focused on creating a sharply foreign milieu. One such story, "Le Vœu" by Marc Sylvanel, published in *La Revue Littéraire Juive*, goes to an extreme: frequent footnotes explain foreign foods and professions, and even translate names. The main character's name, "Gagou," is footnoted "Isaac, en Judéo-arabe" [Isaac, in Judeo-Arabic]; "Ia Deidou" and "Ia Sousou" are "Petit Joseph" and "Petit Moïse" [Little Joseph; Little Moses] (Sylvanel 464). While some foods are translated ("les tochis" are "lamelles de carotte crue mariné" [strips of raw marinated carrot]), others are left obscure ("les mininas"). The combination of foreign words and a proliferation of footnotes creates an uncomfortable reading experience. The intended audience of this text is unfamiliar with the Tunisian Jewish community, yet is probably familiar with Jewish culture—the story is published, after all, in a Jewish periodical, and words such as "kacher" [kosher] are left untranslated. Sylvanel's story, like many of the "Contes de la Hara" [Tales from the Hara, the Tunisian Jewish ghetto] published in the same periodical, attempts to introduce the French Jewish reading public to their North African counterparts, while maintaining the foreign nature of those communities.³⁹ Bhabha speaks of the "anxiety provoked by the hybridizing of language" because of the "psychic, cultural, [and] territorial" boundaries that get called into question, but here, hybridity leads to reassurance—the community described is clearly not the reader's (Bhabha 59). In an attitude perhaps inherited from their AIU schooling, France's Sephardic immigrants did not want to draw parallels between themselves and the Sephardic and Mizrahi communities in North Africa. For the same reasons that Navon set *Zohra* in Morocco, newly-French Jews chose to see themselves as morally and culturally superior to those who had not yet immigrated to France.

Navon's novel *Joseph Pérez* offers a different reading experience, one that underscores Navon's goals of creating a didactic narrative. In the original 1925 edition, foreign words are not italicized, and most are not footnoted. The reader is left either to understand, or accept as foreign, words such as "Séraï," "hakham," "schems," "kaddisch," and "Ribbi" (Navon *Joseph* 1925 1; 3; 3; 7; 13). Some words, however, are footnoted, such as "Balata" ("Balat, en langue turque" [Balat, in Turkish]), "Hodja"

³⁹ See Todd Shepard's chapter, "Repatriation Rather Than Aliyah," previously cited, for a discussion of French Jews' view of their Algerian coreligionaries.

(“instituteur” [teacher]), “Paras” (“Argent... des sous” [Money... pennies]), and, somewhat more surprisingly, “goy” (“Non Juif” [non-Jew]) (4; 120; 143; 195). Although most of the footnoted words are specific to Turkish or Sephardic culture, “goy” is a term with Biblical roots that most Jews would understand, just as they would understand “kaddisch” and the other terms left without explanation. It is thus essential to look at the context in which these words are used. “Sérai” serves to place the story in its Turkish setting. “Hakham” is clearly an honorific, set before certain names, and eventually clarified by the context. Words that are footnoted tend to appear in dialogue; the footnotes thus clarify the meaning of the conversation. By seamlessly incorporating untranslated foreign words, yet also including explanations that enhance the cultural bearings of the text, Navon seems to be offering his work for a wider audience—a reader unfamiliar with Jewish culture would still be able to access, understand, and appreciate the novel, without missing the culturally foreign overtones.

Joseph Pérez was reissued in 1999 by Les Belles Lettres as part of the collection “Les Arbres de Judée,” whose goal is to republish works that feature Jewish characters and communities before their annihilation. The new edition dissolves the careful balance of foreign words and limited footnoting by italicizing all foreign words and providing footnotes that offer both translation and historical or cultural explanation. The footnote for “Kaddisch,” for example, gives an explanation of the term and describes various traditions related to the prayer. A footnote is also added to “Arbre de Vie,” the name of Joseph’s religious school, explaining that the term is the title of a major Kabbalistic work, yet it is unclear what, if anything, this explanation has to do with the name of the school. The footnotes also direct pronunciation of the foreign terms. The footnote on “*hakham*” reads: “*Hakham* (le « kh » note le son « ch » de l’allemand “achtung”): le sage juif; dans le contexte, petit lettré ou instituteur ” [*Hakham* (the “kh” makes the sound “ch” in the German “achtung”): the Jewish sage; in the context, a man of letters or teacher] (Navon *Joseph* 1999 11). The new edition of *Joseph Pérez* seems to serve as a cultural introduction to Judaism for 21st-century readers of all backgrounds. Perhaps this echoes Navon’s goal as well. However, the addition of italics and footnotes further foreignizes the text. If it is a cultural introduction, it is to a culture that is no longer accessible, whose language will never, typographically or otherwise, attain the same familiarity as the French text in which it is embedded.

While footnotes may serve their intended purpose in each work, do they contribute to a cross-cultural understanding that extends beyond the text? Or ultimately, do the footnotes add to a project of cultural authenticity that is only superficial? Bhabha argues that “the threatened ‘loss’ of meaningfulness in cross-cultural interpretation [...] becomes a hermeneutic project for the restoration of cultural ‘essence’ or authenticity” (Bhabha 126). However, the footnotes only offer ontological, not epistemological, clarification; the reader is not going to come away

with an understanding of Sephardic culture based solely on information contained in the footnotes. Relying on them alone would fall into the “confusion between justification and explanation, the priority of knowledge ‘of’ over knowledge ‘that’” (127), as footnotes only offer “knowledge ‘of’”. Taking the footnotes along with the text on which they are dependent, however, produces a more active exchange. The combination of a narrative of Sephardic culture, words in Judeo-Spanish and Hebrew that are left untranslated, and footnotes that offer translations or cultural explanations, creates a cultural portrait that is accessible but not assimilatory. Moreover, the act of reading engages the reader actively in the project of cultural representation. Bhabha notes that Walter Benjamin describes “the performativity of translation as the staging of cultural difference”; although two words may “intend the same object,” “their discursive and cultural *modes of signification* are in conflict with each other, striving to exclude each other” (227). Leaving terms untranslated avoids this conflict of signification; requiring the reader to turn to footnotes may force him or her to confront this linguistic contestation, but ultimately leads to “a provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages” (Benjamin 78) and, perhaps, with the foreignness of cultures. The reader is not left with a full understanding of Sephardic society, but instead, with a view of its cultural and linguistic hybridity.

By incorporating familiar elements of genre, language, and theme into their narratives, authors such as Navon and Benrubi were able to engage the reader in the hybrid space created by immigration. This space allows for symbolic interactions between otherwise fixed identities; the hybridity allows for difference that does not privilege one aspect or culture over the other. Through the linguistically hybrid text, the reader engages with the immigrant’s experience of cultural hybridity, negotiating between French and Judeo-Spanish, modernity and tradition. Although marginalized by Ashkenazi writers of the same time period, Sephardic immigrant authors were able to use their literature for didactic and political purposes. As a result, instead of clinging to their identity as Sephardic Jews, or wholly inhabiting their new role as French citizens, new immigrants used these literary models to carve themselves a third, hybrid, space of identity. This space allowed for an identity defined by difference, by rethinking the cultural contact between Judaism and France. By writing literature that articulated solutions to issues of immigration and assimilation, the Sephardic writers of the “Réveil Juif” provided subsequent generations with a model of cultural hybridity—a way to conceptualize one’s identity as both Sephardic and French. Perhaps this new identity model can shed light on later generations who, although raised to be French before Jewish, return to their Sephardic roots in contemporary fiction that embraces the immigrant narrative of their ancestors.

Chapter Two

Fictional Genealogies: Writing the Jewish Maghreb

This chapter looks at two narratives by Maghrebi Jewish immigrant authors, taking as a point of departure Albert Memmi's assertion that the Maghrebi Jew, under colonialism, is neither colonizer nor colonized, but a colonial "hybrid." This outsider status necessitates a new approach to questions of identity formation, expression, and transmission. The narrators of Albert Memmi's *La Statue de Sel* [*The Pillar of Salt*] (1953) and Marcel Bénabou's *Jacob, Menahem et Mimoun: Une épopée familiale* [*Jacob, Ménahem and Mimoun: A Family Epic*] (1995) both struggle with the hybrid identities they developed as Jews in colonial North Africa. Their cultural hybridity is expressed linguistically, as language politics are at the forefront of their identity crises; both see French as a language of cultural capital, and mastery of the language as the only path to attaining access to that capital. Both narrators explore fictive genealogies as a way to establish their identities, but ultimately find their roots through literary narrative. I argue that they use the writing process as a way to assert their hybrid identities on a personal and societal level. By writing their stories into French literature, they legitimize their claim to French's cultural capital and address the gaps in the Francophone archive. Their work asserts their hybrid identities as part of a multicultural, multilingual conceptualization of French national identity.

Guy Dugas's bibliographic study of 20th century French Judeo-Maghrebian literature brings more than 120 authors and 400 works to light, a collection he deems both quantitatively and qualitatively significant (Dugas *Bibliographie* 7). He notes that "the discourse of collective memory" is a major theme. Works written after independence often focus on a return to the past (the "looking back" Memmi invokes in the title *Statue de sel*), usually through a character living in the diaspora who returns to the land of his or her birth through memory, nostalgia, dream, or actual travel (Dugas and Geesey 23). Writing in French, Judeo-Maghrebian authors exhibit little of the reticence, or sense of linguistic exile, of their Arab-Muslim counterparts; instead, their work is voluntarily "francophone and even francophile" (30).

Out of this large corpus of literature, I have chosen to focus on Memmi's colonial and Bénabou's postcolonial narratives for their complex interplay of narrative and authorial intent. Both Memmi and Bénabou have written elsewhere about their experiences as Maghrebi Jewish immigrants. The narrators of *Statue* and *Jacob* reflect their authors' critical writing; they engage with similar issues, and find possible solutions in literary production. The writing projects of both narrators thus act as mirrors for the writing projects of the authors, which are the novels themselves. This metanarrative interplay is crucial to my larger claims for the projects' impact on French literature, historiography, and identity.

I begin by briefly examining Memmi's own outsider status as described by Camus in an introduction to Memmi's work. I then trace similar issues of identity in Benillouche, the protagonist of *Statue de Sel*, who rebels against his family's traditions only to find himself rejected by the French community he strives to join. Benillouche's struggle with his inevitably hybrid identity can be seen in the language politics of his education. It is through writing that Benillouche manages to create a space for his true identity, which is a composite of both Jewish and French cultural influences. I show how Benillouche's writing is in fact subversive in its medium and its aims – by writing in French, in the space of French academia, Benillouche forces open a space for his alternative identity within French literature. I then look at Bénabou's narrator in *Jacob*, who struggles with similar issues, but whose postcolonial viewpoint allows him the critical distance necessary for loftier goals. Bénabou's narrator's goal of creating a cultural history for his people leads him to search for appropriate literary and genealogical models. His project fails precisely because there is no existing space for his hybrid expression, but I conclude that Bénabou himself succeeds; his novel fills the gap its own narrator finds impassable.

Just as AIU-educated Sephardic Jews living in the Ottoman Empire felt an affinity for French society, Jews in French-colonized North Africa were heavily influenced by French culture, both through AIU education and the presence of French colonialism.⁴⁰ The Jewish population of Tunisia traces its earliest roots to Roman rule (there is archeological evidence of a synagogue from the 3rd-5th century CE), but there is also a significant number of Sephardic Jews who immigrated from the Iberian peninsula during the Inquisition and Italian Jews from Livorno, who also had their origins in 16th century Iberia. Although Tunisian Jews eventually numbered nearly one hundred thousand, they were “second-class” citizens under Christian, Arab, and Ottoman rule (Shaked and Bar On 186). Their status only changed well into French rule, when, after World War I, France granted French citizenship to select Tunisian Jews, “mostly members of a small Jewish elite who were assimilating to French culture quite quickly” (186). However, this protection was short-lived, as Nazi Germany occupied Tunisia from November 1942 to May 1943. Under Nazi rule, Jews were taken hostage, fined, and deported to labor and death camps. After liberation, Jews regained their rights and embraced French culture and language. This marked a significant

⁴⁰ In the previous chapter, “Reexamining the ‘Réveil juif’: Ottoman Immigrants in Paris,” I examine the literary production of Sephardic Jews in France who emigrated from the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century. These immigrants were educated in schools run by the French Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), an organization that, from its inception in 1860, established schools throughout the Ottoman Empire and North Africa to educate Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews. When the Ottoman Empire began to collapse, its Jews, already familiar with French culture and language from their AIU educations, immigrated en masse to France.

change in Judeo-Tunisian culture, as Arab influence in language, dress, art, and customs was replaced by French. This French cultural assimilation “did not allow a return to [the Arab influence that] preceded it” (187) and thus led to large-scale Tunisian Jewish immigration to France after Tunisian independence.⁴¹

In his 1957 study *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du Portrait du colonisateur* [*Portrait of the Colonized, preceded by Portrait of the Colonizer*], Albert Memmi examines the marginalized position of Jews living in French-colonized Tunisia. The Tunisian Jew, Memmi argues, does not fit into the colonialist dichotomy—neither colonizer nor colonized, he shares in both identities but does not fully belong to either. As an “espèce de métis de la colonisation” [sort of hybrid of colonization] (Memmi *Portrait* 25), the Tunisian Jew does not just straddle the colonial divide, but is in constant motion between the colonizers and the colonized. This movement echoes the negotiation Navon describes between tradition and modernity.⁴² The Jewish community sees in their French colonizers a model of cultural progress, and in their Muslim counterparts, a traditional world that has no place in modern times. Although the Jewish population may share the socioeconomic condition of the colonized, they reject the colonized’s values as belonging to “un monde déchu” [a fallen world]; the Jews are invested in moving away from this world through “leurs efforts pour oublier le passé” [their efforts to forget the past] (53). Thus it is only through a negation of cultural history that the Jews can distance themselves from the colonized, yet even as they learn new customs and languages, they are never accepted by the colonizers they emulate. Moreover, they remain “éternels candidats hésitants et refusés à l’assimilation” [eternally hesitant candidates refused assimilation], reluctant to shed their past and fully assimilate into French society.

Memmi explores this liminal position in his semi-autobiographic novel *La Statue de sel*.⁴³ In Albert Camus’s preface to the novel, he comments on the protagonist as a reflection of the author, who is “un écrivain français de Tunisie qui n’est ni français ni tunisien. C’est à peine s’il est juif puisque, dans un sens, il ne voudrait pas l’être” [a French writer from Tunisia who is neither French nor Tunisian. He is hardly Jewish

⁴¹ For further background on Tunisian Jewry and on Albert Memmi in particular, see Shaked and Bar On 2001.

⁴² In the previous chapter, “Reexamining the ‘Réveil juif’: Ottoman Immigrants in Paris,” I discuss Abraham H. Navon, whose articles, novels, and plays were aimed at fellow Ottoman immigrants, and advocate integrating into French culture without losing certain aspects of Sephardic tradition.

⁴³ Although *Statue* is a work of fiction, it is strongly autobiographic. The autobiographical narrative is particularly suited to Memmi’s project of showing the inarticulated space between tradition and modernity. Marc Caplan argues that “Through the autobiographical narrative, the ambivalence of the author situated between tradition and modernity – the community inside and the society outside, the mythical and the referential, the oral and the written – comes into psychological and dramatic focus” (Caplan 82).

because, in a sense, he doesn't want to be] (*Memmi Statue* 9). Thus Memmi is defined by negation, and given a negative identity that operates on multiple levels: he is at once barred from being French and Tunisian by those who claim those identities (in this case, by Camus, who cannot help acting as synecdoche for the entire French North African community that rejected Memmi), yet he is reluctant to embrace the Jewish identity that is offered to him. Similarly, Memmi's protagonist, Alexandre Mordekhai Benillouche, struggles to fit into the world surrounding him. He is drawn into French society through his privileged position as recipient of an academic scholarship; the more time he spends among his pied-noir classmates, the more distanced he feels from his own family. His alienation is not only cultural, but also linguistic, religious, and socioeconomic, as he feels himself pulled away from traditional Judaism, his Judeo-Arabic-speaking mother, and the ghettoized and poverty-stricken Jewish community of Tunis.

When Camus defines Memmi by negation, he introduces an unusual clause into the issue of Memmi's Judaism by asserting that Memmi is barely Jewish because "il ne voudrait pas l'être" [he doesn't want to be], thus suggesting that Judaism is a choice—something Memmi seems to disprove when Benillouche tries but fails to fully assimilate into French, non-Jewish society. Yet what Camus appears to be questioning is the very nature of Judaism: "Il ne lui resterait plus que d'être vraiment juif si, pour l'être, il ne fallait partager une foi qu'il n'a pas et des traditions qui lui paraissent ridicules" [The only thing remaining for him was to be genuinely Jewish if, to be Jewish, it was not necessary to share a faith he does not profess and traditions which seem to him ridiculous] (9). Is it possible to be Jewish yet still question the religion's faith and traditions? Memmi's novel suggests that this is, indeed, possible, even inescapable: Although Benillouche rebels against fundamentals of Jewish religion and his family's traditions, he continues to identify himself as Jewish—for example, he is unable to reject the practice of circumcision. Camus's conclusion suggests that, through the writing process, Memmi has replaced Jewish tradition with a new form of Judaism: "En écrivant sur la difficulté d'être juif, l'auteur finalement a choisi de l'être (et c'est tant mieux), remplaçant la conscience traditionnelle religieuse de ses pères par une conscience plus moderne, dramatique, intelligente, solidaire sans illusions" [In writing about the difficulty of being Jewish, the author finally chose to be Jewish (and it's for the better), replacing the traditional religious consciousness of his ancestors with a more modern consciousness that is dramatic, intelligent, united and without illusions] (10). Thus Camus suggests that being Jewish is not only a choice, but that Judaism can be molded to fit modern times.

We already see evidence of the changing face of Judaism in Benillouche's childhood, despite the fact that his narrative pits the modernity of his new surroundings against the traditional milieu in which he was raised. His family observes

the Sabbath, but in their own way: “Depuis longtemps, nous avons abandonné la synagogue pour les fournisseurs mais le samedi matin restait saint” [We had long ago abandoned the synagogue and visited our suppliers instead, but Saturday morning remained holy] (28). Not only does the Benillouche family skip traditional Saturday worship, but they conduct business on a day on which, according to religious doctrine, business is forbidden. However, Saturday remains a holy day for them—Benillouche and his father dress nicely and share their promenade with the “fidèles qui revenaient du temple” [worshippers leaving temple] (28), before joining friends at a cafe. Benillouche’s father thus observes a sort of Sabbath atmosphere of ritual without actually participating in traditional Sabbath rites. In addition to separating themselves from the more traditional Tunisian Jewish community by their lack of religious observation, the family is geographically removed. Benillouche explains, “Je ne suis pas né au ghetto. L’Impasse se trouvait à la lisière du quartier juif, mais cela suffisait à l’orgueil de mon père” [I was not born in the ghetto. The Impasse was situated at the outskirts of the Jewish quarter, but that was enough to fulfill my father’s pride] (33). Thus, even before rebelling against his family, Benillouche is already removed from the greater Tunisian Jewish community by religious observance, geography, and socioeconomic status.

Benillouche’s struggle between his ancestral roots, his desire to join the world of the French colonizer, and his marginalized identity as a Tunisian Jew embracing Eurocentric modernity in colonial Tunisia recalls the struggle Navon and others describe of Ottoman Jewish immigrants in France. Just as Joseph Pérez, upon meeting Françoise Delombre, is embarrassed by his Jewish given name, adopting “René” in the place of “Joseph,” Benillouche, enrolled at a French high school, neglects the Jewish marker in his own name: “Au lycée, rapidement, je pris l’habitude de sauter Mordekhaï dans mes copies ; et bientôt je l’oubliai comme une vieille peau” [At the high school, I quickly adopted the habit of skipping Mordekhaï in my work; and soon I forgot it like an old skin] (108).⁴⁴ Despite his attempts at omitting his Jewish name, he finds himself as attached to it as if it were indeed his skin—“cette peau traînait, bien collée” [this skin dragged behind me, stuck to me] (108)—and, like Pérez, Benillouche cannot prevent friends from his past, or school officials, from reminding him of his Jewish moniker.

Benillouche’s rejection of his Jewish name is only part of his struggle to gain acceptance in the world of the French colonizer. He will never fully assimilate, but in the process of trying to do so, he succeeds in cutting ties with his ancestral roots. He finds himself a stranger in his own city (110), a city that embodies his ancestry and has now become “hostile, comme une mère dénaturée” [hostile, like an unnatural mother]

⁴⁴ Joseph Pérez is the eponymous protagonist of Navon’s most successful novel, discussed in the previous chapter.

(117). He understands that even breaking with his origins will not allow him entry into French society: “je vis bien que si je me coupais inévitablement de mon milieu d’origine, je n’entrerais pas dans un autre” [I saw that if I cut myself off entirely from my background, I would not enter into another] (123). However, by participating in the French educational system, by mastering Racine,⁴⁵ and by striving to assimilate, he finds that he has no common ground with those who share his background: “je réalisai l’étendue de mon éloignement, combien le lycée et mes études m’avaient rendu impossible une vie commune avec mon peuple” [I realized the extent of my alienation, how much the high school and my studies had made it impossible to live together with my people] (309). Conceptualizing cultural belonging in spatial terms, Benillouche finds himself without a cultural homeland, stranded in the isolating marginalized space of hybrid identity.

Space is an important framework for a discussion of Benillouche’s identity struggle. While spatial terms are often used to discuss colonialism, here, the traditional dichotomy of metropole and periphery is complicated by two main factors. First of all, *Statue* takes place entirely in Tunisia; the metropole is represented by French Tunisians, Benillouche’s French cultural education, and the French language – not France itself. In fact, France, as we will see, is never fully realized beyond its representation in Benillouche’s imagination; Benillouche never gains access to the physical metropole. France’s absence in the traditional colonial dichotomy draws attention to Benillouche’s true struggle. Instead of being torn between France and Tunisia, he is pulled three ways – by his Jewish roots, his Tunisian culture, and his desire for acceptance into Tunisian French society. By rejecting his roots, he is attempting to shed an inextricable part of his identity. As he realizes that hybridity is the only solution to his crisis, he is left without a cultural space for the expression of that hybrid identity.

Even if Benillouche no longer feels a kinship with his own people, he cannot separate himself from his origins. Much like the Ottoman immigrants, Benillouche soon realizes that cultural belonging may be out of his control. While visiting his friend Henry, he remarks on his dislike of Henry’s violin playing: “J’avoue que la musique occidentale m’ennuyait un peu” [I admit that Western music bores me a little] (175). The tone of his avowal suggests that he is not comfortable with his natural reaction to Henry’s music; he tries to enjoy it (“Je forçais mon attention à suivre le déroulement des partitions” [I forced myself to follow the development of the score] (175)) because it is another step in assimilation to Western culture. He is at Henry’s, in fact, to avoid a Berber-Jewish ritual taking place at his parents’; when he returns home, thinking the ritual would be over, he finds a woman in a trance, dancing to music played by an

⁴⁵ (whose name means “root,” and thus cannot help but invoke Benillouche’s attempt at adopting French roots)

African band. The violence of his reaction to the ritual can only be read in stark contrast to his mild distaste for Henry's music. Whereas Henry's music causes his mind to wander, the ritual music draws him into an overwhelmed, dream-like state: "Je croyais entendre et sentir le déchirement des chairs dans l'atroce bataille contre le rythme, contre les démons" [I thought I heard and felt flesh tearing in the terrible struggle against the rhythm, against the demons] (180). When he discovers his mother is the entranced dancer, he nearly loses control: "Je me sentais délirer" [I felt myself become delirious] (182). Just as French supplants his mother tongue, his concept of "mother" has been influenced by his French education. He states that "[d]ans mes livres, la mere était un être plus doux et plus humain que les autres, symbole du dévouement et de l'intelligence intuitive" [in my books, the mother was gentler and more human than others, a symbol of devotion and intuitive intelligence] (180). The mother who is dancing before him is neither gentle nor, in Benillouche's eyes, human – she is a "loque envoûtée" [bewitched wreck] he barely recognizes as his mother (180). Although Benillouche is extremely upset by the scene he witnesses, his reaction is not a rejection of the ritual; as it draws to a close, he realizes that it has touched him deeply, where Western music could not: "Après quinze ans de culture occidentale, dix ans de refus conscient de l'Afrique, peut-être faut-il que j'accepte cette évidence : ses vieilles mesures monocordes me bouleversent davantage que les grandes musiques de l'Europe" [After fifteen years of Western culture, ten years of conscious rejection of Africa, maybe I had to accept the obvious: that these ancient and monotonous melodies moved me more than all the great music of Europe] (184). He concludes, "Ah! je suis irrémédiablement un barbare!" [Ah! I am an irreparable barbarian!] (184), thus accepting, but not embracing, his roots. One cannot help but read "berbère" [Berber] into "barbare" [barbarian], and thus take this statement as Benillouche's acknowledgement of his maternal Berber-Jewish heritage.

Seeing himself as a barbarian is the result of a lifetime of rejecting the identity he was born with and struggling to adopt a hybrid identity comprising his Jewish and Berber roots, his Tunisian surroundings, and the French colonial influences he gleans from school and his new circle of French-Tunisian friends. Ultimately, this struggle results in an identity crisis that leads Benillouche to see himself as a stranger: "Je suis devant moi-même comme devant un miroir infidèle ; l'étrangeté s'est glissée au cœur de ma vie" [I stand before myself as before an unfaithful mirror: strangeness had slipped into the core of my life] (346). Benillouche's observation draws the agency away from himself. By positing "strangeness" as the grammatical subject, Benillouche suggests that he has become a stranger to himself without realizing it; he has no control over the process. Earlier in the novel, he grants that agency to his professors, who "m'aiderent à accoucher de moi-même" [helped me to give birth to myself] (237), as if there is a secret self hiding within him that only his professors, the embodiment

of French culture and education, can bring out. As his professors will supplant his mother as maternal figure, his newly born French self will, he hopes, displace the Berber identity he longs to reject. He sees French education as a way to reconstruct himself:

J'étais moi et je m'étais étranger [...] Je ne serais pas Alexandre Mordekhai Benillouche, je sortirais de moi-même et irais vers les autres. Je n'étais ni juif, ni oriental, ni pauvre, je n'appartenais pas à ma famille ni à sa religion, j'étais neuf et transparent : j'étais à faire

[I was myself and I was a stranger... I would not be Alexandre Mordekhai Benillouche, I would escape from myself and go towards others. I was neither Jewish, nor Oriental, nor poor, I did not belong to my family or to their religion, I was new and transparent: I was to be remade] (247-8)

Throughout the novel, Benillouche tries to remake himself, to fashion a hybrid identity that will allow him to participate in the incompatible worlds of his family, French society, and colonial Tunisia. He begins by looking at his origins—not actual, but imagined. By assigning himself new origins, he tries to eliminate his mother's role in his heritage. He asks himself, “De quelle tribu montagnarde mes ancêtres sont-ils sortis ? Qui suis-je enfin ?” [From which mountain tribe did my ancestors emerge? Who am I, after all?] (109). He searches everything from his facial features to state records to find an answer to this question, attributing his ancestral roots to origins as disparate as a family of Berber princes or an Italian Renaissance painter.⁴⁶ He tries to force himself to believe these newfound roots: “Je découpai l'article du gros Larousse et montrai à mes amis les toiles de mon aïeul” [I cut out the article from the fat Larousse and showed my friends my ancestor's paintings] (109). He tries to use a symbol of the French educational system—the Larousse dictionary—as a source of proof of his Western heritage, thus displacing his identity fully into the Western world. But the ancestral evidence falls short, and Benillouche is forced to abandon his project of arbitrary genealogy.⁴⁷

Benillouche's sense of alienation is heightened by the language politics of colonial Tunisia. Language acts as a crucial marker of exclusion in colonial society, keeping, in this case, the Arabic-speaking Muslims separate from the French-speaking occupiers, and the Judeo-Arabic- or Judeo-Spanish-speaking Jews apart from both

⁴⁶ Alan Astro argues that Benillouche's choice of an Italian Renaissance painter “can only refer to Memmi” – both the author of the book, and the painter Lippo Memmi – thus “blurring the distinction between author and narrator” (Astro 81). This further supports my claim that Benillouche's project of writing his identity into French literature mimics Memmi's.

⁴⁷ One of Memmi's assumed ancestors is a family of Berber princes converted by the warrior queen “la Kahèna” (109). In a later novel, *Le Scorpion* (1969), Memmi repeats this claim but spells the queen's name “Cahèna.” Guy Dugas suggests that this is a deliberate change meant to give the queen a name closer to “Cohen,” and thus an undeniably Jewish identity. (Dugas *Albert Memmi* 56)

groups. Even the structure of the novel hints at the importance of language, as the first part, “L’Impasse” [The Impasse/Dead End], later gives way to the third and final section, “Le Monde” [The World], indicating Benillouche’s expanded access to language and space.⁴⁸ Although “Impasse” refers literally to the street Benillouche grew up on, it also indicates the stifling environment of this time in his life; once he is awarded the academic scholarship that will allow him entry into the French high school, and thus, possibly, into French society, the section ends. Yet even within “L’Impasse,” Benillouche feels linguistically stranded:

Ma langue maternelle est le patois tunisien, que je parle avec l’accent juste des petits musulmans du quartier [...] Ma correction relative me valait les moqueries de tout le monde ; mes coreligionnaires n’aimaient pas cette étrangeté ou croyaient à quelque affectation, les musulmans soupçonnaient une singerie.

[My mother tongue is Tunisian patois, which I speak with the exact accent of the little Muslims in my quarter... My relative correction was met by everyone’s mockery; my fellow Jews didn’t like this strangeness, which they took for affect, and the Muslims suspected a mimicry.] (43)

As Alan Astro, in an essay on the novel, notes, “His ‘mother tongue’ is neither his mother’s tongue nor that of his community of origin, and those with whom he shares the patois regard him as an outsider” (Astro 63). Benillouche’s native language and culture have no true community; even without French influence, he is an outsider. His attempts to adopt the language and culture of the French occupiers, and thus become part of the French Tunisian community, can never fully drive out his origins.

Even as Benillouche tries to alter his accent, which is the product of multiple linguistic influences, he never succeeds in assimilating linguistically. Language is clearly very important to him, even as a child. Raised on superstitious sayings, he takes language too literally, turning metaphorical exclamations into performative speeches which he then internalizes: “Lorsqu’un camarade me dit: ‘Que tu crèves !’ j’ai froid à la nuque et je pressens l’horreur de la mort. Lorsqu’on me dit: ‘Que la maladie te prenne!’ je me sens défaillir déjà” [When a classmate tells me, “Drop dead!”, I get a chill on my neck and sense the horror of death. When they say, “I hope you get sick!” I already feel myself grow faint] (Memmi *Statue* 45). Benillouche is never able to rid himself of “cet envoûtement magique du langage” [this magic spell of language] (45), which can be seen, in and of itself, as a type of language system—one of many that contribute to

⁴⁸ See also Seán Hand’s discussion of the novel’s structure as stages of self-definition which Benillouche analyzes “intellectually in order not to look back existentially” (95). Hand reads linguistic mastery as Benillouche’s tool for narrative “looking back.” Hand, Seán. “‘Don’t Look Back’: Albert Memmi’s *La Statue de sel*.” *African Francophone Writing: A Critical Introduction*. Eds. Laïla Ibnlfassi and Nicki Hitchcott. Oxford: Berg, 1996. 93-102. Print.

Benillouche's identity. Benillouche constructs a new hybrid identity for himself, in part, through linguistic mastery. He sees French language as the epitome of French identity. The "diction parfaite" [perfect diction] of his school's director "représentait pour nous le vrai Français, le Français de France, dont le prestige restait inentamé" [represented, for us, the real French, the French of France, whose prestige remained infallible] (93), while the "accent à peine maîtrisé" [barely mastered accent] (104) of his benefactor, M. Bismuth, serves to undermine his authority in Benillouche's eyes. These experiences teach Benillouche that, in order to attain the French identity he covets, he must "pénétr[er] l'âme de la civilisation en maîtrisant la langue" [penetrate the soul of the civilization by mastering the language] (123).

Benillouche succeeds in mastering the French language, but never French society. His linguistic mastery even seems to cause a further rift in the identity he is trying to construct. The multiple languages that form his identity are unable to coexist: "Les deux parties de mon être parlaient chacune une langue différente et jamais ne se comprendraient" [The two parts of my being each spoke a different language and would never understand each other] (247). These competing identities are not on equal footing. His connection to French is stronger than that to his mother tongue:

Je pense en français et mes soliloques intérieurs sont depuis longtemps de langue française. Lorsqu'il m'arrive de me parler en patois, j'ai toujours l'impression bizarre, non d'utiliser une langue étrangère, mais d'entendre une partie obscure de moi-même, trop intime et périmée, oubliée jusqu'à l'étrangeté. [I think in French and my interior monologues have been, for a long time now, in French. When I speak to myself in patois, I always have the strange impression, not of using a foreign language, but of hearing an obscure part of myself, too intimate and obsolete, forgotten to the point of foreignness.] (314)

French acts as a mask covering Benillouche's bifurcated identity. As Benillouche lives in a world of single national, ethnic or linguistic allegiances, by speaking only in French, he can hide his hybridity. His attitude toward French and patois recalls Camus's preface, in which he concludes that in Memmi's own identity struggle, "pour la langue au moins, il s'est voulu français" [for the language, at least, he willed himself to be French] (10), as if by writing in French, Memmi is authoritatively claiming the language, and its accompanying identity, as his own.

Just like Memmi, Benillouche gains ownership of the French language and thus his French identity through the writing process. He finds that writing grants him agency over his identity crisis by allowing him to invent an identity for himself that is both new and a composite of his cultural and linguistic influences: "Pour m'alléger du poids du monde, je le mis sur le papier : je commençai à écrire. Je découvris l'extraordinaire jouissance de maîtriser toute existence en la recréant" [To lighten the burden of the weight of the world, I put it on paper: I began to write. I discovered the

extraordinary pleasure of mastering all of existence in recreating it] (123). Writing thus occupies a central role in Benillouche's identity and in the novel itself. The novel is framed by a brief preface in which Benillouche finds himself unable to write the answer to his final exam, which asks him to "[é]tudiez les éléments condillaciens dans la philosophie de Stuart Mill" [study the elements of Condillac in Stuart Mill's philosophy] (12). Both Étienne Bonnet de Condillac and John Stuart Mill offer Eurocentric views on human ability, knowledge, and individual freedom; by refusing to engage in this discourse, and substituting his own story (the rest of the novel can be read as what he writes instead of the answer to the exam), Benillouche offers an alternate philosophy to that of the French educational system in which he has been raised. His response is not a rejection of the exam entirely; he says, "j'ai écrit sept heures durant comme les autres; j'ai même profité du quart d'heure supplémentaire accordé aux traînants" [I wrote for seven hours like the others; I even took advantage of the extra fifteen minutes granted to stragglers] (15). Rather, he uses the space of the exam—the culmination of his French education—to examine how sensation and experience (Condillac) influence human knowledge and individual freedom (Mill) under conditions of colonialism and alienation.

It is significant that Benillouche chooses an academic space in which to address his identity struggle because French academia has played such a large role in alienating him from his roots. In *Portrait*, Memmi writes, "celui qui a la chance insigne d'être accueilli dans une école, n'en sera pas nationalement sauvé : la mémoire qu'on lui constitue n'est sûrement pas celle de son peuple" [whoever has the great luck to be accepted into a school will not be saved nationally: the memory which is assigned to him is certainly not that of his people] (141). Thus acceptance into the French system of education inculcates a foreign cultural memory that condemns the colonized to forget his or her own culture. But because Benillouche can never internalize and appropriate the foreign cultural memory, he uses the tools of the colonizer—European philosophy, French academia, and the French language—to subvert his marginalized position, and assert himself in a "third" space that exists in writing.⁴⁹ This external space allows him to use language to his benefit rather than to his detriment—he writes in perfect academic French, devoid of any accent or foreign marker. Jacques Derrida sees French literature as an unaccented space for the Algerian Jew. He claims, "On n'entrait dans la littérature française qu'en perdant son accent" [One entered into French literature only by losing one's accent] (Derrida 77); even if the writer's spoken

⁴⁹ This third space's form as literature – the narrative of *Statue* – provides a unique space for self-expression. Marc Caplan suggests that the "mediation of literary form" allows the "peripheral intellectual" to create "an autonomous cultural space ideally independent from both the confines of the tradition and the coercive or repressive aspects of the imperial order" (Caplan 120).

French is still markedly foreign, his or her participation in the monolingual world of French literature does not betray accented origins.

Benillouche's act of resistance can be read as an act of subversive mimicry similar to what Scheikevitch feared in the Salonican Jews' emulation of French literature and fashion in the previous chapter, but Benillouche is operating within the colonial framework Bhabha envisaged when developing his terminology. According to Homi Bhabha, mimicry occurs when the colonized subject imitates aspects of the colonizer's culture as a possibly subconscious attempt to gain the power represented by that culture (Bhabha 85-92). By writing a new form of French identity into the traditional space of French academia, Benillouche repurposes the colonizer's mode of historiography for his own use. This act both mocks the colonizer's power and endows the colonized's project with the authority of the dominant discourse.⁵⁰

Benillouche can be read as exemplary of the "métis de la colonisation" [hybrid of colonization] Memmi describes in *Portrait*; through his narrative, he creates an identity inclusive of his cultural *métissage*. This identity allows him a new form of personal expression that can cross cultural boundaries—ultimately, Benillouche creates a Francophone narrative, a story of a Jew in colonial Tunisia, written in French and marketed for a French audience (the professors who will read his exam). In a similar way, Memmi himself writes *La Statue de sel* as an assertion, and realization, of his hybrid identity. As Camus suggests, by writing about the difficulty of being a French-educated Jew in Tunisia, Memmi chooses to inhabit this identity, while at the same time formulating a more modern view of the practice of Judaism—much like the view Navon advocates for his fellow Ottoman immigrants.

Although Benillouche uses the exam to work through and assert his Judeo-Tunisian-French identity, it is not the perfect solution to his crisis. Throughout the novel, Benillouche treats his Jewish identity with scorn, hatred, and disgust. His continued connection to his Judaism is not entirely voluntary. Although he rebels against his family's Jewish rituals, he cannot bring himself to fully reject them. When he refuses to respect certain traditions, his father "lança le test définitif" [launched the definitive test]: "Je suppose que tu ne circonciras pas tes garçons" [I suppose you won't circumcise your sons] (166), he tells him. By issuing a negative statement as opposed to an open-ended question, Benillouche's father poses a challenge that his son cannot bring himself to face; Benillouche cannot reject this basic tenant of Jewish tradition. As much as he feels like an outsider in his religious community, he recognizes that his rebellion is not, ultimately, against an external culture, but against himself: "Je me battais contre n'importe qui, c'est-à-dire contre moi-même" [I fought against anyone, that is to say, against myself] (157). By the end of the novel, Benillouche must embrace

⁵⁰ Benillouche's textual resistance can also be seen as a non-violent alternative to the solutions Frantz Fanon suggests for the colonial subject.

his Jewish identity; the hybridity he claims in his exam includes his Jewish self just as it incorporates his other cultural influences.

The exam as a statement of resolution poses additional problems in light of the narrative of the novel. “L’épreuve” [The Test], the section in which Benillouche completes his exam, is not the end of the novel; it is followed by “Le départ,” in which Benillouche and his friend Henry prepare to go to Argentina.⁵¹ Argentina lies firmly outside the dichotomy of Europe and North Africa that has occupied Benillouche’s imagination throughout the novel. At the same time, its colonial past and its close cultural ties to Europe (Buenos Aires is often called “the Paris of South America”) make it an obvious choice for a subject trying to escape colonialism. As Benillouche’s nontraditional exam response effectively ends his academic career, he sees no future in Tunisia but death (367); he says, “Ici n’existe pas de solution” [Here, there is no solution] (368). Although he has managed to express a new identity through writing, he is unable to claim this selfhood in life. He hopes his experiences will “serve[nt] à quelques-uns” [serve others] (369) but cannot find a way for them to serve himself. He cannot even express to Henry why he wants to go to Argentina; an explanation would be “insupportable” [unbearable] (374). He claims he wants to leave for the sake of leaving; it is clear that he is running from his family. Stopping himself from subconsciously referring to an old family superstition, he says, “Voilà mes libérations” [Here are my deliverances] (373). Before leaving, he destroys the eight thick notebooks that make up his journal. Despite having found a way to articulate his hybridity in writing, Benillouche still struggles to reject his past.

Although Benillouche does not fully claim the hybridity he describes in his exam response, on the narrative level, the exam statement does address the politics of representing difference which plague its author. As the text comprising *La Statue de sel*, it exists, even within the confines of colonialism, as a document asserting an identity that was previously unarticulated. By prefacing the statement with a biography of Benillouche’s life, Memmi assures that it will be read as the product of his character’s cultural influences, and thus as the identity statement of anyone who shares Benillouche’s experiences. As a text written towards the end of France’s colonial rule – by 1953, Tunisia had already embarked on the road to the independence it achieved in 1956 – it provides a model for French-educated Tunisian Jews, and a way to conceptualize their identity in a possible postcolonial future. The novel’s titular reference to the Biblical pillar of salt suggests that as much as the book is about

⁵¹ There are two chapters entitled “L’épreuve”; the first, prefatory chapter (11-14), and the second-to-last (355-66).

looking back, it does so only to advocate looking forward.⁵² Yet under colonialism, France remains in a position of political, linguistic, and cultural power. Given these constraints, Benillouche's solution lays a viable claim to Frenchness for Tunisian Jews. Moreover, by writing the novel, Memmi is carving out a space in French literature for Jewish colonial identity, and bringing the colonial to the mainland by making Judeo-Tunisian identity part of French literature.⁵³

If Benillouche uses writing as a way to assert his hybrid identity in a world that does not yet have a place for that identity, Marcel Bénabou, in *Jacob, Ménaïhem et Mimoun: Une épopée familiale*, takes the act of writing as resistance a step further. The novel is at once an essay on the impossibility of writing a book, a genealogical study of the narrator's roots, and a memoir of life as a Jew growing up in French Morocco. In fact, the novel blurs the boundaries of literary convention and genre to the extent that Bénabou felt the need to write an article two years after the book's publication explaining his intentions and the written result. He begins by acknowledging the misleading nature of his title; the novel is not, at all, the "épopée familiale" [family epic] it claims to be. Indeed, other than the "quelques dizaines de pages [...] consacrées aux trois héros éponymes (ou plutôt à deux d'entre eux)" [some dozen pages...devoted to the three eponymous heroes (or rather to two of them)] (Bénabou "Genèse" 95), the epic is "absente" or "fantôme" (96). And, despite the book's title, its focus on anecdotal memory, and a first-person narrator "qui semble, bien souvent, se confondre avec l'auteur" [who seems, rather often, to merge with the author], Bénabou insists that it is not an autobiography: "[À] aucun moment, et quelle que soit la place qu'y occupaient ces traits personnels, ces livres n'ont aucunement été conçus comme devant être, au sens habituel du mot, des récits autobiographiques" [At no time, and regardless of the place these personal traits hold in the novel, were these books conceived as being, in the usual sense of the word, autobiographical accounts] (98) – a statement many critics seems to miss or ignore.⁵⁴ While it may be tempting to conflate the author with the first-person narrator of the same name, as my argument shows, it

⁵² Seán Hand calls the book a "personal looking back" and a "political looking forward" (100). For further reading, see Hand, Seán. "'Don't Look Back': Albert Memmi's *La Statue de sel*." *African Francophone Writing: A Critical Introduction*. Eds. Laïla Ibnlfassi and Nicki Hitchcott. Oxford: Berg, 1996. 93-102. Print.

