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From Moroccan Jewish Memory to Israeli Settlement: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Palestinian Erasure in Yamit Armbrister's *One Moroccan Woman*

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a Palestine-centered reading of Yamit Armbrister's *One Moroccan Woman*, a Moroccan Jewish-Israeli novel that has not yet received sustained standalone analysis. The article argues that the novel produces settler countermemory, a form of minority recollection that recovers Moroccan Jewish-Muslim intimacy and exposes Ashkenazi racism while remaining complicit in Zionist erasures of Palestine. Drawing on Ella Shohat's critique of Arab-Jewish dislocation, Olivia C. Harrison's transcolonial reading of Maghrebi literature through Palestine, and recent work in settler colonial memory studies, the analysis follows Tamar Ben Zaken's movement from Marrakesh to Kiryat Gat as a process of de-Maghrebization and settlement incorporation. In Morocco, Tamar's Jewishness is formed through Muslim foster motherhood, Arabic sound, and shared domestic ritual; in Israel, that formation is cast as incompatible with full citizenship, while Palestinian presence is displaced into the language of intrusion and terra nullius. Sephardic displacement, the article shows, is redirected into Hebrew, labor, land, and state-building at the very site of Palestinian dispossession. The novel's political value lies in its unresolved contradiction; it remembers Morocco against Israeli erasure while muting the Palestinian history that made its Israeli chapters possible, and it thereby exposes the workings of the settler narrative it inhabits.

KEYWORDS

Moroccan Jews

Mizrahi Jews

Settler Countermemory

Palestine

Zionism

Arab Jews

Introduction

Yamit Armbrister's *One Moroccan Woman* seeks to recover Jewish Morocco through Muslim-Jewish symbiosis, Arabic music, and domestic ritual while narrating Palestine/Israel through the grammar of Zionism. This article treats the novel as a qualitative literary case study in the cultural production of ethnic identity under nation-building. Its central concept is settler countermemory. By this term, I mean a form of minority recollection that challenges one dominant narrative while participating in another structure of domination. Tamar's memories contest the Israeli erasure of Moroccan Jewish identity and the Ashkenazi degradation of Jews from Arab and Muslim lands. However, these memories are folded into a national meta-narrative that normalizes settlement, recodes Palestinian resistance as transgression, and neglects Palestinian dispossession. The article aims to read the ambiguity by which a displaced Moroccan Jewish migrant is made available to a settler project.

Scholarship on Maghrebi Jewish writing has often been organized around exile, nostalgia, deterritorialization, and the recovery of Jewish-Muslim social worlds. Work by Emanuela

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Trevisan Semi, Aomar Boum, Sarah Frances Levin, Judith Roumani, and the contributors to Dario Miccoli's *Contemporary Sephardic and Mizrahi Literature* emphasizes that North African Jewish writing repeatedly returns to cities, family objects, language, domestic memory, food, and ritual in order to repair the ruptures produced by migration. Semi's work is especially useful because she identifies Jewish-Moroccan-Israeli lifewriting as a field of double or multiple belonging, in which Israel does not end exile but intensifies attachment to Morocco. Recent scholarship has widened this field. Dario Miccoli's *A Sephardi Sea* traces how memories of migration and exile anchor Sephardi and Mizrahi identities across the modern Mediterranean, Emily Benichou Gottreich's *Jewish Morocco* resituates Jewish life inside Moroccan history rather than apart from it, and Aviad Moreno and Haim Bitton show how community memoirs written by Moroccan immigrants in Israel answered Ashkenazi stereotyping with communal self-narration. Yet this scholarship often leaves the Palestinian dimension underdeveloped. To say that Moroccan Jews remember Morocco against Israeli erasure is necessary, but it is not enough. One must also ask where this memory is relocated and whose history disappears when Moroccan Jews are made Israeli.

Ella Shohat's work remains central to this reading because it shows that Zionism produces the Mizrahim by detaching Jews from Arab and Muslim worlds and by urging them to identify primarily as Jews within a Euro-Israeli hierarchy. Olivia C. Harrison's *Transcolonial Maghreb* further shows how Palestine becomes a test case for Maghrebi decolonization, Arab-Jewish memory, and the colonial separation of Arabness from Jewishness. Armbrister's novel stages this rupture through Aziza, the Muslim foster mother associated with care, while Palestinians near Kiryat Gat are rendered through the language of danger and infiltration.