⁵³ The first French Tunisian work was Salah Ferhat's 1918 *Poèmes* (Bekri and Morris 178); the first Judeo-Tunisian work in French was published in 1919 (Dugas *Bibliographie* 17). However, there was limited production of French colonial literature until after independence. The limited scope of Memmi's novel as a solution to the colonial crisis should be understood as operating within the confines of an emerging literary tradition.

⁵⁴ See, for example: Bornier, Evelyne M. "Jacob, Ménaïhem et Mimoun: une épopée familiale. Poétique de l'identité chez Marcel Bénabou." *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 7.1-2 (2004): 67-79; and Elbaz 1999.

is essential to keep them separated; while the narrator's project mimics the author's, they are two separate endeavors.

Yet why would Bénabou set up a text as a family epic only to deceive his readers, some of whom “attendent encore” [are still waiting] (95) for the promise of the title to be fulfilled? Unlike *La Statue de sel*, which was published three years before the decolonization of Tunisia, *Jacob* was published nearly forty years after Moroccan independence, by a writer who was already part of an established French literary group.⁵⁵ Moroccan Jewish life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was comparable to Jewish life across colonial North Africa (Schroeter and Chetrit 171), though French influence was perhaps even stronger than elsewhere, as Morocco was home to the largest AIU presence (176).⁵⁶ As of the late nineteenth century, Moroccan Jews were organized in semi-autonomous communities run by Jewish elites, created by a system of foreign European protection (177-8). The AIU's attempts at gaining Moroccan Jews the status of French citizen enjoyed by their Algerian counterparts failed (180). As Bénabou's narrator points out in *Jacob*, during World War II, the Jews of Morocco, although subject to discrimination, were not deported, and were thus relatively protected. By the end of the war, there were 250,000-270,000 Jews living in Morocco (Schroeter 146). However, following the establishment of Israel in 1948, they suffered persecution and hate crimes, and once Morocco gained independence from France in 1956, many Jews, including Bénabou, immigrated to France or Israel (despite official attempts to ban Jewish emigration).

Like Jews from Tunisia and the Ottoman Empire, Moroccan Jews were exposed to heavy French cultural and linguistic influence, through the presence of both the French protectorate and AIU schools. Like Memmi, Bénabou is writing his story in the language of the colonizer. However, whereas Memmi is writing about contemporary events, Bénabou focuses only on the past (both his own past and the historical past); he is trying to use his personal history to tell the universal story of Moroccan Jewry. The blatant impossibility of his task, acknowledged repeatedly throughout the narrative, suggests that the tools at his disposal—personal and collective memory, the French language, and a panoply of literary models—are insufficient. The genre of the “impossible book” reflects the intended subject matter's inexpressibility. Bénabou will never be able to write a family epic; he can only write about the impossibility of telling the story of a marginalized people using the linguistic and cultural equipment of the colonizer. Indeed, Robert Elbaz argues that Bénabou's problems are endemic to “all Maghrebian biographical narratives”; such narratives “fail to become a story” because “the narrative consciousness cannot let go of its problematic colonial past” (Elbaz

⁵⁵ I will discuss Bénabou's participation in OuLiPo later in this chapter.

⁵⁶ See Laskier, Michael M. *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco: 1862-1962*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1983.

"Bénabou" 48).⁵⁷ Moreover, that past, and any present and future, cannot be narrated because of a shortcoming in linguistic expression; these texts beg the question of "whether one's reality is representable with those linguistic tools that were imposed upon its narrative consciousness" (49) – in other words, whether the story of the colonized can be told in the language of the colonizer.⁵⁸

Like Benillouche, Bénabou's narrator attributes the identity crisis that is central to the failure of the "family epic" to the cultural *métissage* produced by the contrast of a French colonial education and a Jewish-Moroccan upbringing. As Memmi argues in *Portrait*, the academic indoctrination of French culture and history conflicts with the personal and ancestral history of the colonized.⁵⁹ The history Bénabou's narrator learns is "sans lien avec le passé de mes véritables aïeux" [without connection to the past of my real ancestors] (Bénabou *Jacob* 21). The two cultural histories fight for ownership of the narrator's past, producing an overabundance of memory, whether ancestral or adopted: "Je découvris que ce qui me nuisait, c'était la profusion, le foisonnement, l'hypertrophie, de la mémoire. Ou plutôt la tyrannie que cette mémoire, encombrée d'un passé marocain qui se refusait à passer, exerçait sur mon rapport à la réalité" [I discovered that what harmed me was the profusion, the proliferation, the hypertrophy, of memory. Or rather the tyranny that this memory, cluttered by a Moroccan past that refused to budge, exercised on my relationship with reality] (21). The cultural indoctrination of French colonial education goes beyond the refrain of "le trop fameux *Nos ancêtres les Gaulois*" [the notorious *Our ancestors the Gauls*] (21); by sharing in French academia, the colonized subject also shares in the colonizer's present and future: "Puisque j'étais engagé dans la même histoire que les descendants des Gaulois, puisque j'étais prêt à partager leur avenir, qu'y avait-il de si ridicule à épouser, au

⁵⁷ Frederic Jameson's argument that all third-world texts should be read as national allegories (in his essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text*, 15 [Autumn 1986], pp. 65-88) is similarly dismissive of the literary impact and narrative nuances of marginalized literature.

⁵⁸ While I agree with Elbaz's assertion that language poses a serious obstacle in the narration of Bénabou's (or the Maghrebian author's) narrative, I disagree with his statement that the Maghrebian text fails because it uses the "the historical tools and rational modes of expression of the colonizing world" in its quest "to recreate the sheltered world of before the colonial fall" (60). The post-colonial Maghrebian narrative (and even the colonial, in Memmi's case) does not seek to recreate a past world, but to find ways of realizing through narrative expression the future of the Maghrebian identity. To say that the Maghrebian text is only concerned with the pre-colonial world (or indeed, the world "before the colonial fall," which implies the colonized world) would negate any literary attempt at staking claim to the present or future, and suggest that Maghrebian literature ignores its contemporary situation.

⁵⁹ As previously cited, at school, "la mémoire qu'on lui constitue n'est sûrement pas celle de son peuple" [the memory which is assigned to him is certainly not that of his people] (Memmi *Portrait* 141). For a study of French colonial education and its impact on ancestral culture in Indochina, see Ha, Marie-Paule. "From 'Nos Ancêtres, les Gaulois' to 'Leur Culture Ancestrale': Symbolic Violence and the Politics of Colonial Schooling in Indochina." *French Colonial History* 3 (2003): 101-117.

moins métaphoriquement, leur passé ?” [Since I was engaged in the same history as the descendants of the Gauls, since I was ready to share their future, what was so ridiculous about adopting, at least metaphorically, their past?] (21). However, internalizing and appropriating French history poses problems for the Moroccan Jew; the adopted history cannot remain metaphorical, but becomes the instigator of a very real feeling of nostalgia: “Je ressentais aussitôt combien charnellement me manquaient cette Bretagne, cette Bourgogne ou cette Normandie, si proches de mon cœur, si familières à ma mémoire, et où je n’avais jamais mis le pied” [I immediately felt how I physically missed this Brittany, this Burgundy or this Normandy, so close to my heart, so familiar to my memory, and where I had never set foot] (22). Thus the memory of the French colonizer becomes Bénabou’s narrator’s own memory, albeit a prosthetic one. His adopted memory tries to supplant and devalue his ancestral past, leaving him with “un sentiment quasi permanent de nostalgie, de frustration mêlées” [an almost permanent feeling of nostalgia mixed with frustration] (22). Yet he can never fully rid himself of his Moroccan-Jewish identity: “J’acceptais de laisser coexister en moi (même si c’était parfois avec mauvaise conscience et à des niveaux de croyance très différents) des mondes aux références contradictoires” [I agreed to let coexist in me (albeit sometimes with a bad conscience, and very different levels of belief) worlds with conflicting references] (68).

French colonial history is not the only component of Bénabou’s narrator’s prosthetic memory. As a small child during World War II, he has few memories of the war; it is only afterwards that he is “informé de la réalité des faits” [informed of the facts] (31). He makes up for this lacuna by educating himself with films and books that soon stand in for his nonexistent memories: “Très vite, des images insoutenables [...] (devenues depuis des classiques de la mémoire), commencèrent à me hanter)” [Soon, unbearable images (which have since become classics of memory) began to haunt me] (31). By calling these images “classics of memory,” Bénabou’s narrator implies that memory is a construction that can be artificially amended; the wartime images become part of the narrator’s identity, along with his adopted French history and ancestral past. He also suggests that these media-propagated images have become part of the collective memory of all Moroccan Jews who were unaware of what was happening during the war, thus implying that even collective memory can be composed of “adopted” images or experiences.

Just as Bénabou’s narrator internalizes and appropriates French history, colonial language politics play an important role in his hybrid identity. Growing up, he is aware of a linguistic hierarchy, even among Moroccan Jews; “d’agaçantes questions de langage” [irritating questions of language] troubled his “toute petite enfance” [early childhood], which “se caractérisait par un mélange d’idiomes (français, arabe, hébreu) et d’accents [...] qui exigeaient, pour être correctement maîtrisés, une constant

vigilance” [was characterized by a mix of languages (French, Arabic, Hebrew) and accents...which required, to be correctly mastered, constant vigilance] (115). Language is something that can be dangerous, must be mastered, and requires one’s utmost attention; this system undermines the privileged position of a mother tongue in which one is comfortable and feels a sense of belonging. The hierarchy is determined by “la place plus ou moins grande faite à l’arabe, ou plutôt au judéo-arabe” [the size of the place made for Arabic, or rather for Judeo-Arabic] (115). The narrator learns that his mother tongue, Judeo-Arabic, occupies a low position in the hierarchy of language politics; using Judeo-Arabic words in French conversation would “lower” the level of that dialogue within the hierarchy of language, and cultural, politics. Perhaps even lower in the hierarchy is Judeo-Spanish, which Bénabou does not identify by name; its minute presence in the narrator’s life, in the form of “un fort contingent de mots ou de locutions espagnols” [a strong contingent of Spanish words and phrases] (116), only serves to isolate him from his Judeo-Arabic-speaking friends. The complex linguistic *métissage* of the narrator’s home is a “langue intime” [intimate language] that “était difficilement exportable, sous peine de ridicule, hors du cadre familiale” [was difficult to export, under pain of ridicule, outside of the family] (116-17). Alan Astro argues that “the surfeit of languages at one’s disposal, even if each is felt somehow to be one’s own language, leads to an excess of being that is simultaneously a lack of being” (Astro 76); this surfeit of languages can be compared to the overabundance of memory that plagues the colonized subject and haunts the attempted narrative. The multitude of languages of the narrator’s childhood, and the complex politics governing their use, make him unable to own a mother tongue; instead, he is forced to “modeler ma parole sur celle d’autrui” [model my speech on that of others] (Bénabou *Jacob* 117).

Bénabou’s narrator sees his writing project as a way to cope with, and even cure, the excesses of language and memory, by using them as material in a project with wide-reaching goals. He envisions writing a book that will be the culmination of his own lifetime of experiences as well as his ancestral history and the history of the Moroccan Jewish people. He is prepared to devote his life to this gargantuan project; he claims that until he manages to write the book, “je continuerais à vivre de cette vie insatisfaisante et précaire dont je n’étais plus tout à fait sûr qu’elle fût celle pour laquelle j’étais né” [I would continue to live this unsatisfying and precarious life which I was no longer quite sure was the life I was born to live] (46). The book will stand in for his absent roots, and justify the profusion of memories with which he struggles. He proposes to “canaliser, discipliner les débordements de ma mémoire en leur donnant une forme littéraire” [channel, to discipline the excesses of my memory by giving them a literary form] (28), thus gaining agency over a life that, without the organizing principles of literary form, might be the confusing and unregulated sum of a multitude of influences that are out of his control. Yet the nature of the “literary form” is unclear

– he wants “éviter des mots comme ‘autobiographie,’ ‘mémoires’ ou ‘récit d’enfance’” [to avoid words like “autobiography,” “memoir,” or “childhood story”] (28). Thus he needs to come up with an entirely new form of literary expression, in addition to finding a way to distill, organize, and universalize the already precarious material of memory. Not surprisingly, the project does not go as planned; “[l]’écriture, au lieu de me débarrasser du passé, ne faisait au contraire qu’en réveiller des pans entiers, auxquels je n’aurais jamais spontanément songé” [writing, instead of ridding me of the past, only awakened entire areas which I had never thought of on my own] (225).

Jacques Derrida argues that the lack of a stable model of identification for an “ego” can lead to either amnesia or “hypermnesia,” an abnormally strong memory of the past (Derrida 116). Bénabou’s narrator’s conflicted understanding of his cultural heritage leaves him with a combination of these memory issues. Although he cannot access the key elements of his ancestral past that he needs for his autobiography, he insists on reconstructing a compilation of all memories, native or adopted, to which he can lay claim. This hypermnesia allows the narrator to create a memoir that goes “au-delà de la simple reconstitution d’un héritage donné, au-delà d’un passé disponible” [beyond the simple recovery of a given heritage, beyond the available past] (Derrida 117). Memories are thus not the only material used in a memoir, and the project is no longer one of recovery, but of creation. This contributes to the writing project growing out of the narrator’s control; he has an overabundance of memories of questionable veracity, and no suitable form for their narration.

The concept of modeling or imitation that Bénabou’s narrator employs in his speech modeling is crucial to his writing project. Overwhelmed by his material, he looks to literary models for help. At first, the concept of the book is a combination of Mallarmé’s “Livre”—what the narrator calls “stricte orthodoxie mallarméenne” [strict Mallarmean orthodoxy]—and the Jewish Bible; belonging to the “peuple du Livre” [people of the Book] allows the narrator access to the literary model of the sacred text (Bénabou *Jacob* 49). The choice of these two models is significant, as it shows the competing discourses of French literature (Mallarmé) and familial ancestry (Jewish religion) in the narrator’s identity.⁶⁰ But as these models fail, he looks elsewhere; the exhaustive list of authors he turns to is catalogued in the chapter “Modèles” (109-134), as well as, more concisely, in Warren Motte’s essay on Bénabou, “The Rhetoric of the Impossible” (12). Motte suggests that it is the overbearing presence of these literary giants that makes Bénabou’s narrator’s project impossible. Yet what the narrator’s frustration reveals is not intimidation, but the lack of a totally appropriate model—

⁶⁰ For further reading on Bénabou’s use of Mallarmé, see Warren Motte’s “Playing It by the Book” in *SubStance*. 26.1 (1997): 16-33. See also Motte, Warren. “The Rhetoric of the Impossible.” *SubStance* 28.2 (1999): 4-21, especially p.9-10; and Lorente, Catherine. “Authorial Shadows in Marcel Bénabou.” *SubStance* 28.2 (1999): 62-73.

there is not a single Moroccan Jew who has written the kind of hybrid literary text that the narrator proposes.⁶¹ Moreover, the narrator belongs to the marginalized subgroup (Moroccan Jews) of an already marginalized group (Sephardic Jews, or even Jews in general): “Même à l’intérieur du judaïsme sépharade, déjà marginalisé par rapport aux grands foyers de la culture juive, elle [la communauté] faisait figure de parente pauvre, de cousine un peu disgraciée” [Even within Sephardic Judaism, already marginalized from major centers of Jewish culture, the community was regarded as the poor relative, the slightly disgraced cousin] (Bénabou *Jacob* 43).

This sense of isolation contributes to Bénabou’s narrator’s need to posit his oeuvre as a family epic. From the beginning, he invokes family as a metaphor for the writing process. In the *Incipit* of *Jacob*, he discusses a sentence that he came up with more than thirty years before. Although he intended it to be a sentence in his Book, he is never able to find another sentence to equal it, and thus the perfect sentence is doomed to “demeur[er] irrémédiablement sans famille” [remain irreparably without family] (12). Just as the sentence will never find its “family,” the family is missing from the family epic; the biographical information that would make up a family epic is absent as well. Bénabou’s focus on Mallarmé goes beyond modeling the latter’s “Livre” project; Barbara Johnson notes that in “Don du Poème,” Mallarmé compares “poetic production” to “natural reproduction” (Johnson 137), positing the blank page as a generative space. Similarly, Bénabou’s narrator uses his narrative project, which begins with the orphaned sentence, to give birth to a new genealogy for himself. By laying claim to an adoptive ancestry, he can legitimize his social identity through a retrospective textual genealogy.

Bénabou’s narrator’s genealogical quest leads him on a path similar to Benillouche’s; across “d’immenses lacunes” [huge gaps] (Bénabou *Jacob* 152) in his family tree, he finds “incertains ancêtres” [uncertain ancestors] (136) whose connection to him is at best homophonic (such as *Abu*, *Abo*, *Abbou*, *Ebo*, *Ebbo*, and *Ebu* [143]). His genealogical research results in a pool from which he chooses arbitrarily, without regard for true ancestral connections: “j’avais désormais les coudées franches pour élire des ancêtres selon mon cœur, sans trop m’inquiéter des liens qui pouvaient (ou non) les rattacher à moi” [I now had the freedom to elect ancestors according to my whim, without worrying much about the links that could attach them to me (or not)] (155). But the narrator’s chosen genealogy is not entirely arbitrary; just as Benillouche elected as ancestor a painter whose work appeared in the Larousse, Bénabou’s narrator searches for roots that will explain, and support, his hybrid identity. When he discovers a second-century sage named Ben Abouya, designated in Talmudic texts as *Aher*, or *Other*, due to his philosophical heresy, he adopts him

⁶¹ Guy Dugas’s bibliography of 124 French Judeo-Maghrebian authors counts 51 Algerians, 55 Tunisians, and only 18 Moroccans (Dugas *Bibliographie* 13).

immediately. His otherness makes him the ideal ancestor: “Moi qui étais précisément parti à la recherche de ce qui me faisait autre, pouvais-je rêver plus séduisante figure d’ancêtre que ce grand *Autre*, cet *Autre* archétypique?” [I, who had gone specifically looking for what made me other, could I imagine a more seductive ancestral figure than this big Other, this archetypical Other?] (147). However, despite the thematic and near-homophonic fit, Ben Abouya falls short; the narrator lacks any information on his private life, and thus would have a hard time incorporating him into a family epic. The narrator’s other ancestral finds meet with similar fates, and, like Benillouche, he is forced to abandon his quest for his roots.

In his essay on *Jacob*, Bénabou revisits his search for “uncertain ancestors.” He admits that “ils avaient probablement peu de choses à voir avec mes ancêtres réels, mais au moins ils me permettaient de baliser et d’illustrer les différentes étapes de l’histoire juive marocaine, et même, à l’occasion, de l’histoire tout court depuis l’Antiquité” [they probably had little to do with my real ancestors, but at least they allowed me to mark and illustrate the various stages of Moroccan Jewish history, and even, on occasion, history itself since Antiquity] (Bénabou “Genèse” 103). Thus Bénabou acknowledges his move from the personal to the universal, even privileging the universal application of his project and relegating his personal input to illustrative examples. He intends his “family epic” to serve as the story of all Moroccan Jewry, for a wider audience unfamiliar with Moroccan or Sephardic Jews. Bénabou’s narrator has similar goals. He dedicates his work “[a]u monde extérieur qui – juifs et gentils confondus – s’obstinaient dans une ignorance ou une méconnaissance” [to the external world who—Jews and Gentiles alike—persist in an ignorance or disregard] of Moroccan Jewish history; his work will “fournir des clés pour le déchiffrement d’une histoire, d’une tradition, d’un patrimoine” [provide the keys to the decryption of a history, tradition, and heritage] (Bénabou *Jacob* 44). Moroccan Jewish history is presented here as a puzzle to be decoded, but Bénabou’s narrator does not necessarily have the means to do so. Moreover, this project is an urgent one, as it investigates a disappearing world. Like Navon, Bénabou’s narrator sees Moroccan tradition as endangered; only his parents “incarnaient, avec quelques autres personnages de leur génération... l’attachement à la vieille morale” [embody, along with a few other characters from their generation, the attachment to the old moral code] (33). His own life is moving steadily away from tradition and “vers des activités résolument «profanes»” [towards resolutely “secular” activities] (34). Thus his work is not a personal project, but an intellectual one; he is motivated by the “tâche urgente de préservation culturelle : sauver le plus de vestiges possibles d’un monde dont tout indiquait qu’il était fragile et, à terme, menacé” [urgent task of cultural preservation: to save the most remains possible of a world which was, by all indications, fragile and ultimately threatened] (45). The choice of French as the language of preservation is, for the narrator, a natural

one, as it is “la seule forme acceptable de pérennité” [the only acceptable form of sustainability] (45) – yet French is, in fact, the narrator’s only option. If the Moroccan Jewish community is endangered, so is their language, Judeo-Arabic; it is only by using French that the narrator can hope for an audience.⁶² Moreover, only French can accommodate his readership goals. He hopes that his work will be both an instructive text for future generations, and a historical and cultural introduction for the outside world:

Elle servirait ainsi (n’est-ce pas une des fonctions majeures de l’épopée?) de mémoire et de signe de reconnaissance pour les jeunes générations : aucune mère – pour peu qu’elle fût attentive à maintenir des liens vivants avec son histoire familiale – ne pourrait se sentir dispensée d’en prescrire la lecture à ses enfants. Quant au spectateur extérieur – puisque c’est à lui surtout que je pensais au départ –, il lui suffirait de regarder ces pages avec une suffisante insistance et [...] il verrait peu à peu émerger, d’entre les lignes, un monde inconnu.

[It would thus serve (isn’t this one of the major functions of the epic?) as a memoir and a token of appreciation for the younger generations: no mother—as long as she is careful to maintain the connection with her family history—could help feeling the need to read it to her children. As for the outside viewer—since initially it was him, in particular, that I thought of—he has only to look at these pages with sufficient attention and he will see gradually emerge, between the lines, an unknown world.] (81)

In this way, the narrator mobilizes his personal family history as a universally instructive and definitive text. It will be the family archive for individual Moroccan Jewish families, and the historical archive for Moroccan Jewry in general. However, his ambitions for the nonexistent work go beyond the universal didactic application; he hopes to see his book enter into the canon of French literature:

Je me disais [...] qu’une telle œuvre [...] aiderait à combler [...] une lacune injuste et depuis trop longtemps béante dans la littérature universelle, qu’elle permettrait aussi [...] de faire entrer un peu d’air frais dans la littérature française, qui me semblait, depuis quelques années, sentir un peu trop le renfermé.

⁶² The issues I highlight here are not limited to Sephardic literature, but are prevalent throughout postcolonial narrative. For example, Assia Djebar’s *L’Amour, la fantasia* (1985) engages in similar questions of language and representation. Djebar translates and transcribes oral narratives of Berber women into her French text in order to give voice to their accounts of Algeria’s war of liberation. The novel’s focus on testimony and silence draws attention to the problems inherent in rewriting history from the margins in the language of the colonizer.

[I told myself that such a work would help fill an unjust and long-gaping hole in universal literature, and that it would also bring a bit of fresh air into French literature, which seemed to me, in recent years, to feel a bit musty.] (82)

This goal is crucial to the narrator's project. Not only does he hope to create a historically definitive text, but he expects that text to participate in and revitalize—indeed, fundamentally alter—the French literary canon by expanding it to incorporate the Jewish Maghreb.

As Bénabou's narrator intends his project to have historical authority, he is particularly concerned with its objective veracity. In order to “transformer les moindres fragments de mon expérience personnelle en vérités pour tous” [transform the smallest fragments of my personal experience into truths for all] (83), he must treat his sources—oral histories, family legends, and ancestral artifacts—as “de véritables documents historiques” [genuine historical documents] (104). He embarks on a scientific project of “correcting” his family history in order to create a “documentation objective” (105). His language reveals that his intentions are perhaps more lofty than his resources; his family history will be “corrigée au besoin” [corrected as needed], according to a panoply of scientific methods: “historique, sociologique, linguistique, voire ethnographique, ethnologique ou anthropologique” [historical, sociological, linguistic, even ethnographic, ethnological, or anthropological], although he admits that he does not fully understand these fields, nor recognize the differences between them (105). However, beyond the scientific control of historical truth, he is concerned with the “beauté de la narration” [beauty of the narration] (173). He admits to making changes in the narrative in order to maintain “la nécessaire balance romanesque” [the necessary novelistic balance] and allow for “des nécessités purement littéraires” [purely literary necessities] (213). The writing process, therefore, seems to work against the narrator's stated goals of objective truth, thus calling into question the possibility of writing a literary-historical text.

Yet even before the narrative becomes obscured by literary concerns, its building blocks seem to be breaking down. While rereading his work, the narrator discovers that his memories lack consistence and “stabilité bétonnée” [concrete stability] (226). During the writing process, they take on a life of their own as they change from within: “Ils évoluaient, se présentaient sous des formes changeantes” [They evolved, presented themselves in changing forms] (226). Some of the changes, however, are due to the narrator's own, albeit unrecognized, agency: they change “avec des biffures, des corrections, des remaniements, des repentirs” [with erasures, corrections, revisions, regrets] (227). Of course, he is the one doing the erasing and revising; the regrets are his alone. Yet he seems barely conscious of his own role in the modifications, comparing the process to particularly elusive dreams or to the messages of a hesitant subconscious. The memories are at once part of him—compared to coagulating blood—

and an uncontrollable external force: “je croyais les voir se coaguler, mais ils se constituaient alors en grappes aux contours imprévisibles” [I thought I saw them clot, but then they clustered in unpredictable contours] (227). As his memories take on a form and movement of their own, his agency over them dissolves: “je sentais combien mes interventions écrites avaient pu être arbitraires, voire illégitimes : au fil des jours, l’écriture avait fait naître divers fragments de récit dont aucun désormais ne me semblait le bon” [I felt how much my written interventions could have been arbitrary, even illegitimate: as the days passed, the writing had created various fragments of narrative, none of which now seemed to be the right one] (227). His writing only detracts from the stability or truth of his resources, turning what may have been a real memory into a spurious tale. The degradation of the narrative recalls the narrator’s genealogical quest, which also took a stable starting point (his last name, Bénabou) and led to a fictional construction.

Ultimately, Bénabou’s narrator recognizes that, due to the lack or instability of his resources, his project is impossible. He wonders if he has been, the entire time, trying to forge “un univers purement mythique” [a purely mythical universe] (237) – the opposite of the historical document he intended. Indeed, the world he is trying to memorialize in his epic will remain mythical as long as it has no place in the French literary canon. Just as Benillouche asserts his hybrid identity through the written space of the exam, Bénabou’s narrator sees the written word as an opportunity to create a lasting document of Judeo-Moroccan identity formation. The “mythical universe” is not imaginary, but exists only in the undocumented historiography of Moroccan Jewry. It is “mythic” in that its cohesive existence is idealized, not real; even in its non-idealized form, it is a world that exists only in the past. By making the story of Moroccan Jewry part of the French literary canon, Bénabou’s narrator is staking a claim on behalf of Moroccan Jews to French national identity – making the mythic real. Yet where Bénabou’s narrator, who, notably, speaks of his project in the conditional mode, fails, Bénabou succeeds. By writing a narrative on the impossibility of writing a definitive Judeo-Moroccan epic, he has managed to bring the issues facing Jewish Maghreb identity into the French literary world.

Still, Bénabou’s success must be qualified; as a “solution” to the crisis of the hybrid postcolonial Judeo-Moroccan identity, it is complicated and indirect. Literature for Bénabou is never a straightforward project. In addition to *Jacob*, which Bénabou wanted to title *On écrit toujours le même livre* [*One Always Writes the Same Book*] (Motte 5), his books include *Pourquoi je n’ai écrit aucun de mes livres* [*Why I Have Not Written Any of My Books*] (1986) and *Jette ce livre avant qu’il soit trop tard* [*Dump This Book While You Still Can*] (1992). Robert Elbaz calls these three works “pure products of the Oulipian laboratory,” referring to the association “Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle” (OuLiPo) for which Bénabou is “the definitively temporary secretary” (Elbaz “Bénabou” 47).

OuLiPo seems to be more concerned with structural experimentation in literature than with content, so it is difficult to contend that Bénabou's primary goal is content-based. However, Bénabou argues, both in *Jacob* and in his essay on the novel, "Genèse d'une épopée absente" [Genesis of an absent epic], that his goal is to address a content-based gap in literary history and historiography. Bénabou's prominent position as an OuLiPo member, and his publication by French publishing giants Éditions Gallimard, Hachette Livre, and Éditions du Seuil, suggest that his work has indeed entered into the French literary canon. By creating a document intended to address all Moroccan Jewry, Bénabou is clearly attempting to establish a genealogical and literary heritage for French Moroccan Jews.

Using narrative as a site of genealogy is a way to create roots for an uprooted culture. By writing stories that take place in the Ottoman Empire or North Africa, the Sephardic immigrants I discussed in Chapter One are also engaging in a project of genealogy; reminding subsequent generations of their origins will help them establish roots that encompass their parents' homeland and remind them of their Spanish origins through the presence of Judeo-Spanish and Sephardic traditions. For Jewish authors from the colonial Maghreb, such as Memmi, the colonial culture – with its French colonial presence and social hierarchy – has displaced the native culture, whether Sephardic, Mizrahi, or Berber. Even after colonialism, the connection to the colonized's cultural roots remains disrupted, as we see in Bénabou's postcolonial example. Memmi's and Bénabou's narrators' meditations on possible ancestors suggest that they are searching for their origins. By hand-picking ancestors with specific qualities or affiliations, they are creating a genealogy that will be a stable base for their developing identities by couching those identities within the greater framework of a collective ancestry. By writing the biography of their ancestors, the authors can become the master of their own pasts, at least within the world of the narrative.

Authors such as Memmi and Bénabou provide formal structures in which to situate the narration of a multicultural, multilingual identity. Whereas Memmi's and Bénabou's narrators fail to develop stable fictive genealogies on which to base their identities, their fictional narratives create a space of identity formation that is culturally and linguistically tied to French literature. These projects of writing identity prefigure the postmemorial work of post-immigration generations. When second-generation authors write memoir-style fiction about their ancestors' immigration, they are engaging in a similar project of creating a narrative genealogy in which to base their heterogeneous identities.

Chapter Three

“Ces lieux imaginaires”: Postmemory and Temporal Conflation

As children of immigrants or of Holocaust survivors, the post-war generation of French Jews grew up in the shadow of their parents' experiences. Due to assimilation or the survivors' refusal to discuss the trauma of the war and the past eclipsed by the war, this generation often had little connection to their heritage. Disconnected from their ancestral pasts, many struggled to engage with the formative events that preceded them. Without firsthand access, they were forced to rely on representations of these events. Their own writing thus takes these representations as its point of departure, filtered through the lens of retrospective interpretation and a longing to fill in the missing pieces of their pasts.

In writing about the Holocaust, James E. Young notes that no postwar critic writing retrospectively “can know these events outside the ways they are passed down to” her or him. The knowledge and understanding gained from Young's attempts “to learn all there was to know” about the events of the war “were dependent on their representations” by others (Young *Writing* vii). Jewish communities who were not directly affected by the Holocaust, but whose assimilation caused a rift in the transmission of culture or language, experienced similar problems of engagement. The intense desire for knowledge and the necessary mediation of that knowledge that Young discusses are central issues for generations disconnected from their heritage by either war or immigration, or both.

Although Sephardic immigrants from the Ottoman Empire and North Africa were often eager to assimilate to French society, as we see in the previous two chapters, their literature provided strategies for integrating rather than assimilating – adopting the new culture without completely leaving the old. Yet many families assimilated, raising their children without a strong connection to their heritage. This chapter considers how the second generation responded to their assimilated upbringing. Looking both at narratives written by and from the perspective of children of Holocaust survivors and children of immigrants, this analysis takes as its point of departure the theory of postmemory conceptualized by Marianne Hirsch in *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997).⁶³ As discussed in my introduction, “postmemory” describes the relationship of the second generation to the previous generation's trauma. Hirsch argues that these traumatic experiences are inherited and internalized to become memories, even though they were not experienced directly.

⁶³ Hirsch first introduced the concept in “Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning and Post-Memory,” *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 15.2 (Winter 1992-93): 3-29, an article which was later incorporated into the first chapter of *Family Frames*. She elaborates on the theory in “The Generation of Postmemory,” *Poetics Today* 29.1 (Spring 2008): 103-28.

Although Hirsch developed this theory in an analysis of second-generation Holocaust survivors, I hope to show here how it can be applied more broadly to situations in which there is a break in the transmission of culture or language from one generation to the next.⁶⁴

Hirsch's theory was partially influenced by Nadine Fresco's interviews with eight Jews born after the Second World War. All reported that at "home no one ever mentioned the war years. There was a deathly silence on the subject" (Fresco). Parents talking about their past simply left out the war. Its absence was palpable, often substituted by a geographic move; yet "in changing place, [the parents] had also changed time" – the chronological gap was never reconciled. Fresco reports that children tried to fill the gap by inventing stories, poring over family documents and photographs, returning to their parents' former hometowns, or visiting concentration camps. The title of Fresco's article on the interviews, "Remembering the Unknown," suggests that the subjects, "burdened with their posthumous life," are not only attempting to but partially succeeding at accessing the inaccessible – remembering something that is not theirs to remember.

For Hirsch, this contradiction is an essential part of postmemory theory. In an article on the evolution of the theory, Ernst van Alphen notes that while foundational texts by Fresco and Helen Epstein dwell on the lack of transmission (what Fresco calls silence), subsequent theorists focus on the transmission or inheritance of trauma.⁶⁵ Van Alphen argues that we need to return to emphasizing that the problem is what is missing or lost, *not* inherited. The failure of transmission causes "the intense desire for it on the side of the children" – much like Young's desire to learn *everything* about the Holocaust (van Alphen 478). The resulting "hampered indexical relationship between past and present, between event and its memory, is restored" through narratives that "work through" the trauma (486). Van Alphen further argues that the term "postmemory" implies a connection that is, inherently, not there, and is therefore inadequate to express the phenomenon: "The term *postmemory* risks, I think, becoming unwittingly symptomatic of the *desire* of the generation of survivors' children to connect to the past of their parents, a desire that remains frustrated" and unfulfilled (487). But he does not suggest a better term, and indeed this assertion seems to miss the inherent contradictory quality of postmemory.

⁶⁴ Although some theorists argue that there is no such thing as unmediated memory, there is still a clear distinction between postmemory and memory. While even constructed, fallible memory is based on some connection to the events being remembered, postmemory necessitates no real connection. Postmemories are pure inventions, possibly inspired by research or someone else's testimony, encouraged by an emotional connection to the events. See the discussion of Gillis at the end of this chapter.

⁶⁵ Helen Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* (1979)

There is indeed an existing (familial or cultural) connection with the previous generation, even if there is no shared lived experience of the events. Still, the reason why the second generation struggles with these events is precisely because their effects linger; their presence is felt though the conspicuous absence of speech, culture, or language that they engendered. In *After Such Knowledge*, hailed by Hirsch as an emblematic text for discussions of postmemory (Hirsch "Postmemory" 103), Eva Hoffman defines "post-memory" as "a memory not of theoretical abstraction or ideological strategies, but of proximity charged with feeling" (Hoffman 180). The key term in Hoffman's definition is *proximity*, which emphasizes the asymptotic relationship between the second generation and the influential event. As close as the second generation may get to connecting with their parents' past, they will never fully access it – and, as Young points out, their version of the events is based on an already-removed representation. When the second generation engages through art and literature with their parents' pasts, their work is a representation of a representation, and cannot help but call attention to the "vicarious" nature of this past (Young *Memory's* 1). Young argues that by emphasizing this tenuous connection, these artists ensure that postmemory "remains an unfinished, ephemeral process, not a means toward definitive answers to impossible questions" (2).

Postmemorial texts, therefore, do not resolve the dilemma of the second generation. However, they do illuminate the importance of the events' transmission to historiography. Wars and immigration have a lasting effect on later generations, and that impact is a crucial part of their legacy and the ways we remember and commemorate them in the present. In an analysis of postmemorial art, Young discusses Shimon Attie, an artist who projected photographs of Jews from the 1920s and 1930s onto the present-day original sites. By projecting these "'after-images' [...]" back onto otherwise indifferent landscapes" (2), Attie transforms the space of the present to encompass the events of the past, collapsing time within the same geographic space. If postmemory resists closure, it is not to keep the memories alive like an open wound, but to incorporate them into the daily life of the present.

This chapter looks at three authors whose work engages with their families' pasts through narrative techniques that conflate or confuse the past, present, and future. Although the Holocaust may be present in the postmemories of these authors and their characters, the novels analyzed here emphasize immigration as a significant break in the transmission of family heritage. The first two texts are by Ashkenazi authors, in contrast to the Sephardic authors treated in the rest of the dissertation. This allows this study to take the Ashkenazi perspective into account, but these texts also provide an opportunity to consider immigration through the lens of postmemory, a theory traditionally applied only to the Holocaust, as they engage with both the legacies of the Holocaust and of immigration. In *Contes d'exile et d'oubli* [*Tales of Exile and*

Forgetting] (1979), Henri Raczymow maps prewar Poland onto postwar Belleville. Similarly, in Dominique Garnier's *Nice, pour mémoire* [*Nice, For Memory*] (1980), Noémi Fogelmann, in 1980, traces her mother Sarah's path through 1940 Nice; soon, Noémi's and Sarah's stories and time periods conflate in Noémi's attempt to make sense of her past. The third text, Eliette Abécassis's *Sépharade* (2009), explores a family history stretching from twenty-first-century Strasbourg to fifteenth-century Spain. The protagonists of these three texts explore their identities through the conflating geographic and temporal spaces of postmemory. Ultimately, the identities they construct contribute to a new model of national identity and a new definition of what it means to be French.⁶⁶

By using postmemory theory to approach these narratives, this study stretches previous applications of that theory to consider how immigration can act as a break in intergenerational transmission. Whereas postmemory allows children of Holocaust survivors to connect to the past by creating a prosthetic memory of their parents' experiences, it can help children of assimilated immigrants both connect to and mobilize the pre-immigration past to inform, and revise, their present identity. Raczymow's text serves as a model for the new application of this theory. Although *Contes d'exile et d'oubli* takes place both before and after World War II, its engagement with the Holocaust is not as explicit as in Raczymow's other work, such as the critically popular *Un cri sans voix*.⁶⁷ This analysis focuses on *Contes* as a memory text. This differs from Hirsch's use of *Contes*, which she offers as an exemplary text for her discussion of the "difference between memory and postmemory" in the context of exile (Hirsch "Past Lives" 665). Hirsch identifies Raczymow's text as emblematic of postmemory on the level of content and theme, but not through structural, literary, or linguistic analysis. I propose that Raczymow's postmemorial work operates through a structural conflation of multiple lines of narrative that exist in different times and places. In his critical writing, Raczymow acknowledges the postmemorial nature of his fiction, using Hirsch's term to describe his connection to his namesake older brother who died

⁶⁶ I have omitted two texts from this analysis despite their relevance because they focus more on the Holocaust than on immigration: Georges Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* and Patrick Modiano's *Dora Bruder*. For an excellent discussion of these texts and their engagement with postmemory, see Annelise Schulte Nordholt's *Perec, Modiano, Raczymow: La génération d'après et la Mémoire de la shoah* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2008).

⁶⁷ On *Un cri sans voix* and the Holocaust, see especially Froma I. Zeitlin, "The Vicarious Witness: Belated Memory and Authorial Presence in Recent Holocaust Literature," *History and Memory* 10.2 (Fall 1998): 5-42. See also: Annelise Schulte Nordholt, "Ni victime, ni témoin: Henri Raczymow et la difficulté d'écrire la Shoah," *Lettres Romanes* 56.1-2 (Feb-May 2002): 127-142; Karein Goertz, "Transgenerational Representations of the Holocaust : From Memory to 'Post-Memory'," *World Literature Today: A Literary Quarterly of the University of Oklahoma* 72.1 (Winter 1998): 33-38; Fransiska Louwagie, "Oedipe à Jéricho: L'Oeuvre testimonial d'Henri Raczymow," *Neophilologus* 92.2 (April 2008): 217-33.

before the war (Raczymow "Histoire" 23). Raczymow argues that what affects him is not the death of his brother or other family members, but his postmemory of them: "il faut comprendre ce qui vous liait à eux d'un lien tordu" [one must understand the twisted link that connected you to them] (20). Thus he prioritizes the impact of transgenerational memory over loss and other traumas.

Although this study proposes to apply postmemory to immigration, I do not want to conflate immigration and the Holocaust, or to offer them as comparable traumas. Like the Holocaust, however, Jewish migration has historically engendered historical and fictional writing. Young writes that "most agree that the resurgence of Jewish historiography in the sixteenth century was generated specifically by the mass expulsion of Jews from the Iberian peninsula the century before" (Young *Writing* 15). All kinds of events offer opportunities for testimony; among Jewish historians and scribes there is a "long tradition of literary testimony" (21) in response to events of varying historical impact and significance. Testimony is a unique genre in that it allows for history to become narrative; testimony serves different purposes than other types of historical accounting – we read testimony "for knowledge – not evidence – of events" (37). Indeed, the literary nature of testimonial writing changes the priorities of the text: "even the diarists themselves – once they enter immediate experience into the tropes and structures of narrative – necessarily convert experience into an organized, often ritualized, memory of experience" (25). In literary narrative, memory supplants the event itself. This process allows for events, like the Holocaust, to act as a metaphor for other traumas. Sylvia Plath, for example, uses the Holocaust as a symbol of her unrelated pain: "The Holocaust exists for her not as an experience to be retold or described but as an event available to her (as it was to all who came after) only as a figure, an idea, in whose image she has expressed another brutal reality: that of her own internal pain" (118).⁶⁸ Young argues that the Holocaust has not only "begun to figure retroactively all pre-*Sho'ah* catastrophes" but "has also become a standard in Jewish literature by which all kinds of post-Holocaust calamities, Jewish or not, are now measured" (134). Susan Suleiman notes that "the Holocaust has become a template for collective memory [even] in areas of the world that had nothing to do with those events but that have known other collective traumas" (Suleiman 2).⁶⁹ Immigration is not necessarily a "calamity" or even a trauma, but in the genre of testimony, the nature of the event is secondary: the real aim is to "to document the witness, the witnesses' memory of events, and the transmission of this memory – not the events" (Young *Writing* 166).

⁶⁸ See, for example, concentration camp imagery in Plath's poem about her suicide attempt, "Lady Lazarus."

⁶⁹ Suleiman goes further to quote Jay Winter's citation of Pierre Nora, "Whoever says memory, says Shoah," thus equating "memory" and "Holocaust" and eclipsing questions of the nature of that memory.

Unlike the Holocaust, migration does not necessarily involve violence, trauma, or perpetrators, but those involved are still subject to displacement and rupture. In Raczymow's and Garnier's novels, the distinction between the impact of the Holocaust and of immigration is blurred. While Raczymow engages specifically with the negotiation between Poland and France, for Garnier, immigration may be read more subtly, possibly as the influence of moving from place to place on the characters' identity formation. Eva Hoffman argues that the "importance of emigration in the biographies of survivors and their children has been [...] oddly underestimated" (Hoffman 77). Although emigration was

a sort of accident of history, a turn of events or a twist of plot, rather than a direct consequence of the Holocaust, [...] in retrospect, we can see that the turn was taken by so many survivors, especially those from Eastern and Central Europe, and that the twist was so over-determined and determining as to make uprooting an almost intrinsic part of the Holocaust's aftermath. (78)

It is no surprise that migration would be eclipsed by almost all other events related to the war; indeed, unlike other events, migration could be seen as a positive aspect of the war, as it held the promise of new beginnings – regardless of what obstacles, in practice, it entailed. Although Hoffman acknowledges that "whatever the hardships of that uprooting, they did not compare to, and were indeed largely camouflaged by, the preceding ordeals" (79), she insists that

emigration is an enormous psychic upheaval under any circumstances. It involves great, wholesale losses: of one's familiar landscapes, friends, professional affiliations; but also of those less palpable but salient substances that constitute, to a large extent, one's psychic home – of language, a webwork of cultural habits, ties with the past. Perhaps even ties with the dead. (79-80)

As Hoffman shows, not only does migration entail its own "psychic upheaval," but, significantly, it affects ties with all elements of the past, including the former homeland, one's cultural heritage, and dead relatives.

In an article on memory, Raczymow echoes Hoffman's argument. He begins: "A la fin des années soixante-dix, je fis un voyage. [...] Je voyageai en Pologne" [At the end of the 1970s, I took a trip. [...] I went to Poland] (Raczymow "Mémoire" 178); he then qualifies this to reveal that it was "un voyage imaginaire" ("je n'ai jamais mis les pieds en Pologne" [I have never set foot in Poland]) and he went not to the Poland of the 1970s, but "dans la Pologne juive que [ses] grands-parents quittèrent" [to the Jewish Poland that [his] grandparents left]. From this imaginary voyage, he brought home a non-imaginary souvenir: "un petit livre où je tentai de sonder ce « presque rien » de ma propre mémoire. Une mémoire sans mémoire. Une mémoire sans objet, par-delà l'exil et l'oubli" [a short book in which I attempted to explore this "next-to-nothing" in my own memory. A memory without memory. A memory without

purpose, beyond exile and oblivion] (178). The book he describes is *Contes*, and the memories it contains read as a classic example of Hirsch's postmemories – only instead of being triggered by the war, they were directly inspired by Raczymow's imaginary voyage, by his connection (or lack thereof) to a place and time that belonged to his ancestors. This connection is not tenuous because of the war, but because of migration: “De ce monde, de cette vie, nous avons été exclus avec l'émigration, et ce monde et cette vie eux-mêmes ont été rayés de l'histoire” [Emigration has excluded us from that world, from that life, which themselves were stricken from history] (179). Although it is the Holocaust that ultimately made recourse to the past impossible, it is emigration that severed Raczymow's ties in the first place.

Raczymow's, Garnier's, and Abécassis's work are unique in that they depict the individual protagonist's responses to a collective rupture, unlike the texts analyzed in the next chapter, which focus on the impact of the individual experience on communal identity. However, the experience of the individual cannot be divorced from the collective memory in which he or she is embedded. Suleiman writes of the power of the individual memory to “become an object of public debate or conflict; [...] help to establish a consensus or an ‘official memory’ about the collective past; [...] figure as representative of the experience of a particular group; [...] or] crystallize the difficulties of remembrance itself, self-reflexively” (5). She critiques Dominick LaCapra for assuming “the collective nature of historical trauma, without exploring how the collective is related to the individual; and also without distinguishing what we might call *personal* historical trauma from *collective* historical trauma” (133). The texts analyzed in this chapter may be in conversation with the “collective historical trauma” of the Holocaust or other collective histories, but they are more concerned with exploring the specific nature of “personal historical trauma” – the relationship between the protagonist and his or her family's past, specifically through previous places and times.

The importance of place is foregrounded in the opening scene of *Contes d'exil et d'oubli*, which addresses the reader directly: “J'suis l'pèlerin, drelin, drelin, drelin.’ C'était un colporteur déguenillé. Il venait deux ou trois fois l'an aux abords de Konksk. Cela ne vous dit probablement rien, Konksk. Oh ! c'est un petit village de Volhynie, peut-être. Et Volhynie non plus? N'importe” [‘I am the pilgrim, ring, ring, ring.’ It was a ragged peddler. He came two or three times a year to the outskirts of Konksk. That probably doesn't mean anything to you, Konksk. Oh! It's a small village in Volhynie, perhaps. Not Volhynie either? Nevermind] (Raczymow *Contes* 11). This passage foreignizes every element of the scene: the peddler's language, his location, and even the relationship between the narrator and the reader. The rhyme of “pèlerin” and “drelin” makes the repeated “drelin” sound like an echo of the previous word, at once mimicking the onomatopoeic meaning of “drelin” and eclipsing its meaning as merely

a sonic repetition of the speaker's identity as "pèlerin." The speaker's identity is then tied to his location, but "Konsk" means nothing to the reader, and the narrator's attempt to make a connection of familiarity by defining it as a village in Volhynie is equally unsuccessful. This passage not only places the reader in the uncomfortable position of a failed identification, but, as the reader will later discover, places him or her in the same position as the narrator himself, who says repeatedly that he knows nothing of Konsk.

The narrator's own gaps in knowledge are, of course, characteristic of the postmemorial genre. By placing the reader in the same position, the narrator draws the reader's attention to questions of epistemology and narrative reliability. The narrative is framed as the protagonist Matthieu Schriftlich's quest to uncover his family origins, but the historical veracity of this goal is undermined by the narrative's reliance on anecdotes and storytelling, genres traditionally outside of the realm of historiography. In his critical writing, Raczymow refers to the tendency of "ceux qui [...] sont nés en France, et essentiellement la troisième génération qui fait retour sur le monde aboli de leurs grands-parents, [de] mythifi[er] également ce monde englouti, mais en dehors de toute connaissance de cause" [those born in France, especially the third generation looking back to the vanished world of their grandparents, [to] mythologize this engulfed world, but [to] do so unconsciously] (Raczymow "Mémoire" 179). To this end, Matthieu must invent myth out of the little information he attains. Raczymow claims that his books "ne cherchent pas à combler cette mémoire absente" [do not attempt to fill in absent memory] but instead "présent[e la mémoire] comme absente" [present memory as absent]; in them, he tries "de restituer une non-mémoire, par définition irrattrapable, incomblable" [to restore a non-memory, which by definition is irretrievable, unfillable] (181). By tracing his uncertain genealogy (much like the narrators of the texts discussed in the previous chapter), Schriftlich can assign identities and histories to empty names, essentially speaking for the dead. But in *Contes*, the dead fight back. As Matthieu imagines a relative, Matl Oksenberg, populating an anecdote, Matl suddenly addresses him directly, in the present tense: "Que veux-tu de moi ? lui dit-elle. D'où te vient ce droit usurpé à me tisser au sein de ta mémoire fictive ?" [What do you want from me? she says to him. Where do you get this usurped right to weave me into your fictitious memory?] (103). When Matthieu clings to Matl, who was murdered, as the deceased relative who may benefit the most from narrative ventriloquism, Matl again intervenes: "Laisse-moi, supplie Matl Oksenberg, laisse-moi à l'écart de tes noms amnésiques, exsangues, par lesquels tu crois rester en vie, résister à la mort" [Leave me alone, begs Matl Oksenberg, leave me apart from your bloodless amnesiac names, through which you believe you can stay alive, resist death] (106-7).

Matthieu’s persistent narrative use of the murdered, victimized Matl indicates his need to fill the empty names – the only historical facts he possesses – with extended narratives, thus lending storytelling the authority of historical testimony. Moreover, Matl’s struggle illuminates an ethically shady aspect of Matthieu’s project by calling attention to his use of the past for the purposes of the present. By using names, like Matl’s, that also indicate an historical person, Matthieu is further victimizing the individual, resurrecting her against her will. Perhaps because Matl is already established in Matthieu’s mind as a victim, she fights back against his resurrection. Thus it benefits Matthieu to avoid letting the dead speak for themselves, and to favor his own versions of their life stories. In Matthieu’s pursuit of storytelling that resembles history, names act as empty receptacles, but often they are all Matthieu can access; he asks rhetorical questions like, “Qui est Rywka Grünenblamm, hormis son nom?” [Who is Rywka Grünenblamm, besides her name?] (47-8), bringing the long-deceased Rywka into the present tense. He also uses repetition, as if the repeated echoing of his story helps crystallize it as fact; one critic writes that, for Raczymow, “la technique du recommencement est une façon d’approcher la réalité non maîtrisée, voire inconnue du passé” [the technique of repetition is one way of approaching the uncontrolled, or even unknown, reality of the past] (Louwagie 231). However, the repetition only underscores the utter impossibility of narrative certainty. The book’s middle section, “Quatre chansons” [Four songs], begins with a negation of its own reliability – a series of scenes of Korsk punctuated by the repeated refrain “Je ne sais rien de Korsk” [I know nothing of Korsk] (19), which eventually becomes the all-inclusive “Je ne sais rien” [I know nothing] (20). The songs themselves, anecdotes about Korsk’s residents, are introduced by the following storytelling genealogy, which I quote at length to highlight its different repetitive elements:

Mon oncle Noïoch Oksenberg *me raconta un jour cette histoire* : Cela se passait lors des *fiançailles* de la fille de Haïm Mandelswagg [...] avec le fils unique du restaurateur bien connu *Moshé Katz, non, attends, pas Moshé : Mendel Katz, Mendel Katz, c’est ça.* [...] ton grand-père, Simon, lui-même tout juste *fiancé* de quelques semaines avec ma sœur Matl, *se leva, posa son verre de vodka,* [...] et annonça son désir de *raconter une histoire* [...]. Il commença ainsi [...] : Permettez-moi alors de vous *raconter cette petite histoire* : Cela se passait lors des *fiançailles* de la fille de Schlomo Kurtzner avec le fils aîné de Yaneck Bronberg. Soudain, un certain Schmul *se leva, posa son verre de vodka sur la table et entreprit de raconter une histoire,* l’histoire, justement, d’un certain Nathan, son beau-frère, qui, lors des *fiançailles* de Yitzack Rayzman, le fils de...A ce moment-là, Noïoch Oksenberg *posa son verre de vodka sur la table* et [...] me dit : Le mieux, tu sais, pour toi, c’est encore d’inventer. Et il ajouta : Ce qui est mort est mort. Et les violons se turent. Mais un jour pour moi, je ne sais quoi ni comment, ils chantèrent à nouveau.

My uncle Noïoch Oksenberg *told me this story* one day: This happened at the *engagement* of Haïm Mandelswagg's daughter...with the only son of the famous restaurateur *Moshé Katz, no, wait, not Moshé: Mendel Katz, Mendel Katz*, that's it...your grandfather, Simon, himself just *engaged* a few weeks before to my sister Matl, *got up, put down his glass of vodka*...and announced that he wanted *to tell a story*...He started like this: ...So let me *tell you this little story*: It was during the *engagement* of Schlomo Kurtzner's daughter to Yaneck Bronberg's oldest son. Suddenly, a certain Schmul *got up, put his glass of vodka on the table, and started to tell a story*, the story, actually, of a certain Nathan, his brother-in-law, who, at the *engagement* at Yitzack Rayzman, son of... At that moment, Noïoch Oksenberg *put his glass of vodka on the table* and told me: The best thing, you know, for you, is to make things up. And he added: What's dead is dead. And the violins went silent. But one day for me, I don't know what or how, they sang again. (20-1, emphases added)

The reader cannot help but get lost in the preponderance of storytellers, with their similar way of introducing their stories (getting up, putting down their vodka) and the stories' parallel settings of engagement parties – not to mention the lack of an actual story ever getting told! The string of narrators undermines the credibility of the anecdotes that follow, particularly given Noïoch's Oksenberg's recommendation to “make things up”: with the past “dead,” it must be invented. The violins' silence indicates the loss of the past; although they sing again in the pages that follow, Oksenberg calls into question both their method and content.

Just as Oksenberg, supposedly a firsthand witness, cannot recall Mendel Katz's name, other characters' names are vaguely referenced or even changed throughout the narrative. Of the names populating the text, most are of family members of ambiguous relation – for example, the storyteller Simon Gorbach's mother (41), Rywka Grünenflamm, may also be his grandmother (60); she is alternately the daughter (41) and the granddaughter (46) of the cantor, Szlama Grünenflamm; her husband Reb Schlomo Grünenflamm (97), who should be Simon's father, is also referred to as Simon's maternal grandfather (43). The family connections whose mystery seems to be Matthieu's goal are thus particularly hard for the reader to follow. *Contes* is broken into three sections – the story of the peddler, the four songs, and a section called “préhistoire” [prehistory] that makes up most of the text. In the préhistoire, Matthieu grills Simon Gorbach for information on prewar Poland. Gorbach's relation to Matthieu is unclear, but he is not – as most critics have erroneously stated – Matthieu's grandfather.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ See, for example, Annelise Schulte Nordholt, “Perec, Modiano, Raczymow et les lieux,” *Temoignages de l'après-Auschwitz dans la littérature juive-française d'aujourd'hui*, Annelise Schulte Nordholt, ed., p.245 where

This confusion is not surprising, and in fact can, and should, be read as one of Raczymow's goals. Despite the preponderance of names and genealogical clues, it is impossible to derive true historical meaning because the lines of transmission have been irreparably severed. The trauma of what Matthieu sees as "double exile" (a term reminiscent of Sephardic immigrants' sense of double exile from Spain) leaves only the empty names: "Quitter la Pologne, être exilé de l'exil même. A Matthieu Schriftlich incomberait d'enjamber le cadavre pitoyable de ces noms afin de parvenir peut-être à quelque visage serein et beau d'une aïeule assassinée qu'il n'aurait jamais connue" [To leave Poland, to be exiled from exile itself. It was up to Matthieu Schriftlich to step over the pitiful cadaver of these names in order perhaps to reach the serene and beautiful face of a murdered grandmother he would never have known] (45). The "pitiful cadaver" of the names personifies the names themselves and allows them to be killed like the grandmother who, in death and memory, becomes "serene and beautiful." Stripped of their significance as individuals, the names, together, represent the family heritage; through them, Matthieu can connect with the history he has lost. Yet despite his claims, he does not come to know the otherwise unknown grandmother, but instead creates an imagined grandmother to take her place. By perpetuating the memory of the names, he saves them from the oblivion of the undifferentiated mass of forgotten people and places: "Matthieu Schriftlich parviendra alors à sauver Konski de tous les noms de villages juifs [...], de tous les noms des gens qui ont fui, qu'on a chassés" [Matthieu Schriftlich succeeded then in saving Konski, out of all the names of the Jewish villages, out of all the names of the people who fled, who were hunted] (56). The imaginative postmemorial form necessitates the invention of individuated memories – the selection of Konski rather than any other Polish village, of Matl and Rywka rather than any other persecuted Polish Jew. However, Matthieu's postmemory also creates a fantasy of individual ancestors at the expense of all others: his project is a personal, not universal, recuperation of the imagined past.

Despite Matthieu's insistence on his power of salvation through names, he is intent on finding information from Simon Gorbach's stories. Yet the stories only highlight their own inaccessibility and absence by drawing attention to their lost transmission. Simon tells of his grandfather Schlomo telling a story to his young grandchildren that ended with "tout s'est bien terminé" [it all ended well]; but then

she claims that Matthieu is listening to his grandfather, Simon Gorbach, but then references Raczymow's *Rivières d'exil*, in which the "même grand-père" [same grandfather] is now named "Simon Dawidowicz." However, in *Contes*, Szlama Davidowicz is "le grand-père maternel de Matthieu" [Matthieu's maternal grandfather] and Gorbach is not sure whether he remembers him from before the war (57, 73); Simon Davidowicz is Szlama's father. Thomas Nolden, in *In Lieu of Memory: Contemporary Jewish Writing in France* (NY: Syracuse UP, 2006) also refers to Matthieu's interlocutor as his grandfather (68).

Simon adds: “Or tout ça, justement, s’est fort mal terminé, car Schlomo ignorait le fin mot de l’histoire. Et ses petits-enfants, quelques années plus tard, l’apprirent hélas à leurs dépens” [But all this, in fact, ended terribly, because Schlomo didn’t know what was really at the bottom of it. And his grandchildren, a few years later, unfortunately learned it the hard way] (51). “Le fin mot de l’histoire” [what was really at the bottom of it] is the key to the story, the moment of its transmission, which in this case is lost due to emigration and the war. This is the essential part that Schlomo is missing. Its loss, never articulated, resists narration. In *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, Dominick LaCapra argues that in traumatic situations,

memory is always secondary since what occurs is not integrated into experience or directly remembered, and the event must be reconstructed from its effects and traces. In this sense there is no fully immediate access to the experience itself even for the original witness, much less for the secondary witness and historian. (LaCapra 21)

The stories Matthieu craves of prewar Poland all fall into LaCapra’s category of unintegrated memories and partially reconstructed events. There is no closure; Konk is “sans tombe” [tombless] (37). In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud claims that one must know what is lost in order to properly mourn it and move on (Freud 245-46). Because this is impossible for Matthieu, he and Simon must invent what has been lost. The title of Racyzmow’s work, *Contes* [*Tales*], suggests that its contents are far from historical fact. “Quatre chansons,” which began with the narrator’s profession of ignorance, ends with a reiteration of that missing information: “Car de Konk, de Kaloush, de Gustawan, je ne sais rien. Il me faut tout inventer” [For of Konk, of Kaloush, of Gustawan, I know nothing. I must invent everything] (36). Of course, for Matthieu, who may be the narrator of this section, this is not surprising; he was never there. But in “Préhistoire,” Simon says the same thing: “Savez-vous, Matthieu, dit Simon, il me faut bien un peu inventer moi aussi, ça fait si longtemps” [You know, Matthieu, Simon said, I have to invent a little too, it’s been so long] (51). Simon continues to express his amazement at Matthieu’s curiosity, which he does not understand: “C’est moi qui suis le vieillard, et c’est vous qui scrutez le passé. N’est-ce pas inverser les rôles ?” [I’m the old guy, you’re the one scrutinizing the past. Isn’t that a reversal of roles?] (51), he asks Matthieu.

Matthieu’s quest is often ridiculed for its utter futility. His interest is called an “obsession noire” [black obsession] to “remuer la vase polonaise à l’aide d’un bâton pour y trouver on ne sait quelle pépite d’or fin qu’il aurait perdue” [poke around in the Polish mud with a stick to find who knows what golden nugget he may have lost] (49). The narrator even bets against him, saying, “Que cherche-t-il, Matthieu Schriftlich? Parions qu’il ne trouvera rien” [What’s Matthieu Schriftlich looking for? Let’s bet he finds nothing] (46). The places he wants to find are “rêvés plutôt que remémorés”

[dreamt up rather than remembered] (53); reality itself is called “trop élastique” [too elastic] and compared to the once-endless source of a now-dried lake whose very existence is called into question (84). Although Matthieu fears that Simon is simply inventing history – “Ah! comme Matthieu avait hâte de le surprendre en flagrant délit d’invention” [Ah! how Matthieu longed to catch him red-handed in the act of invention] (61) – he has no way of verifying it. Ultimately, the narrator urges Simon to make up all his stories because there is no one to hold him to the truth: “Racontez Simon. Inventez au besoin. Qui vous en tiendra rigueur ? Qui de vous exigera des comptes ? Les âmes juives errant hors des sépulcres ?” [Tell, Simon. Invent as necessary. Who would hold it against you? Who would ask to see your accounts? Jewish souls wandering out of the graves?] (96). The narrator’s mockery further ups the ethical stakes of Matthieu’s project; by pointing out that there is no one to counter his fictionalization, the narrator gives free reign to Matthieu’s fabricated history while at the same time underscoring Matthieu’s rampant capitalization of the past.

However, it is *precisely* the dead risen from their graves who end up collaborating on Matthieu’s story. The section “Préhistoire” is Matthieu’s attempt to cross the barriers of postmemory and access the inaccessible. Its title echoes a comment in Raczynow’s essay on memory, where he states that prehistory was passed down to him “sous la forme de la non-transmission” [in the form of non-transmission] (Raczynow “Mémoire” 180). “Préhistoire” solves this dilemma. Whereas place had, in “Quatre chansons,” been the primary problem of memory (the narrator knowing nothing of Korsk), “préhistoire” foregrounds time as the organizational element of storytelling. It resituates the past by artificially creating a moment before which everything is “pre” history; if history is recorded, prehistory is unverifiable and must be accessed in non-traditional ways. The first scene in “Préhistoire” takes place at a lake that, later, Matthieu tries to look up in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* but cannot find “la moindre allusion” [the slightest allusion] to it. Prehistoric life is “effacée, gommée” [deleted, erased], “importune même aux survivants” [a bother even to the survivors] (44). So instead of relying on Simon’s stories, Matthieu goes back to prehistory to see it for himself, through the collapsed time of Raczynow’s narrative.

Raczynow’s narrative strategies are unusual but not unique. Accessing memory is, by definition, accessing the past, and thus eliding time. One critic argues that “memory-time,” in which many time indices can function simultaneously, “suspends chronological time even while the latter continues to pass or progress - thus, during the process of remembering, it becomes unclear in which time one remains” (Kaplan 311). Obviously the most famous example of this in French literature is in Proust. In contrast to the authors analyzed here, Proust’s philosophy of memory “relies on memory being involuntary” and effortless; it is “triggered by external sources” that “allow for its contents to be revealed” (321). But Proust, like Matthieu, finds pleasure

in temporal collapse. Matthieu experiences temporal (and accompanying geographic) change as something he cannot control but does not resist: “Il lui semble s’enliser dans les sables mouvants, mouvance du temps, mouvance des lieux” [He seemed to be sinking into quicksand, shifting time, shifting places] (46). Despite the quicksand metaphor, this is not a negative experience. His lack of agency suggests that postmemorial memory is not voluntary, but is in fact the fate of every member of a second generation shut off from the past.

The past that Matthieu accesses through the narrative’s temporal conflation is not the intact world of his ancestors but a past in which places are stripped of their true signification and meaning, and names are not people but characters in a project of fictional reconstruction. Even the former existence of elements of the past has no bearing on Matthieu’s postmemory. He asks, “Cela a-t-il existé, Konski en Volhynie, Kaloush en Galicie ? Ou ne reste-t-il que cela : Kaloush, Konski, ces simples, ces pauvres mots ?” [Did it exist, Konski in Volhynie, Kaloush in Galicia? Or is there only this: Kaloush, Konski, these poor, simple words?] (61). By stripping place names of their geographic anchors and reducing them to “poor, simple words” (like the empty names of the dead), the narrative can conflate not only time but geography; if the town of Konski is no longer tied to its Polish region, can’t it exist in France? And not just in France, but in Matthieu’s France – which is a generation after his grandparents’ Poland? Space and time are traditionally linked; a place changes drastically from one era to the next. The narrator is conscious of this, referring, for example, to “l’angle de la rue Ramponeau et du boulevard de Belleville des années 50” [the corner of the Ramponeau Street and the Belleville Boulevard of the 50s] (65) – in other words, of the novel’s present. By severing the ties that bind place and time, Raczymow lets Matthieu move more fluidly into the past.

Matthieu’s time travel is not presented metaphorically; he physically travels from 1950s Belleville to prewar Poland through the collapse of traditional narrative structure. The physicality of Matthieu’s movement is an important element of Raczymow’s technique. When Matthieu remembers, he reaches through time: “Mais Konski ? Mais Kaloush ? demande Matthieu tendant la main vers Mme Berkowicz. Et la main de Matthieu reste tendue dans le vide” [But Konski? But Kaloush? Matthieu asks, reaching his hand toward Mme Berkowicz. And Matthieu’s hand remains suspended in the void] (71). Literally reaching into the past, Matthieu is left probing an empty space he does not possess the memories to fill. However, when the act of remembering is described as a journey, Matthieu can ultimately reach his destination:

Dans *l’extrême mouvance* de ces noms et de ces lieux rêvés plutôt que remémorés, Matthieu Schriftlich doit *assurer chacun de ses pas. Il avance* – vers Konsk mettons, Konsk c’est-à-dire les quelques images, les quelques phrases qui lui viennent par à-coups, au gré de son cœur – un peu comme Matl et Myriam *avançaient* vers la

terrasse de l'isba où Schlomo Grünenflamm prenait l'air en les observant venir. *Il avance* tantôt malaisément, tantôt sautillant, et il se demande *s'il parviendra* à bon port, c'est-à-dire à *toucher la réalité*. [...] Il a raison, Noïoch Oksenberg : A quoi bon *remuer le passé* ? Mais Matthieu Schriftlich n'invente pas la réalité ! Il tâche simplement de *gagner sur elle, de la prendre de court* comme le moribond sur la mort, et il est des instants peut-être où elle perd sa peau, frottis de grains de sable dont aussitôt il peut *s'emparer et tapisser sa route*. Puis, dans un rire grotesque, la réalité, rouée, échappe comme à Konsk Motelé Goldring tentait d'échapper aux bras rétiaires de Yaneck Bronberg dans la haute-ville, près du nouveau Centre administratif. [...] Ah ! la réalité est ténue, un fil, un fil de la Vierge. Il faut être d'une grande délicatesse pour la saisir. A moins *qu'elle vienne à lui*, soudain, coller à ses yeux, à ses oreilles. Alors *il tire un peu*, tout doucement, avec prudence, et insensiblement dans la nuit polonaise il discerne enfin une brillance.

In *the extreme periphery* of these names and places dreamt rather than remembered, Matthieu Schriftlich must *be sure of every step*. *He advances* – toward Konsk, let's say, Konsk meaning the few images, the few sentences that come to him in spurts, according to his heart – a bit like Matl and Myriam *advancing* toward the terrace of the isba where Schlomo Grünenflamm was getting some air while watching them approach.⁷¹ *He advances* at times uneasily, at times leaping, and he asks himself *if he'll safely reach his goal*, in other words, *touch reality*. [...] He's right, Noïoch Oksenberg: What good is it to *stir up the past*? But Matthieu Schriftlich doesn't invent reality! He simply *tries to gain on it, to catch it off-guard* like the dying do death, and there are maybe moments where it loses its skin, smeared with grains of sand that, immediately, he can *grab and use to line his path*. Then, with a grotesque laugh, cunning reality escapes like in Konsk Motelé Goldring trying to escape Yaneck Bronberg's gladiatorial arms in the upper town, near the new administrative center. [...] Ah! Reality is tenuous, a thread, gossamer. One must be very delicate to grasp it. Unless *it comes to him*, suddenly, sticks to his eyes, to his ears. Then *he pulls a little*, very slowly, cautiously, and little by little in the Polish night he discerns, finally, a shimmer. (53-55, emphases added)

Matthieu's journey takes him, step by step, into the past. Although he might be going "toward Konsk," it is not his ancestor's Konsk, but a theoretical city, comprised of bits of information, that exists only in his mind. His aim is not to access this postmemorial image, but to "touch" it, to "stir" it. In conversation with Noïoch Oksenberg – an

⁷¹ An "isba" is a Russian hut or log cabin.

imagined character inhabiting the name of a real ancestor – he questions his motives, and tries to establish reality as something separate from him that he can access only by conquering or “catching off-guard.” But the reality Matthieu yearns to find only exists in his mind, as a postmemory. His attempts to figure it as a separate entity only draw him into the imagined world represented by Konsk. As he grows closer to creating and accessing his own postmemory, the space between him and the postmemory collapses and the two time periods, past and present, blur into one: He tries to use the “sand” of the past to line his path in the present; in the extended simile comparing personified reality to characters in Konsk, the action is set “near the new administrative center.” Surely in Matthieu’s true present-day, the center is not “new”; this detail thus indicates the collapse of time, or the subsuming of two time periods into one narrative time that encompasses both present and postmemorial past. Suddenly Matthieu is no longer in 1950s Belleville, or even in the “periphery” of imagined space, but firmly in the “Polish night” of his postmemory. Whereas the narrator uses the imperfect past to refer to Konsk’s residents Matl, Myriam, Motelé, and Yaneck (“avançaient” and “tentait”), after this passage, the narrative, although set in Konsk, is in the present tense: “A présent, Schlomo Grünenflamm médite la leçon d’un conte Yiddish sur la terrasse de l’isba, face au lac de Kamentaz” [Now, Schlomo Grünenflamm studies the lesson of a Yiddish tale on the terrace of the isba, facing Lake Kamentaz] (55). In case the reader misses the tense change, the marker “a présent” is a convenient reminder of the new temporal framework.

Through the process of storytelling and narration, Matthieu’s temporal conflation achieves tangible results. Schlomo, Simon’s deceased grandfather, often takes Simon’s place as storyteller, but the shift occurs with no narrative flagging – for example, “déjà Reb Schlomo Grünenflamm se tait, et Simon ne raconte plus” [already Reb Schlomo Grünenflamm is silent, and Simon stops narrating] (71). Always narrated in the present tense, these passages both blur the lines between narrator and character and collapse the distance between the two time periods and geographic locations. This also gives the impression of unmediated communication, as the characters from the past are telling their own stories directly. However, as in the example above, each instance of this collapse ends abruptly, suggesting that the conflation is not tenable. Moreover, the epistemological uncertainty of the past reminds the reader that these people and places are not historical facts or memories but postmemories; through temporal conflation, this uncertainty maps onto the present. As Simon tells Matthieu the story of Schlomo as an adolescent, his past-tense narrative gives way to Schlomo’s story in the present tense, and the setting blurs with Matthieu’s surroundings:

Reb Schlomo Grünenflamm contemple les géraniums ; et en Matthieu
Schriftlich des mots-pétales s’assemblent en phrases-fleurs. Mais tout se
brouille, se disperse. Matl Oksenberg, corps morcelé, béances. Konski, archipel

sur quelque carte inventée ou rêvée et dont personne ne peut recomposer les morceaux épars.

Reb Schlomo Grünenflam contemplates the geraniums; and in Matthieu Schriftlich petal-words assemble into flower-sentences. But everything blurs, scatters. Matl Oksenberg, fragmented body, gaps. Konski, archipelago on some invented or dreamed-up map whose scattered pieces no one can recombine. (87-88)

This passage not only links people and places across time, but shows how all these elements are contained within the postmemorial narrative. Schlomo's story, in the present tense and divorced from its narrator, breaks down into pure language: the geraniums themselves are petals and sentences. The gaps in Matl's story are mirrored in the fragments of her murdered body, which in turn reflect the pieces of the story of Konski. In Matthieu's postmemories, Konski can no longer be a town; it is instead composed of its narrative parts, represented here as islands making up an archipelago on an imaginary map which, in turn, is in pieces that cannot be put together.

The utter breakdown of the images of the past allows for temporal fluidity, which helps Matthieu access some form of the past; yet this accessible past is not the reality he seeks, but a postmemorial image of that reality. Faced with the unreliability of postmemory, Matthieu suggests that his present reality may be just as unstable: "Matthieu Schriftlich, s'il y songe soudain, n'est pas moins irréel, au fond, que ce paysage, que ces lieux imaginaires, que ces noms bénis" [Matthieu Schriftlich, if he suddenly thinks about it, is no less unreal, deep down, than this landscape, than these imaginary places, than these blessed names] (114). By questioning his own reality, Matthieu addresses the question plaguing his generation. Susan Suleiman argues that "the second generation's most salient shared experience is the feeling of belatedness – perhaps best summed up in Raczymow's rueful statement, 'We cannot even say that we were *almost* deported'" (Suleiman 180). Equating the reality of the present moment with that of the postmemorial past allows Matthieu to live in a version of that past, regardless of its historical accuracy. Moreover, by taking events once anchored in time and placing them, through temporal conflation, in an eternal present, the once-historical events can become available to all future generations as atemporal myth or legend – the titular "contes."

Raised with no knowledge of his family's past, Matthieu is forced to wade through Simon's disjointed, unreliable anecdotes to construct a postmemory that can fill the void of history lost in transmission. It is only through Matthieu's persistence that he can move beyond Simon's discouragement and the lack of reliable source material and arrive at a postmemory that he can accept as a substitute for history. In Dominique Garnier's *Nice, pour mémoire*, the protagonist, Noémi, experiences an entirely different type of postmemory. Unlike Matthieu, Noémi does not consciously recognize

her desire to access her family's past. Although she clearly feels the "twisted link" to her past, the trauma of the second generation that Raczymow describes, she does not understand the foreboding feeling that haunts her when she arrives in Nice, the city where her mother lived during the war. Noémi's postmemorial experience is thus involuntary, suggesting that it is the place – Nice – that causes the temporal collapse that leads her to confuse her experiences with her mother's and grandmother's.

Nice, pour mémoire exhibits similar structural fragmentation to *Contes*, but where *Contes* had clearly defined sections and chapters with titles indicating the theme or subject – in keeping with its presentation as a series of "tales" – *Nice* has only breaks between sections, with no numbering or thematic indications. Whereas Raczymow's frenetic narrative was structured by Matthieu's persistent desire to learn about the past, the aleatory nature of Garnier's text reflects Noémi's meandering through the streets of Nice, her path conflating with her mother's as the narrative switches between the 1980s and the 1940s. Thus the novel's form mimics its theoretical function: the narrative changes in function of Noémi's encounters with her mother's past.

Although Noémi does not initially seek out a connection with her history, Garnier emphasizes her physical solitude and isolation. Despite being surrounded by tourists, Noémi feels alone; she watches people sunbathe on the beach but does not understand them or want to join them. Her attempts at communication fail; she writes and stamps a postcard but, unable to address it, throws it away. Yet she cannot help but be influenced by her surroundings. The more time she spends in Nice, the more disconnected she feels from her body, which finally succumbs to the sun and sand: "Son corps était en état de Bonheur: il se laissait accabler sur les galets [...] A seize heures, il dévorait un "pan bagna" [...] Et la nuit, il s'écroulait [...] Et pendant ce temps-là, pendant que ses cuisses, ses bras viraient à l'ocre, elle était indifférente, incapable de s'harmoniser avec le paysage" [Her body was in a state of Happiness: it let itself be overcome by the pebbles... At four o'clock, it ate a « pan bagna »... And at night, it collapsed... And during this time, while her thighs, her arms were turning to ochre, she was indifferent, unable to harmonize with the landscape] (Garnier 14). Noémi's body enters into a relationship with her surroundings, but she remains separate. Although, at first, her isolation seems voluntary, she cannot overcome it. She claims to hate places that are "silencieuse et vide" [silent and empty] (81) but she cannot connect to the crowds surrounding her.

Noémi's physical and emotional solitude are the isolation of her entire generation, disconnected from their past and thus unable to connect with their present and future. Trying to make sense of the landscape before her is impossible: "tous les éléments du paysage passaient à travers le prisme du passé" [all the elements of the landscape passed through the prism of the past] (15); instead of seeing what is in front

of her, she sees “pièces d’un puzzle” [puzzle pieces] of the present and past combined, jumbled and senseless. Without knowledge and understanding of the past, she is unable to connect to the present: “Le présent définitivement échappait. Il glissait toujours plus arrière pour épaissir la réalité d’autrefois” [The present drifted away for good. It kept slipping further and further back to thicken the reality of the past] (15). The past seems to seep into the present, contributing to her sense of isolation and confusion: Noémi is tormented by “le bruit de la mer qu’elle captait avec des sens de jadis (ses sens?)” [the sound of the sea that she picks up with senses of the past (her senses?)] (15). If the tools to access the present are from the past, and Noémi is unable to access the past, she may not be capable of experiencing the present. Subconsciously, Garnier suggests, this is why Noémi has come to Nice; as Young argues that history is transmitted “in particular times and places,” Noémi must seek out the *place* of history – Nice – to access the *time* – the 1940s. Only then can she experience Nice as it is in the present, and thus move through the impasse of her emotional crisis.

Noémi’s inability to connect with her surroundings is a direct result of what she describes as a lack of memories. When she meets the young Franco-German Hans Schneider, also born after the war, who says he has no memories (71), Hans argues that their lack of memories is typical of their generation: “Nous sommes tous frappés d’amnésie. Enfin eux, la génération des pères. Nous, les fils, les filles, nous essayons de vivre comme si nous étions une génération spontanée, engendrée par personne, issue de nulle histoire” [We are all struck with amnesia. I mean them, the parents’ generation. We, the sons, the daughters, we try to live as if we were a spontaneous generation, born from nobody, out of no history] (76). The first generation’s self-imposed amnesia has given birth to a generation with no traditional anchors in the past – no ancestry or history.

Both Hans and Noémi represent Garnier’s own relationship to her generation and her past. Alan Morris writes that “absence and silence created a break in the author’s family chain, ensured that her heritage was problematically incomplete, and thereby left her looking for a way to combat that void” (Morris 100). According to Eva Hoffman, Garnier’s generation was left with “the desire to repeat a terrible parental fate, and to escape it” (108). Morris concurs; he suggests that Garnier found her solution through fiction writing, but only with “a specific type of formal approach: her novel must allow her to re-enact the role played previously by her mother” (100). Claire Gorrara argues that because Garnier was born after the war, she “cannot position herself as an eye-witness” and thus “feels excluded from an unspoken Jewish heritage” (Gorrara 41). Because Garnier and her contemporaries were born after the war, the war represents their entire inaccessible past and eclipses their lost heritage. By occupying her mother’s role through her writing, Garnier can gain access to a perspective that allows insight into both the war and her prewar ancestral heritage.

Noémi's encounter with Hans creates an opportunity in the narrative for her to mimic her mother Sarah's contact with Germans during the war. Hans's father was a German soldier in Provence – the region where Sarah, living in Nice, spent the war; his mother was French. Although he and Noémi share similar feelings of being disconnected from their past and present, Noémi cannot fully identify with Hans. Hoffman describes a similar encounter with her “first German contemporary” (107). Although he is of her “generation and similar intellectual formation,” he is also the son of a Nazi judge who struggled with his father's actions (108). Over dinner, he tells her about the forest he loved as a child – the same forest where her parents had hidden during the war. Struck by this parallel, Hoffman writes, “we looked at each other with a kind of flummoxed resignation. For what could we do except acknowledge both the utter disparity and the strange symmetry of our histories?” (109). In both Hoffman's and Noémi's experiences, the shared history is heightened by shared geography: the forests of Germany or the streets of Nice. Noémi and Hans see themselves as ghosts wandering a “ville peuplée de fantômes” [city filled with ghosts] (81). But Noémi, unlike Hans, is personally inhabited by a ghost: that of her mother. Although, like Hans, she believes that she has no memories, the city teaches her otherwise: “Les rues me parlent. Les maisons, la mer, le soleil, les odeurs, et jusqu'à vous, tout me rappelle que quelque chose s'est passé. Mais quoi ? Moi, Noémi Fogelman, sans souvenirs je crois, je ne suis pas. Ce sont... [...] Ce sont les souvenirs d'une autre” [The streets speak to me. The house, the sea, the sun, the smell, even you, everything reminds me that something happened. But what? I, Noémi Fogelman, I believe myself to be without memories, but I'm not. They are... they are someone else's memories] (91-2). Noémi's realization that she is somehow accessing her mother's memories launches the narrative into a negotiation between past and present in which the boundaries of time are blurred.

The temporal conflation in the narrative begins long before Noémi is conscious that these moments stem from her mother's memories. Walking around, she feels that the city contains its own past: “Nice d'avant la guerre sommeillait à ses pieds” [Prewar Nice dozed at her feet] (17). Prewar Nice is dormant; Noémi just needs to figure out how to access it. Counting distractedly while walking, she finds herself reciting a children's rhyme, and suddenly she is a child being reminded to make a wish at the end of the rhyme. Although this moment of temporal slippage could be occurring in Noémi's mind, later moments involve memories that, as she points out, are not her own. The first time this occurs, Noémi has gone to visit the apartment her mother may have inhabited during the war. She stares at the window and thinks of her mother visiting the same apartment for the first time: “Sarah avait dû poser une toute petite valise en carton noir, et s'était dirigée vers la fenêtre” [Sarah must have put down a small black cardboard suitcase, and had gone towards the window] (34). When the

landlord interrupts Noémi's reverie to note that the place needed cleaning, Sarah responds: "–Bien sûr, répondit machinalement Sarah. – Bien sûr, dit Noémi" ['Of course,' Sarah responded without thinking. 'Of course,' Noémi said] (34). By thinking about her mother, Noémi has resurrected Sarah and brought her into the present; Noémi's own response is now merely an echo of her mother's.

Although Noémi's postmemories of Sarah take place during the war, the war itself is only a catalyst for Sarah's immigration to Nice. The city itself encompasses Noémi's lost past, a continuous moment that stretches from the 1940s to the novel's present. Safely ensconced in her room, Noémi looks outside and sees the past: "C'est Nice en 1945, et c'est encore le printemps, c'est Nice en 1950, en 1960 ; cela n'a aucune importance, c'est Nice et l'histoire est arrêtée depuis longtemps" [It's Nice in 1945, and it's still spring, it's Nice in 1950, in 1960; it doesn't matter, it's Nice and history was stopped long ago] (116). Since Noémi has no connection to 1940 or 1960, all of history blurs into her mother's past. Until she can access her mother's memories, she is trapped in both place and time – like Sarah, hiding while her mother speaks to a Nazi soldier, "en suspension dans le temps, dans l'espace réduit de cette chambre ouverte" [suspended in time, in the confines of this open room] (75).

The narrative's temporal conflation works seamlessly as Noémi and Sarah and even Sarah's mother (Estelle, referred to as Mamele, Yiddish for "mommy") take each other's places in a Nice that perfectly resembles its wartime counterpart. During Noémi's visit, there are a series of earthquakes. They are first described in a passage juxtaposed with the arrival of the Nazis in Paris and the simultaneous arrival of Sarah's baby brother, whom Mamele wishes had been a stillbirth. The earthquakes are only mildly disruptive, but Noémi refers to them as "la catastrophe" (53), thus encouraging the comparison with the real catastrophe of the Nazis' arrival in the preceding passage. At first, people ignore them: "Ce n'était pas un séisme important, il était passé presque inaperçu. Une secousse de plus, rien d'alarmant" [It wasn't a strong earthquake, it passed almost unnoticed. One more tremor, nothing alarming] (57). But the public's flippant attitude only draws a comparison to the prewar public's reaction to early anti-Semitic laws. As the earthquakes continue, they instigate a sense of foreboding, of a greater earthquake – or catastrophe – to come. Noémi begins to notice Nice's crumbling façade: "Il en avait toujours été ainsi, même du temps de sa mère. A présent elle remarquait qu'en effet beaucoup de vitres étaient cassées et de volets fermés" [It was always like this, even in her mother's time. Now she noticed that a lot of windows were broken and shutters closed] (56). When a man in the park asks if she felt the earthquake, she says, gravely, "tout s'effrite" ['everything is crumbling'] (58). Comments about the earthquakes blur into wartime scenes that use the same language. One woman asks another if she felt the tremors, and reminisces about a quake in the past when "tout le pays avait craqué" [the entire country cracked open]

(71); the next passage begins with “Il y eut un craquement sur le palier” [there was a cracking sound on the landing] (72), and Sarah asks Mamele if she heard the noise, soon identified as the Nazis taking their upstairs neighbors. By referring to the quakes as a “catastrophe,” the narrative blurs the distinction between the earthquakes and the Nazi occupation in both Noémi’s mind and the reader’s.