The theoretical framework of this article brings Shohat's critique of Arab-Jewish dislocation into conversation with Harrison's transcolonial reading of Maghrebi literature through Palestine. Shohat provides the central vocabulary for reading Moroccan Jewish displacement as a transformation of identity, geography, and memory under Zionist nation-building. In "Rupture and Return," she shows that the ingathering of the exiles coincided "with the imaging of the empty land of Palestine," whose "indigenous inhabitants could be bracketed or, alternately, portrayed as intruders deemed to 'return' to their Arab land of origins" ("Rupture and Return" 49). Within the same rescue narrative, "the 'Diasporic Jews' had to abandon their diasporic culture, which, in the case of Arab Jews, meant abandoning Arabness," while concepts of "ingathering" and "modernization" "naturalized and glossed over the historical, psychic, and epistemological violence generated by the Zionist vision of the New Jew" (49). Her formulation is crucial because it treats Mizrahi identity as a historical production, formed through movement into Israel and through the dismemberment of earlier Judeo-Arab and Judeo-Muslim affiliations. Moroccan Jewish identity in *One Moroccan Woman* therefore becomes legible through the tension between lived Maghrebi belonging and Israeli national incorporation. Tamar's attachment to Muslim neighbors, Arabic sound, domestic ritual, and Moroccan place-memory registers the older world that the Israeli state later asks her to abandon. Shohat's hyphenated Arab-Jew clarifies what is at stake. The aim of hyphenation is "to call into question the Eurocentric nationalist paradigm that erased the hyphen and made it taboo" (*Taboo Memories* 336), whereas Zionist incorporation redirects Jewish identity into a state narrative that suppresses other pasts, languages, and lands.

Harrison supplies the transcolonial dimension of this argument by placing the Arab-Jewish rupture within the wider question of Palestine. Her essay "Rethinking 'Jews' and 'Arabs' through Palestine" reads Maghrebi writers for whom Palestine is the site where the colonial legacies opposing "Jews" and "Arabs" in the Maghreb become visible and contestable. Her reading of Edmond Amran El Maleh is especially instructive. She suggests that El Maleh

compares Moroccan Jews in Israel to Palestinians, presenting both as victims of anti-Arab hatred and discrimination (22). El Maleh's fiction mounts what Irene Siegel calls "a continuum of Judeo-Arab-Muslim affiliation" that directly challenges "the European, and by extension Zionist, discursive and political formations that would alienate these terms from one another" (18); in *A Thousand Years, One Day*, his protagonist "believed the doors of the Promised Land shall open and welcome him with great opportunities . . . a cruel disillusion . . . he was an Arab after all" (qtd. in Hochberg 27). Where Albert Memmi came to reject the Arab-Jewish hyphen, El Maleh writes against that irreversibility. This constellation bears directly on *One Moroccan Woman*, where Moroccan Jewish memory is recovered through Aziza, Muslim domestic care, Arabic music, and Moroccan ritual, while Palestine is narrated through danger, infiltration, empty land, and biblical return. The framework of this article therefore reads Armbrister's novel through a double lens. Shohat explains how Arab-Jews become Mizrahim inside Israel, while Harrison shows why that transformation must be read through Palestine. Together, they make it possible to examine Tamar's Moroccan Jewish memory as a countermemory that contests Ashkenazi erasure while remaining entangled in a settlement narrative that displaces Palestinian history.

The concept of settler countermemory also builds on settler colonial studies. Patrick Wolfe's influential account frames settler colonialism as a structure of native elimination rather than a discrete event, and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury's study of kibbutz archives shows that settler memory can work through recognition and disavowal rather than simple forgetting. Within this structure, Mizrahim occupy what Giulia Daniele calls an in-between position, incorporated into the settler project while marginalized inside it, and Yehouda Shenhav shows that the category of the Arab Jews was itself produced at the meeting point of nationalism, religion, and ethnicity.

This article uses three linked concepts: de-Maghrebization, the Arab-Jewish rupture, and settler countermemory. De-Maghrebization names the process through which Moroccan Jews are forced to abandon the languages, domestic customs, and Jewish-Muslim proximities through which their Jewishness was historically lived. Brahim Barhoun's reading of Ariella Aïsha Azoulay offers the related figure of "amputation" for this transformation, describing the conversion of the North African "Jewish Muslim" into a French or Israeli national subject as a forcible severing from the Maghrebi body politic, while cautioning that this model can understate historical agency and idealize precolonial relations (150–53). The Arab-Jewish rupture names the colonial and Zionist production of Arabness and Jewishness as hostile identities. Settler countermemory names the paradoxical memory produced when a racialized minority remembers against one hegemonic narrative while being incorporated into another. Tamar's Moroccan memory counters Ashkenazi hegemony, but it does not automatically become anti-colonial. It contests the erasure of Moroccan Jews while legitimizing the erasure of Palestinians. The analysis therefore reads with and against Tamar's narration, treating the novel's emancipation rhetoric, terrorism, empty land, and national construction as ideological symptoms.