Rather than jumping between separate time periods, Garnier causes different time periods to conflate by linking passages with similar language and imagery and blurring the distinctions between Noémi and Sarah and between the earthquakes and the occupation. This occurs both over the course of the entire novel and in juxtaposed passages. Early in the narrative, when Noémi sees her mother’s apartment in Nice for the first time, she looks out the window and sings quietly, “maman ? maman ? ma man? Ma ma man man ma m mmmm...” (34); Sarah, in a later scene, at the same window, murmurs, “mama-ma-ma-ma-man” (94). In a very literal interpretation of postmemory, Noémi actually seems to possess her mother’s memories, though they must be – as with all postmemory – her vision of her mother’s memories. As she walks through Nice, she feels like she encompasses everyone and their memories, but ultimately this only leads her to imagine herself in Sarah’s place, waiting for Mamele: “Les existences étrangères la pénétraient d’images inconnues. [...] Elle était tout le monde à la fois, partiellement. Elle se laissa grossir, devint la foule, arriva place de la Préfecture. Place de la Préfecture : Sarah y avait attendu tant d’heures pour avoir des nouvelles !” [Foreign beings penetrated her with unknown images. She was everyone at once, partially. She let herself grow, became the crowd, arrived at the Prefecture. The Place de la Préfecture: Sarah had waited there so many hours to get news!] (99). Postmemory here is instigated by geography: just as Nice imbues Noémi with her mother’s memories, the Place de la Préfecture acts as a bridge to the past. Sarah’s interminable wait for her mother mirrors Noémi’s stay in Nice; Noémi cannot bring herself to leave the city, despite the quakes that are causing others to leave. Noémi feels trapped by her postmemories. In a passage that begins with Noémi running through the city, the narrative quickly segues into her mother’s memories of her own mother, whom Noémi never met:

Pourquoi courait-elle [Noémi] ainsi? Mamele avait disparu un matin. Restait la vision d’une petite femme brune soulevant sa valise et montant dans le train de Chalon. Puis la vision d’une femme blanche se levant de son lit d’hôpital en s’aidant d’une chaise en métal. Elle n’était jamais arrivée à Nice et, pour Sarah, la mort avait pris l’aspect de cette disparition, la vie celui d’une patiente attendue. Noémi s’obligea à ralentir.

Why was Noémi running like this? Mamele had disappeared one morning. There remained the vision of a small brunette lifting her suitcase and boarding the train from Chalon. Then the vision of a white woman rising from her hospital

bed with the help of a metal chair. She never made it to Nice and, for Sarah, death had taken on the appearance of this disappearance, life of a patient waiting. Noémi forced herself to slow down. (95-96)

Through postmemory, Noémi “sees” both Sarah and Mamele in the 1940s – Sarah on her journey to Nice, and Mamele the last time Sarah saw her, hospitalized before her deportation. But Noémi’s “visions” go beyond the visual: she also understands both death and life through Sarah’s eyes, and internalizes these definitions until they become her own. Life and death are both suspended experiences: disappearance and waiting. Similarly, Sarah’s story is suspended in Noémi’s, as the narrative switches between them at least a dozen times – as if Noémi cannot move beyond the present moment until she lives her mother’s experiences.⁷²

The themes of disappearance and waiting imbue life in Nice as everyone either waits uncomfortably for the next earthquake or leaves out of fear that the quake will destroy the city. In the midst of people talking about the impending disaster, Noémi finds strange comfort in the monastery and its cemetery – she “songeait au monastère de Cimiez comme à un refuge possible” [thought of the Cimiez Monastery as a possible refuge] (86), and although the syntax suggests that it would be a refuge from the quake, the narrative implies that she sees it as a place of respite from Nice and its accompanying memories. But she finds only death in the abandoned gravestones of the cemetery; Hans says, “Ici la catastrophe a déjà eu lieu. La cendre recouvre tout” [The catastrophe has already happened here. Ash covers everything] (88). He is suggesting that their surroundings are a window onto the aftermath of catastrophe – both the catastrophe of the past and of the future. Instead of being a refuge from Nice, the cemetery is a physical incarnation of Noémi’s view of the city: “Nice s’incarnait dans des corps décomposés, des squelettes secs que l’érosion du sol laissait aisément imaginer” [Nice was embodied in the decomposed bodies, the dry skeletons that the soil’s erosion made easy to imagine] (89). While Hans is disgusted and nauseated, Noémi is unable to turn away from the scene; she describes it as “un miroir” [a mirror] (90). The cemetery and its incarnation of death – specifically death in Nice – are a reflection of her postmemories of her mother’s experience of catastrophe.

Unlike Hans, Noémi longs for the catastrophe to repeat itself, in the form of a major earthquake, so that she can live through something similar to what her mother experienced. Hans’s disgust at the monastery’s cemetery is mirrored in his frustration with Nice’s obsession with the quake. He complains, “On ne peut plus entrer dans un café, dans un magasin sans entendre parler de tremblement de terre. C’est grotesque” [You can’t go to a café or a store without hearing people talk about the earthquake. It’s grotesque] (112). Hans’s disdainful tone and use of “grotesque” imply both that people

⁷² See narrative switching to Sarah’s story: pp.35-36, 39-40, 47-49, 50-52, 59-61, 62-65, 66-67, 72-76, 76-79, 79-80, 82-85, 92-94, 106-107.

are talking about something that defies description and that their obsession with it is inappropriate. This contrasts sharply with the postwar silence about what happened during the war – the silence that Noémi needs, obsessively, to fill with postmemories. Postmemory gives Noémi the tools to talk about what is otherwise indescribable. The scenes of the past that haunt her give her the authority to act, and speak, as a witness, but until the memories are physically her own, she is trapped in the catastrophe itself and cannot process it or attain closure.

Although Hans vehemently insists that he does not believe a major quake will occur, he still wants to leave Nice along with everyone else. Noémi is enraged by both his disbelief and his desire to leave. She says to him: “La mort dans Nice, cela ne vous concerne pas ? Vous perdez toute chance de comprendre. Il faut avoir vu. Tenez, je vous plains. [...] Repartez dans votre Allemagne. Repartez donc, mais vous n’êtes pas sauvé” [Death in Nice, this doesn’t concern you? You’re losing any chance of understanding. It is necessary to have seen. Here, I pity you... Go back to Germany. Go back, then, but you are not saved] (113). Noémi is looking for catharsis for a war she did not experience. Although Hans was also born after the war, she sees him as saddled with both patrimonial guilt and the guilt of his silence. He is in need of salvation – a salvation that can only come from suffering through a catastrophe in the same city in which his father perpetrated the catastrophe that affected Noémi’s mother. Notably, Noémi tells Hans that seeing death in Nice firsthand is an opportunity to understand it – but instead of insisting that he must see it, she says he must *have seen* it (“Il faut avoir vu”), as if experiencing the present catastrophe retroactively creates a memory and experience of the war. For Noémi, Nice is simultaneously exists in past and present; even though the earthquake would take place in the present, through a postmemorial link to the war, it maps onto the past, allowing Hans’s witnessing to occur in the past, and thus his recovery and salvation to follow in the present.

Noémi finally finds closure in Orlamonde, Maeterlinck’s extravagant prewar residence, now in ruins.⁷³ The ruined villa exists outside of time (or “contre le temps” [against time]), suspended in its abandoned state, and outside of place, its name (particularly on the partially effaced sign, “ORL MONDE” [129]) suggesting the homonym “hors le monde” (outside of the world). Given the importance of place to Noémi’s postmemories, Orlamonde, at once part of Nice and outside of it, belonging both to her mother’s time and her own, allows Noémi to escape the tyranny of Nice and its impending quake while still working through her postmemories. She hopes that, from Orlamonde, she can witness the quake she is certain is about to strike Nice.

⁷³ Maurice Maeterlinck bought the villa in 1935, but fled to Portugal at the onset of World War II, and only returned to Nice in 1947. He died there two years later. His wife remained there until her death in 1969. The villa was then abandoned until it was converted into apartments in 1983 (three years after the publication of *Nice, pour mémoire*).

She pictures the decimated city and is “heureuse à l’idée que la destruction serait totale” [happy at the idea that the destruction would be complete]; she imagines, with pleasure, the death that will ensue: “Mort joyeuse, spectaculaire, dont les effets attendus et tant décrits ne cesseraient cependant pas de surprendre. Englobement d’un espace et d’un temps usés, d’où ne renaîtrait plus aucune parole” [Joyous, spectacular death, whose effects, unexpected and much described, will nevertheless not cease to amaze. Engulfment of a spent space and time, from which not a single word will be reborn] (134). This passage is in conversation with the book’s last passage from the past, in which the narrator claims that “[l]e pire, dans ce monde tremblé était d’être restées vivantes” [the worst, in this shaky world, was to remain alive] (126). The “shaky” world, metaphorically Occupied France, is now literally quake-ridden Nice. The total annihilation that Noémi envisions parallels the effects of the war – not just in the deaths that, although expected, do not “cease to amaze,” but in the obliteration of speech. For Noémi, the war is characterized by silence – Sarah’s failure to tell Noémi about her and Mamele’s lives during and before the war. For Garnier as well, the past is silent – Raczymow, in an article on Garnier’s novel, calls the narrative “l’écoute attentive d’un silence” [listening to silence] (Raczymow "L'Ecoute"). By witnessing similar destruction, Noémi can possess her own memories of catastrophe, instead of relying on her postmemories – her vision of her mother’s memories. She already sees herself as a victim of the war and her family’s migration, but substituting her own memories for postmemories would legitimize this status.

However, although another quake does strike, it does not bring the destruction or silence she had hoped for. Instead, she emerges with a voice that is both “forte et neuve” [strong and new] (136). The horizon has the glow of “la naissance du premier jour” [the birth of the first day] (136-37) and Noémi herself is reborn: “Elle, ne commence à avoir une signification qu’avec la venue du jour inconnu” [She only begins to have meaning with the advent of the unknown day] (137). There is no cathartic apocalypse, but through her experience of Nice’s earthquakes, Noémi can resist being subsumed by her past: Having created her own memories of her mother’s city of exile, she can emerge with the ability to see the city through her own eyes instead of through her mother’s. The novel’s last line, in which she hears “plus rien que le bruit de ses pas” [nothing more than the sound of her footsteps] (139), indicates that, although still walking through Nice, she is no longer haunted by her mother’s memories. Yet while Noémi finds closure, Garnier’s novel deliberately avoids resolution. In an article on writing and memory, Claire Gorrara argues that testimonial writing does not intend to produce a historical record, but instead “acts as a participant in the experiences it describes and aims to influence current political and cultural debates” (Gorrara 39). Through the use of temporal conflation, Garnier’s text brings the past into the present and thus offers a way to grapple with a silent past. Gorrara suggests that “what Garnier

wanted to do in 1980s France was to contribute to future writing on the Holocaust as the Jewish experience took on increasing importance in literary and historical circles” (43). By resisting a redemptive apocalyptic ending, Garnier is refusing to wipe clean the troubled slate of the past; instead, she opens up the narrative to further discussion.

Although Garnier’s novel advocates continued literary conversation about the history of French Jewry, the novel itself has not been widely embraced by critics. Despite its nontraditional narrative structure and engagement with ongoing questions of commemoration, historical repetition, and cultural legacy, only a few critics (Thomas Nolden, Alan Morris, and Claire Gorrara, all cited in this analysis) have seen the novel as a critical source. Yet the questions it raises are salient in today’s critical debates, and reappear in contemporary literature. Both Raczymow and Garnier offer their narratives as attempts by members of the second generation to establish a coherent link to the past that can then inform their identities in the present. A key feature of these texts is the reliance on the repetition of the past as a method of reclaiming and promoting cultural legacy, as the stories they narrate are constantly in the process of being told and retold. Repetition is an essential component of Jewish historiography in general. In *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, Yosef Yerushalmi argues that historical events are seen as a repetition of foundational biblical events; for example, the expulsion from Spain was seen as a repetition of the expulsion from Egypt. Raczymow’s and Garnier’s technique of temporal conflation encourages this view of history as a series of repetitions. While these authors and their characters are Ashkenazi Jews, Robert Elbaz argues that the use of repetition to indicate the ever-evolving and unresolved past is a particularly Sephardic and Maghrebian literary feature. Lacking the ability to resolve itself, “le texte a recours à un procès de répétition exprimant son impuissance à narrer le récit qu’il projette” [the text takes recourse to a process of repetition expressing its inability to tell the story it projects] (Elbaz “L’écriture” 37). In the case of these two Ashkenazi authors, the central past event on which their narratives hinge is migration related to World War II, and the postmemorial legacy of the event – the silence it engenders and the second generation’s reaction to that silence – offers similar conditions to those that Elbaz finds in Sephardic and Maghrebian literature. Yet in Francophone Sephardic and Maghrebian narratives that also engage with questions of transmission and postmemory, there is a stronger emphasis on questions of hybrid identity and belonging, of the connection between the individual, his or her Jewish community, and the larger French community. Perhaps this is due to Sephardic and Maghrebian communities’ strong ties to their surrounding cultures. As we saw in the work of first-generation Sephardic immigrants discussed in the previous two chapters, and will see in the work of the next generation discussed in chapter four, these multiple national, cultural, and linguistic allegiances lead to the development of complex hybrid identities.

Eliette Abécassis's novel *Sépharade* offers the opportunity to discuss the effect of postmemory on the development of Sephardic/Maghrebian hybrid identity in a narrative that, like Raczymow's and Garnier's, uses temporal conflation to explore postmemory. *Sépharade* overtly foregrounds questions of both collective and individual identity, initially through its title, which begs an explanation of a term that once referred only to Jews of Spanish origin, but has now come to include French Jews from the Maghreb. Abécassis's use of the term in her title suggests that her work will attempt to define it, as indeed her narrator and characters do. An inscription Abécassis wrote when signing my copy of the book, "l'histoire d'une jeune, l'épopée d'un peuple" [the history of a young woman, the epic of a people], is even more suggestive of the dynamic of collective versus individual identity at play in the novel. By equating individual and collective history, Abécassis argues that the treatment of the story of an individual can be a case study for broader ancestral history. She thus encourages reading the protagonist's story as a paradigm for others of her background and generation.

Abécassis's protagonist, Esther Vital, born in Strasbourg to Moroccan parents, is trapped between her family's traditions and the French culture that surrounds her, but she also longs for the past she never knew – her ancestral Morocco and Spain. Yet despite these diverse cultural influences, Esther identifies primarily as French: "Esther Vital était la fille de Moïse Vital, et la petite-fille de Saadia Vital, de Fès. Néanmoins Esther Vital était française" [Esther Vital was the daughter of Moïse Vital, and the granddaughter of Saadia Vital of Fes. Nevertheless Esther Vital was French] (Abécassis 21). Esther's French identity is privileged through a *negation* of her heritage – *despite* her Moroccan ancestry, she is French. Yet the introduction to her character complicates this statement: "Née à Strasbourg, elle était alsacienne" [Born in Strasbourg, she was Alsatian]; "Mais aussi, juive marocaine par ses parents" [But also, Moroccan Jewish from her parents]; "Esther était alsacienne née à Strasbourg, dans la communauté sépharade marocaine" [Esther was an Alsatian born in Strasbourg in the Moroccan Sephardic community] (21-22). These statements pit Esther's individual identity against the multiple identities of her communities. Yet even within these communities, identity is not facile. Esther's father Moïse is from Fès, and her mother Suzanne is from Mogador (a distinction that becomes very important in the identity politics of the narrative); but by choosing to immigrate to France, they embrace their new French identity at the expense of all others: "Ils étaient français de cœur, plus français que les Français, ils citaient Corneille et Racine dans le texte, ils adoraient la culture française, pour eux la France était l'Eden, le paradis dans lequel les idéaux les plus élevés s'épanouissaient" [They were French at heart, more French than the French, they cited Corneille and Racine in the text, they adored French culture, for them France was Eden, the paradise in which the highest ideals flourished] (27).

Suzanne, Moïse, and others of their generation who also immigrated to France, although raised with a connection to their heritage, do not value its transmission. Esther's fiancé's grandfather mourns that he "avait su transmettre à son fils tout son savoir, mais il n'avait pas su transmettre la transmission" [knew how to transmit all his knowledge to his son, but he didn't know how to transmit transmission] (401). It is thus not surprising that Esther, like other children of immigrant parents, is raised to be monoculturally French: "A ses enfants, elle [Suzanne] avait donné une éducation française. Pas un mot d'arabe dans leur vocabulaire. Elle-même prétendait ne pas parler l'arabe, elle disait qu'elle avait tout oublié. Mais Esther savait que c'était faux" [Suzanne had given her children a French education. Not a single word of Arabic in their vocabulary. She, herself, claimed not to speak Arabic, said that she had forgotten everything. But Esther knew that was false] (104). Esther knows that her mother is still connected to her heritage, but, herself disconnected both culturally and linguistically, she cannot encourage her to embrace it. Unable to speak Arabic, Esther "ne se sentait rien de commun avec les juifs qui venaient de débarquer du Maroc" [feels nothing in common with the Jews who had just arrived from Morocco], despite belonging to "la deuxième génération d'immigrés" [the second generation of immigrants] and thus identifying as partially an immigrant herself (27). Instead of recognizing the elements of her own Moroccan culture in new immigrants, she sees them as "culturellement kitsch"; their accent, manners, and clothing disgust and alienate her.

However, Esther's rupture of transmission is different from Raczynow's and Garnier's protagonists'. The latter are marked by migration, but also by the widely-recognized collective trauma of the Holocaust; for Esther, the historical trauma of the expulsion from Spain is influential, but, of course, not as immediate. One character who refused to immigrate to France muses on the different heritages of trauma for those who were in France during the war as opposed to those, like North African Jews, who were not: "En France, il y avait eu la collaboration et les rafles de juifs. Il en ressentait un effroi d'autant plus viscéral qu'elle lui rappelait l'histoire de sa propre famille, pourchassée par l'Inquisition. Il en était marqué dans sa chair" [In France, there was collaboration and roundups of Jews. He felt a fear even more visceral in that France reminded him of the story of his own family, pursued by the Inquisition. His flesh was marked by it] (206-07). But the Inquisition, though traumatic, is not the rupture that plagues Esther's generation; instead, it is the new immigrants' assimilation into French culture. This assimilation entails a loss, in Esther's case, of both Moroccan and Spanish heritage; Abécassis's narrator argues that the immigrant generation, "[o]ublieux de ce passé qu'ils traînaient pourtant sous chacun de leur pas, [...] ignoraient que, sans le vouloir, ils étaient la dernière génération d'une histoire millénaire" [forgetful of this past though they trailed it in each of their steps, were

unaware that, unwittingly, they were the last generation of a thousand-year history] (32). Accordingly, Esther, who “n’avait pas conscience de ses origines” [was not conscious of her origins] (31), is not aware of the heritage she is missing – unlike Raczymow’s and Garnier’s narrators, who are almost hyperaware of their missing memories. Her generation is compared to the son in the Passover seder who does not know how to ask the questions that would lead to the transmission of the Passover story – the “pire” [worst] son, who does not even know that there is a question to be asked (200). Indeed, for assimilated French Jews, the holiday itself, “fête de la Transmission, était en train de devenir la fête de ceux qui ne savaient pas poser la question” [holiday of Transmission, was in the process of becoming the holiday of those who did not know to ask] (201).

Ironically, Esther’s pursuit of her French identity leads her to discover her Sephardic origins. Encouraged to “succeed,” Esther understands that this success is not success in life but in “son intégration : sa place dans la société française” [her integration: her place in French society] (30). As Albert Memmi emphasizes as well, the path to this success is academia: “L’université était [...] le signe évident de leur intégration, de leur identité française” [The university was the obvious sign of their integration, of their French identity] (42). Esther chooses to study Montaigne, because “Montaigne, c’était la France. C’était le début de la littérature, l’invention de l’autobiographie, le style épuré et sobre” [Montaigne was France. It was the beginning of literature, the invention of autobiography, the style sober and refined] (42); “Avec Montaigne, elle était sûre de plonger au cœur de l’esprit français, aux racines de l’esprit républicain” [With Montaigne, she was sure to plunge into the heart of the French spirit, to the roots of the Republican spirit] (293). However, Montaigne proves surprising; her attempts to “s’émanciper psychologiquement et intellectuellement” [emancipate herself psychologically and intellectually] from the Sephardic culture she finds suffocating lead her to discover instead that the author she thought the epitome of Frenchness was actually “le descendant de juifs espagnols” [the descendant of Spanish Jews] (293).

Esther’s discovery of Montaigne’s patrimony calls into question the concept of authenticity and prefigures the ultimate failure of Esther’s efforts to claim certain elements of her identity while rejecting others. *Sépharade* presents identity as a construct; the novel’s epigraph, “Descends au plus profond de toi-même, et trouve la base solide sur laquelle tu pourras construire une autre personnalité, un homme nouveau” [Descend to the depths of your being and find the solid base on which you can build another personality, a new man] (9), suggests that with enough soul-searching or research into one’s past, it is possible to construct a new self based on existing (but hidden) tools. In an interview, Abécassis states: “J’ai voulu, dans ce livre, être la plus sincère et la plus authentique. C’est tout simplement le fruit de longues

recherches sur mes origines” [I wanted, in this book, to be the most sincere and the most authentic. It’s simply the result of extensive research on my origins] (Kebballi). Although raised with a strong connection to her past (unlike Raczymow and Garnier), Abécassis finds that to achieve “authenticity,” she must research her roots. Esther, with no knowledge of her origins, still makes choices that reveal a connection to her lost heritage – in a sense, a postmemorial connection. In an effort to selectively embrace certain cultural influences, she “avait simplement pris l’habitude de ne pas voir l’allemand, pourtant omniprésent dans cette région frontalière” [had simply gotten used to not seeing the German, despite its ubiquity in this border region] (22); at school, instead of choosing to study German as a second language like most of her classmates, she chooses Spanish. Like Memmi’s protagonist Benillouche, she is embarrassed by her name at school, though when she asks to change it and her parents offer her other names – Messody, Bashéva, and Sultana – she opts to keep the less foreign-sounding Esther (29).⁷⁴ Ultimately, Esther finds herself struggling with an overabundance of cultural influences: “Elle tentait de démêler les nœuds du passé et du présent, de faire la part de l’héritage et de ce qu’elle avait construit elle-même, seule, contre ce qui la figeait dans ses origines” [She tried to untangle the knots of the past and present, to separate the heritage from what she herself had built, alone, against what trapped her in her origins] (41). With her heritage represented only by the new immigrants she finds offensive, Esther must look elsewhere to find her origins. But when she travels to Morocco to explore her roots, she finds more connection to the Berber culture that she had not even known existed. Shocked by what she interprets as physiological and cultural similarities, she becomes convinced she is both Berber and Phoenician. But although she finds new roots through travel, she cannot shed the influences she grew up with, and instead of adopting a new identity, she simply adds “Berber” and “Phoenician” to the plethora of identities that vie for her attention.

Although Esther’s identity crisis stems from the confusing combination of a severed connection to her past and a variety of cultural influences, she is not the only character to feel pulled in different directions. Her aunt Rachel, a Moroccan living in Quebec, married to John, a non-Jewish Canadian, does not feel at home in any one culture:

- Mais tu en es où exactement : juive ? québécoise ?
- Québécoise, je ne sais pas. Je ne me sentirai jamais québécoise, je parle anglais avec un accent... Mais c’est vrai que je fréquente plus le milieu québécois que le milieu marocain. J’ai passé plus de temps là-bas qu’au Maroc, tu te rends compte ? Je ne me sens plus du tout une immigrante. En même temps, face aux

⁷⁴ See chapter two for a discussion of Benillouche, the protagonist of Albert Memmi’s *La Statue de Sel*.

vrais Québécois comme John, je me sens marocaine. Je ne me suis jamais sentie aussi marocaine que depuis que je vis avec lui !

– But where do you stand exactly? Jewish? Québécois?

– Québécois, I don't know. I'll never feel Québécois, because I speak English with an accent... But it's true that I spend more time in a Québécois environment than a Moroccan one. I've spent more time there than in Morocco, do you realize that? I don't feel like an immigrant at all anymore. At the same time, faced with real Québécois like John, I feel Moroccan. I never felt as Moroccan as I do since living with him! (118)

The question that provokes this reflection suggests that one must take a side – the colloquial “tu en es où,” “where do you stand,” literally translates as “where are you in this” – as if identity is a space to be occupied, and Rachel can only occupy one space, Canadian or Jewish. Forced to choose, she seems to identify through negation. Unable to speak unaccented English, she is not Canadian; estranged from Morocco, she is not Moroccan; faced with her “real” Canadian husband, she cannot possibly feel Canadian, and instead feels more Moroccan than ever, although at the same time she does not feel like an immigrant.⁷⁵

Esther and other second-generation immigrants are the heirs of this identity crisis. With competing influences coming from home and society, attempting to privilege certain cultural aspects at the expense of others leads them to realize that they must find a way to embrace all aspects at once. Cut off from her ancestral roots, Esther must seek them out in order to give them a place in her hybrid identity. Although her mother pretends not to speak Arabic and refuses to transmit her culture to her daughter, her attachment to her roots is evident. The narrator remarks that, “[e]n vérité, malgré le rejet de ses origines, Suzanne rêvait du Maroc” [in truth, despite the rejection of her origins, Suzanne dreamed of Morocco] (112); even Suzanne's French betrays her origins, as in her non-colloquial use of “interdit,” forbidden: “C'est « interdit ». Un mot français, certes, mais une traduction directe du mot arabe *h'ram*” [It's “forbidden.” A French word, for sure, but a direct translation of the Arabic word *h'ram*] (104). In order to claim her cultural legacy, Esther must latch on to the pieces of her past offered to her; for example, she angers her mother by choosing to wear the traditional wedding dress Suzanne rejected at her own wedding.

Esther's attempts at engaging with her past can be read through theories of cultural memory that explain how her claims on Berber culture, the wedding dress, or other aspects of her heritage have lasting significance for her process of identity

⁷⁵ Of course, Québécois speak Canadian French, and English with an accent; perhaps Abécassis here is conflating Québécois and Canadian, or the speaker's accent in English is so different from the Québécois accent that it stands out as foreign.

formation. In an article on collective memory and cultural identity, Jan Assmann claims that

Cultural memory works by reconstructing, that is, it always relates its knowledge to an actual and contemporary situation. True, it is fixed in immovable figures of memory and stores of knowledge, but every contemporary context relates to these differently, sometimes by appropriation, sometimes by criticism, sometimes by preservation or by transformation. (Assmann 130)

Esther sees her imagined Phoenician roots in the red color of the wedding dress. Whereas Suzanne's refusal to wear her mother's wedding dress marked her attempted rejection of her roots in favor of assimilation, Esther's choice to wear it signals her embrace of the long-lost roots she discovered through research and travel, thus both appropriating her lost heritage and reconstructing it to fit her needs. By constructing a genealogy from newly reclaimed parts of her heritage, Esther can fashion an identity that is both hybrid and national – in other words, an individual identity that allows her to belong to multiple communities and identify with multiple nationalities. Heritage, as David Lowenthal argues, “distills the past into icons of identity, bonding us with precursors and progenitors, with our own earlier selves, and with our promised successors” (Lowenthal 43). Although “heritage remains metaphorically ancestral” (44), it “distills the past into icons of identity” that we can then use to connect to others and form identity-based groups. While members of these groups can share similar ancestry, heritage is the claim of the individual, and is necessarily unique. National identity, however, is a group bond based on people of disparate ethnicities and heritages who share a common set of memories and cultural references in the present moment; it is less dependent on the ancestral past. Lowenthal tells of his British colleagues in the early 1960s who had no idea who their great-grandparents were; when told that Americans knew their ancestry well, they responded, “Well, we don't need genealogical fetishes; we have a secure *national* identity” (50). He finds that subsequent “diminished pride in nationhood” then led many British to seek out their genealogical roots. Although Esther does not experience “diminished pride” in her national identity, she is never secure in her French identity because she grows up with so many competing cultural influences. Her search for her genealogical roots is, at the same time, a search for collective identity.

Although Esther's parents neglected to transmit their ancestral heritage to their daughters, Esther was still raised in Strasbourg's community of Moroccan Jews, and was taught certain elements of her culture through the behavior expected of her as a daughter and a woman. She finds these cultural expectations suffocating: “Il n'y avait pas de place pour l'individu, pas de place pour ses désirs propres, qui devaient s'identifier soit à ceux de la religion, soit à ceux de la communauté, soit à ceux de sa famille” [There was no place for the individual, no place for her own desires, which

were to be identified either with those of the religion, those her community, or those of her family] (44). Esther's attempt to break away from this community is thus also an effort to assert her individuality, defined by the hybrid identity she explores through her research into her past. Yet she also longs to belong to a community, and despite having roots in Europe and Africa, she finds that Israel may be "sa véritable origine, [...] terre des ancêtres, de ses ancêtres" [her true origin, land of ancestors, of her ancestors] (154). The draw of Israel is not its connection to *her* ancestors, but to a general ancestral legacy: "En Israël, son identité juive s'épanouissait en même temps qu'elle disparaissait dans une identité collective" [In Israel, her Jewish identity blossomed at the same time as it disappeared into a collective identity] (154). Esther goes to Israel to marry Charles, a childhood acquaintance who shares her background, but once there, finds herself attracted to Noam, the son of her father's oldest friend, also of Moroccan origin but raised in Israel. Noam epitomizes Israel's collective identity: "Noam était Israël" [Noam was Israel] (156); "Noam [...] pensait que pour s'intégrer, il devait mépriser ses origines et se fondre dans la nouvelle culture israélienne" [Noam thought that to integrate, he had to despise his origins and blend into the new Israeli culture] (180). Esther's attraction to Noam is her attraction to the collective Jewish identity Israel represents; but this identity is uncomplicated, not nuanced by the multiple origins Esther claims. Charles, on the other hand, represents Esther's Sephardic Moroccan upbringing and her French identity, but is "un juif assimilé" [an assimilated Jew] (146) and is not interested in following the traditions that Esther feels define her.

Esther's difficult process of identity formation is, in a sense, a crisis of memory. Susan Suleiman describes such a crisis as a moment "that highlight[s] the relations between individual memory and group memory" (Suleiman 5); in Esther's case, this relation is severed, as she shares no memories with the collective. Forced to go outside her community to construct an identity, Esther fails, because her crisis cannot be solved in isolation. The connections she is raised with are strong group connections – to France and Frenchness, to Strasbourg's Moroccan Jewish community – but they are not rooted in the past, and they send Esther conflicting messages. Thus, like Matthieu Schrifftlich and Noémi Fogelmann, Esther turns to her past to find roots that can equip her in the present. At first, her research only complicates her concept of her identity, constantly adding to the influences she recognized from her upbringing:

Esther croyait être française, alsacienne, juive, marocaine, et elle ne savait pas qu'elle était espagnole. Elle pensait être espagnole, et elle était arabe, elle croyait être arabe, et elle était berbère, elle croyait être berbère et elle était phénicienne, et ainsi de suite, depuis le début, le commencement, et jusqu'à la fin des temps. Esther believed herself to be French, Alsatian, Jewish, Moroccan, and she didn't know that she was Spanish. She thought she was Spanish, and she was Arab,

she thought she was Arab, and she was Berber, she thought she was Berber and she was Phoenician, and so on, since the start, the beginning, and until the end of time. (446)

As she discovers new aspects of her heritage, she fits them into her continuously evolving identity; instead of each culture taking the other's place, they construct a new hybrid self. As in Raczymow's text, this process occurs through narration. Abécassis's narrator states that "[n]ous avons tous des identités multiples; et c'est ce qui nous rend immortels. Tout événement du passé vit en nous d'une façon invisible" [we all have multiple identities; this is what makes us immortal. Every event from the past lives invisibly in us] (443). This immortality is not the endless life of a single person, but the continued trajectory of multiple generations whose cultural influences build and are sustained through collective memory. Postmemory relies on this concept of a living past, the invisible vestiges of past events that are only accessed through certain narrative techniques. The narrator equates identity with narration: "Et qu'est-ce qu'une identité si ce n'est une narration, la somme des histoires qu'on nous raconte ?" [And what is an identity if not a narration, the sum of the stories we tell?] (443). Both identity and narrative are the sum of many disparate parts, and as Esther's journey of self-discovery shows, these parts are both transtemporal and transspatial. As Abécassis suggests in the above-cited interview, heritage helps authenticate our identity: her narrator emphasizes the universality of the claim that her unique heritage is the story "de mon authenticité car c'est par elle que je suis" [of my authenticity because through it, I am] (11). Heritage thus acts like a badge of authenticity – an external and internal marker of actualized identity. In order for Esther to authenticate the hybrid identity she is exploring, she must borrow from her ancestral past. Writers narrate in order to understand "qui nous sommes à travers ce que nous avons été, et aussi tout ce que les autres ont été, ceux de nos familles, ceux des ancêtres que nous n'avons jamais connus, qui sont morts à jamais, mais qui continuent d'exister à travers nous [...] nous sommes le vecteur indocile de leur immortalité" [who we are through who we have been, and also everything others have been, those of our families, those of our ancestors whom we never knew, who are dead forever, but who continue to exist through us... we are the uncontrollable vector of their immortality] (12). By narrating her history, Esther can lay claim to the ancestors living through her, thus bringing the past into the present.

Esther's links to the past are both physical and spiritual. Although raised without knowledge of her heritage, an implicit link to her mother and grandmother is ingrained: "On aurait dit que l'esprit de sa mère et de sa grand-mère habitait le sien" [One might say that her mother's and grandmother's spirit inhabited hers] (47). Esther finds this connection suffocating, "un cordon ombilical qui n'avait jamais été coupé à la naissance" [an umbilical cord that was never cut at birth] (47-48), but as

she seeks out the stories and rituals of her past that map onto her present, she grows more comfortable claiming her heritage as her own. The narrative foregrounds the importance of objects of the past through its attention to ritual, especially in connection to the book's central event, Esther's wedding. At first, Esther feels pulled by her grandmother's ancient rituals and her mother's rejection of these rituals; she feels like she is "censée avoir accompli en une génération ce pas de géant qui mène du Moyen Âge aux Temps modernes" [supposed to have accomplished in one generation that giant step that leads from the Middle Ages to Modern Times] (47). This dilemma manifests itself in her grandmother's wedding dress: "Cette robe, spécifiquement juive, avait ses origines dans l'âge d'or espagnol, d'avant l'Inquisition, où les juifs étaient conseillers à la cour des rois" [This dress, specifically Jewish, had its origins in the Spanish Golden Age, before the Inquisition, where the Jews were advisors to the kings' court] (74). At first, the dress's ostentatious color and construction are "[t]out ce qu'Esther détestait" [everything Esther hated] (75). It represents the Orientalized view of Moroccan beauty; she imagines that "Delacroix l'avait peinte, exaltant la beauté et l'indolente suavité des femmes marocaines" [Delacroix painted it, exalting the beauty and indolent sweetness of Moroccan women] (75) – a stereotype that Esther is loath to fill. However, she also sees her marriage as the continuation of a chain her mother had tried to sever. By donning the wedding crown with which she "avait l'air d'une princesse orientale" [looked like an Oriental princess] (124), and thus accepting the Orientalized image, she is embracing the heritage her mother rejected. Suzanne did not wear the dress when she married Esther's father Moïse but the reader later discovers that she wore it for her engagement ceremony to Isaac, Moïse's best friend and Noam's father. The memories of this aborted marriage are tied to her memories of the dress; although, in her efforts to forget the past, she destroyed the pictures of herself in the dress, when she sees the dress on Esther, she thinks that "Esther était elle, à ses propres fiançailles" [Esther was her, at her own engagement] (324). Esther thus *becomes* her mother, *in the past*. By wearing the dress, Esther not only accepts a heritage her mother rejected, but threatens to reenact a marriage that never happened. Just as Suzanne's engagement ended abruptly when she ran off with Isaac's best friend, Esther destroys her own engagement by sleeping with Isaac's son Noam. When she goes to visit Noam the night before her wedding, she finds comfort in what she sees as their ancestral connection: "Le passé était là et il effaçait les différences, car ils étaient unis par le secret commun de leur naissance, le mystère berbère" [The past was there and erased the differences, because they were united by the common secret of their birth, the Berber mystery] (371). By bringing the past into the present, Esther feels connected to Noam, who represents not only her Berber self but her connection to a collective Jewish/Israeli identity. Sleeping with Noam thus allows her to cement her Berber heritage, through his last name, "Bouzaglo : elle savait d'où venait ce nom, du

pays de ses ancêtres, c'était un nom berbère. Et elle savait où elle était arrivée : au pays de ses ancêtres" [Bouzaglo: she knew where this name came from, from her ancestors' country, it was a Berber name. She knew where she had come: to her ancestors' country] (383-84). Yet their encounter, described in the chapter "noces berbères" [Berber nuptials], foreshadows what is indeed the "common" – as in "joint" – "secret of their birth," and cannot help but echo with the phrase "noces barbares" [barbarian nuptials] (the title of a Prix Goncourt-winning novel).⁷⁶ In the following chapter, the reader learns that Esther is Suzanne and Isaac's son, and thus Noam is her half-brother.

Suzanne's refusal to inform Esther about her past thus leads Esther to commit accidental incest and destroy her engagement to Charles, mimicking both Suzanne's failed engagement and Suzanne's mother, Sol's, failed engagement generations before to Charles's grandfather, Jacob. Sol's marriage failed because of her rival, Yacot's, curse, which caused Sol to trip on her wedding dress – the same dress Suzanne and Esther would later wear. The narrative's structure encourages the comparison between these repeated events. Each chapter focuses on one character and his or her past, seamlessly moving from the present moment to the past, then back to the present. This narrative technique recasts the present moment in light of the past, suggesting that all generations are inextricably linked to each other. As in Raczymow's narrative, marriage (or engagement) acts as a central temporal structure; it is particularly effective as a postmemorial device because it marks generational progression. After she sleeps with Noam, marking the third instance in her family legacy of failed engagements, Esther wakes up unhinged from her surroundings, caught between generations, experiencing the present at the same time as moments of the past in which she had never lived:

Dans un demi-sommeil, elle se demanda où elle était. Elle crut un instant être à Strasbourg, dans la chambre d'enfant qu'elle partageait avec sa sœur [...] L'aube se levait sur la ville assoupie [...] Et dehors, par la fenêtre, elle voyait la pluie tomber sur la ville [...] À quelques rues de là, la rue Brûlée, où l'on brûlait des juifs. À quelques années de là, d'autres femmes aux yeux bandés, fusillées. Half asleep, she wondered where she was. She thought for a moment she was in Strasbourg, in her childhood room she shared with her sister... Dawn rose over the drowsy city... And outside, through the window, she saw the rain fall on the city... A few streets away, Brûlée Street, where they burned Jews. A few years away, other women blindfolded, shot. (390-91)

Esther's postmemorial journey takes her from Noam's bed in Israel to Strasbourg three decades earlier, and then to Strasbourg during different moments of Jewish persecution. The language equates movement in time with movement in space – "A

⁷⁶ (Yann Queffélec, 1985)

few streets away” and “A few years away” – suggesting Esther’s postmemories not only can, but must, encompass different times and places in order to fully contribute to and express her culturally hybrid identity. The offhanded tone and sudden transitions underscore the brutal imagery they introduce, serving as a reminder of the reasons these past events may have been psychologically buried in the first place.

As in Garnier’s narrative, *Sépharade*’s movement through the past and present not only jumps through time but conflates the different periods and characters. Just as Esther’s wedding echoes her mother’s and grandmother’s, it also creates a space for broken connections from the past to reform. By mixing stories from the past and present, relationships jump out of both time and place. For example, when, at the wedding, Jacob, Charles’s grandfather, sees Sol, his approach is described in terms that echo the description of their last meeting in the preceding passage, and are reiterated in the wedding scene: “Jacob s’était avancé vers Sol, comme il s’était avancé vers elle cinquante ans plus tôt, dans les jardins de la Menara, à Marrakech” [Jacob had come towards Sol, as he had come towards her fifty years earlier, in the gardens of Menara, in Marrakech] (419). Placing Jacob’s movements in the present moment in the pluperfect (had come) is an awkward construction linguistically, but emphasizes the transtemporal connection. Temporal conflation also works through a juxtaposition of events that, like in *Nice, pour mémoire*, does not follow the events’ actual chronology. For example, after sleeping with Noam and realizing that she had destroyed her relationship with Charles, Esther, perched over the ocean on Noam’s balcony, contemplates suicide; in the following scene, the reader sees Sol, about to marry Sidney but still lovesick for Jacob, do the same; once Esther learns that Isaac is her father, she reconsiders the comfort of the ocean:

La mer étoilée l’appelait, afin qu’elle se fondît en elle à jamais. Elle était si haut. Et soudain, le vide l’aspira. [...] Et son corps de plomb aspiré par le vide, ce corps qui lui faisait horreur, qui la dégoûtait, il lui fallait s’en débarrasser. The starry sea called her, so that she could disappear in it forever. She was so high. And suddenly, the void swallowed her... And her leaden body swallowed by the void, this body that horrified her, that disgusted her, she needed to get rid of it. (397)

La mer immense l’appelait [...] Elle aurait été aspirée par l’océan, accueillant et hostile comme une mère. Elle se serait laissé entraîner sans un geste comme elle se laisserait faire par la vie qui l’attendait désormais. The immense sea called her... She would be swallowed by the ocean, welcoming and hostile like a mother. She would let herself be taken without a move, as she would let herself be taken by the life that awaited her from now on. (409)

La vision de la mer lui apporta la réponse. Elle ne survivrait pas. Elle noierait l'abjection de cette nuit, de son acte, dans l'eau qui, la veille, lors du bain rituel, aurait dû la laver de toutes ses impuretés. Elle se laverait de nouveau, pour la dernière fois.

The vision of the sea brought her the answer. She wouldn't survive. She would drown the abjection of this night, of her act, in the water which, the day before, at her ritual bath, should have washed her of all her impurities. She would wash herself again, for the last time. (431)

For both Sol and Esther, suicide by drowning offers a passive and purifying way out of the lives they feel they have no control over. The sea is an active participant both grammatically and narratively, calling to the suicidal girl. The ocean, figured as both mother and ritual purifying bath (mikvah), is a link to the womb – a path to the past that annihilates past, present, and future. By drowning herself in the sea, Esther cancels her body's actions, and rids herself of her agency.

Esther's and Sol's misfortunes are caused by a lack of information: Sol does not know about Yacot's sorcery; Esther is pushed to her affair because of her father's missing amulet she suspects Charles of stealing (she finds it at Noam's the morning after sleeping with him, and realizes Isaac had stolen it to disrupt the marriage). The amulet, a family heirloom from Toledo passed down from father to son, is a central feature of the plot and represents the transmission of heritage – but like the other moments of transmission, such as the many secrets that circulate in the novel, there is a failure of transmission with tragic results.

Despite the dissolution of Esther's engagement, her new knowledge of her past allows her to connect to her heritage in a way she was unable to do before. The narrative conflation of past and present forces Esther to root her identity in the complex past of her community, as opposed to only using the historical links she finds through her travels. Ultimately, the hybrid identity Esther constructs through postmemory and research is both historical and collective. Just as Raczymow's narrative took events once anchored in time and, through temporal conflation, made them into myths by placing them in an eternal present, Esther can appropriate past events to construct her own myths, and use those now-atemporal events to inform her actions in the present. Yael Zerubavel argues that groups whose claims to nationhood have been denied in recent history “turn to a more remote past to provide evidence of their distinct historical roots. Despite the manifest claim for ‘restoration,’ the portrayal of this remote past is clearly shaped by the need to highlight a symbolic continuity with the present” (Zerubavel 108). Denied access to her recent past, Esther must rely on a postmemorial construction of her remote (historical) past to establish ties to her heritage; the hybrid identity she develops depends on the support of her many communities. She thus creates a model for her entire generation to follow. In the

novel's last scene, Moïse reveals the secret of Esther's paternity to his father, who, in turn, reveals that the secret of the family amulet is that Sephardic Jews, since their expulsion from Spain, must carry their past with them.

Gorrara's argument referenced earlier, that testimonial writing is participatory, has important ramifications for postmemorial writing. Raczymow's, Garnier's, and Abécassis's narratives advocate the necessity of using some form of the otherwise inaccessible past in the project of constructing an identity that is in conversation with both ancestral history and national identity. Instead of just referencing historical events, these narratives rethink them in the context of the more culturally complicated present. As examples for others cut off from their heritages, Matthieu, Noémi, and Esther create narratives of their own pasts that can be applied universally. In a study of second-generation Algerians in France, Richard Derderian suggests that "intentional juxtaposition and confusion between the past and the present lead the reader to conclude that the Algerian War is a drama that still has no end in sight" (Derderian 251). By bringing the past into the present, temporal conflation makes the past into unfinished business. Derderian argues that the pattern he sees in second-generation Franco-Algerian literature of reviving the past is in order to release the past's hold on the present; in other words, to bury the past. On the contrary, the second-generation Jewish immigrants in this analysis revive an often painful past in order to incorporate it in a more constructive, positive way into the present.

In his edited volume *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, John Gillis writes, "We need to be reminded that memories and identities are not fixed things, but representations or constructions of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena. [...W]e are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities" (Gillis 3). Memory, even "direct" or "first person" memory, as opposed to postmemory, is subject to constant revision, especially when in the service of identity formation. Gillis argues that "modern memory" is actually predicated on "a break from the past" and "an intense awareness of the conflicting representations of the past" (8) – much like postmemory, born of a break in transmission. Although the texts analyzed here speak to the immigrations of previous generations, migration is an ongoing global process. The changing face of nationalism brought about by the global economy provides opportunities for more and different iterations of postmemorialization: "Today, the constructed nature of identities is becoming evident, particularly in the Western world, where the old bases of national identities are being rapidly undermined by economic globalization and transnational political integration" (4). Where the cultural makeup of communities is shifting due to globalization and immigration, people will selectively pick from their pasts in order to construct heritage-based identities that do not conflict with their new heterogeneous communities. New ways of commemorating and memorializing will "deritualize and dematerialize remembering so that it becomes

more a part of everyday life, thus closing the gap between the past and the present” (17) so that both individuals and communities carry their past with them. Texts like those discussed here thus become portable sites of memory – both “lieux” [sites] and “non-lieux” [non-sites] of memory, to borrow Pierre Nora’s terminology.⁷⁷ As postmemorial texts, they do not commemorate as much as reconstruct and reinterpret; they are as much about the present as the past.

In an era of increased migration, national identity and ethnic heritage are constantly being redefined to fit new demographics. Identity as an intellectual concept is closely tied to, and may even stem from, issues of migration and assimilation; one critic traces the use of the term “identity” in popular social science to the 1950s, quoting “the immigrant psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, who explained that his development of the term grew out of ‘the experience of emigration, immigration, and Americanization’” (Handler 34). Whereas France’s solution to increasing immigration in the nineteenth century was to create a melting pot, this view of multiculturalism is now clearly unrealistic.⁷⁸ However, the French government has yet to rethink this model; one critic writes that

immigrants living in France pose a double challenge to the historic construction of French culture. Black African and North African immigrants – and, perhaps more disquieting, their French-born children – seem to be resisting the proposition the Republic has historically made to immigrants: that they exchange their first identities for French ones, that they accept being melted down and being reminted as “French” by education in the culture. (Lebovics 251)

By clinging in part to their heritages, immigrants pose a threat to national identity as France has perceived it. Only by rethinking the tenants of national identity, and the structures of culture and memory on which it is based, can France provide a space for second-generation immigrants and future generations who embrace both their past and their present cultural influences.

When narratives that conflate time create a space in which the recuperation of a fantastical past can reshape the present, they can work to revise the politics of post-immigration identity formation. The texts I analyze in this chapter use historical events and cultural artifacts to bridge temporally disparate elements of their protagonists’ identities. Making these events and objects relevant to the present revalues them for

⁷⁷ By “non-lieux de mémoire,” I do not want to suggest the same definition as Marc Augé in *Non-lieux: Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), for whom “non-lieux” are the anonymous spaces of postmodernity. Rather, I refer to the “non-lieux” of Claude Lanzmann’s “Les non-lieux de mémoire” in *Au Sujet de Shoah : Le film de Claude Lanzmann* (Paris: Belin, 1990), which are blanks in memory similar to those experienced in postmemorial situations.

⁷⁸ See Gérard Noiriel, *Le Creuset française. Histoire de l’immigration XIXe-XXe siècles* (Paris, 1988).

the future; by redefining their significance, they can remain relevant to future generations. Language operates in a similar way; as a marker of cultural identity, it can be buried in a lost ancestral past or revised in a project of heritage recuperation. Official French policies that attempt to promote monoculturalism often focus on regulating language. In the next chapter, I will turn to texts that conflate languages as the texts here conflate time, and read them as direct responses to France's language policies and as attempts to use multilingualism to create a linguistically hybrid post-immigrant identity.

Chapter Four

“My madre wasn’t a mère”: Multilingual Identities and Untranslatability

The tensions between conflicting linguistic-cultural identities that I analyze in this study have an instructive relation to modern France’s complicated condition of contested languages. France has a long history of promoting monolingualism as a key component in the construction of its national identity. Although early modern France was neither monolingual nor monocultural, by adopting modern nationalism, France forced its denizens to conform to certain political ideals. According to nationalist ideology, “the ideal model of society is mono-lingual, mono-ethnic, mono-religious, [and] mono-ideological” (Blommaert and Verschueren 362). In its infancy, France’s nationalism focused on the importance of territoriality. After the French Revolution (1789-99), French was used for administrative purposes of communication, but less than 50% of the population spoke French or its dialects (364).⁷⁹ Yet even then, French began to be seen as an instrument of national identity: “Language now served not only as an instrument of ‘internal cohesion’, but also as a means of achieving ‘external distinction’, that is dividing off the essential French nation from surrounding nations” (Lodge 215). By the mid-nineteenth century, the focus on France’s homogeneity⁸⁰ had shifted, perhaps in response to complications in the territorial model caused by France’s expanding colonial empire, or in reaction to the cultural diversification caused by colonialism.⁸¹ Postcolonialism and its ensuing waves of migration to France from the colonies only strengthened France’s emphasis on linguistic homogeneity as a key element of nationalist ideology. However, even in nineteenth-century Metropolitan France, France’s regional languages were seen as a threat to national identity. Just as in colonial schools like the AIU’s, education was used in France to impose French on the many speakers of regional languages (such as Breton, Occitan, and Franco-Provençal):

The Second Empire (1852-70) and more particularly the Third Republic (1871-1940) carried the notion of the centralised state to an extreme degree, seeking the absorption of all regional identities into the single national identity of a monolithic state. To this end, the last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed the implementation of a vigorous policy of language-planning. (216)⁸²

⁷⁹ On the rise of French via print-capitalism, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and NY: Verso, 2006, especially pp. 44-46 and 144-148. Anderson also argues that “from the start the nation was conceived in language” (Anderson 145).

⁸⁰ *Homogeneity* is a term coined by Blommaert & Verschueren to refer to “a view of society in which differences are seen as dangerous and centrifugal, and in which the ‘best’ society is suggested to be one without intergroup differences” (362).

⁸¹ Although France’s colonization began as early as the 17th century (in what is now Canada), by the 19th and 20th centuries, its colonial empire was second only to Britain’s in size.

⁸² See the description of harsh punishments for speaking regional languages in school, in Lodge 218.

France's emphasis on fashioning itself as a monolingual, monocultural nation has continued throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and features prominently in contemporary political, legal, and cultural debates. The 1994 Loi Toubon (officially entitled "Loi n° 94-665 du 4 août 1994 relative à l'emploi de la langue française" [relating to the usage of the French language]), named for Jacques Toubon, France's minister of culture from 1993-95, mandates the use of French in all government publications, public advertisements, workplaces, media broadcasts, and schools.⁸³ It declares French to be "un élément fondamental de la personnalité et du patrimoine de la France" [fundamental to the personality and patrimony of France] (Article 1).

France has a recent history of rejecting pan-European legal measures to protect minority languages. In 1995, when 22 member states of the Council of Europe signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), France refused to participate. By March 2012, of the Council's 47 member states, only Andorra, France, Monaco, and Turkey had not signed and ratified the convention ("Framework Convention"). Nor has France ratified the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (adopted in 1992, in effect since 1998), which asks participants (25 states as of 2012) to agree to a series of public commitments to regional or minority languages ("European Charter"); in 1999, the Constitutional Council, France's highest constitutional authority, declared that the charter did not conform with the French Constitution's declaration that French is the language of the Republic (*Décision n° 99-412 DC du 15 juin 1999*).

Although France does not deny the existence of its multilingual population, it refuses to encourage or confirm it through law or education.⁸⁴ A 1999 report by

⁸³ See conclusion for a discussion of Toubon's past and present role in French government and culture.

⁸⁴ In 1983, France instituted "Enseignement des langues et cultures d'origine" [Instruction of languages and cultures of origin], known as ELCO, a program for the education of children of immigrants. Alec Hargreaves argues that its execution is politically suspect and inefficient:

The ELCO program is paid for entirely by the governments of countries from which migrants come. An important consequence of this is that the languages in the ELCO program are often other than the mother tongues of the children to whom they are taught. This is because the governments concerned are prepared to fund only their official national languages, whereas many migrants and their children speak regional dialects or completely different languages. [...] the ELCO program is in effect an encounter with a foreign language rather than support for their mother tongue. (Hargreaves "Postcolonialism" 41)

A similar phenomenon exists among supporters of French regional languages; those who support them may do so at the expense of other dialects from the same region. In an article on French identity, language, and authenticity, Herman Lebovics writes that, "often at the cost of suppressing the pluralism of living local dialects, regionalists, who tended to come from the educated petite bourgeoisie, created societies to cultivate the reconstructed regional language, the correct usage of which they regulated" (Lebovics 242).

Bernard Cerquiglini, then director of the Institut national de la langue française [National Institute of the French Language], commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Research and Technology, and the Ministry of Culture and Communication, acknowledges 75 languages “parlées par des ressortissants français sur le territoire de la République” [spoken by French nationals in the territory of the Republic] (among them is Yiddish, but not Judeo-Spanish) (Cerquiglini). In 2008, a constitutional amendment (n° 2008-724 du 23 juillet 2008) officially declared “regional languages” to be part of France’s patrimony (Article 75-1), but in 2011 the Constitutional Council stated that this amendment did not give these languages any status or rights in public education (*Commentaire*). Earlier in 2011, Xavier North, Delegate General for the French language and the languages of France at the Ministry of Culture and Communication, claimed that “the French government was spending one million euros a year to promote regional languages,” but also stated that, by officially recognizing France’s 75 languages, “the very essence of France would be put into question... France faces a difficulty in recognizing all of these languages. Historically speaking, France has been built on French” (Hooper).⁸⁵

France’s attitude toward regional languages mirrors its reaction to linguistic influences from foreign sources. The Academie Française’s opposition to the 2008 amendment recognizing regional languages was a brief departure from its uphill battle against the incorporation of Anglo-Saxon terms in spoken French (such as “cool,” “speed,” and “fun,” labeled “nuisibles” [harmful] on the Academy’s website).⁸⁶ The philosopher Michel Serres, a member of the Academy, argues that English loan words (such as the “fake Anglo-American slang of *Libération*”) have become more acceptable than France’s own regional languages: “There is more English in our glossaries now than words that according to me are French, words still in use though far from Paris” (Serres 203). Yet in his experience, immigrants from France’s former colonies are subject to the same linguistic marginalization as regional dialect speakers:

⁸⁵ For a detailed discussion of language debates in European law, see Giovanni Poggeschi, “Language Rights and Duties in Domestic and European Courts.” *Journal of European Integration*, 25:3 (2003): 207-224 (especially 208-211, 218-219 for the French case). Also see the ongoing case of Corsican nationalism: Patrick Hossay, “Recognizing Corsica: The drama of recognition in nationalist mobilization.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 27.3 (2004): 403-430. The French government recognized a “Corsican people” only as a component of “the French people.” The German press remarked on this as an underlying problem in French politics, claiming that “[Those disturbed by the decision] anticipate that where there is a people, there must also be a state, and they fear that after the Corsicans also a ‘Bretonic,’ a ‘Basque’ or even an ‘Alsatian people’ could be making demands” (qtd. in Blommaert and Verschueren 365).

⁸⁶ See the section “Dire, ne pas dire” [To say or not to say] for an interactive page aimed to increase awareness among French speakers of common mistakes: <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/langue/index.html>

When boarding at the Lycée Montaigne in Bordeaux I lived in dormitories and dining halls loud with the talk of mutual foreigners, foreign to each other in language, accent, and habits: Charentais, Landais, Pyreneans, Basques, Garonnais, and so forth, whose gestures and shouts only emphasized their differences, sometimes greater differences than those I observed later on when boarding again at Louis-le-Grand in Paris, where the same students, Berrichons from Berry, Mokos from Toulon, Tunisians and Martiniquians, represented the whole of France. (200)

For Serres, the “whole of France” is a multilingual, transcontinental, indeed *transnational*, entity. There may be more common ground among immigrants from former colonies than among residents from France’s twenty-two metropolitan regions. Although France’s members may be foreign to each other, tied to their disparate linguistic and cultural origins, Serres argues that they are united in their shared sense of national belonging. Clearly, many who identify as French also identify with other languages, cultures, and nations. It is necessary to address this hybrid identity at the same time as the multilingualism it produces, and to interrogate France’s response to multilingualism as well as to its residents’ hybrid identities.

This chapter looks at texts by three French Sephardic authors as one group of responses to France’s refusal to embrace its multilingual, multicultural demographic. Sephardic authors are particularly suited to address issues of language given their geographic and linguistic history. Even before their exile from Spain in 1492, although very involved in Spanish culture and politics, they were set apart by religion, language, and culture. After the expulsion, they naturally continued to use Hebrew, the language of their religion, in liturgical settings, but they also kept speaking Spanish, which evolved through contact with other national languages and communities into Judeo-Spanish.⁸⁷ The majority of Sephardic Jews immigrated to the Ottoman Empire, where, generations later, they began to be educated in French-run schools, and learned to see French society as the paradigm of “civilized” culture.⁸⁸ Thus it is not surprising that when the Ottoman Empire fell in the early twentieth century, most Sephardic Jews turned to France as their new homeland. Despite their familiarity with French culture and language, they did not integrate seamlessly into French society. Rather, once they arrived in France, they found that in order to assimilate, they had to forget their roots. Many raised their children to speak only French and to ignore Jewish culture and traditions. In spite of this, their children saw themselves as second-generation immigrants, inextricably tied to their parents’ pasts; a generation later, they began to write about their lost cultural heritage.

⁸⁷ See the introduction for a more complete explanation of the evolution of Judeo-Spanish.

⁸⁸ See chapter one.

These authors had to develop new ways to write about their Judeo-French identities, incorporating the hybridity of their culture and language into a French narrative using code-switching, explanatory footnotes, folksongs, and cultural glossaries. However, the goal of their narrative strategies is not just a literary one. By producing French Sephardic texts, these authors are attempting to alter the current, monocultural conception of French national identity to include the hybrid identities of France's postcolonial, post-immigration population.

The narratives I study in this chapter complicate the traditional dichotomy of center/periphery adapted by Itamar Even-Zohar to examine marginalized literature.⁸⁹ Their authors – Brigitte Peskine, Marcel Cohen, and Clarisse Nicoïdski – were born in the mid-twentieth century (1951, 1937, and 1938) in France to immigrant parents, and were raised speaking French, with little exposure to their ancestral language, Judeo-Spanish. They all wrote extensively in French before incorporating Judeo-Spanish into their work, which they did in middle age (Peskine at 45, Cohen at 48, and Nicoïdski at 40) in works ranging in genre from pseudo-autobiography to epistolary novel to poetry. Writing in Judeo-Spanish thus marks a calculated return to their heritages. As writers who are already part of the dominant national literature, their move to the linguistic periphery can be read as an attempt to bring the margins into the center – to force French literature to accept a multilingual, multicultural narrative. Their Sephardic literary voices are mediated through their preexisting identities as French authors; this enables them to write in a minority language but from the position of cultural authority bestowed by French literature.

The study of minority literatures has been relegated to specialized programs that fall into the margins of both academic analysis and popular access. Although Francophone literature (technically any literature written in French, but most often used to refer to literature from French-speaking countries outside of France) is critically acclaimed and widely read, it often remains separate from “hexagonal” (metropolitan) French literature in bookstores, syllabi, and academic research.⁹⁰ From the dominant hexagonal perspective, maintaining a separation between what is labeled “Francophone” and “French” does not allow for authors writing in French outside of France to claim ownership of French cultural traditions, even if they were raised with French educations that encouraged them to substitute “nos ancêtres les Gaulois” [our ancestors the Gauls] for their own ancestral heritages. The authors I study in this chapter, all born in France, are not considered “Francophone” in the exclusionary sense

⁸⁹ See Even-Zohar, *Polysystem Studies*. Special issue. *Poetics Today*. 11.1 (Spring 1990).

⁹⁰ Metropolitan, or mainland, France is frequently referred to as “hexagonal” (due to its shape), in contrast to France's overseas territories. For a history of the moniker and its cultural symbolism, see Nathaniel B. Smith, “The Idea of the French Hexagon.” *French Historical Studies* 6.2 (Autumn 1969): 139-155.

of the term, but their narratives aim to break down the barriers between Francophone and French by expanding the linguistic parameters of French literature.

These narratives incorporate French, often as a dominant language, either through code-switching, self-translation, or bilingual publication. Giving French a dominant position marks the publication as intended for a French-speaking audience, and forces a coherent articulation of the relationship between a minority literature and its linguistically dominant host. Writing in France in the second half of the twentieth century in Judeo-Spanish about Sephardic traditions and history reconfigures the concept of tradition as pre- or anti-modern (explored in chapter one) to one of opposition to a linguistic and cultural hegemony. Judeo-Spanish, appearing infrequently through code-switching (foreign words or phrases in a French text) or more prominently as the main language of narration, acts as a marker of Sephardic tradition. It is also, necessarily, a marker of the past, as both the language and traditions have ceased to be passed onto the present in daily life. The presence of Judeo-Spanish in the French text thus breaks down the border between center and periphery because the margins are given both voice and literary form in the dominant literature.

These texts invite a critical look at multilingual literature in general. While multilingualism is a much-discussed topic in linguistics, particularly (and predictably) in second-language acquisition pedagogy and sociolinguistics, as a literary phenomenon it has yet to be fully theorized. Literary scholars tend to approach multilingualism from the perspective of translation studies, which will, here, provide a useful point of departure.⁹¹ However, one of the problems inherent in this approach is that resulting theories of multilingual narrative then tend to focus only on one end of the literary process – the reader or translator – instead of on the original (pre-translation) text itself, or on the textual culture it represents.⁹² I hope here to look at problems in translation and readership, while at the same time considering what kind of political and cultural work the narratives accomplish both before and after translation. For example, one of the texts I will discuss was written and published in Judeo-Spanish, and then translated by the author and published in French; my analysis will focus on how the author's translation choices reflect his goals and readership for the two versions of his text. Another text I consider was written in Judeo-Spanish, published with practically no intended readership, but then anthologized in translation, and served as inspiration for an Ashkenazi author in Argentina. By looking at these

⁹¹ See Miller 2005.

⁹² For example, Joshua Miller's 2005 analysis of multilingual narrative leads him to address translation directly, concluding that translation studies should consider the unique challenges of multilingual narrative to monolingual translation, and rethink the linguistic hierarchy imposed by traditional translation techniques.

texts from the perspective of postmemory theory, we can also see the larger picture of their circulation and impact in and on society.

This study looks first at two novels, *Les Eaux Douces d'Europe* [*The Sweet Waters of Europe*] (1996) and its sequel *Buena Familia* [*A Good Family*] (2000), by Brigitte Peskine, both written in French with code-switching in Judeo-Spanish.⁹³ The novels themselves reflect Peskine's own process of identity formation in her career as an author, as well as a private and public project of cultural and linguistic resurrection. Her characters, however, occupy different roles open to immigrants and second- and third-generation immigrants who struggle with access to their pasts. By tracing the linguistic techniques Peskine employs in both novels, we can see the progression of the protagonist's strategies for negotiating the competing elements of her identity. Ultimately, the sequel's privileging of French over Judeo-Spanish underscores the difficulty inherent in the multilingual expression of a culturally hybrid identity.

I then turn to Marcel Cohen's 1985 Judeo-Spanish epistolary memoir, *Letras a un pintor ke kreyá azer retratos imaginarios por un sefardi de turkia ke se akodra perfektamente de kada uno de sus modelos* [*Letters to a painter who believes he makes imaginary portraits, from a Sephardic man from Turkey, who remembers perfectly each one of his models*] and its 1997 bilingual French-Judeo-Spanish edition, *Lettre à Antonio Saura* [*Letter to Antonio Saura*], translated by the author. By studying the original text as well as Cohen's translation strategies, we can read both versions as Cohen's attempt to lay claim to his Sephardic heritage while making that cultural and linguistic identity accessible to a French readership.

Finally, I look at Clarisse Nicoïdski who, like Cohen, published only one Judeo-Spanish narrative, the book-length poem *Lus Ojus Las Manus La Boca* [*Eyes Hands Mouth*] (1978). Reading the poem in the context of Nicoïdski's French-language work helps decipher the poem's description of the agony of geographic, cultural, and linguistic displacement. Although published in France, the text is a bilingual English-Judeo-

⁹³ Code-switching is switching back and forth between multiple languages or dialects, usually in the course of a conversation; here, in print. For example: "I will take mon fils to the store" – in this case, the sentence is in English with code-switching ("mon fils") in French. For an extensive overview of code-switching, see Chad Nilep, "'Code Switching' in Sociocultural Linguistics." *Colorado Research in Linguistics* 19.1 (June 2006): 1-22. Unlike linguistic borrowings, which are foreign words regularly integrated into the host language, code-switching is irregular and can span one word or an infrequent phrase. See chapter 12, "Neologisms: internal versus external factors," in Ayres-Bennett, Carruthers, and Temple, *Problems and Perspectives: Studies in the Modern French Language* (Longman, 2001), on linguistic borrowing in French:

[B]orrowings (however infrequent) are distinguished from nonce borrowings which occur only once in their corpus, and these in turn are distinguished from a single code-switched item, where, usually in the context of a bilingual community, the speaker switches for one word into the second language. (324)

Spanish edition. However, Nicoïdski also translated her work into French in order to present it in both languages at the 1980 conference “Cultures juives méditerranéennes et orientales” [Mediterranean and Eastern Jewish Cultures] in Paris at the Georges Pompidou Center; an excerpt in Judeo-Spanish with its French translation was published in the conference’s proceedings (Nicoïdski “Lorca”). An analysis of the poem’s language and imagery shows that Nicoïdski’s attempt to bring her Judeo-Spanish poetry to the French public is a political statement about the position and future of Sephardic culture in contemporary France.

The political statement these authors’ multilingual literature makes is not immediately obvious, as its methods are, at first glance, quite problematic. Foreign words in an otherwise straightforward narrative are, at best, incomprehensible and disruptive, and at worst, alienating and even threatening or at least disorienting. Why not simply translate all foreign words? After all, don’t most words have an equivalent that can be found in any bilingual dictionary? Brian Lennon, in a discussion of the problems of the multilingual text for both publishing houses and translators, cites a letter by Warren Weaver on machine translation. Weaver suggests that the “problem of translation” be treated simplistically as a “problem in cryptography”; one might look at a text in a foreign language and think, “This is really written in English, but it has been coded in some strange symbols. I will now proceed to decode” (Lennon 66). Yet Theodor Adorno, in his essay “On the Use of Foreign Words” in support of the use of Latinate terms in German, argues that code-switching gives voice to nuances that would be lost in translation:

Foreign words become the bearers of subjective contents: of the nuances. The meanings in one’s own language may well correspond to the meanings of the foreign words in every case; but they cannot be arbitrarily replaced by them because the expression of subjectivity cannot simply be dissolved in meaning. (Adorno 287)

Adorno, here, suggests that there is more to a word than its meaning. The “subjective contents,” or “nuances,” of a word include a wide range of cultural referents that indicate elements such as the word’s register, its intertextual connections, and its linguistic and cultural community. For example, Peskine’s characters use Judeo-Spanish to refer to family members (*madre, ijika*) and foods (*biskochos, borrekas*); Cohen refuses to translate the people (*azirgi, memet*) and objects (*tchadir, fustuk*) of his family’s Istanbul. Keeping these words in Judeo-Spanish ensures that their cultural connotations, while perhaps not accessible to the monolingual reader, will not be lost in translation.

While Adorno valorizes the use of code-switching, he does not address the problematic reading experience foreign words produce. As Lennon notes, the “suspension of one language within another allows a monolingual reader a form of

experience of the foreign” (48). In a text about immigration and acculturation, code-switching mimics, for the reader, the violence of the linguistic, cultural, and identity split in the text. At the same time that code-switching foreignizes, it domesticates; the repetition of foreign words throughout a text eventually makes them recognizable, then familiar. The linguistic structure itself becomes the message, asking the reader to struggle through the foreign words until they become a seamless part of the reading experience.

For the Sephardic French corpus, this process of familiarization is essential, as the multilingual reader is nearly nonexistent; Judeo-Spanish has very few speakers left today. Incorporating Judeo-Spanish into a contemporary text with a goal of domesticating the language can thus be seen as a move in the fight against language death. Yet as Lennon and other critics point out, “*Why* attempt to prevent language death?” (135). Why treat language as an organic organism with a lifespan that begins and ends? If a language “dies,” shouldn’t we acknowledge that this is a sign that that language no longer has a use in contemporary society?

However, in the case of Judeo-Spanish, we can see language death as synonymous with culture death. The project of the second-generation immigrant authors incorporates Judeo-Spanish as a metonym of the Sephardic culture they are trying to resurrect. France’s Sephardic population was significantly decreased by the Holocaust. In fact, the term “Sephardic” in France now refers to the large population of Mizrahi Jews who immigrated to France from North Africa after decolonization (Benveniste 13). The remaining population of French Jews whose families emigrated from the Ottoman Empire has inherited the Mizrahi culture that now dominates French Jewry.

The Ottoman immigrants’ desire to assimilate, the toll of the Holocaust, and subsequent Jewish immigration all contributed to the near-disappearance of Judeo-Spanish culture in France. Even Jews who were conscious of their Judeo-Spanish roots were not equipped to access them; they were unfamiliar with the language and culture. However, by producing literary projects that engaged with Sephardic culture, they bridged the gap between past and present. Researching the Sephardic community both in the Ottoman Empire and France, compiling lists of proverbs, reviving the language, and revisiting the cuisine allowed second-generation immigrants access to their parents’ experiences. These methods are similar to those of a certain generation of French Algerians, who, unlike their predecessors, chose to emphasize their pasts in their projects of identity formation. While second-generation French Algerian novelists and filmmakers of the 1980s assumed that their claims to French identity required them to divest “themselves of the baggage of colonial history,” a later generation focused instead on embracing their past and its significance to their present. Alec Hargreaves suggests that this may be due to “a growing conviction that the younger

generation of French Algerians cannot become fully part of French society until the majority ethnic population recognizes the historical role of their parents and its continuing significance today” (Hargreaves "Generating" 223).

Although second-generation Ottoman Jews cannot be conflated with their North African Muslim counterparts, they do occupy a similar position of minority discourse within French literature and society. Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd argue that minority discourse is

the product of damage – damage more or less systematically inflicted on cultures produced as minorities by the dominant culture. The destruction involved is manifold, bearing down on variant modes of social formation [...] and deracinating whole populations at best or decimating them at worst. [...] With a certain savage consistency, this very truncation of development becomes both the mark and the legitimation of marginalization. (JanMohamed and Lloyd 4)

Whether dominated through colonialism or racism, deracinated through mass migration or expulsion, or decimated by war or genocide, Ottoman, North African, and Eastern European Jews, as well as North African Muslims, West Africans, and countless other minority populations in France, have unfortunately met JanMohamed and Lloyd’s conditions for marginalization. They further argue that “*the* central task of the theory of minority discourse” is the “project of systematically articulating the implications of that subject-position” (9), a project emphasized throughout the texts considered in this study, from Peskine’s protagonist’s identity quest, to Cohen’s desire to situate himself within the legacy of Sephardic Jews, to Nicoïdski’s eulogy for the lost language of her roots. All these authors attempt to articulate their identities within the framework of both their pasts (situated outside of France) and their culturally, linguistically, and geographically French presents and futures. These competing cultural influences call for a transnational repositioning of French Sephardic literature: Is it Francophone or French? Is there a difference?

As briefly discussed earlier, the definition of Francophone is problematic; while its true sense designates all French speakers, it more commonly indicates French speakers outside of Hexagonal France. In a study of France’s “other worlds,” Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi points out the paradox of Hexagonal France’s exclusion from “Francophone,” as France “is nevertheless the founding site and the originating center of what is Francophone” (Mudimbe-Boyi xiii). Separating the two terms not only ignores France’s place as linguistic origin, but also negates the complex, often violent, and indeed ongoing history that links France with other French-speaking communities. Christopher Miller, referring to the “Prix littéraire de la francité,” which defines *francité* as “francophonie *minus* France,” suggests that “[s]ubtracting France from francophonie makes it much easier to advertise francophonie as apolitical and reciprocal” (C. L. Miller 186), denying the inherently politicized nature of France’s linguistic legacy.

Separating France and Francophone also constructs an exclusionary duality of “us” versus “them.” Amin Maalouf’s opposition to the term Francophone is precisely this: “‘Francophones,’ en France, aurait dû signifier ‘nous’; il a fini par signifier ‘eux,’ ‘les autres,’ ‘les étrangers,’ ‘ceux des anciennes colonies’ [“Francophone,” in France, should mean “us,” but it now means “them,” “others,” “strangers,” “those who come from the colonies”] (Maalouf). Mudimbe-Boyi thus advocates blurring the barrier between France and Francophone, allowing “for an understanding of the adjective Francophone as an autonomous, separate entity focusing outside of France but also as inclusive of France” (Mudimbe-Boyi xvii).

Definitions of Francophone are constantly changing. Mudimbe-Boyi tells of looking in a bookstore for African and Caribbean writers who were once housed under “littérature Francophone,” and finding them instead under “littérature étrangère” [foreign literature] (xiv); this suggests that “Francophone” is becoming even more exclusive. Yet others observe terms changing in the opposite direction. Emily Apter suggests that Francophone, which once defined France’s colonial legacy, might now encompass “linguistic contact zones all over the world in which French, or some kind of French, is one of many languages in play” (Apter 86). Sephardic Jews, then, living in the Ottoman Empire, writing in French at the end of the twentieth century, would be included among their French-speaking coreligionists in French-occupied North Africa as producers of Francophone literature. Indeed, as the European community allows for more cross-cultural communication, Francophone literature may have to be redefined. Mireille Rosello suggests that due to Europeanization, “Francophone literatures can no longer be assumed to come ‘from’ countries that constituted the former colonial empire” (Rosello 52). Shifting the focus on Francophone away from colonialism or postcolonialism opens up the definition to changing global demographics, effectively reversing Maalouf’s exclusionary, colonial-based definition to one that encompasses all French-speaking populations.

This new definition of Francophone allows the term to be *inclusive* and to actually create new transnational communities based on linguistic or cultural bonds. This new system also gives minority literatures the opportunity for an equal voice. Neil Lazarus sees the politics of the literary world already changing; he observes “a profound decentering of the dominant traditions of the literary world” since the 1970s, from the Nobel Prize’s four recent African laureates,⁹⁴ to recent winners of the Prix Goncourt (Lazarus 13).⁹⁵ “Everywhere in Anglophone and Francophone literatures,”

⁹⁴ Wole Soyinka in 1986, Naguib Mahfouz in 1988, Nadine Gordimer in 1991, and J. M. Coetzee in 2003.

⁹⁵ Tahar Ben Jelloun, born in Morocco, won in 1987; Patrick Chamoiseau, born in Martinique, won in 1992; Amin Maalouf, born in Beirut, won in 1993; Jonathan Littell, a French-American writer living in Spain, won in 2006; Atiq Rahimi, born in Kabul, Afghanistan, won in 2008; Marie NDiaye, born in France of Senegalese origin, won in 2009.

Lazarus writes, “much of the most vibrant, audacious, and inspiring contemporary writing is being produced by such writers” (14). He adds that these changes can be seen on the academic level as well:

Today courses in post-1945 “English” literature that ignore “minority” or “postcolonial” writers and the issues of decolonization, migration, and diaspora are simply anachronistic. The same is true of courses in modern French literature that ignore such writers as Assia Djebar, Sony Labou Tansi, and Patrick Chamoiseau, and that have nothing to say about *Beur* culture. (14)

Lazarus’s discussion of Francophone literature includes *Beur* authors, born in France but of North African Muslim descent.⁹⁶ The problem of defining Francophone literature meets new challenges in the case of *Beur* literature, which is classified as “Maghrebian,” “French,” or “immigrant” depending on the bookstore (Hargreaves “Writers”). *Beur* writers may occupy the most similar position to the authors in this study, also born in France to immigrant parents, and caught in a similar struggle between heritage language and culture and French influence. Yet as Alec Hargreaves points out, *Beurs*’ “Muslim parents seek to sustain [their heritage] within the family home” (Hargreaves “Language” 47), whereas second-generation Sephardic Jews were often raised in more assimilated households. It is also essential to take into account differences in race and class. North African Jews with Mizrahi (North African) origins may racially resemble their Muslim counterparts, but those with Spanish origins, like many Moroccan and Ottoman Jews, do not. French Jews are thus a non-racially-determined minority. Moreover, Jews who emigrated from North Africa after decolonization were generally able to maintain their professional positions (Abitbol 254). Indeed, Algerian Jews, considered French citizens since the 1870 Crémieux decree, were not considered immigrants but, like *Pieds-Noirs*, “repatriated” citizens, and benefited from state-sponsored aid designed for *Pieds-Noirs* (251). But if second-generation French Jewish immigrants do not regularly encounter many of the *Beurs*’ obstacles, they do share in the struggle between heritage and host country cultures. This is apparent in both cases through the negotiation of multiple languages within *Beur* and French-Jewish literary texts. Unlike race, language is an aspect of cultural difference that is not visually apparent, and may not even surface until later in life, as in the case of the three authors in this study.⁹⁷ Even writing in French, Algerians, with

⁹⁶ *Beur* is a colloquial term that has entered into academic and popular discourse, originally coined by reversing the syllables of “arabe.”

⁹⁷ Derrida uses the unique linguistic position of North Africans to elide the differences between his subject position and that of his Muslim peers, contending that he is “a true Maghrebian, perhaps even the only true Maghrebian or the most Maghrebian of all Maghrebians, not because he speaks all or even some of the languages of the Maghreb, but precisely because he speaks only one language and this language is French” (Berger *Algeria* 15). Essential to an understanding of this claim is Derrida’s

“origins and mental baggage [that] place them in a different community” than their intended French readership, produce works that “cannot be said to belong wholly to the literature of France” (Hargreaves "Writers" 37). Incorporating other languages, such as Arabic, Berber, Judeo-Spanish, or Judeo-Arabic, into the French text presents further problems for publishing and readership; Hargreaves notes that if “French editors are to be persuaded to take the risk of publishing unknown [Beur] authors, their texts must be accessible to a French [non-Beur] audience” (37).

While the case of Beur literature offers a unique opportunity for theoretical affinities with second-generation French Sephardic literature, the latter must be considered for its singularity. While most postcolonial theory focuses on difference – whether due to socioeconomic position, politics, racism, or colonial legacy – theories of French Judaism must take into account the majority position of the Jewish minority, as discussed above. Peskine, Cohen, and Nicoïdski all grew up in France, speaking unaccented French. They wrote, and published, non-Jewish-themed work in French before foraying into Judeo-Spanish. As we will see in closer analysis, their decision to experiment with Judeo-Spanish and grapple with issues of Sephardic legacy and hybrid identity was a conscious move to confront their heritage in order to redefine their identities. Beur and first-generation immigrant writers may not have the luxury of choice that these authors enjoy, but instead see their narratives as the necessary pathway to access French identity.

One other element that complicates the particular position of French Jewish authors, and of all French Jews, is the legacy of the Holocaust. The pain of the Vichy collaboration (and indeed, Vichy’s independent role in the persecution of France’s Jews) is present for all Jews living in postwar France, whether they immigrated before or after World War II. North African Jews, especially Algerians, who were French citizens, and the Jewish elites of the Maghreb, were so attached to France and its colonial rule that the Vichy laws came as a shock; after the war, “North African Jews stubbornly downplayed” France’s anti-Semitism (Abitbol 251). Annette Wieviorka has written of the widespread postwar repression of France’s wartime anti-Semitism and the Holocaust’s Jewish toll, in favor of a patriotic focus on the French resistance movement and the deaths of French political prisoners.⁹⁸ Faced with public dismissal of their trauma, French Jews were even more eager to assimilate and put the past behind them. Writing during the last quarter of the twentieth century, the authors in this study can begin to address this silence at the same time as they address the silence of post-immigration assimilation. Although they may not engage directly with the trauma of the Holocaust, it is still present – as a source of guilt and shock in Peskine’s novels,

Monolinguisme de l'autre, where he argues that French, despite being his only language, is not his mother tongue.

⁹⁸ See Annette Wieviorka, *Déportation et Génocide : Entre la mémoire et l'oubli* (Paris : Hachette, 2003).

as an echo of the expulsion from Spain in Cohen's text, and as another violent element in the decimation of the Sephardic people and culture in Nicoïdski's.

When writers finally began to speak about France's wartime collaboration, it was often through witness testimony, which, like memoir, walks a problematic line between history and fiction.⁹⁹ The authors in this study experiment with genre in a similar way, weaving memoir and novel, epistolary form and historical fact, in order to negotiate the various methods, subjects, and goals of representation. As one critic points out, "we usually think of representation in terms of mimesis, but representation can also take the form of advocacy. Two definitions of the word 'represent' are at work at the same time: to depict or portray, *and* to act as a spokesperson for" (Richman 107). Peskine, Cohen, and Nicoïdski share a goal of multiple representations. Their work aims to represent themselves (and in Peskine's case, her protagonist as well) as hybrid Sephardic French Jews; to speak for the silenced generations of Sephardic Jewry; and to offer a model for future generations of Sephardic French Jews.

Brigitte Peskine, born in 1951 in a suburb of Paris, grapples with both the legacy of post-immigration assimilation and of the Holocaust in novels that use multilingualism to express Sephardic French identity. Her paternal grandmother was born in Istanbul and immigrated to Paris in 1920; her father was born the following year. Her family did their best to deny their Sephardic roots; she sees her father's marriage to an Alsatian (Ashkenazi) Jew as a conscious attempt to repudiate his family's culture. Peskine did not grow up speaking or even understanding Judeo-Spanish (Peskine "Personal Correspondence"). She was already an accomplished author and scriptwriter before using archival resources in Paris to prepare the materials for *Les Eaux Douces d'Europe*, a novel about a Sephardic woman's struggle to leave her traditional family in Constantinople for the modern freedoms of Paris. Peskine's academic quest for her lost mother tongue is similar to Beur writers' pursuit of Arabic; Sakinna Boukhedenna, for example, "is one of several Beur authors who have followed adult education classes in Arabic in the hope of" recovering her North African heritage, yet none of these authors "has acquired a sufficient grasp of Arabic to write in that language" (Hargreaves "Language" 58). Although total linguistic and cultural competency may not be possible, the project of their pursuit opens the door to partial access. Writing the novel allowed Peskine to connect with a cultural heritage she had known nothing about: "Ce livre m'a fait rentrer dans un monde inconnu et retrouver ma famille. J'ai découvert des cousins par ce livre, et nous nous sommes réunis à cinquante-cinq, issus des mêmes grands-parents, à Tolède. Avec tous la même quête culturelle et familiale!" [This book made me go into an unknown world and find my family. Through this book, I discovered cousins, and we got together at fifty-five, all

⁹⁹ See Annette Wieviorka, *L'Ère du Témoin* (Paris: Hachette, 2002), for a discussion of the emergence of Holocaust testimony and its use in historical archives.

from the same grandparents, in Toledo. All with the same search for culture and family!] (Qtd in Boutin).

Peskine suggests that her mission is not unique; others, similarly distanced from their cultural heritages, have embarked on journeys through genealogy, language courses, or literary composition to gain access to a culture that is not yet entirely dead. Often, historical documentation one might find for a dominant culture is simply not available, and researchers take recourse to more creative sources. JanMohamed and Lloyd write that

One aspect of the struggle between hegemonic culture and minorities is the recovery and mediation of cultural practices that continue to be subjected to “institutional forgetting,” which, as a form of control of one’s memory and history, is one of the gravest forms of damage done to minority cultures. Archival work, as a form of counter-memory, therefore is essential to the critical articulation of minority discourse. (JanMohamed and Lloyd 6)

Thus the archival work Peskine and others perform works against the lacunae in their histories. By producing new narratives that incorporate their research, these authors create and circulate a discourse that is singular to their cultural heritage. This phenomenon is not just limited to Sephardic immigrants. Marianne Hirsch, in her work on memory and the Holocaust, coined the term “postmemory” to describe the relationship of the second generation to the previous generation’s trauma. She argues that these traumatic experiences are inherited and internalized to become memories, even though they were not experienced directly (Hirsch “Postmemory”).¹⁰⁰

When the Sephardic community left the Ottoman Empire, they were leaving a country that had been their home for generations where, due to political changes, they were no longer welcome. Although they expected an easy transition to life in France, many faced discrimination, even from France’s existing Jewish community, and ghettoization. Their assimilatory reaction was disruptive both to immigrant individuals and to their community. In the hope that their children would not be subject to the difficulties of living as immigrants in an intensely monocultural society, they were reluctant to transmit the Sephardic culture to future generations. As the immigrants’ accented French had become a symbol of their second-class status, they were careful to raise children who spoke only French, and not Judeo-Spanish.

By crafting a novel in the style of a memoir that incorporates Judeo-Spanish, Peskine is engaging in a postmemorial project that aims to access her ancestors’ troubled past and connect to her cultural heritage while, at the same time, bringing the Sephardic immigration story into the contemporary literary world. Peskine’s text reads like a memoir or autobiography; it is prefaced by a detailed genealogical chart, and

¹⁰⁰ See chapter three for a deeper theoretical treatment of postmemory and memory politics in France.

begins with an account of the narrator's birth. Yet, as Lennon points out, "to publish a memoir," whether of one's own life or not, "is to transform oneself into a fictional character" (13-14). In Lennon's example, that character is necessarily a monoglot, constricted by the demands of a monolingual readership and, thus, by the publishing industry. However, by incorporating Judeo-Spanish in her memoir-style novel, Peskine is using the text to produce a polyglot self that stands in opposition to her monolingual upbringing.

Indeed, both the genre and language of *Les Eaux Douces d'Europe* are problematized from the start. The narrative begins in the voice of Rébecca Gatégno, the narrator and main character: "On ne peut pas dire que ma naissance, le 31 août 1898, donna lieu à une explosion de joie. Je n'ai jamais su, d'ailleurs, si c'était 98 ou 99" [One cannot say that my birth, the 31st of August, 1898, gave way to an explosion of joy. I never knew, anyway, if it was 98 or 99] (11). By framing her narrative as a first-person account, yet beginning with a negation of speech ("One cannot say"), Peskine is calling into question the capacity of both the memoir genre and language itself. In order to assert her reliability as narrator, Rébecca must turn to the combination of French and Judeo-Spanish that helped shape and eventually define her identity. Representing her life in one language would be, to quote Gini Alhadeff's own (English-language) Sephardic memoir, "as fictional as if a single language had been chosen to record dialogues in the tower of Babel" (Alhadeff 17). Code-switching allows for the linguistic expression of this hybrid identity.

Rébecca feels pulled in different directions by the Judeo-Spanish and French parts of her identity. Her father's friends "commençaient leurs phrases en français, la langue chic des gens modernes, et les terminaient en judéo-espagnol, pour plus de commodité" [began their sentences in French, the chic language of modern people, and ended them in Judeo-Spanish, for convenience] (20). Speaking French is a struggle against the self; to do so is to engage in an uncomfortable and foreign activity, but it is necessary in order to move beyond the narrowly defined world of Judeo-Spanish. This multilingual chaos teaches Rébecca that language cannot be trusted; words do not always signify their literal meanings. She learns that "« Tu me fais mourir » et « Je vends à perte » signifiaient « Tu exagères » et « Je réduis ma marge »" ['You make me die' and 'I sell at a loss' meant 'You're exaggerating' and 'I'm reducing my profit margin'], but although she compiles a list of translations, she continues to search for "la clé des mots" [the key to words] (32). Her French education at the Alliance Israélite Universelle schools only further complicates her struggle by inculcating her with a French cultural and linguistic identity. She claims that "[e]n prêchant l'assimilation, l'Alliance nous avait inoculé la haine de nous-mêmes" [by preaching assimilation, the Alliance inoculated us with self-hatred] (150). The Sephardic community is being "vaccinated" against its roots so that a French identity can take

over. As we will see in the novel's sequel, the self-hatred initiated by the Alliance fuels Rébecca's rupture with her family's language, culture, and history; she will have to work through this feeling in order to reconnect with her heritage. Armed with French and English from school, and Judeo-Spanish from her community, Rébecca nonetheless finds that no language is really her own (234); the breakdown of her cultural identity is mirrored in this linguistic confusion.

Rébecca's lack of mother tongue is reflected in the linguistic composition of Peskine's text. In just under 400 pages, there are over 100 Judeo-Spanish words or phrases with no translation given; almost as many proverbs with footnoted translations; and about 40 words whose translation is given or apparent by the context. All Judeo-Spanish is set off from the surrounding French text by italicized typeface, but even when words are translated in direct apposition, the translation is more than just linguistic. For example, *cortijo* is a courtyard, but the first time it appears, we read: "De la cuisine on accédait au *cortijo*, le patio que nous partagions avec les voisins" [From the kitchen one could access the *cortijo*, the patio we shared with the neighbors] (15). This contextual translation provides linguistic equivalence *and* cultural reference. The footnoted proverbs are treated in a similar way; their literal translation is often insufficient, and their idiomatic meaning is explained – negating the "decoding" Weaver suggests may be possible. The translated words and proverbs make the text a sort of ethnographic glossary that contributes as much in the fight against the death of a language as in the project of cultural revival.

However, the vast majority of Judeo-Spanish is not translated. Some words or expressions reappear throughout the text, such as *que mal mos kera!*, which appears at least five times (90, 140, 154, 217, 225). Eventually, the reader can determine from the context that this phrase is uttered as a superstitious apotropaic formula; the actual translation, roughly "may evil stay away from us," is not necessary. This repetition mimics the language-learning process of an immersion-style classroom, but stops at total accessibility; there are no glossaries or language references. From the context, the reader can determine that many of the untranslated words are names of foods or dishes, such as *biskochos*, *bimuelos de patata*, and *pastelikos* (22, 114, 148). Others are family titles like *Señor Padre* and *Ermano* (12, 13). The novel's untranslated words indicate the specialized lexicon of Judeo-Spanish, a vernacular spoken only in the closed community of Sephardic Jews. Whereas proverbs operate as linguistic currency, traded in conversation outside the home, words related to cuisine remain in the private, female sphere. Rébecca's intensely troubled relationship with her female self and the place of the woman in Sephardic culture is reflected in the obscurity of the untranslated text, accessible only to the cultural insider. By leaving words in the lexicon of female space untranslated, Peskine recreates the private realm of the Sephardic vernacular and gives the reader the experience of observing a closed world.

While it may seem that Peskine's text serves as an ethnographic introduction to Sephardic culture, its use of multilingual narrative subtly serves to mimic the characters' linguistic and cultural hybridity in the reading experience. In an article on code-switching in Creole, a critic argues that "[e]n opacifiant son texte, l'écrivain contraint le lecteur d'une part à vivre la difficulté d'être des protagonistes, d'autre part à s'interroger sur l'adéquation du langage à rendre compte de la réalité" [by rendering the text opaque, the writer forces the reader to, on the one hand, live the difficulty of being the protagonists; on the other, to question the adequacy of language's ability to reflect reality] (DeSouza 182). For Rébecca, French is actually the foreign language, not Judeo-Spanish; this is reversed for the reader through the experience of the hybrid narrative. Peskine even provides a model for the reader to follow, in the French waiter whose restaurant, situated in Paris's Sephardic ghetto, now serves dishes adapted to its new clientele: "Le patron avait même appris à demander : « *Usted gusta ?* » sur le ton inquiet d'une mère sépharade" [The owner had even learned to ask "*Usted gusta?*" in the worried tone of a Sephardic mother] (286). By setting up these parallel experiences, Peskine normalizes cultural and linguistic hybridity. The subtle incorporation of the multilingual text, in its many forms, expands the flexibility of the narrative and allows hybridity to become a normative literary technique.

As the reading experience is a linguistic and cultural learning experience for the French-speaking reader, the text creates a unique space in which the reader's relationship to French changes. Despite Peskine's use of Judeo-Spanish, her text is, primarily, French. Like Abdelkebir Khatibi, Peskine resignifies French, allowing for Judeo-Spanish to enter the language and for French, as Réda Bensmaïa writes, to "see double"; by using other languages, Peskine "subject[s] French to a *system* that puts it in a position to *translate the untranslatable*, to express the inexpressible" (Bensmaïa 168). Rébecca's quest to find a space in between languages and cultures is mapped onto the language of her expression. The reader is forced to empathize, especially as he or she continues to follow Rébecca in the novel's sequel, where she travels physically and mentally between cultural and geographic spaces. It is this mobility that allows Rébecca to escape "the limited, linear ways of understanding" herself that monoculturalism promotes (Smith 245). Just as language is deterritorialized by its unmooring from traditional methods of expression, Peskine's characters' sense of permanent diaspora creates hybrid, deterritorialized identities. In an essay on migrancy, Andrew Smith writes:

The paradox of diaspora is that it is a concept intimately linked to a sense of territory, to the lost homeland or the once-and-future nation. Yet at the same time, because diaspora formations cross national borders, they reveal precisely the fact that cultural practices are *not tied to place*. They show culture, in other words, as *deterritorialized*. (256)

If language is “not only world-disclosing but also world-constituting” (as Said, Foucault, Anderson, and others have argued) (Lazarus 11), Rébecca’s diasporic existence allows for the exploration and development of both hybrid language practices and hybrid identity.¹⁰¹

Peskine continues Rébecca’s story in *Buena Familia*, but the terms of the multilingual narrative have changed. Recovering from a nervous breakdown, Rébecca joins family in Venezuela and attempts to regain control of her life. She sees her Sephardic identity as a duty accomplished; she speaks of it as a “contrat” [contract] she has “rempli” [fulfilled] (Peskine *Familia* 11). Although she is still conscious of her dual identity, she treats her Sephardic self as belonging to a past life. She introduces herself to the reader as “née à la fin du siècle dernier dans un quartier juif d’Istanbul” [born at the end of the last century in a Jewish neighborhood of Istanbul] but “habit[ant] à présent Orgeval, en région parisienne” [living now in Orgeval, in the Parisian region] (11), thus emphasizing the two distant realms she has inhabited, the Jewish/Turkish component firmly in the past.

The Judeo-Spanish narrative of *Les Eaux Douces*, once representative of the presence of Sephardic culture, now stands in for the absence of that identity. *Buena Familia*’s comparatively infrequent code-switching in Judeo-Spanish either refers to past events or transports the reader or characters to the past. Upon seeing her estranged nephew, now, in 1945, a soldier, Rébecca notes how disconnected he is from his past:

Il n’était pas question pour lui de se retrouver, en quittant son uniforme, dans la peau d’un *ijiko* du quartier de la Roquette. Sa naissance à Istanbul, la façon qu’avait son père de rouler les *r*, mes gestes de tendresse, le réseau d’entraide familial, le *ladino*, tout cela était derrière lui, à jamais.

[It was out of the question that he would find himself, in taking off his uniform, as an *ijiko* of the Roquette neighborhood. His birth in Istanbul, his father’s way of rolling his *r*’s, my tender gestures, the family network of support, *ladino*, all this was behind him, forever.] (169)

Her nephew’s separation from his origins is both described using Judeo-Spanish (*ijiko*) and expressed in terms of language loss (“rolling his *r*’s,” “*ladino*”¹⁰²). The italicized foreign text marks something lost, outside of the novel’s temporal scope. Similarly, when Rébecca hears the benediction “*De novya*” (translated in the book as “Qu’elle soit bientôt mariée!” [May she be married soon!]), the power of the language – and its connotations of the traditional life path Rébecca found herself doomed to follow –

¹⁰¹ Neil Lazarus cites “the proliferation of scholarly monographs with titles like *Inventing India* (Crane 1992), *Imagining India* (Inden 1990), *Inventing Ireland* (Kiberd 1995), *Writing Ireland* (Cairns and Richards 1988) and Mudimbe’s *The Invention of Africa* (1988)” (11) as examples of texts on nation-building that take language as their point of departure.

¹⁰² Ladino is another term for Judeo-Spanish; see introduction for a discussion of terminology.

transport her in both time and place: “L’espace d’un instant, j’étais revenue à Constantinople” [In a second, I was back in Constantinople] (21). Her painful memories of childhood culminate in another Judeo-Spanish phrase – “*Ke mal mos kera*” – which brings her back to the present.

Songs from her past have the same power of transportation, but when she meets a young Venezuelan doctor who grew up with the same Judeo-Spanish – or perhaps Spanish – lullabies and love songs as she did, she is shocked by the similarities “entre le *ladino* parlé en Turquie et certaines déformations sud-américaines du castillan” [between the *ladino* spoken in Turkey and certain South American distortions of Castilian Spanish] (66). Soon, the Spanish that surrounds her takes the place of the Spanish of her heritage, both in her own life and in the novel’s code-switching; the italicized, sometimes footnoted, phrases are now particular to her new Venezuelan identity, such as “*chicharras*” (22) and “*sembrar el petróleo*” (187). This linguistic assimilation is typical of Sephardic Jews who immigrated to Latin America, as modern Spanish slowly eclipsed the particularities of Judeo-Spanish.¹⁰³ Just as linguistic borrowing in French is seen not only as a threat to the French language, but “as a threat to the French way of life” (Ayres-Bennett, Carruthers and Temple 340), the rise of modern Spanish among Sephardic Jews is considered a threat to Sephardic culture. Venezuela offers both linguistic and cultural alternatives that are, like the language, not far from Rébecca’s heritage but different enough for her to find refuge from her past in them. For example, she describes preparing for Christmas – in itself a sign of assimilation – “en mélangeant les traditions culinaires de la *juderia* de Haskeyu à celles des *llanos* vénézuéliens” [by mixing the culinary traditions from the *juderia* of Haskeyu with those of the Venezuelan *llanos*] (76). Her identity is still made up of multiple languages and cultures, but the elements of that hybridity have changed.

As Judeo-Spanish is eclipsed by Rébecca’s newly developing identity, the other aspects of her Sephardic self become buried in a past characterized by suffocating tradition, and Rébecca develops a hatred of that part of her identity. On the one hand, she sees her time in Paris as a sort of cultural salvation: “Oui, ils étaient orientaux, dramatiques, excessifs. Comme je le serais devenue si je n’avais pas passé dix ans à Paris” [Yes, they were Oriental, dramatic, excessive. As I would have become had I not spent ten years in Paris] (30). Yet at the same time she sees herself engaging in the behavior she condemns: “L’exaltation que je m’étais efforcée de contenir depuis des semaines explosa de façon théâtrale, ridicule. Orientale...” [The exaltation that I had forced myself to contain for weeks exploded in a way that was theatrical, ridiculous.

¹⁰³ This is an example of “dialect leveling” – when a language changes due to modernization or standardization – but in the case of Judeo-Spanish, the disappearance of the language is synonymous with cultural assimilation as well, as we can see from the Venezuelan Spanish code-switching of *Buena Familia*.

Oriental...] (49). Recognizing stereotypes of her family's culture in herself allows Rébecca to isolate her self-hatred on that part of her identity. By labeling the behavior "Oriental," she places it at a pronounced geographic distance from her new Venezuelan self. Although she criticizes the stereotypes of the "Orient," she cannot escape them, nor can she reject the traditional rites. Referring to her son's circumcision and her nephew's bar-mitzvah, she says, "Malgré la distance, il convenait d'exprimer notre appartenance au monde du *Señor Padre*, que Vitalis et moi-même avions tant abhorré..." [Despite the distance, we still expressed our belonging to the world of the *Señor Padre*, which Vitalis and I had so hated] (13). Despite her actions, Rébecca is slow to acknowledge the inextricable Jewish part of her own identity, yet readily observes it in others: "Maurice avait beau se proclamer athée et Colette agnostique, ils revendiquaient tous deux une part d'identité juive" [In vain did Maurice proclaim himself an atheist and Colette agnostic; they both laid claim to their share of Jewish identity] (54). Although Rébecca describes her "Oriental" behavior and adherence to Jewish traditions, she sees her time in Paris and Venezuela as negating her Sephardic identity.

Through Rébecca's self-hatred, Peskine offers a more nuanced view of her characters' relationships to their Jewish identities than in *Les Eaux Douces*. Where that novel focused on the binary between tradition in Constantinople and modernity in Paris, *Buena Familia* expands the identity map to include South America and North Africa. Complicating the dualities of tradition and modernity, ancestral homeland and adopted country, calls into question the concept of roots established in *Les Eaux Douces*. Rébecca's upbringing gave her what she sees as a dual identity: "L'école m'avait ouvert les portes d'un autre monde: le mien... Le vrai mien. J'avais juste oublié que pour s'intégrer, il faut être deux. Les écoles de l'Alliance israélite universelle ont fabriqué d'éternels déracinés" [School opened the door for me to another world: mine... my real world. I had just forgotten that to integrate, it was necessary to be two. The Alliance Israélite Universelle schools had created eternally uprooted people] (139). However, rather than being "eternally uprooted," Rébecca has access to a variety of roots – even in Paris, living in the Sephardic neighborhood, she "sentait paradoxalement moins exilée" [felt paradoxically less exiled] than she had in Constantinople (16). Once in Venezuela, she feels a close affinity to the native people, because "la malédiction d'être né indien me semblait comparable à la malédiction d'être né juif" [the curse of being born Indian seemed to me to be comparable to the curse of being born Jewish] (130). Yet the natives possess an ability that escapes Rébecca: "Plus le temps passait, plus je me demandais à quel partie du monde j'appartenais, et plus j'admirais leur rapport à la terre : bien que dépossédés, ils en étaient restés les fils spirituels" [The more time passed, the more I asked myself what part of the world I belonged to, and the more I admired their relationship to the land: although dispossessed of their land,

they remained its spiritual sons] (130). Although Rébecca recognizes the natives' ability to stay connected to their dispossessed land, she cannot do the same. It is only once she buys a house in France that she claims to feel rooted: "Avec ce bicoque, je me suis acheté un passé [...]: une histoire, des racines" [With this shack, I bought myself a past: a history, roots] (279).

As Peskine's representative of the immigrant generation, Rébecca can only feel rooted once she has assimilated into French society, and even then, she needs to write the story of her life in order to feel in control of her own identity. Jacques, her niece Simone's son, embodies the second generation – raised without ancestral ties, he has a tenuous connection to his roots. His lack of connection to his origins is foreshadowed by his conception: Simone, living rebelliously in Paris, gets pregnant by her artist boyfriend, who then leaves her to her family's wrath. She is saved by Rébecca's brother Vitali, who marries her and adopts her unborn son. When Jacques discovers that Vitali is not his father, he leaves his family to pursue a woman, who happens to be his married cousin – which can be read as attempting to connect to family in a different, and problematic, way.

When Rébecca sees Jacques again, he asks her about Ricardo, a marrano who had suddenly decided to study and embrace his Jewish roots (before being killed in a protest): "Pourquoi l'histoire des Juifs est-elle toujours tragique? [...] Tant qu'il était catholique, Ricardo était drôle, chahuteur... Quand il a commencé à apprendre l'hébreu, il a changé. Il est devenu grave" [Why is the history of the Jews always tragic? As long as he was Catholic, Ricardo was funny, boisterous. When he began to learn Hebrew, he changed. He became serious] (85). Rébecca explains that Ricardo, as the only member of his family to return to his roots, was left with the burden of his Jewish history on his shoulders. She says, "Les Juifs sont dépositaires de l'histoire de leur peuple" [Jews are custodians of the history of their people]; Jacques responds, "Dépositaire [...] ça signifie chargé, non? Plombé dès le départ" [Custodian, that means loaded, right? Weighed down from the start] (85). Yet although Jewish history is posited as a burden to be carried by the family, it is not Jacques's burden; in fact, he has been deprived of both his cultural history and his genealogical roots. In response to this conversation, he decides to actively seek out his origins by going to find his father.

Jacques is explicitly conscious of his lack of connection to his origins. After leaving Venezuela, he decides that he cannot pursue a future without knowledge of his ancestral past: "Si je veux me marier et avoir des enfants, je dois savoir d'où je viens" [If I want to get married and have kids, I must know when I come from] (125). He visits his uncle in London, who tells him about his grandparents and his family's history in Constantinople. In a letter, Jacques asks Rébecca angrily, "Pourquoi [...] m'avez-vous privé de cette partie de moi-même ? Pourquoi avoir rompu avec ce qui vous a faits tels que vous êtes ?" [Why did you deprive me of this part of myself? Why

break with what made you who you are?]) (125). Although Jacques cannot understand why anyone would want to ignore his or her roots, when his search for his father leads him to a Nazi sympathizer, he finds himself suddenly renouncing the man he had spent so long searching for: “J’ai décidé que cet homme n’était pas mon père. Que je lui refusais ce droit. Mon père fut et sera toujours Vitali Gatégno” [I decided that this man was not my father. That I refused him this right. My father was and would always be Vitali Gatégno] (144).

Just as Memmi and Bénabou sought to construct their own genealogies, Jacques feels the need to seek out a family other than the one that raised him. As a teenager, when his family’s insularity becomes too suffocating, he leaves for a boarding school in an attempt to “devenir un habitant de ce pays” [become an inhabitant of this country] (37); whereas his parents’ home will always be marked by their status as immigrants, Jacques, born in Venezuela, has the opportunity to feel a stronger sense of belonging to the country of his birth. But although he hoped to find “une famille plus grande” [a bigger family], he finds only “des brutes primitives” [primitive bullies] (37). When he confides in Rébecca, she promises him: “Tu trouveras ta famille [...] Mieux: tu la construiras” [You’ll find your family. Better: you’ll build it] (37), thus validating the concept of family as elective. For Rébecca, who harbors increasing animosity toward her past, the ability to choose one’s heritage allows her the freedom to leave some aspects of Sephardic culture behind while preserving others.

By refusing to pass on her family’s culture and traditions, Rébecca gives her nephew a blank slate onto which he can build his own past and future. Yet Rébecca’s rejection of her ancestral past leads her to a life characterized by psychological distress and uprootedness. After the war, Rébecca sees a friend from her childhood; talking about taking his son to visit Turkey, he says, “Il est bon pour un fils de savoir d’où il vient. Pour qu’à son tour il le raconte à ses enfants...” [It’s good for a son to know where he comes from. So that he can, in turn, tell his children] (246). Although Rébecca does not want to go back, she suggests that Jacques go. He mocks her proposal: “qu’irais-je faire à Istanbul, moi qui n’y suis même pas né?” [what would I do in Istanbul, I, who was not even born there?] (282). But Jacques’s daughter, Sarah, insists on going, “pour connaître le berceau de sa famille, son arrière-grand-mère, sa grande-tante et tutti quanti!” [to see the birthplace of her family, her great-grandmother, her great-aunt and all the rest !] (282). For Sarah’s sake, Jacques suggests that Rébecca accompany them on a trip back to their ancestral home. This trip, he says, would allow her to write the book she has always dreamed of, “le livre de ta vie” [the book of your life] (282).

Thus (as in *Statue de Sel*) the writing process and the book *Buena Familia* itself are posited as the ways in which Rébecca works through her problematic relationship to her past. Her niece mocks her assertion that her house gives her roots (“Dans une

passoire rouillée! Un pot ébréché!” [In a rusty colander! A chipped pot!]), but the physicality of the house and its construction in the French countryside give Rébecca a sense of stability for a future in which she identifies as French. However, old kitchen tools are not enough to root her in the past; it is the book itself that connects Rébecca to her family history. The book’s meta-existence brackets the text, from Rébecca’s reference to the current writing project on the first page to Jacques’ reference to its future existence on the last. The framing mechanism of Rébecca’s own memoir and the interplay of Judeo-Spanish and French make the reader complicit in Peskine’s project. Like Ahmadou Kourouma, whose Malinké-tinged French made readers “sense that they are directly participating in the action of the narration,” Peskine’s multilingual text begs “the reader’s active participation in its construction” (Gyasi 154).

The linguistic evolution from the intensely multilingual narrative of *Les Eaux Douces* to the more straightforwardly French text of *Buena Familia* allows Peskine to use linguistic narrative techniques as a framework for a discussion of the quest for cultural roots. Although Rébecca attempts to reject her heritage, she is unable to escape it; writing a memoir gives her agency to incorporate the aspects of her Sephardic identity into her French future. Through the fictional character of Rébecca, Peskine resurrects her own ancestral heritage. Peskine’s multilingual narrative assures Judeo-Spanish (and, metonymically, Sephardic culture) a place in the immortal archive of French literature. The combination of translated and untranslated Judeo-Spanish in the French text attempts, to borrow a term from Salman Rushdie, to “decolonize” French literature, allowing the hybrid immigrant identity a place in French historiography. By writing the Judeo-French Diasporic experience into French literature, Peskine is working toward a new, multicultural, multilingual conceptualization of French national identity.

It is thus essential to consider not only the involvement of the reader in the reading process, but the books’ reception and reach. *Les Eaux Douces* was initially published in 1996 by Seuil, an established house that has published social scientists and scholars such as Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, and Frantz Fanon. It was then published in translation in German, Turkish, and Greek, and in a pocket edition in 2003 by Éditions de l’Aube. A selection was anthologized in English translation in 2006 in *Daughters of Sarah*, a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award (Sartori and Cottenet-Hage).¹⁰⁴ *Buena Familia*, published by NiL (an imprint of Robert Laffont), was also published in Turkish translation. Pierre L. Horn reviewed *Les Eaux Douces* in *World*

¹⁰⁴ In her introduction to Peskine for the anthology, Michèle Sarde compares Peskine’s depiction of the Ottoman Jewish community to Albert Cohen’s, but notes that, by using a female subject, she offers a more critical perspective on Sephardic customs. Sarde reads the Judeo-Spanish proverbs as Peskine’s attempt to “underscore the patriarchal or macho connotations” of the culture (Sartori and Cottenet-Hage 243).

Literature Today in 1997, the same year he published *Modern Jewish Writers of France*. His review lauds the novel's representation of the history and politics of the early twentieth century, as well as the "painterly descriptions" of Sephardic culture, but glosses over the multilingualism at play in the novel, calling it a tool for "re-creating local color" and referring to Ladino somewhat condescendingly as "that wonderful Judeo-Spanish language" (Horn). But despite Horn's marginalization of Sephardic culture, Peskine's work has been well-received and widely disseminated.

In thinking about the impact of Peskine's novels, her use of Judeo-Spanish, a vernacular, is notable because, as we will see in Cohen's work as well, language takes on new significance in print. Print languages have enormous influence on the future of a nation or culture; Anne-Emmanuelle Berger's study of Algeria's languages shows how, in different national instances, the mother tongue was determined by the somewhat arbitrary result of "which language assumed the form and acquired the status of a 'print language' (Berger "Wedding" 63). Once a national language is already established, other languages or mother tongues can never fully assimilate into that culture; the "successful assimilation of the familial into the national" – which Berger terms an "impossible wedding" – "occurs when the mother tongue and the national language coincide as a result of historical and political processes" (63). Peskine's and Cohen's use of Judeo-Spanish in their French texts attempts to emulate these processes. Making Judeo-Spanish a written language endows it with the power of historical documentation and national belonging; incorporated into French text, it can speak for the Franco-Sephardic community.

While Peskine represents Franco-Sephardic identity through code-switching in a primarily French text, Marcel Cohen chooses to write, at first, only in Judeo-Spanish, and then, later, to produce a French and Judeo-Spanish version. In 1985, Cohen, already known in literary circles for his narrative prose in French, published an epistolary memoir addressed to and illustrated by his friend Antonio Saura, a major post-war Spanish artist. The memoir, entitled *Letras a un pintor ke kreyta azer retratos imaginarios por un sefardi de turkia ke se akodra perfektamente de kada uno de sus modeles*,¹⁰⁵ is written in Judeo-Spanish, the language Cohen heard spoken as a child but never spoke himself. Cohen translated his narrative into French and republished it in 1997 in a bilingual edition entitled *Lettre à Antonio Saura*. The French text omits some passages present in the original; Cohen also chose to leave certain words untranslated and to provide a glossary in the back of the book. The 2006 English translation, *In Search of a Lost Ladino: Letter to Antonio Saura*, is based on the French, although the new title and a critical introduction by the translator, Raphael Rubinstein, encourage a more directed reading, focused on the loss of language and culture.

¹⁰⁵ Hereafter referred to as *Letras*.

Although Cohen's narrative is framed as a memoir, it is not the story of his life, but of the entire history of the Sephardic people and their cultural and linguistic loss. Unlike Peskine's more traditional memoir-style novel, accompanied by a family tree and recounted chronologically, Cohen's text is narrated in epistolary fragments, and jumps from historical overview to family saga to philosophical musings, all the while conscious of its existence as an object, as a "livriko" [little book], at once in need of formal structure and capable of political impact (Cohen and Saura 46). This fragmented narrative mirrors the disrupted saga of the Sephardic people that Cohen is trying to narrate. By studying Cohen's linguistic and generic decisions in both the Judeo-Spanish and French texts, we can determine how the narrative functions as an attempt to reclaim a lost heritage. I argue that Cohen uses historical anecdotes, his relationship with Saura, Judeo-Spanish, and unorthodox translation techniques to write his own cultural history into French literature.

Cohen's relationship to Judeo-Spanish is not straightforward; even as he writes *Letras*, he describes his language learning as passive or accidental. His parents, immigrants from Turkey who had learned French in Alliance Israélite Universelle schools and spoke it perfectly, still spoke Judeo-Spanish at home; in the original text, Cohen states, "y ansina es ke yine yo me embezi" [and so it was that I learned it anyway] (Cohen and Saura 17). Thus Cohen emphasizes that he learned the language despite his parents' love of France and linguistic assimilation. Yet in the French translation, Cohen writes: "c'est donc en les écoutant que je m'en suis imprégné, faute de tout à fait le parler moi-même" (M. Cohen 10) ["so it was that in listening to them I was immersed in the language, without exactly speaking it myself" (Cohen, Rubinstein and Saura 28)], suggesting that he was exposed to the language but did not participate in it.¹⁰⁶ His command of Judeo-Spanish is not precisely spelled out, but "faute de tout à fait le parler" could indicate "without exactly speaking it" or "just short of/in the absence of fully speaking it"; either way, he emphasizes his ability to understand the language rather than produce it. This distinction is important because it implies that Judeo-Spanish is not, after all, Cohen's mother tongue – in fact, he does not even really speak it. His choice to write in it thus appears deliberate and academic, but also calls into question the exact nature of his relationship to the language.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Hereafter, the Judeo-Spanish version will be marked with an "S" before the page number; the French version with an "F"; the English version with an "E."

¹⁰⁷ Cohen's English translator, Raphael Rubinstein, describes Cohen's tenuous grasp of Judeo-Spanish as based in aural nostalgia: "He tried to listen to recover the sound of his grandmother's voice. Cohen had not only never written in Ladino, he really had never spoken it. It was a language only of his very first years, and as a result there are lots of mistakes, misspelled words, things that a practised fluent Ladino speaker would find strange and the spellings are odd, but he's written it as he remembers his grandmother speaking it" (Rubinstein).

Abdelkebir Khatibi writes of the psychological rift that occurs when working in two languages – in his case, French and Arabic. He argues that a “foreign tongue is not added to the native tongue as a simple palimpsest, but transforms it”; in Peskine’s text as in Cohen’s, the experience of reading French changes when that French text also includes Judeo-Spanish. Khatibi continues:

When I write in French, my entire effort consists of separating myself from my native language, of relegating it to my deepest self. I am thus divided from myself within myself, which is the condition for all writing inured to the destiny of languages. Dividing myself, reincarnating myself – in the other’s language. Henceforth, little by little, my native tongue becomes foreign to me. Bilingualism is the space between two exteriorities. I enter into the telling of forgetting and of anamnesia. Henceforth, “I am an/other” in an idiom that I owe it to myself to invent – a limit experience inherent in this situation. (Khatibi 158)

In Cohen’s case, and in terms of literary fluency, French is the native language, and Judeo-Spanish the foreign; but this simple dichotomy is complicated by the fact that Judeo-Spanish is actually the language of Cohen’s heritage, a mother tongue he never quite mastered (until, perhaps, the writing of *Letras*). The French and Judeo-Spanish versions of Cohen’s text give him two separate outlets for his divided identities, but the French version’s incorporation of Judeo-Spanish suggests that, while the Judeo-Spanish identity can exist monolingually (if the language can even be considered monolingual, given its multilingual construction), his French self cannot. Just as Khatibi’s native tongue “becomes foreign” through the continued use of French, Cohen, like Peskine, discovers that French is not an adequate language of expression; as when expressing oneself in a foreign language, it is impossible to find the right word. It is only through bilingualism (or “diglossia,” as Khatibi terms his linguistic expression) that the author can move between languages and express his or her hybrid identity. And – crucial to Cohen’s work – this linguistic negotiation is inextricably tied to memory – to “the telling of forgetting and of anamnesia.” It is not coincidental that Cohen (and, as we will see, Nicoïdski) uses the language of his ancestors to access his ancestral past. As he does this, his once-homogenous French identity and methods of expression break down. Like Khatibi, Cohen is “othered,” or foreign to himself, and to express this, he must invent a new “idiom,” language or combination of languages, that gives him the tools to describe this “limit experience.”

Cohen, too, speaks of his diglossia in terms of feeling like a foreigner. In an early instance of code-switching in the French text, he asks, “Comment imaginer que nous puissions devenir un jour, dans notre propre langue, les mousafires de nous-mêmes?” (F11) [“How could we imagine that we could one day become mousafires to ourselves in our own tongue?” (E29)]. “Mousafir” means foreigner in Turkish; Cohen’s

translation choice further foreignizes this rhetorical question while underscoring the complexity of the relationship of assimilated generations to their ancestral language. By stating that he is a foreigner to himself, he suggests that a part of him will always remain Judeo-Spanish – that is the part that refuses to translate “mousafir” and calls Judeo-Spanish “our own tongue” – but that that part is only a small portion of his identity, one that clashes with his non-foreign, French-speaking self. Cohen’s negotiation of linguistic foreignness raises certain questions: Is the foreign Judeo-Spanish or French? What part of Cohen is foreign? Can a mother tongue be a foreign language? Even if these questions remain unanswered, *Letras* attempts to address them if only through Cohen’s linguistic choices. At the end of the text, he asks, “No es bastante de avlar?” (S46) [Isn’t it enough to speak?], suggesting that his text is performative speech (and complicating the origin of Judeo-Spanish as a spoken language by commemorating it in written form). By speaking – or writing – in Judeo-Spanish, he is resurrecting the language both for himself and for current generations.

The language’s resurrection is, of course, predicated on its death. David Crystal, in his book *Language Death*, argues that speakers of a living language are the precarious archives of that community’s linguistic history (Crystal 2). Cohen, however, takes his role in language preservation a step further by anthropomorphizing the language, conflating it and its speakers. In the book’s opening section, he writes, “No saves, Antonio, lo ke es morirse en su lingua. Es komo kedarse soliko en su silensyo” (S17) [You don’t know, Antonio, what it is to die in your language. It is like being alone in your silence]. Here, Cohen suggests that the speaker himself dies in a language that is no longer being spoken; remaining “alone in your silence” is existing without language, and thus without life. But in the French translation, Cohen assigns agency to the language itself: “Tu n’imagines pas, Antonio, ce qu’est l’agonie d’une langue” (F9) [You cannot imagine, Antonio, the agony/death throes of a language];¹⁰⁸ Rubinstein’s English translation reads “the death agony of a language” (E27). Giving Judeo-Spanish the capacity for agony or death conflates the language with its community of speakers. Later in his narrative, Cohen focuses on the Sephardic community’s decline through generations of persecution, putting particular emphasis on the neglected historiography of the Sephardic Holocaust experience. By conflating the death of the language with the death of the community, Cohen implies that resurrecting the language as he does in *Letras* can simultaneously restore Sephardic culture and the Sephardic community.

In fact, Cohen questions whether a language really can die. Referring to Judeo-Spanish’s ambiguous nomenclature, he writes, “La lingua maternal: asi se dize de lo ke se entendya” [The mother tongue: that’s what we called what we heard] (S29), but

¹⁰⁸ The French “agonie” means both “agony” and “death throes.”

literalizes “mother tongue” as the mother’s language, and then gives it the properties of an actual mother, by asking, in the French translation, “mais cette mère meurt-elle jamais?” [but will this mother ever die?] (F10-11). This open-ended question is partially answered in the next sentence: “En elle veille notre passé, en elle nous sommes tout à fait présents à nous-mêmes” (F11) [“In her, our past grows old; in her, we are completely present to ourselves” (E29)]. However, the original text contains none of the French translation’s ambiguity. Cohen writes, “ma, en este kavzo, Antonio, la madre no se meure nunca. Siempre se keda fuerte. Puedes azer el mas grande viage, quando retornas la topas bien en pies. En eya vive tu pasado, en eya te sientes presente a ti mismo” [but, in this case, Antonio, the mother never dies. She always remains strong. You can take the longest trip, when you return you’ll find her on her feet. In her lives your past, in her you feel present to yourself] (S18). Why would Cohen undermine the confidence of the original text in his French translation? The original narrative can only be fully understood by fellow Judeo-Spanish speakers; its existence practically ensures the persistence of the language, at least within the limited realm of the book and its audience. However, the French text is more widely accessible; its readers may have little or no familiarity with Judeo-Spanish. In both versions, the relationship between the language and its speakers is a complex one that exists both in the past and present, but not in the future. Language acts as a repository of the past – as an archive of personal and collective history – and, through its use in Cohen’s narrative, as a reminder of his present identity.

Although Cohen successfully argues that Judeo-Spanish is a living language, he does not deny that its present existence is precarious. In an anecdote peppered, in the French translation, with untranslated Judeo-Spanish words, Cohen describes a depressed relative stuck in the past, “comme l’aurait fait [...] un roi exilé en proie à toute la nostalgie de la terre” [like an exiled king, prey to all the nostalgia on earth] (F15). This suggests that the past, and the language that recalls it, is a burden to the present. Yet by resisting translation, Cohen brings this character’s nostalgia-based Sephardic identity into the present, using code-switching to emphasize the link between speaking Judeo-Spanish and inhabiting a Sephardic identity. Despite his own connection to his past, he seems to feel that his Sephardic identity is only fully realized through language. He remarks, “Kuryozo, Antonio... Avlarte por la primera vez al nombre del sefardi ke so yo, y fin’al ultimo” (S28) [“Strange, Antonio...strange to speak to you for the first time in the name of the Sephardic Jew that I am, and also for the last time” (E42)], as if his Sephardic identity were only actualized through the act of writing, and then remained contained within the text, a textual ghost of a once-oral language. Although omitted from the French translation, he continues in the original, “Nacer y morirme en kada palabra y saverlo” [to be born and die in each word and to know it] (S28), further emphasizing an identity that does not exist outside the text.

Does this imply that before and after writing, Cohen has no Sephardic identity? Instead, I argue that the act of writing *Letras* marks the reclamation of a heritage that once belonged to an ancestral past but is mapped onto Cohen's personal present through the object of the published text. Cohen is not able to fully reclaim his lost heritage; for example, although he writes the text in Judeo-Spanish, he undertakes the project of its translation into French himself, with the knowledge that it is only through translation that it will be accessible. But Cohen's project opens new possibilities for the future of Sephardic identity. He writes, "kreo realmente ke, sis to yo el ultimo kapatche de avlar un poko de djudyo, sto tambien el primero ke pudo retornar a Espanya desde la salida" [I truly believe that, if I am the last capable of speaking a little Judeo-Spanish, I am also the first who can return to Spain since the expulsion] (S45). Cohen's generation, although only tenuously connected to its heritage, is in a privileged position historically to access what has been lost. Whereas previous generations lived in exile, Cohen can physically return to his Spanish roots. In fact, by writing to his Spanish friend, he is staking a claim to their shared cultural heritage.

In reclaiming his lost cultural heritage through writing *Letras*, Cohen is making ancestral tradition into his own personal history. In a move representative of postmemory, he posits himself as a repository for imagined post-expulsion ancestral memory, stating, "Lo ke aki te eskribo, Antonio, es el poko de ke me akodro despues de estos cinkos syekolos en Turkya" [What I'm going to write here, Antonio, is the little that I remember after these five centuries in Turkey] (S17). Cohen's inherited memories are only of the period of exile, as if the traumatic nature of the memories and their circulation as artifacts of lost heritage have made it possible for them to be displaced onto subsequent generations. By conflating his identities as author and character, Cohen allows his character to "write" a new type of history, recasting the past according to his fictive narrative and thus affecting the present. This authorial move can also be seen in Créole literature, whose hybrid language and burden of historical representation are similar to Cohen's. One critic writes that, for Caribbean authors Maryse Condé and Raphael Confiant, "la reconstitution du personnage de l'écrivain annonce la nécessité de se distinguer des générations précédentes, et de proposer, tout en s'inscrivant dans une relation de continuité par rapport à celle-ci, d'autres approches, d'autres genres dont leur livre est le reflet" [the construction of the character of the writer signals the need to distinguish oneself from previous generations, and to suggest, while remaining in a continuous relationship with them, other approaches, other genres which their book reflects] (Moudileno 197). Using an authorial, authoritative narrator allows Cohen, like Condé and Confiant, to pose as the expert in histories that are contested or lack historical documentation, providing

“memories” of an extended past, and thus to shape those histories according to personal preference.

However, although Cohen treats what he writes as memories, he frequently questions his ownership of the culture and language. He refers to the language as “la muerte” [death] speaking through his mouth (S19), positioning himself as a ventriloquist of his narration. As an embodiment of his culture, he is “sto muerto” (S19) [“already dead”] and the subject of academic scrutiny. He extends the metaphor to describe himself as a fossil on display, a “kavzo [...] byen konservado” [perfectly preserved specimen] that has been “buskado por miraklo en Paris en la segunda mitad del siglo veynte” [miraculously discovered in Paris in the second half of the twentieth century] (S20). Yet this specimen’s anthropological value is problematic; he is “inkapatche de avlar kasteyano” [incapable of speaking Spanish] and the “nota a los visitantes” [note to visitors] warns that he “ofre la partikolarida de komer solamente steack-frites y de beber gros-rouge” [“has the curious habit of subsisting only on steak frites and red wine” (E31)] unlike his true ancestors, compared here to “maymounas del zoo” [monkeys in zoos], who eat “pepitas o fustukes” [sunflower seeds or pistachios] (S20).

Cohen’s French identity makes him an illegitimate spokesperson for his ancestors; he cannot speak on their behalf, but, as a recognized French author, he can provide the medium for their historiography. His relationship to Judeo-Spanish acts as a synecdoche for his link to all of Sephardic culture; he understands but cannot truly speak the language, yet he chooses to write a book in it. The discomfort this relationship produces is described as “agony” in the French translation (F22), “dying” in the original: “Y ahora, mouryandome en el avlar myo, sto dechando los mousafires avlar por mi boka y eskriver kon mi mano. Eyos eskreven y eyos me meldan” [And now, dying in my language, I let the foreigners speak through my mouth and write with my hand. It’s they who write, they who read me] (S29). Again, he is a ventriloquist for the ancestral narrative, and the foreigners – who remain “mousafires” in the French and English translations – are both narrator and audience. As an ancestral story aimed for those ancestors, the narrative becomes more history than memoir.

Yet his ancestors are not his only audience; Cohen’s narrative is a letter directed to his Spanish friend Antonio Saura, whose abstract paintings with violent brushstrokes included in the text reflect Cohen’s own narrative.¹⁰⁹ The original title emphasizes Saura’s work over the artist himself; the text is a series of letters to an unnamed “pintor ke kreyta azer retratos imaginarios” [painter who believes he makes imaginary portraits], written by “un sefardi de turkia ke se akodra perfektamente de kada uno de sus modelos” [a Sephardic man from Turkey who remembers perfectly

¹⁰⁹ See Marcel Cohen’s *Quelques Faces Visibles du Silence* (Paris: L’Échoppe, 2000), a collection of four texts Cohen wrote about Saura’s work between 1979 and 1998.

each one of his models]. Cohen addresses these “imaginary portraits” directly, arguing that they are not, in fact, imaginary: “‘Imaginaryos’ dizes ke son los retratos ke pintes tu. Ya no lo kreo yo. No kreo ke sea mas el imaginary ke lo ke tenemos olvidado” (S27) [“‘Imaginary portraits,’ you call the faces that proliferate in your paintings. I don’t think for even a moment that they are. For me, the ‘imaginary’ is simply what we’ve forgotten” (E40)]. He thus draws a connection between the “imaginary” of the title and the titular emphasis on his own ability to remember. By saying that the “imaginary” is “what we’ve forgotten,” he suggests that as a culture and language disappear, they leave the realm of the real; by writing them into history, he assures their continued existence, if only as artifact.

Additionally, by writing the story of Sephardic history and immigration in both Judeo-Spanish and French (and allowing translations in English and Greek), Cohen is making an argument for his own cultural inclusion. He remarks that he was “un ebreo para los espagnoles antes de la salida, pues un espagnol para los turkos, un turko para los franceses [...], y ahora sto un frances para los espagnoles” [a Hebrew for the Spaniards before the expulsion, then a Spaniard for the Turks, a Turk for the French, and now, French for the Spanish] (S44). By extending this “memory” to pre-15th century Spain, Cohen is, again, speaking for his ancestors, who have been the Other in every society, even before the Inquisition. Now, although he is writing a book in Judeo-Spanish, he is considered French by other Spanish-speakers, yet he clearly does not consider himself to be monoculturally French. Perhaps by writing *Letras*, he is staking a claim to all the societies in which he has historically been othered, arguing that he cannot be defined by one cultural identity.

Indeed, the code-switching of his French translation argues that what he has to say cannot possibly be expressed by one language. Although there is no code-switching in the original text (though Judeo-Spanish is inherently polyglot), it has an extremely limited audience. Even in Judeo-Spanish, if Cohen acts as an archivist for his ancestral past, he cannot prevent his French identity from encroaching. He argues for the necessity of a multilingual expression of his identity, saying

Mi madre no era una « mère ». Mi nona no era una « grand-mère ». Entre la madre, o la mama, de los sefardis y la « mère » de los franceses, entre la dulzura de la nona, o de la vava, y la « grand-mère », me se fouyeron los cinkos syekolos en Turkya. (S29)

[My madre wasn’t a mere, nor was my nona a grandmother. Between the madre, or mama, of the Sephardim and the French mere, between all the sweetness of a nona or a vava and that of a grand-mère, are five centuries of life in the Ottoman Empire that sink into the unsayable.] (E44)

It is impossible to refer to the maternal figure or the mother tongue in translation; code-switching is required as the same word, in translation, loses all the cultural

referents of the original. Judeo-Spanish, as an ancestral language, contains “five centuries of life in the Ottoman Empire.” In the French and English translation, Cohen adds that these centuries sink “into the unsayable”; in translation, they cannot possibly be expressed.

Cohen acknowledges the limits of language throughout his narrative. He says that words “[n]o dizen mas ke el gusto y el tormento del pasado, la lokura del tyempo. Se van los biervos y, lechos de mi, se mueren komo las nuves del cyelo” (S18) [“just reflect nostalgia and the tragedies of the past. As soon as I glimpse them, words escape and die far away, like clouds in the sky” (E28)]. The impotence Cohen describes is reflected in the subject matter of his narrative; he tells the tragic story of centuries of persecution, culminating in a visit to Toledo where he finds a museum guide who speaks of Jews only in the past tense. He concludes that the power of words is all he has left. However, while words might be ephemeral, the written word has permanence, especially in publication and translation.

Taking a closer look at the words that resist translation can shed light on Cohen’s goal in creating a multilingual narrative. In describing “Stambol ke, de memorya, konosko yo” (S30) [“Istanbul as I remember it” (E44)] – another instance of postmemory – Cohen lists the smells of the city. The original reads, “Azeytunas, sudjuk, pastourma, tchouros n’el bakal” (S30); the translation, “Olives, sudjuk, pastourma, tchouros at the bakal” (E44). Cohen’s refusal to translate here is a statement that smells, especially from another culture, simply cannot be communicated. The reader has a choice to either accept the foreign words’ inaccessibility, or to interrupt the reading process and refer to the glossary at the back of the book, which defines each word individually: “sudjuk” is beef sausage, “pastourma” dried and spiced meat, “tchouros” dried fish, and “bakal” a grocer. Equipped with these linguistic aids, the reader can now decipher the original sentence, but the fluidity of the reading experience is lost. Similarly, in the section of the same chapter on “gizada” [cuisine], the author attempts translation but then slips into the original language mid-dish: “Eggplant ratatouille. Fish casserole. Cinnamon sotlach. Armodrote. Malebi” (E48). Some of these words, like “malebi,” which is “rice pudding,” have French or English equivalents, but their Sephardic-ness would be eclipsed by new cultural referents. In a way, this is what Cohen sees happening to his own identity, as his Sephardic heritage has been displaced by his French self, and can only be realized through and in this text.

Although Cohen’s translation choices do not force readers to consult the glossary, those who do are interacting with the Judeo-Spanish text as a didactic tool. In addition to translations, the glossary provides the origin of each word, whether Turkish, Hebrew, French, Portuguese, or Greek, thus underscoring Judeo-Spanish’s inherent multilingualism. The glossary is not Cohen’s creative work, but based on the

work of Joseph Nehama, author of a seven-volume history of Salonican Jewry, who wrote a definitive Judeo-Spanish-French dictionary in 1968 after becoming one of the few Sephardic survivors of the Holocaust. Like Peskine's archival work, Cohen's linguistic and historical research addresses the lack of this information in institutionalized history. By providing the glossary, Cohen offers his readers an immersive experience. For example, he describes a sultan who threatened "his subjects who rarvan" (E48); the glossary lists only "rarvar," originally Turkish, which is "to beat, to mistreat" (E118). The reader is forced to conjugate the verb – to turn "rarvar" into the third person plural present indicative "rarvan." Interacting with Judeo-Spanish through its grammar turns what is otherwise a relic of the past into a living language, one that follows known grammatical rules and can be learned through courses or textbooks – if Cohen used a dictionary for his narrative, so too can the reader.

Cohen's engagement with his Sephardic heritage does not stop at the linguistic; by acknowledging the limits of language, he implicitly suggests additional ways of reconnecting with his culture. Raphael Rubinstein, in his introduction to his English translation, calls the text a "literary time machine" connecting "Paris circa 1981 to fifteenth-century Spain to Ottoman-era Turkey" (E12-13) – performing a similar narrative move to the texts discussed in the previous chapter. Cohen's narrative often delves into historical anecdotes, which he offers as one would stories about one's own family. His ability to individualize the universal – to personalize history – is a crucial component of his postmemorial project. He uses the story of the famous historian Yosef Ha-Kohen's family, persecuted wherever they moved, to talk about his own lack of national belonging. He describes Dominican missionary San Vicente's massacre of Jews in the 14th century by quoting municipal reports on the massacre; he links it to his narrative somewhat superficially at first, saying, "De ke te sto avlando de San Vicente? Ahora me vyene... No me dichites tu ke moravas en Kuenka?" (S40) ["Now, why am I mentioning San Vicente to you? I've got it! Didn't you tell me you lived in Cuenca?" (E59)]. San Vicente's Cuenca and Antonio Saura's are separated by nearly six centuries of history, during which the city's population, economy, and politics shifted radically. Yet Cohen continues, "Alora saves ke este Vicente era el mas grande enemigo de los djudyos. Fue la kulpa suya de tener excitado los kristyanos kontra los djudyos en Kuenko" (S40) ["So you must know what an enemy Vicente was to the Jews and by what diabolical ruse he stirred up the Christians of that city against them" (E59)]. Cohen uses the geographic connection of Cuenca to collapse time, suggesting that Saura is responsible for knowing the history of his city. Yet he pushes even further; after listing the details of the massacre's results, he says, "Bravo, Antonio. Una grande viktorya fue" (S41) ["It was a fine victory!" (E60)]. This sarcastic praise suggests that, through the connection caused both by geography and national identity, Saura is, in

part, responsible for Vicente's actions and the actions of those who persecuted the Jews during the Inquisition.

If Cohen harbors animosity toward Saura for his participation in the society that exiled Cohen's ancestors, is *Letras* intended to cast blame? It is true that the first publication of the text, in Madrid, was available only to a Spanish audience (and one that did not mind struggling through the unfamiliar linguistic components of Judeo-Spanish). Rubinstein suggests that Cohen's goal was accusatory – he says that, in a text that enumerates the many ways Sephardic Jews have been persecuted, “Cohen savors the irony that his readers – including Saura [...] could well be descendents of those involved in the expulsion of many of Spain's Jews” (E12-13). However, in the conclusion of the Vicente account, in a line omitted from the French and English translations, Cohen writes, “Todo esto para dezirte ke, si me vo a pasar las vakansas en tu kaza de Kuenka, komo me lo propones tu, kyero ser byen seguro ke es para travar kyef kon ti” [All this to tell you that, if I'm going to spend my vacation at your place in Cuenca, as you've proposed, I want to be sure that it's to have a good time with you] (S41). Omitting this sentence from the translation suggests that it is not sarcastic, but intimate and genuine. Perhaps the litany of abuses Cohen narrates is not intended to be accusatory, but cathartic. As Cohen's text and translations show, the process of writing allows him to assert his Sephardic identity, and the text itself then contains a written record of that identity. Rubinstein suggests that in “emphasizing Saura's Spanishness, Cohen affirms his own claim to an Iberian heritage” (E11). At the same time, Cohen's references to Sephardic Jewish history and to his French identity demonstrate the hybridity that defines him. Keeping Judeo-Spanish words in the French and English translations mirrors the hybridity the narrative describes and canonizes Marcel Cohen's French-Sephardic identity in permanent written form.

Both Peskine and Cohen wrote from the perspective of previously published authors with strong French identities, identities that had not been threatened until they chose to engage with their families' pasts and complicate their sense of who they were as writers and French Jews. Clarisse Nicoïdski, however, experienced the trauma firsthand of being marginalized in French society because of her Jewish identity. Although, like Peskine and Cohen, she writes about the Sephardic past and memories she did not experience, her writing stems from the childhood trauma of witnessing the physical erasure of her identity on her official papers in order to avoid deportation, a scene she sees as “initiatique” [initiatory] of her identity as a writer (Nicoïdski 276). The “nouvelle identité” [new identity] (275) her parents invent for her is one that will always carry this mark of this erasure; she sees herself not as a writer but as “faussaire,” a forger, or counterfeiter (276), branded by her false papers. Unlike papers, she muses, gravestones cannot be erased; they are the “ultime pièce d'identité”

[ultimate identity papers] (276). But what interests her is what is missing from their indelible faces: the dash between the birth and death dates. She sees this gap as

l'écriture, le récit : ce tracé en creux, cette érosion prématurée de la pierre, fabriquée par une main d'homme, artificielle puisqu'elle, ne doit rien au temps qui passe. Toutes anecdotes, tous événements confondus, annulés. L'écriture n'est peut-être que cet effacement, seule manière pourtant de demander ou de dire une existence.

[writing, narrative: this hollowed line, this premature erosion of stone, made by a human hand, artificial because it owes nothing to the time that passes. All stories, all events, muddled, cancelled. Maybe writing is nothing but this erasure, the only way to ask or speak an existence.] (276)

Nicoïdski's writing does not only address the erasure of her Jewish identity during World War II and of her family's Sephardic past, but speaks to a variety of marginalized subjects, such as homosexual erotica and women artists. By writing about these gaps in history or literary discourse, she can both construct the missing narrative and give it a permanent home in her text. She writes, "le livre (le texte) me semble être le lieu de séjour et d'enracinement final [...] L'inscription, ce lien entre la matière et l'abstraction, seule, nous donne la durée" [the book (the text) seems to me to be the place to stay and take root... Inscription alone, this link between material and abstraction, gives us duration] (281).

Like Cohen and Peskine, Nicoïdski writes about the Sephardic people in order to give them roots in narrative. Her interest in Sephardic themes was sparked by her mother's death; she had been a prolific French author before turning to Judeo-Spanish at the age of 40, when she published her first volume of poetry, *Lus Ojus Las Manus La Boca*. Nicoïdski published twenty novels, one play, and one opera in her short life, but *Lus Ojus* is her only poetic work, and her only text written in Judeo-Spanish, the language of her ancestors.¹¹⁰ Although this volume differs linguistically and formally from her earlier work, its complex thematic elements—and thus the poem series itself—can only be understood if read alongside both her French prose and the traditional Sephardic folklore of her childhood. Through this intertextual reading, the poem's images of sexual desire translate to form a text of national and linguistic longing, an elegy to the speaker's ancestral homeland and to the language of the poem itself.

¹¹⁰ Nicoïdski, née Abinun, wrote in a Judeo-Spanish that was, in its inflection, pronunciation, and vocabulary, markedly Bosnian; for a detailed discussion of the linguistic particulars of Nicoïdski's language, see Balbuena (288-89). Nicoïdski spoke Judeo-Spanish only at home with her parents. Her poetry was prompted by her mother's death. Her husband was the painter Robert Nicoïdski. She died of cancer in 1996 (Ceccatty).

Nicoïdski's decision to write in a dying language for which there is little audience is an important element to consider before literary analysis. Peskine's narrative, mostly in French, is the most immediately accessible to French readers; Nicoïdski's and Cohen's are entirely in Judeo-Spanish but both published, eventually, in bilingual editions. While Cohen's first, monolingual, edition was published in Spain and thus somewhat accessible to Spanish speakers, Nicoïdski's, published in France with an accompanying English translation, was not easily approached by a French audience. Neither was Nicoïdski's poetry intended for a large Judeo-Spanish-speaking readership: the last generation to claim Judeo-Spanish as a mother tongue is currently dying out (most sources estimate about 100,000 speakers worldwide). Moreover, all Judeo-Spanish speakers speak another language fluently; as I discuss in chapter one, Sephardic communities were generally well-integrated into the Diasporic communities in which they lived. Her translator and publisher, Kevin Power, admits that they "never thought about readership" and "hardly had any distribution" but "the Sephardic society bought almost the whole edition," suggesting that Nicoïdski's work was at once personal and academic (Power). Thus, Nicoïdski's language choice deliberately situates her work in the broader scheme of Sephardic literature, language, and culture. The Sephardic secular literary experience reflects the feeling of homelessness and loss of national identity produced by their double exile. According to Nicoïdski's father's memoir, her grandfather once said that "une belle écriture et de belles phrases bien tournées marquent le respect ou l'amour qu'on a pour son destinataire" [good writing and beautiful well-turned phrases mark the respect or love we have for the recipient] (Abinun 233); thus, Nicoïdski's poetry serves as a cultural, historical, and linguistic homage to a dying community.

However, despite her limited publishing goals, her poetry reached a wider audience that shared in her search for roots. Her work was translated into English, German, and – as she writes exclaimatorily – into French, creating a community of readers outside of the intended linguistic boundaries of the text. She notes offhandedly that the French translation "d'une certaine façon, rend dérisoire le sens de la démarche initiale" [in a way trivializes the meaning of the original approach] (283); but if the goal of the original text is to preserve Judeo-Spanish and encourage Sephardic French Jews to embrace their heritages, providing the text in translation will reach a larger audience and thus better accomplish that goal. Nicoïdski's work has been cited in Catherine Clément's historical novel *La Senora* and anthologized in translation in Howard Schwartz's 1980 anthology *Voices Within the Ark* and in Jaime B. Rosa's 2000 anthology *Sepharad 2000: antología judeo-española*.¹¹¹ Her poetry also influenced at least

¹¹¹ Nicoïdski appears in Rosa's anthology as Clarisse Nicoïdski Abinun.

one major poet, Argentinian Juan Gelman.¹¹² Though surprised by its success, Nicoïdski appreciates “la durée de l’écrit et la lumière de l’Histoire” [the permanence of writing and the light of History] (284) given to her work by its continued publication.

As her work often appears in bilingual translation, her use of Judeo-Spanish creates a community of readers who identify either directly with the language or, more generally, with her tenacity in writing and publishing in a marginalized language. She calls the language “*notre judéo-espagnol*” [our Judeo-Spanish], emphasizing its tenuous place as the language of a disappearing culture, a language that was “quasi secrète” and “qui se perdait” [becoming lost]; by writing in Judeo-Spanish, she aims to “retenir cette voix” [preserve this voice] (Nicoïdski 283), the voice of the Sephardic people. She sees her hybrid heritage as allowing her to have “des enracinements multiples et variés” [multiple and varied roots]; Judeo-Spanish gives her a “quadruple héritage culturel,” letting her belong to a series of cultures stretching back through time, from the Spanish renaissance to Slavic, Serbian, and Muslim cultural and literary moments in history (280). For Nicoïdski, Judeo-Spanish represents the multiplicity of her heritage, and while it most directly signifies her Sephardic roots, she acknowledges that she does not have a traditionally defined Jewish identity. Her Judaism is comprised of certain words (“Mazel! Shema Israël!”) whose limited scope might actually imply “de manière criante l’absence de maîtrise – de la langue juive, des prières, du rituel” [vividly the lack of command – of the Jewish language, prayers, ritual] (283). But her use of these words, and her Judeo-Spanish poetry, marks “une appartenance inévitable et *volontaire*” [an inevitable and *voluntary* belonging] to the Sephardic world. Nicoïdski, like Peskine and Cohen, elects to define herself through her writing as multilingual and multicultural.

The emphasis in Nicoïdski’s work, in French as well as Judeo-Spanish, on Sephardic cultural history, indicates her desire to bring this subject to the literary world. At the same time, her work is deeply personal: there are clear autobiographical traces in her prose, and her poetry is intimate and personal. Nicoïdski is not just refusing to allow Sephardic language, culture, and history to disappear, but, like Cohen, is implicating herself and her personal history in the process. By writing in Judeo-Spanish about the disappearance of that language, Cohen and Nicoïdski are making a political statement to Sephardic Jews against assimilation and for a return to personal, and cultural, roots.

The struggle with notions of home and nationalism emerges clearly in Nicoïdski’s poetry through her use of the body. Her first novel, *Le Désespoir tout blanc* (1968), already establishes the body as an important element of community and

¹¹² See Monique Balbuena, “Dibaxu: A Comparative Analysis of Clarisse Nicoïdski’s and Juan Gelman’s Bilingual Poetry.” *Romance Studies* 27.4 (November 2009): 283-97.

identity. It is written through the point of view of Lili, a young mentally and physically disabled girl who endures daily neglect and abuse by her family. Lili's narrative focuses on what is said, seen, heard and felt; the hands, mouth, and eyes are given agency as autonomous beings. She describes her mouth as being able to "se fermer ou chanter, des choses sortent d'elle" [close itself or to sing; things come out of it] on its own accord (161).

The opening of *Lus Ojus Las Manus La Boca* merges the motif of body parts with the theme of memory and the construction of cultural, and personal, identity. The series is broken into three poems— *Lus Ojus* [Eyes], *Las Manus* [Hands], and *La Boca* [Mouth]. The *in media res* beginning of the first line, "i como mi sulvidaré" [and how will i forget], situates the reader in a present moment from which the past is inextricable. Posed as a rhetorical question, the statement suggests that its speaker can neither forget nor remember. This elusive past is further invoked in the first stanza: "si avrian lus [ojus] di lus muartus" [the eyes of the dead opened] indicates a resurrection of the dead, perhaps in support of the living's attempt to connect with the past, to recall the "luz qui nunca si amató" [light that never went out]. As this analysis demonstrates, the dead are the speaker's ancestors, and her connection to them, severed by assimilation, can only be forged linguistically, through a revival of Judeo-Spanish.

However, the gap between past and present is not just a linguistic and temporal one, but is also geographic. Nicoïdski was born in Lyon, France, in 1938; her family was from Sarajevo and, originally, Spain. The imagery in *Lus Ojus* speaks to this geographic displacement. Eyes become a mode of transportation; though often known as the "window to the soul," here they are the window to another time and place. Significantly, the transportation is nautical— the eyes become "un barco" [a boat] and "la vela" [the sail] with which the speaker will "tumar lus caminus dil mar/ di la mar" [take the seaways/ of the sea]. This is reminiscent of travel both in the time of the Inquisition, when the Jews of Spain left by boat to Ottoman lands, and, much later, when Nicoïdski's father, Maurice Abinun, left Sarajevo for the first time to return to Spain, where he encountered a startlingly foreign and anti-Semitic population (similar to that obliquely evoked in Cohen's work). Much of Abinun's sense of estrangement and isolation stemmed from the differences between the Judeo-Spanish he spoke and the Spanish of contemporary Spain; not only did no one understand him, but people regarded him with suspicion, fear, and distrust (Abinun 245). In returning to his national roots, Abinun found he was still an exile; years of immigration, anti-Semitism, and assimilation had made his journey home impossible.

The boat made of eyes becomes the speaker's vessel for nautical travel, but the lack of destination suggests that this travel is futile. This stanza echoes profoundly with a popular Sephardic folksong, "La Serena," listed in the appendix to Abinun's memoir (284). The song tells of a young lover's quest to save a girl locked in a tower in

the middle of the sea. “La mar era de leche” [the sea is made of milk] and “los barkitos de canela” [boats of cinnamon], but these are no obstacles to the young man. Although it later becomes clear that the tower is the sailor’s destination, at first, he brags that he would brave the milky sea and the cinnamon boats to save his “bandyera” [flag]. This folksong is not invoking the Zionist homeland—the diction would be more Hebrew-inflected if it were—but Spain, the nostalgic homeland of the Sephardic Jews. This patriotism is conflated with, and ultimately subsumed by, the love story of the girl in the tower. Similarly, in Nicoïdski’s poetry, what is presented as longing for a lover is actually a linguistic and nationalistic desire.

In *Lus Ojus*, the boat is made of eyes instead of cinnamon, and it navigates a blind, weeping sea. The apparent futility of this voyage is underscored by the continued references to blindness. Once the eyes have become a boat, they are perennially linked to travel: the “cunseja” [tale] of personal history “si camina in [sus] ojus/cuandu lus avris la maniana” [wanders in the lover’s eyes when they open in the morning]. Yet they are a limited instrument; there is always a barrier to accessing the desired vision. Even “si arasgarun lus ojus” [eyes torn open] can only see “il velu [qui] ciega” [a veil that blinds]; they remain “comu tela/ qui scondi la varda” [like a web hiding the truth]. The imagery of barriers and limitation, met with the theme of eyes as a mode of (ineffectual) transportation, combine to produce another reading of this versatile body part: the eyes’ gaze tethers the speaker to surrounding objects. As the wall, candle, lamp, chair, and table watch the speaker with their collective “oju unico/ di la cosas” [one eye of objects], she is forcibly joined to her surroundings: “il oju/ caminándusi/ alrididor di ti/ di mi” [the eye/ is wandering/ around you/ around me]. This movement is not progressive, but circular; someone who is “caminándusi” [wandering around] lacks destination—or, if there is a destination, it remains an unattainable goal.

The sea itself mirrors the geographic displacement of this voyage. The sea is “sta liurandu [...] di no tiner ojus/ di no ver” [crying/at not having eyes/at not seeing] because it has no nationality; it is at once the connection and the barrier between nations. It also restricts and isolates: as a child during the war, Nicoïdski could not leave Lyon; the far-off sea (and its connection to other countries) thus became a symbol of her isolation. In *Lus Ojus*, the sea embodies loneliness. Two entities are irreconcilably separate: “aviartus/ dos puarta/ dos vintanas/ una mar cun dos islas/ sin qui ningunu adientri” [open/ two doors/ two windows/ a sea with two islands/ with no one inside]. Although the doors and windows are open and thus would otherwise be inviting, here they are empty. In fact, the only “cuerpu” [body] in this verse is one that “si caiga/ sin qui si veyá [...] in estus pozzus sin fondo/ ondi mi alma si afoga” [falls/ unseen/ into these bottomless wells/ where my soul is drowning]. The rending of body and soul, and the subsequent drowning of the soul, suggest a crucial rift in the speaker’s identity. If one reads the poem alongside Nicoïdski’s other work and

biography, the “body” remains French, according to its nationality and birth, while the soul is lost at sea, drowning in a well, because of its lost ancestral legacy.

Indeed, in *Couvre-feux* (1981), Nicoïdski’s most autobiographic novel, it is precisely geographic displacement and travel that define the Sephardic people. *Couvre-feux* tells the story of a four year old girl, Judith, living in Lyon with her family during World War II. Judith is the same age Nicoïdski was at this time, and her parents share Nicoïdski’s parents’ names, Maurice and Mathilde. They also share family history: the parents are from Sarajevo, and the family originally is from Spain. These Spanish ancestors are referred to as “des qui voyagent” [those who travel] (12). During the course of the narrative, Judith and her family are constantly displaced in their attempt to escape the Nazis and Vichy government officials. The first time they leave their home, Judith is given her first taste of cinnamon and vanilla. She savors this new flavor like Proust’s familiar *madeleine*, with one crucial difference—she is not recalling a childhood experience. Although the flavor triggers an involuntary “memory,” this memory is not from her own past, but from a collective cultural history: she says that the “goût inconnu” [unknown taste] is like a “départ infini” [infinite departure] (219). This refers to a family history of departure: first from Spain during the Inquisition, then from Sarajevo, just before the anti-Jewish riots that preceded World War II, then from Lyon, during the Holocaust. This trajectory is not unique to Nicoïdski’s family, but common among Sephardic Jews. In fact, a popular folksong, quoted in *Couvre-feux* (217) and in Abinun’s appendix (270), has as its refrain: “en tyerras ajenas yo me vo a murir” [in foreign lands will I die]. The speaker of this song is already in exile, and is condemned to die there. It is precisely the anonymous nature of this permanent residence that is important to the cultural framework of the song; the constant diasporic nature of the Sephardic Jewish experience is underscored by the reference to the final resting place as, simply, “tyerras ajenas” [foreign lands]. This split is omnipresent in Sephardic literature, as in the literary legacy of any exiled community: although a family might live somewhere for generations, that country will always be “foreign,” and Medieval Spain will always be the ancestral and nostalgic “home.”

This clash of nationalities, introduced in *Lus Ojus* by the drowning soul, is further explored in *Las Manus*, the second poem in the series. This split is immediately apparent when the reader recognizes that there are two sets of hands—the speaker’s and someone else’s, perhaps a lover’s. Both the speaker’s hands and her lover’s are portrayed as ineffectual; the speaker’s hands are “dos paxarus matadus/ asperan di cayersi” [two dead birds waiting to fall] —creatures that are already dead but can still fall further. The poem vacillates between negative and positive imagery, but the ultimate image expresses hopelessness and futility. There is no possibility of communication or expression: the lovers’ hands “gritan sin tiner boca/ lioran sin tiner ojus/ cantan sin tiner voz/ dan/ sin tiner nada/ i fin qui puedin/ il suluk dil alma/

ditienin” [scream without a mouth/ cry without eyes/ sing without voice/ give/ with nothing to give/ until they can/ hold/ their breath]. They are anthropomorphized into a helpless being that is forced to suppress its own life—hold its breath, or “suluk dil alma”—literally, soul’s breath. Again, we see the contrast of body and soul, and the repression of the latter. The adopted nationality suffocates the ancestral roots. By the end of the poem, the hand becomes a book the speaker “no sup[o] maldar’ [didn’t know how to read] and the addressee “qued[a]/ alivantada aspirandu/ como si quiri[a] jugar/ sin saver” [stays/ standing waiting/ as if wanting to play/ without knowing how]. The intense futility of this passage is the poem’s ending note; the final image is of two people, looking at each other and feeling a connection, but that connection has yet to be realized: “cuandu mus cunuciremus” [when will we know each other], the speaker asks. This futility is expressed both linguistically—the hand, like Nicoïdski’s poem, is an illegible book—and epistemologically—the addressee wants to play but doesn’t know how; the couple wants to be together but they have yet to meet.

The rollercoaster of imagery and emotion in *Las Manus* mirrors the Sephardic Jews’ exodus as detailed in Cohen’s work, an interminable journey through fear, hope, oppression, hope again, and then finally a feeling of loss and uncertainty. The violent imagery, continued through the third poem, emphasizes the emotional and physical cost of exile. In *La Boca*, this violence is explicitly linked to questions of language and expression. The poem opens with the image of a mouth amid violence and death. The mouth, when open, is compared to “un pozzo/ ondi mi podía ichar” [a well/ where I could throw myself] and, when closed, to “una puerta/ cuandu matavan in la cay” [a door when they were killing in the street]. The mouth, “ichandu gritus fuegu” [screaming fire], is an instrument of speech and sound and, ultimately, language. “Si avrirá la boca di la tiara” [The earth opens its mouth] to reveal shadows yelling “para sus madras” [for their mothers] and mothers yelling “para sus fijos” [for their sons]. But these screams are not effective: the “screaming fire” becomes only “una sola palabra di fuegu” [a lone word of fire]. The mothers’ cries are underscored by the “silenciu qui pue di dar il spantu” [fearful silence] that spreads over the earth. These cries are problematized by the following stanza: the speaker has “vidriu in la boca” [glass in her mouth] and “cuandu il vidriu si entra mas adientru” [as the glass goes deeper] it causes her to recall “un cantu di aligria sulvidada” [a song of forgotten joy]. This song—like the mothers’ cries—is written in “una lingua pardida” [a lost language]. Like Judith’s taste of cinnamon and vanilla, this involuntary memory is foreign and inaccessible. The speaker details her attempts to comprehend the song’s language, but it is intangible, and dissolves into “una scrituria muda” [silent writing]. With language lost, the mouth can only scream “comu un pez/ qui si quieri ichar/ dil ríu/ al mar” [like a fish/ wanting to plunge/ from the river/ into the sea] or “com’un cuchillu/ qui si quieri ichar/ di la manu/ al cuerpu” [like a knife/ wanting to plunge/

from the hand/ into the body]. But this potent scream, “un gritu para matar” [a scream to kill], then “entre tus labios/ murio” [dies between your lips]. The image of the futile scream mirrors the speaker’s relationship with this lost language, Judeo-Spanish. Only the bearer of this language can return the speaker to her origins by “sana[ndo] esta sangri/ qui un día [...] si dituvu alrididor di un buracu” [healing this blood/ that one day...stopped around a hole]. The importance of this language—indeed, its significance as the primary image of the poem—is underscored by the speaker’s statement that this blood “hue vida/ i si fizu boca” [was life/ and it turned into a mouth]. Thus life is reduced to language—as both Peskine and Cohen note, the only remnant of a way of living, of the Sephardic Jewish community, is Judeo-Spanish; however, the language now, too, is disappearing, and is already inaccessible to the speaker’s generation.

The mouth’s screams die before they are emitted because they are in a dying language. The ending of *La Boca* recalls the beginning of *Lus Ojus*, in which the speaker feels “il friu di no puder avlar/ di nunca mas/ puder dizir” [the chill of not being able to speak/ of never again/ being able to say].” The inability to “say” is reflected in *Le désespoir*: Lili tells the reader “Je suis pas folle” [I’m not crazy] almost forty times in 140 pages, but she cannot truly communicate this because she is unable to express herself linguistically. The importance of linguistic expression and language preservation to the Sephardic community can be seen in *Couvre-feux*; little Judith calls Judeo-Spanish “la langue des adultes” [the language of adults] and French, by contrast, “la langue des enfants” [the language of children]. Although other traditions might die—the family does not keep kosher, and celebrates Christmas in order to fit in—the language is passed on. However, Judeo-Spanish is not even considered a “true” language by its speakers; Judith is told that it is “un espagnol abâtardi par des siècles d’usage marginal, loin du pays d’origine...Moins correct. Sans grammaire. Sans règles. Sans rien” [Spanish bastardized by centuries of marginal usage, far from its country of origin... Less correct. Without grammar. Without rules. Without anything] (12). It is also difficult to translate because it depends so heavily on its cultural bearings; when Judith and her cousins translate her parents’ conversations into French, they become “extrêmement drôles!” [extremely funny!] (97). The movement away from preserving language and culture, and towards assimilation, can be seen in the epigraph to *Couvre-feux*, a children’s rhyme about a black woman who drank milk until she was as white as “tous les Français” [all the French people] (9). Like Peskine’s work, Nicoïdski’s decision to write poetry in Judeo-Spanish counters assimilation and problems of cultural continuity by recalling sociohistorical signs while creating new, contemporaneous cultural bearings in the same text.

As these three authors’ work shows, the Sephardic community bears the wound of exile, “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” (Said 173). The extent of the community’s assimilation

leaves its native language as the lasting vestige of its roots. With Judeo-Spanish's imminent disappearance in mind, Peskine, Cohen, and Nicoïdski chose to write in Judeo-Spanish as a testament to the relevance of Sephardic heritage to contemporary French identity politics. If, as Said argues, the condition of exile "den[ies] an identity to people" (175), or at least threatens that identity, these authors are attempting to reinstate this identity by reviving the language as a vehicle of both literary and historical legacy—a vehicle of remembering and restoration. However, this fantasy can never become reality; *Lus Ojus's* images of violence, failure, and lack of communication, the dwindling Judeo-Spanish presence in *Buena Familia*, and the code-switching in Peskine's and Cohen's work, indicate that true restoration is not possible. There is no longer an evolving community of Sephardic culture, tradition, and language; the idealized culture of the writers' nostalgic postmemories does not actually exist.¹¹³ As Nicoïdski's metaphor of a failed love affair demonstrates, despite attempts to remember and inscribe the past, without the necessary linguistic tools, the "scream" of the exiled community dies before it can be heard. The elements that do survive exist in the hybrid identities of these authors and their characters; the hybridity, structurally mirrored in multilingualism, continues to exist through multilingual publication.

By publishing their work in France and, to varying degrees, in French, these authors are suggesting new linguistic and cultural pathways for French literature and new definitions of French identity. Multilingual publication in a purportedly monolingual society cannot help but call into question that society's language politics. In an essay on narratives that resist translation, Joshua L. Miller argues that

Multilingual cultures fundamentally challenge the bedrock binaries of translation, beginning with the seemingly unobjectionable categories of native/original/source and foreign/secondary/target languages. By questioning native-foreign distinctions, multilingual authors disrupt what might otherwise be considered the domestication of a foreign text. (J. L. Miller 475)

While a multilingual text resists domestication because it cannot be fully embraced by a monolingual domestic culture, at the same time, the presence of additional languages subverts the domestic, disturbing the "monolingual complacency" (Apter 61) of the host culture. Novels like Peskine's that are published in French but incorporate untranslated Judeo-Spanish suggest that the foreign words and the culture they invoke are as much part of French literature and society as the surrounding French text.

When these narratives are published or read in translation, even if the political message of the original language is lost, their focus on Sephardic culture remains. Despite Nicoïdski's fears at seeing her work in French, it still reads as an ode to Judeo-

¹¹³ For an analysis of the relationship between nostalgia and postmemory, see Jessica Hillman-McCord's *From the Shtetl to 42nd Street: Nostalgia and Postmemory in Jewish American Musicals, 1961 – Today* (University of Colorado at Boulder, 2007).

Spanish. Translation, as Emily Apter argues, “is a significant medium of subject re-formation and political change” (6); bringing these texts into French increases their political force. These authors’ success, whether in the original, in their own translations, or excerpted years later in anthologies, speaks to the literary quality of their narratives. Apter writes of the unique obstacles authors writing multilingual texts or in marginalized languages face in publishing their work:

authors writing in *patois*, vernacular, argot, creoles, pidgins and so on, gain international recognition *despite* the stylistic and rhetorical roadblocks thrown in the path of their reading publics, *despite* the special problems their use of language poses for translators, and *despite* the rejection they risk from native readers who may judge the literary display of their speech and dialect a form of betrayal, an exposure of private communication systems, an exoticization of their verbal culture. (9)

Although she calls this an “anomalous situation,” it is a testament both to the texts as literature and to their message of political and personal change. Working within the confines of hegemonic discourse and publishing guidelines, the authors Apter describes must find ways to break out of this “ideological encirclement” (JanMohamed and Lloyd 6). Code-switching allows for the minority language to become a non-assimilated part of the dominant culture. By incorporating Judeo-Spanish words in a French text, the Sephardic subject can reconstruct his or her identity from *within* the French literary discourse.

As discussions of the changing face of Francophonie demonstrate, nations that once defined themselves by their monocultural identities must rethink their compositions and perhaps recast their national identities in different terms. According to Apter, the “nation form” is already giving way to a “global form”; whether or not this is actually happening to such an extent, nations are certainly becoming culturally, economically, and linguistically globalized. Writing about *créolité*, Apter argues that Creole fiction’s linguistically hybrid narrative indicates a future when this hybridity will become representative of world literature: “Looking ahead to a day when *toutmondisme* will surpass *tiermondisme*, that is to say, when the nation form gives way to the immanent, planetary totality of Creole, Glissant imagines Creole ‘transfigured into word of the world’” (Apter 245).¹¹⁴ This new nationalism is linguistically-determined; national identity will have to reflect the true linguistic makeup of that nation. Just as what defines a nation will change, so too will the politics of who can claim French as their language. Apter notes that “French speakers who are French nationals constitute one possible world of French speakers among many” (247). As the definition of

¹¹⁴ One critic in *Penser la Créolité* notes that the writers of *Éloge de la Créolité* are limited in their theoretical and political scope because *créolité* is “defined as a *process* of mixing cultures, will only be authentic when the process has ended and a new purity emerges.

Francophone shifts and broadens, the “rights” to French and its cultural capital will become more fluid. Instead of thinking in terms of nations, we might think transnationally, in terms of linguistic communities or languages in contact.

Peskine, Cohen, and Nicoïdski’s language choices make their work notable, but their existing careers writing in French are instrumental in helping their work circulate and thus achieve its intended political impact. Christopher Miller argues that to ask writers from former French colonies why they write in French is “pointless”; their language choice is an “institutionalized inevitability.” Instead, one should ask “*how* Francophone writers write in French” (C. L. Miller 190). Léopold Senghor, a Senegalese poet and the first African to become a member of the *Académie française*, said that his place in the Academy would “allow him to ‘work on... the crossbreeding of the French language’”; he hoped “‘to introduce into the French Academy’s dictionary words like ‘negritude’” (199). Senghor’s success has helped him, along with Césaire and Damas, become known as one of the founders of the movement, and has brought the concept to Francophone and Postcolonial studies. French-Sephardic literature is part of a larger post-immigration literary movement, but also part of a renewed international interest in Judeo-Spanish and Sephardic Studies. New work published in the US, Israel, France, and Latin America uses language to achieve a similar purpose of reclaiming the authors’ Sephardic identity and rethinking how it fits in with a national identity. Yacob Nahmias, a Salonican-born Israeli, recently published a volume of poetry (*Poemas* שירים. Barcelona: Tirocinio, 2012) in a bilingual Judeo-Spanish-Hebrew edition. The press release, explaining that Nahmias’s poetry is in “*ladino* (judeoespañol)” states, in Spanish: “Hace unos pocos años se decidió a reaprenderla en el Centro de Estudios del Ladino Naime y Yehoshua Salti de la Universidad Bar-Ilan para tratar de recuperar, a través de ella, su identidad” [A few years ago (Nahmias) decided to relearn (the language) at the Naime and Yehoshua Salti Center for Ladino Studies at Bar-Ilan University to try to recover, through (the language), his identity]. Although this is Nahmias’s first book of poetry, the publishing house – Tirocinio – is dedicated to “old and new Sephardic literary production.”

In all the narratives discussed in this chapter, language choice is an act of identity, in that the speaker, or author, identifies through his or her language of expression with a community, a culture, and even a political stance. For example, Cohen uses Judeo-Spanish and references to Spain before 1492 as an index of solidarity with Saura, his interlocutor, and with the readership of *Letras*’s first edition, published in Judeo-Spanish in Madrid. The code-switching in Peskine’s novels and Cohen’s French translation challenges French’s cultural dominance by calling into question the assumption that a French text is written in only French. In turn, this destabilizes the related concept that French society comprises only French-speakers. While Judeo-Spanish may never be revived as a language of communication, Sephardic culture,

along with other cultures brought into French society through migration, can, through multilingual literature, become part of the changing face of French identity.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Peskine, Cohen, and Nicoïdski are not alone in their literary-political project, but are joining other Judeo-French authors, such as Katia Rubinstein and Gil Ben Aych, as well as non-Jewish authors, such as Assia Djebar, Leïla Sebbar, and Abdelkebir Khatibi, in creating multilingual French narratives.¹¹⁵ These texts remind a heterogeneous population of its cultural and linguistic diversity. By asserting that texts written entirely or partly in other languages can be, and are, part of French literature, these authors embrace and promote the cultural and linguistic reality that France is trying to deny through its monolingual nationalist façade.

¹¹⁵ Katia Rubinstein, *Mémoire illettrée d'une fillette d'Afrique du Nord à l'époque coloniale* (1979); Gil Ben Aych, *Le Chant des êtres* (1988) and *L'Essuie-main des pieds* (2011); Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985); Leïla Sebbar, *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (1982); Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Amour bilingue* (1983). See also Anne Donadey, "The Multilingual Strategies of Postcolonial Literature: Assia Djebar's Algerian Palimpsest." *World Literature Today*, 74.1 (Winter 2000): 27-36.

Conclusion

From Sephardic to French: Redefining National Identity

We have seen how Sephardic literature in France works linguistically and structurally to confront the break in transmission caused by immigration and to address broader issues of immigration, integration, and national identity in French literature and society. Although the focus thus far has been on the literary production of a small minority population, that demographic has surprising implications for greater French society, and can be read as a synecdoche for the struggles of other immigrant populations. In conclusion, we will examine the place of Sephardic culture in contemporary French society to better understand the role and impact of Sephardic literature. We will then turn to recent debates on France's immigration history and minority populations to gain insight into how France is confronting the issues raised by Sephardic and other second-generation immigrant authors. Finally, I hope this discussion will underscore the need for further conversation, whether literary, political, academic, or otherwise, about France's culturally and linguistically diverse society and ways of addressing the political and cultural obstacles to accepting that diversity as an integral part of French identity.

As France's demographics have changed dramatically over the past half-century, new ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups have become more prominent in all facets of society, including politics, media, art, and literature. Although, judging by the media, the most visible minority may be North African Muslims, other ethnic groups from Eastern and Southern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia are a significant presence in French society. Couched in the North African ethnic population are North African Jews; after decolonization, North African Jewish immigrants doubled France's Jewish population, becoming the ethnic majority among French Jews. These new immigrants had varied origins – some were Sephardic, having roots in Spain; others were Berber or Arab, with roots in North Africa. They joined a dwindling community of Sephardic Jews, survivors of World War II who had been in France since the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century. Still, the combined Sephardic Jewish population forms only a small community in contemporary France.

However, interest in this community has grown in the recent past. Despite the dwindling population of native speakers, Judeo-Spanish is becoming an academically acquired language for the first time. This is apparent in language courses offered both in adult education contexts and through INALCO, France's national institute for eastern languages, which offers a certificate program in Judeo-Spanish and courses in Maghrebian Judeo-Arabic. Yet this new focus on Sephardic Jewry is not confined to the academy or to a niche interest in language revival (or even to the authors discussed in this project, like Brigitte Peskine, who learned Judeo-Spanish to use it in their work).

Recent cultural phenomena show an interest in Sephardic culture both in France's greater Jewish community and in secular society. By looking briefly at a series of recent events, we can analyze the relationship between French society and Sephardic culture within the context of current political debates on minority and immigrant culture in France.

Within the Sephardic community, new institutions cater to a public eager to further their linguistic and cultural knowledge. In 1979, Haïm Vidal Sephiha, who later held the only chair in Judeo-Spanish Studies at INALCO, founded the *Vidas Largas* organization for the promotion of Judeo-Spanish language and culture. In 1992, Jean Carasso established *La Lettre Sépharade*, a multilingual periodical dedicated to Sephardic language and culture which ran until 2007. Carasso's project gave birth to the association *Aki Estamos*, which, since its establishment in 1998, has been actively engaging Paris's Sephardic community through cultural and linguistic activities such as holiday celebrations, Judeo-Spanish theater, cooking classes for children and adults, a chorus, film screenings, language courses, and, most recently, a Judeo-Spanish summer school held in 2012 and planned for 2013. Recently, a building that originally housed the first Sephardic synagogue in Paris, and later a meeting place for new immigrants, was converted into a Judeo-Spanish cultural center; plans include cultural events and classes, a library, and a memorial for the deportation of Sephardic Jews.

While *Aki Estamos* has nearly 400 members, it is unlikely that their efforts are reaching (or even intended for) the non-Jewish French community. Even events aimed at the general public, such as the *Salon du Livre Judéo-Espagnol* (an annual Judeo-Spanish book fair), held for the first time in 2012, are probably only seeing Jewish, if not Sephardic, audiences. However, the literature that this book fair showcased is clearly intended for a non-Jewish readership. Certain novels, such as Ariane Bois's *Le Monde d'Hannah* (2012), published by the major French publishing giant Robert Laffont, introduce French readers to the experience of being a Sephardic Jew in 20th-century France. Bois's novel focuses in particular on the comparative experience of a Sephardic girl and her non-Jewish friend during and after World War II, emphasizing the destruction that the Holocaust brought to Paris's Sephardic community. Other texts, like those discussed in the previous chapter, bring the Judeo-Spanish language to a French-speaking public. Mainstream French authors who have returned to the Judeo-Spanish language of their ancestors in their recent fiction (like Marcel Cohen and Brigitte Peskine) revive Sephardic language and culture both for themselves and for their readers. In light of my analysis of these texts, here, I will focus on broader cultural documents and events.

Among the books presented at the book fair was one cookbook entitled "250 recettes de cuisine juive espagnole" [250 Jewish Spanish Recipes], written by Méri Badi, published in Paris in 1984. The introduction begins with a clear statement of the

book's goal: "transmettre la tradition culinaire judéo-espagnole d'Istanbul" [to transmit the Judeo-Spanish culinary tradition from Istanbul] (Badi 11). It continues by defining the nature of this transmission, emphasizing fidelity to the cuisine's origins in both Jewish and Spanish cooking, as well as to its Ottoman Empire influences. In fact, the recipes are presented as representative of the Sephardic community's path of exile, the collective memory of centuries of history. This balance between tradition and modernity is a common trope in Sephardic literature (as can be seen in all the texts discussed in this project), but Badi's cookbook takes a didactic stance by focusing on bridging the gap between original tools and ingredients and their French equivalents. A section entitled "Les produits utilisés et les ustensiles de cuisine" [Products used and kitchen utensils] (13-14) carefully explains how to find the right herbs, cheeses, and vegetables for the recipes. While this is to be expected from an "ethnic" cookbook, the way the recipes are written underscores an emphasis on translation. Most recipes are titled in French and Judeo-Spanish, but the French name is foregrounded, written in all caps above the Judeo-Spanish. Instead of a recipe for fried fish, there are seven recipes, each for a different kind of fish, with identical ingredients and methods of preparation. Badi does this to show which kinds of fish are "authentically" Sephardic, but also to emphasize the direct equivalences between, for example, the Judeo-Spanish "Kalkan" and the French "Turbot" (41). This not only ensures that French cooks will continue in the exact Sephardic culinary tradition – using the same species of fish, vegetables, and cuts of meat – but also translates tradition directly into the modern world, promoting cultural longevity through translation, much like Marcel Cohen's glossary.

Badi's cookbook is only one text among many other cookbooks, websites, and restaurants that bring Sephardic culture to French society through cuisine. Non-traditional representations of history, through sources such as foodways, folklore, or personal objects, are often the best ways of documenting groups like France's Sephardic community that have occupied marginalized positions in their host societies and thus have not been the focus of traditional historiography. Interest in these marginalized Jewish populations in France has increased, as a recent exhibit at Paris's Jewish History and Art Museum attests. "Jews from Algeria," an exhibit planned since 2005 that opened in 2012, focuses on the mass migration of Jews from Algeria to France in 1962 and the resulting immigrant community. By calling this group "Juifs d'Algerie" [Jews from/of Algeria], the museum emphasizes the community's origin as its marker of identity. This does not negate that community's integration into French society, but rather underscores the hybrid nature of its identity as at once French, Algerian, and Jewish. The exhibit is based on 250 documents and objects from a variety of sources, but is particularly representative of private collections; around 100 families contributed their personal effects, marking the first time the museum has asked for contributions from the public. An article on the exhibit quotes a visitor explaining to

others in the gallery that the silver bowls they are looking at actually belonged to his grandmother, who used them on her wedding day in 1905; he adds that they will be passed down to his grandson (Makhoul-Yatim). By borrowing the bowls for the exhibit, the museum intervenes in living history, thus confronting directly what the exhibit organizer sees as a community whose traditions are disappearing. Involving the contemporary Algerian Jewish community in the exhibit both commemorates that community's complex origins and migration and acknowledges that they play a significant role in France's current Jewish population. Marcel Bénabou sees his novel, *Jacob, Ménaïem et Mimoun: Une Épopée Familiale*, in a similar way – as a document of personal history that will intervene in Sephardic historiography, standing in for both his personal roots and Moroccan Jewish history. Like the museum's bowls, his work will “fournir des clés pour le déchiffrement d'une histoire, d'une tradition, d'un patrimoine” [provide the keys to the decryption of a history, tradition, and heritage] both for his community and for the greater non-Sephardic public (Bénabou *Jacob* 44).

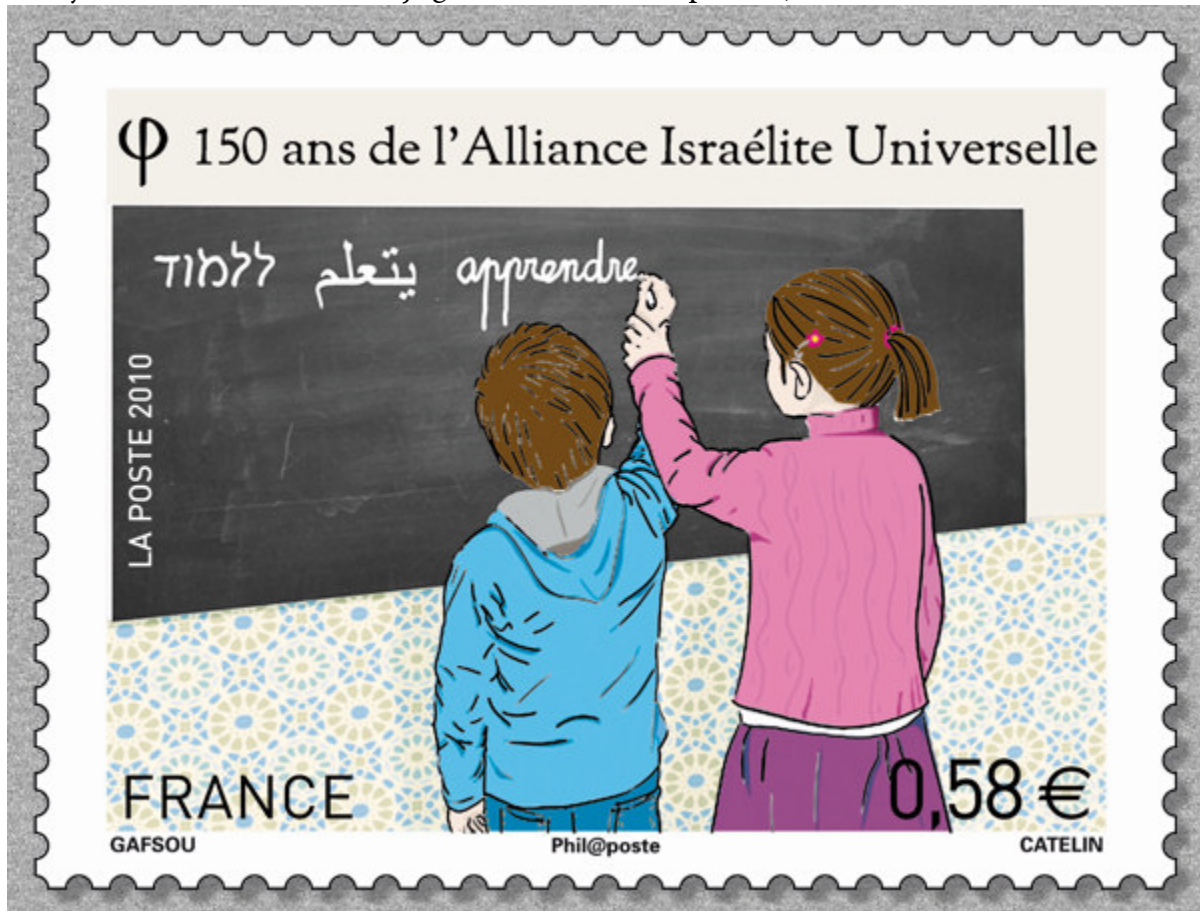
The exhibit's exposure in mainstream French media, including sponsorship by the major left-wing newspaper *Libération* and the public radio station France Inter, suggests its appeal to a broader audience. In particular, the exhibit draws attention to the 130,000 Jews who left Algeria in the massive migration of *pied-noirs* following the Evian Accords in 1962. This population is an invisible minority among a minority, but is also the site of more complicated politics. An article about the exhibit in *Libération* focuses on the community's awkward position in Algeria as naturalized French citizens as of the 1870 Crémieux decree. As French citizens, and Jews, in colonial Algeria, the Jews were outsiders – neither colonizer nor colonized, as Albert Memmi has argued. Their position was further complicated when their citizenship was temporarily revoked by the Vichy government. During Algeria's war for independence, anti-Jewish riots menaced that population, leading to the mass exodus at the end of the war. As immigrants in France, these Jews remained outsiders. Even the exhibit curator, Anne Hélène Hoog, noted the difficulty she encountered naming the exhibit: “Juifs algériens ? Ils sont français depuis six générations. Rapatriés ? Ils n'avaient aucune attache en métropole. Exilés, réfugiés, immigrants ? On a opté simplement, pour ‘Juifs d'Algérie’” [Algerian Jews? They've been French for six generations. Repatriated? They had no connection to the metropolis. Exiles, refugees, immigrants? We opted simply for “Jews from Algeria”] (Bensimon). While the exhibit does not help define this community in relation to other ethnic, religious, or national groups, it does isolate them as a minority group with a strong sense of hybrid identity: Algerian, French, and Jewish. It also draws attention to them as distinct from the Algerian Muslim population – Jews and Muslims of Algerian origin together form the largest non-European ethnic group in France. Unlike immigrants from other North African countries, Algerian Jews harbor little good will towards their Maghrebi roots; a study in the 1980s found no sense of an

“Algerian Jewish” identity – a sign of integration, but also, as Raphaël Draï, a scholar of political science and an Algerian Jewish immigrant, argues, “d’une volonté de ne pas transmettre une mémoire malheureuse” [of a desire not to transmit an unhappy memory] (Bensimon). Rather, they define themselves as French Jews, heirs to a legacy bequeathed by generations of a French-sponsored education.

This education, funded by the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), contributed in large part to the French identity to which Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jews already claimed ownership before immigrating to France, as we have seen in work by Navon, Peskine, and others. As Annie Benveniste argues, Ottoman Jews had to be assimilated into French culture *before* emigrating, and the AIU was instrumental to this process. Recent scholarship has focused on the AIU’s “civilizing mission,” and particularly the ways in which it orchestrated the passage from tradition to modernity, mediated through French colonial education, for thousands of Jews. In Navon’s *Joseph Perez*, the protagonist’s rupture with his traditional milieu and subsequent flight to France are prompted by his AIU education, but the limits of this education (such as his superficial knowledge of Paris’s landmarks) are also responsible for the disappointment and alienation he experiences upon arrival. Peskine’s protagonist, Rébecca, is similarly drawn to a new life in France through her AIU education. Its indoctrination is in sharp opposition to her family traditions, and although it leads her to move to France and embrace French culture, it also “inoculate[s]” her with self-hatred and fuels her rupture with her past. However, a recent exhibit commemorating the AIU’s 150th anniversary portrayed the organization’s work in a much more positive light. Although this organization represents a marginalized population, the exhibit took place in the prestigious event space of Paris’s Hôtel de Ville (City Hall) and received nearly 6000 visitors. The mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, inaugurated the exhibit, lauding the AIU for diffusing the “universal values” of Francophonie and Judaism. In his speech (later published on his website) he speaks of France as a “cultural homeland” for Sephardic Jews, and of Judaism as a “spiritual homeland.” Although he acknowledges the AIU’s role as a cultural mediator between France and the Maghreb, he does not mention the Maghreb or the other sites of AIU schools as former homelands for French Jews. Instead, these countries, and their cultures, are further marginalized, elided by the dichotomy of the dominant cultures – Francophone and Jewish.

As part of the 150th anniversary celebration, conferences were held in France, Israel, Morocco, England, Canada, the United States, and Turkey. The events in France focused on diasporic identity – an issue relevant to France’s Jewish community, but also to France’s other immigrant populations, and to French society as a whole. To accompany the conferences and museum exhibit, the French postal service issued a commemorative stamp showing a girl helping a boy write three words on a chalkboard:

lil-mod, yata'alam, and apprendre – “to learn” in Hebrew, Arabic, and French (though oddly the Arabic verb is conjugated in the third person).



Although Hebrew and Arabic are written and read from right to left, the children are writing from left to right, as in French, thus ignoring the logic of the “foreign” syntax and ensuring French’s primacy. The girl’s firm grip on the boy’s wrist suggests that she is leading him forcefully through the educational process. The progression of the languages – first Hebrew, then Arabic, then French – can be read as indicative of the linguistic progression of North African Jewish communities: Hebrew as the language of ancestry and religious education; Arabic as the lingua franca of the larger community; and finally French as the attainment of modern education and French cultural literacy. In contrast, the stamp issued in Israel for the same occasion represents only the AIU’s limited influence in Israel, featuring a partial view of a building with palm trees, a blurry photograph of children in uniform, and a pale impression of the top of a gate. These are identified in the Israel Philatelic Service’s announcement as the synagogue of the “Mikve Israel” Agricultural School; the attendants of a 1936 sports event at the Alliance school in Tehran; and “the upper section” of the gate of an Alliance school in Jerusalem (Raanan). The focus is clearly on the issues, like sports and agricultural

education, that were important to Israel's national foundation. Neither stamp acknowledges the AIU's large Judeo-Spanish speaking student population.

However, the AIU played a formative role for Francophone Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jews, and the exhibit, conferences, and stamp honor that role as also being integral to the makeup of French society. In other words, despite the fact that French Jews are not France's most significant minority, they represent something greater than the direct influences of their culture. The conferences on diasporic identity that stemmed from the anniversary event are part of a larger interest in the politics of French identity in the face of France's diverse ethnic composition, demonstrated in part by the recent establishment of a national museum for the history of immigration and a governmental position dedicated to "immigration, integration, national identity, and the co-development of France." The clear connection between immigration and national identity that this position establishes is omnipresent in contemporary political conversations. A 2007 issue of the academic journal *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* entitled "Sephardic/Francophone" calls the juxtaposition of these two terms "all-encompassing" of French identity politics. By engaging with French, Francophone, Jewish, Postcolonial, and Women's Studies, this journal issue – and any study of Francophone Sephardic culture – uses its subject as a case study of the broader issues at play in contemporary French society.

Many of France's immigrants have complex histories of migration, having been subject to French colonial rule, wars of independence, and difficult integration into French society. Similarly, Francophone Sephardic Jews, regardless of their country of origin, experienced the trauma of exile, both historically, in exile from Spain, and in the more recent past, exiled from North Africa and other areas under similar conditions (including from the Balkans, where Jewish communities were almost eliminated during the Holocaust). The editors of the journal issue write that although the break with the homeland was "often sudden and traumatic," "Sephardic Jews suffer primarily from being exiled from themselves and cut off from their own history and memory" (Célestin, DalMolin and Sadock 152). This cultural rupture is precisely what is currently being treated by the new movements and events discussed above. The French emphasis on assimilation, characterized by official policies that refuse to differentiate between ethnic groups in, for example, the national census, encouraged this rupture: Sephardic immigrants, whether from the Ottoman Empire or North Africa, focused on assimilating as much as possible into their adopted society. Yet despite their linguistic proficiency, they encountered the same obstacles to integration as France's other immigrants, such as racism and ghettoization.

However, this discrimination was exacerbated for certain populations. Lighter-skinned Sephardic immigrants from Turkey and the Balkans were more easily able to pass as French than their darker North African counterparts. They were also less

attached to their religious rituals and thus more easily integrated into secular society. Later waves of North African immigrants were marked by both race and religion, but benefited from a greater sense of community, as they joined an immigrant population that, by the 1960s, was well established in metropolitan areas such as Paris and Marseille. However, some found themselves as outsiders even within their immigrant communities. Jews from different North African countries did not mix amicably; as we saw in Abécassis's *Sépharade*, even Jews from different cities in Morocco refused to mingle. Algerian Jewish immigrants, perhaps because of their history of French citizenship, tended to be associated with the French colonizers, further complicating their position in their adopted homeland. Although racially, culturally, and linguistically, North African Jews resemble their Muslim counterparts, and share in French society's marginalization of Maghrebi immigrants and their families, these Jewish and Muslim immigrants rarely mix. Overall, the Sephardic immigrant population in France possesses diverse histories, contexts, and racial and cultural particularities, but, as a group, they all participate in larger questions of exclusion, immigration, and diaspora.

Recent interest in Sephardic culture among both the Jewish community and broader French society thus marks an intellectual investment in France's marginalized immigrant populations in general. Sephardic culture, here, functions as an exemplary model for other francophone immigrant communities who want to confront the rupture of immigration and reclaim their ancestral heritage as part of a new culturally and linguistically hybrid French identity. The cultural objects and movements analyzed here underscore the need for a new kind of historiography for marginalized populations that are not otherwise represented by traditional modes of historical writing, commemoration, and cultural ritual. By extending this analysis to other moments of French engagement with immigrant communities – such as the conversations surrounding the aforementioned museum of immigration – we can determine how these events contribute to evolving conceptualizations of French national identity.

In 2011, France's contentious new immigration museum, the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration (CNHI), prepared to hold a conference on the country's "postcolonial situation." However, when the museum insisted on censoring one of the participants, the conference was cancelled amid controversy. The public debates responding to this incident called on France to reevaluate its relationship to its postcolonial demographics. The traditional view of French national identity as monocultural no longer applies to a country composed of immigrants from former colonies, refugees, expatriates, and other migrants, who do not see their foreign origins as an obstacle to their French identities. Yet government responses to this changing population cling to obsolete structures. This analysis shows how these public debates, along with second-generation immigrant literature discussed in this dissertation, work

to renegotiate the boundaries of French national identity. By theorizing the connection between diasporic literature and contemporary debates on French national identity, we can see how both particularist (*communautariste*) and Republican universalist responses to France's culturally diverse population are working to change the politics of cultural inclusion.

Despite a long history of immigration, France's official policies have shunned a multicultural identity; in fact, the government has shied away from acknowledging just how integral the immigrant population is to the country's economy, politics, and culture. Since 1789, the French population has been officially divided into two groups, delineated not by origin but by citizenship: French nationals and foreigners. By rejecting a distinction along ethnic lines, France promoted its national ideal of "égalité." Yet as France's population becomes increasingly composed of immigrants, these categories become less effective groupings for analyzing the politics of these new demographics. In the 1990s, discussions on demographics attempted to address this problem. As people debated whether ethnicity should or could be a factor in population analysis, even the term "ethnicity" itself proved problematic, as it can designate multiple categories of national, ethnic, or racial belonging (such as Kabyle versus Algerian, Jewish versus Moroccan). Although a movement to include racial or ethnic categories on official census projects was rejected as unconstitutional, these categories can, and are, included on optional population surveys (leading to, for example, "ethnic" or multicultural marketing).

Conversations taking place in the 1990s raised awareness of the need for institutionalized gestures of inclusion, but also for an acknowledgement of France's fraught relationship with its immigrants over the course of history. An immigration museum was first conceived in 1992, but was not pursued seriously until 2001; it then appeared on Jacques Chirac's presidential agenda in 2002. Chirac stated that the goal for this new museum was to combat negative portrayals of immigration and immigrants. Detailed in his proposal were two main tasks: To bring to light the often-ignored role immigrants played in the history of France, and to consider the media's role in constructing images of immigrants. The museum was to be a "Cité": museum, pedagogical center, multimedia center, and more. Yet this seemingly huge step in confronting France's colonial past and post-migrant present and future was met with obstacles from its start.¹¹⁶

In 2007, the year the Cité was slated to open, Nicolas Sarkozy's new government created a Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Codevelopment.

¹¹⁶ For a history of the museum's early conception, see "A Brief History of the Museums That Do Not Exist, May Be Created, May Not, But Extant or Not, Will Cause Even More Headaches" in Herman Lebovics, *Bringing the Empire Back Home: France in the Global Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 171-174.

By officially associating these terms, this ministry suggests that France's national identity is both defined by the state and dependent on the state's control and assimilation of outside cultural influences. The public reaction against this ministry was passionately vituperative. The day it took effect, eight prominent academics quit their positions at the as-yet-unopened Cité in protest, forever linking the contentious ministry to the museum project in the eye of the public. They published a statement calling the association of immigration and national identity unacceptable and shameful; they argued that it stigmatized immigration and promoted a nationalism based on xenophobia.

Their statement was followed by similar reactions from a variety of national associations. The NGO Movement Against Racism and for Friendship between Peoples (MRAP) called it a "ministry of shame"; another NGO, the Catholic Committee Against Hunger and for Development, said it would "stigmatize foreigners." Doudou Diène, a UN Special Rapporteur on racism, called the ministry an ethnic- and racially-based reading of politics that treated immigration as a threat to national identity. The major left-wing newspaper *Libération* published a petition denouncing it; the same week, a conference was held at the *Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales*, a leading institution for social science research and education, on the institutionalization of xenophobia. The following year, the journal *Cultures et Conflits* published a special issue (Spring 2008 no. 69) on "Government xenophobia, State nationalism," focusing on the ministry's roots in governmental xenophobia that portrays foreigners as a threat to nationalism. In December 2009, twenty academics published an open letter in *Libération* calling for the elimination of the ministry as a threat to democracy.

In the meantime, Sarkozy appointed Brice Hortefeux to head the new ministry. Hortefeux set as his objective in his first year the expulsion of 25,000 illegal immigrants; during his two-year term, he also established new legislation concerning detention centers and family regroupment policies. Soon after his tenure, he was convicted of and fined for a racial insult against Arabs, in which he stated that "Quand il y en a un [arabe] ça va. C'est quand il y en a beaucoup qu'il y a des problèmes" [when there is one Arab, it's ok, it's when there are many that there are problems] ("Hortefeux"). Hortefeux was succeeded by Éric Besson, who held the post from 2009 until its elimination the following year. During his brief tenure, he was accused of lying about immigration policy,¹¹⁷ and in response to his participation in a debate on national identity, he was branded on the cover of *Marianne* magazine as "l'homme le plus

¹¹⁷ See "Les délits de la solidarité," an article published by gisti, a French non-profit human rights organization dedicated to immigrant rights (<http://www.gisti.org/spip.php?article1399>). This article responds to Besson's claim that those protesting against new immigration laws were protesting against laws that did not exist; the article lists people who were convicted under the supposedly nonexistent law.

détesté de France” [the most hated man in France], an epithet echoed in the American *Time* magazine the following week ("Enquête"; Crumley). Perhaps the collective failures of these ministers, combined with the continued criticism of the ministry, provoked Sarkozy to terminate the position and establish instead a Ministry of Immigration, Integration, Asylum and Codevelopment, thus eliminating the association of these terms with national identity.

Yet the Cité perpetuated the contentious and confusing legacy of official immigration policy. It was constructed in the Palais de la Porte Dorée, originally built to house the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition that showcased France’s colonies and their diverse resources, featuring such offensive and exploitative exhibits as a human zoo. Although the 1931 exposition instigated contemporary discussions of colonialism, including a small counter-exhibit on colonial abuses, its laudatory view of French imperialism left a strange legacy for the future home of an institution supposedly dedicated to eradicating these views. The museum’s press packet barely engages with the building’s past, except to note that it was built for the exposition, and is now being “habité par un nouveau projet” [inhabited by a new project] (Kheniche 4). Perhaps encouraged by the ministry scandal, the media did not lend the museum its full support. One article in the French media weekly, *Télérama*, asks, “comment l’Etat peut-il d’un côté diaboliser l’immigration depuis trente-cinq ans, organiser des charters, traquer le sans-papiers et, de l’autre, rendre hommage, dans un bâtiment de la République, à « ces étrangers qui ont enrichi la France » ?” [how can the State, on the one hand, demonize immigration for thirty-five years, organize charters, track undocumented immigrants, and, on the other, pay homage, in a building of the Republic, to “these foreigners who have enriched France”?] (Leclère "Boycotter").

Indeed, the Cité’s own president, Jacques Toubon, came to office with a suspect political legacy. A right-wing politician, he served as minister of culture and francophonie from 1993-1995. He is best known for a law he passed during this period, colloquially known as the “Toubon Law,” which mandates the use of French in official government publications, advertising, broadcast media, commercial communications, and state-sponsored education. He was also known for his attempts to fight “franglais” – the linguistic influence of English on French – by producing a list of words to take the place of commonly-used words derived from English. Toubon’s assault on franglais, of course, can be seen in opposition to the French Sephardic authors’ deliberate creation of a linguistically hybrid narrative in their use of Judeo-Spanish and French, and particularly to didactic moves such as Cohen’s glossary.

Yet despite his history of fighting against outside cultural and linguistic influences, Toubon, in a conference prior to the museum’s opening, announced his commitment to recognizing the impact of precisely these kinds of influences. He portrayed the museum’s mission as one of historical revision, noting that recent

conversations show “combien il est indispensable de porter à la connaissance de tous la véritable histoire de notre pays” [how indispensable it is to bring to everyone’s attention the true history of our country], thus emphasizing the new official version of history the museum would create and institutionalize (Toubon 8). This new history, one that acknowledges the role of immigration in France’s construction, will help “modifier le regard contemporain sur l’immigration dans notre pays et en Europe” [to change the contemporary view of immigration in our country and in Europe] (8) – thus impacting not just French official policy and popular discourse, but all of Europe’s.

In an interview with the magazine *diasporiques*, Toubon tries to better define the role of the Cité. However, his focus on immigration somehow avoids many of the problems at play in public discourse on the subject. He insists, “Nous ne racontons pas ici l’histoire de l’esclavage ni celle de la colonisation ; ni celle de la xénophobie ou du racisme. Notre vocation est de raconter l’histoire de l’immigration dans notre pays, telle qu’elle s’est déroulée depuis le début du XIXe siècle” [We are not telling the story here of slavery or of colonization, nor that of xenophobia or racism. Our job is to tell the story of immigration in our country, as it has unfolded since the beginning of the 19th century] (Lazar 7). While it may seem laudable that Toubon is emphasizing the immigration story that has been omitted from traditional historiography (the same story that authors such as Bénabou are trying to write back into the literary-historical canon), he is in fact prioritizing immigration at the expense of other issues. This methodology ignores inextricably related issues, such as colonialism, which influenced and shaped immigration. By willfully excluding these issues, it is impossible to fully represent and understand the nuanced history of immigration.

A comparison between Memmi’s colonial novel and Bénabou’s postcolonial text illuminates the strong connection between colonialism and immigration from two different perspectives. Memmi’s protagonist, Benillouche, is uncomfortable living under colonialism; he yearns for a connection to the colonizer’s culture (as demonstrated by his disgust for Berber music and forced enjoyment of Western music) but is unable to immigrate, whether to Paris or Buenos Aires (the “alternative” Paris). Bénabou’s protagonist, however, speaks from the postcolonial perspective, but cannot let go of the colonial past. Whereas for Benillouche, colonialism means the impossibility of immigration, for Bénabou’s protagonist, immigration is the rupture of the colonial past and postcolonial present. In both cases, we cannot ignore the extent to which colonialism is a part of France’s immigration history.

Although Toubon claims that the Cité’s mission is to recover this neglected past and, in doing so, change the evolution of society in the present and future, he continues to avoid engaging with the more challenging aspects of this evolution. When the interviewer asks about Hortefeux’s plan to deport 18,000 migrants by the end of the year, Toubon avoids answering the question, saying that history is marked by

“cycles” – times that are more “open” to immigration and times that are not. He cites the Academy of Science’s poor reception of Marie Curie, who was caricatured for her Polish heritage and (falsely) labeled a Jew; he notes, though, that after she served as a nurse in World War II, she was reaccepted into society and “en 1996, François Mitterrand l’a fait entrer au Panthéon” [in 1996, François Mitterrand accepted her into the Pantheon]. The “happy” ending of this anecdote never addresses the original discrimination, and the feel-good coda is markedly belated (by about 82 years!). In fact, Toubon’s interview is characterized by a refusal to engage with current political discourse: “je n’ai pas la prétention, moi, de tenir un discours politique” [I don’t claim to hold a political discussion] (10), he says; instead, he insists on using what he calls “exactitude scientifique” [scientific accuracy] (9) to avoid bias in presenting historical fact.

Toubon’s evasive and piecemeal embrace of France’s history of immigration is echoed in a recent scandal surrounding a conference on France’s postcolonial situation that the Cité planned on hosting and cancelled at the last minute. The conference, scheduled for May 20-21, 2011, was to be organized by Esther Benbassa, a specialist of comparative minorities in France; the proceedings were to be published that same day in a special issue of the Cité’s journal, *Hommes et Migrations*, to be entitled “La France Postcoloniale.” Even though the papers to be presented had been submitted to the editorial committee two months before, on May 5th, Benbassa received an email from Marie Poinot, the editor-in-chief, stating: “Vous savez que ce thème est sensible pour cette institution. Il peut se passer que certains articles soient refusés tels quels par la direction” [You know that this is a sensitive topic for this institute. It may happen that some articles be rejected as is by the management].¹¹⁸ An email the following week further clarified this vague threat, detailing the problems with one particular article, entitled, “La brèche. Vers la racialisation postcoloniale des discours publics” [The Breach: Toward the Postcolonial Racialization of Public Discourse], by historian Nicolas Bancel, a specialist of colonial and postcolonial French history who has a long and well-established publication history. This email was, evidently, prompted by a last-minute committee meeting of journal editors; Poinot had already drafted an introduction for the journal that made reference to the article in question. Bancel revised his article according to the committee’s stipulations and resubmitted it the next day.

A few days later, Benbassa received another email, rejecting Bancel’s redacted article, and claiming, now, that it was off-topic; Poinot wrote that the article “analyse davantage la radicalisation des discours publics et des politiques d’asile et d’immigration que le caractère postcolonial de ces discours et politiques qui est

¹¹⁸ All correspondence between Esther Benbassa and Marie Poinot can be found on Esther Benbassa’s blog: <http://blogs.rue89.com/passage-benbassa/2011/05/18/non-a-la-censure-204453?page=4>

annoncé dans le titre, mais insuffisamment démontré dans l'article" [analyzes more the radicalization of public discourse and the politics of asylum and immigration than the postcolonial character of these discourses and politics that is indicated in the title, yet insufficiently substantiated in the article]. Benbassa's response, the same day, accuses the committee of censorship that has nothing to do with the quality or topicality of Bancel's work; she notes that the censorship was sudden, coming as it did after two months of working together on the project, and emphasizes that despite Bancel's compliance in editing his text, it was still censored. She suggests, citing the May 5th email that admitted to the sensitive nature of the topic, that the committee was looking to intervene; she calls it a clear "political censure."

As Benbassa refused to proceed with the censored materials, both the journal's special issue and the conference were cancelled at the last minute. The Cité issued a press release, stating that the journal's publication was predicated on "une révision importante" [a major revision] of one of the articles; this statement is immediately followed by, "La revue Hommes et Migrations regrette l'attitude intransigente de la coordinatrice et sa décision d'annuler la publication du dossier" [The journal *Hommes et Migrations* regrets the intransigent attitude of the coordinator and her decision to cancel the issue's publication]. The juxtaposition of the revision request and the critique of Benbassa's response strongly implies that Benbassa refused to allow the revision, whereas, in fact, the article was revised but still rejected.

French media took up Benbassa's case with fury. An article in *Télérama*, a popular weekly devoted to broadcast media and culture, directly challenges the journal committee's topicality argument, stating that Bancel's article "est certes critique sur la politique sécuritaire et d'immigration de Nicolas Sarkozy (et notamment sur son discours de Grenoble de juillet 2010) mais il est sourcé et argumenté. Qu'on conteste ou pas l'argumentation de Nicolas Bancel, l'intérêt de cette publication ne faisait guère de doute" [is certainly critical of Nicolas Sarkozy's politics of security and immigration (and particularly of his speech in Grenoble in July 2010) but it is referenced and argued. Whether or not we challenge Nicolas Bancel's argument, there is little doubt that the publication is of interest] (Leclère "Censure"). *Mediapart*, a French investigative online journal, concurs that "les conditions du refus plaident en faveur d'une décision motivée par des raisons plus politiques que scientifiques ou techniques" [the conditions of the refusal indicate a decision motivated by reasons more political than scientific or technical] (Confavreux). Indeed, Bancel's article looks at the treatment of targeted immigrant groups in French discourse; omitting this as "off subject" or "not postcolonial" denies the postcolonial population entry into current processes of identity formation in the public and official spheres.

The rejection of Bancel's article as off-topic also raises the question of what exactly "postcolonial" means today, in France and in transnational contexts. The

definitions of cultural and political terms are constantly changing. To take an example in the realm of France's minority and immigrant communities, "Sephardic" technically refers only to Jews of Spanish origin; since decolonization and the flood of North African Jews (of various origins) to France, Sephardic now refers to any non-Eastern-European Jew, including Berber and Arab Jews. Similarly, while post-colonial once indicated anything "occurring or existing after the end of colonial rule," it later came to refer to anything "relating to the cultural condition of a former colony" (OED); I would argue that it, more broadly, now denotes a situation of the former colony or colonial power that directly or indirectly stems from the ramifications of colonialism. Thus, a conference, like the Cité's, on France's postcolonial situation (especially given the subtitle, "Prise en compte de l'héritage colonial dans la société française" [a consideration of the colonial legacy in French society]), cannot help but engage more generally with France's post-immigration demographics. In fact, Bancel's article shows how discourse that does not specifically mention certain groups nevertheless targets them; he claims that "les sous-groupes plus particulièrement visés par ce dispositif juridique et discursif [sont] les ressortissants postcoloniaux du Maghreb et d'Afrique noire" [the sub-groups particularly affected by these legal and discursive measures are the postcolonial immigrants from the Maghreb and black Africa] (Bancel 25). Yet in a country where the majority of immigrants hail from former colonies, it is difficult, and even unnecessary, to dissociate the effect of specifically postcolonial immigrants from those from other countries.

More importantly, Bancel's article calls attention to the contradiction between official government discourse and policy and what Toubon called the evolution of society. Bancel notes that Sarkozy's contentious ministry is, above all, responsible for policing and controlling immigrants; at the same time, "il institutionnalise clairement le lien entre identité nationale et immigration" [it institutionalizes the link between national identity and immigration], which in turn presents "l'immigration comme une menace diffuse ou directe de « l'identité nationale »" [immigration as a diffuse or direct threat to "national identity"] (17). Moreover, this discourse sets up "une optique qui opposerait la « vraie France » à sa multiculturalité contemporaine" [a perspective that opposes "real France" to its contemporary multiculturalism] (18), stigmatizes immigrants, and legitimizes the idea of immigration as a "problem" to be "solved."

By creating a culture that stigmatizes immigrants, France vilifies the aftereffects of immigration as well – the complex cultural and linguistic politics of immigrant communities survive in future generations. By studying the literature of these communities, we can see how authors engage with political discourse through certain literary techniques. Literature is a unique space for the exploration and assertion of new forms of identity because it allows for the conflation of past and present, history and fiction, and multiple languages and cultures. Language can be a tool to revise

existing definitions of identity and promote new techniques for the assertion of culturally complicated identities. New immigrants, as we have seen, can use literature both to work through the struggles of migration and to advise future generations on methods of preserving tradition. The first generation's awareness of changing times is evident particularly in Navon's work; in his memoir, *Une Vie de Juif*, he calls the past "épuisé et déprimant" [exhausted and depressing] but worthy of memorialization; and in his play *Les Fiançailles de Zohra*, he depicts the modern French suitor as the only correct choice for Zohra and the key to the balance of tradition and modernity for future generations. Later generations can recover lost traditions and begin to incorporate them into their lives and host cultures, as we see in the case of authors whose work is a direct return to their ancestral pasts – most notably, those like Brigitte Peskine, Marcel Cohen, and Eliette Abécassis whose Sephardic work marks a departure from earlier themes and a clear decision to engage with the past. The circulation of such literature contributes to and can even instigate extraliterary conversations about immigration, national culture, and identity that can work to make society more open to cultural diversity.

Starting in the 1980s, the children of postcolonial immigrants from North Africa began to write novels that explored their identities, negotiating between an ancestry they never knew and a homeland that never felt fully like home. In the literature of second-generation Sephardic Jewish and North African Muslim immigrants, there is a clear desire to engage with both cultures in a new way that allows for the creation of a hybrid space of identity formation. Some use language to express this hybridity, as we have seen in Marcel Cohen's work. Cohen's code-switching forces the reader into the uncomfortable position of being out of linguistic control. Judeo-Spanish destabilizes the French narrative, mimicking the experience of exile or immigration. The completed work thus mirrors the hybridity of the author or protagonist in a performative way for the reader. Other literary techniques experiment with the subversion of cultural stereotypes. In Memmi's *La Statue de Sel*, we saw how Benillouche uses his French exam as a space of revolt to express his hybrid identity, thus appropriating the tool of the colonizer to assert an identity that goes far beyond colonizer or colonized. We see a similar phenomenon in the work of Leïla Sebbar, an Algerian immigrant born to a French mother and Algerian father, who focuses on the experience of *Beur* youth, born in France to North African immigrant parents. Her characters search for a connection to their heritages by engaging with historical and artistic representations of their ancestral pasts, but then undermining and thus taking ownership of these symbols. For example, the eponymous protagonist of *Shérazade* tells her boyfriend that she is "not an odalisque," but feels a strange connection to Matisse's orientalist painting of that figure. Piecing together her identity from both established and new cultural representations allows her to redefine Frenchness as inherently hybrid.

The hybridity that second-generation immigrant authors advocate is clearly coming through as a workable model in current discussions of French politics. In his essay “Citizenship, Republicanism and Multiculturalism in Contemporary France,” Jeremy Jennings notes that “France has seen itself as and has sought to become a monocultural society” *despite* what Jennings calls “an astonishing level of cultural and ethnic diversity,” referencing Gérard Noiriel’s seminal work on France’s post-immigration demographics (Jennings 575).¹¹⁹ Jennings examines the responses to this diversity, arguing that “it is only with considerable difficulty that the Republic in its French form is able to respond positively to their new reality” (576). He concludes that there are three essentially incompatible types of responses: the conservative “traditionalist” view which does not allow for any plurality; the “multiculturalist” view that maintains the existence of minority cultures as perennially separate entities; and a middle ground that he calls “modernizing republicanism” (589), based on a theory detailed by Dominique Schnapper that a political domain can be *independent* of individual interests – in other words, that a heterogeneous but cohesive nation is possible.¹²⁰ Yet in order for the nation to accept the multiculturalism of individuals (or of separate ethnic groups), it has to recognize and respect the rights of individuals to speak different languages and to follow different traditions, as long as they do not directly conflict with the rules of the nation. Schnapper thus advocates integration at the risk of the dissolution of social cohesion, but her theory warns against the homogenizing, or particularizing, effects of traditionalist and multiculturalist models.

This new conceptualization of French identity, advocated across two generations of Francophone Sephardic authors, has its roots in the current political landscape of France. The opposition of the traditional Republican view of national identity and the multicultural vision may seem stronger than ever but the true participants in the debates – those affected by the discursive categories of national identity – are blurring the boundary between these views. One analysis of the *sans-papiers* movement shows that these undocumented immigrants emphasize, rather than minimize, their cultural uniqueness, even in pursuit of the universalism of Republican politics. By asserting their difference, the *sans-papiers* are “challenging cemented assumptions about the meaning of the Republic and of assimilation in the French context” (Dubois 28). By presenting themselves as at once foreign and French, the *sans-papiers* dismiss questions of assimilation and raise instead the issue of the violation of the human rights on which the French Republic was built. This new focus places them in France’s historical trajectory – part of the nation’s past, present, and future.

As the literature and debates analyzed above show, individual and historical memory are key concepts in conversations about national identity. Traditional

¹¹⁹ Gérard Noiriel, *Le Creuset français: histoire de l’immigration, XIXe-XXe siècles*. Paris: Seuil, 1988.

¹²⁰ Dominique Schnapper, *La Communauté des citoyens: sur l’idée moderne de nation*. Paris: Gallimard, 1994.

assimilationist conceptions of French national identity, grounded in shared history and memory, do not allow for the identities advocated by this literature or the political conversations now circulating in France. An opposing view of national identity suggests that Frenchness in fact encompasses multiple cultures, languages, and diasporas. This latter solution, however, is not necessarily a total departure from the more traditional nationalist definitions. The majority of immigrants to France are from former French colonies; they actually do share, in part, in French national history and memory by virtue of the cultural allegiance created by colonialism through colonial education. Moreover, the *pieds-noirs*, French colonists in Algeria who were repatriated at independence, operate in a middle space despite their French ethnicity; those born in Algeria and forced to immigrate to France feel a connection to Algeria that second-generation ethnically Algerian immigrants may lack. The proliferation of different models of Frenchness, comprised of potentially conflicting cultural and linguistic influences, creates a diverse population that nevertheless shares in self-identifying as French, albeit using a more inclusive definition of the term. This is only one place to start redefining national identity; eventually, political conversations will lead to a view of national identity that is not assimilationist but open to difference and respectful of the hybridity of a post-immigrant society.

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