Muslim Mothers, Jewish Daughters

Armbrister's *One Moroccan Woman* approaches the Moroccan past through female memory and domestic relationships. As an Israeli-born writer of Jewish-Moroccan descent, Armbrister revisits the uprooting of Moroccan Jews to Israel and the partial erasure of Maghrebi-Sephardic identity that follows it. The novel follows Tamar and Meir, a Moroccan Jewish couple whose departure from Morocco does not bring secure belonging in Israel, and whose failed adjustment to the Ashkenazi order exposes the distance between Zionist narratives of return and Moroccan Jewish experience. Through Tamar's memories of Moroccan Jewish-Muslim life, Armbrister

reconstructs a pre-Israeli Sephardic identity rooted in family, neighborhood relations, and female attachment.

Loosely based on Armbrister's grandmother's experience, the novel moves between Morocco and Israel in order to show the rupture between the two spaces. Like Gabriel Bensimhon and Galit Dahan Carlibach, Armbrister uses Judeo-Moroccan and Arabic terms, including "kuttab," "galabia," "tzadik," "nedunia," and "chena," to keep Jewish-Moroccan culture audible within the English narrative. These terms resist the Zionist-Ashkenazi model of a monolingual, monocultural Jewish identity and make clear that Sephardic identity in the novel is inseparable from the Muslim-Moroccan environment in which it is formed. They enact in miniature what Lital Levy calls writing between Hebrew and Arabic, and they resist the separatist imagination whose limits Gil Z. Hochberg has traced, in which "Jew" and "Arab" are made to appear as mutually exclusive identities. *One Moroccan Woman* depicts a social world in which intimacy, rivalry, affection, and difference coexist. The novel refuses to reduce Jewish-Muslim relations to persecution, yet it neither idealizes Morocco nor erases its hierarchical structures. In this respect, Armbrister's novel belongs to what Semi calls "the building of a counter-narrative" ("Lifewriting" 84). *One Moroccan Woman* thus writes against the occlusion of Jewish-Muslim-Maghrebi history in Israeli cultural discourse, reclaiming Jewish-Arab identities that Zionist ideology renders suspect.

After her mother's death, Aziza, the family's Muslim nanny, becomes a maternal figure for Tamar and her siblings. Her role exceeds domestic service as she enters the emotional structure of the Ben Zaken household. Tamar describes Aziza and her husband Abdul as nearly kin: "Aziza and Abdul were Muslims, but they were as close to us as family. They'd been with my family since the early stage of my parents' marriage, and now they were more committed than ever to the children they'd helped deliver. . . . Our house was always filled with Papa's Muslim friends and merchants" (Armbrister 1). Through Aziza, Tamar encounters Muslim-Moroccan spirituality from within the household rather than from a distance. The family home is also located near a mosque, and Tamar is constantly drawn to the call to prayer. The "deep voice" of "the muezzin" distracts her "worries for a brief moment" as she climbs "on top of the roof" to see the Kairaouine Mosque, which people describe as "the most beautiful mosque in the world" (11-12). Her attraction to the mosque implies no conversion; it marks a Jewishness formed in proximity to Muslim sound, architecture, and ritual.

The Ben Zaken household also functions as an interreligious social space. At Tamar's mother's funeral, Jewish and Muslim neighbors gather in the same house to mourn her loss. Tamar recalls that the house "was packed from room to room with family, friends, business people; Arab neighbors, city representatives, and anyone who wanted to join" (Armbrister 9). The novel affirms Jewish-Muslim difference while presenting that difference as part of social familiarity. Sarah Frances Levin's work on Moroccan Jewish and Muslim satire helps clarify this relation of Jewish-Muslim affinity and difference. She argues that Jewish and Muslim Moroccans often composed jokes, satires, and parodies about one another's customs, and that such verbal rivalry could be understood as an expression of "wit" rather than hatred. Muslim listeners, Levin writes, admired Jewish "wit and wordplay even as it was used against them," and some cases "were even viewed as expressions of affection" (81). This context helps explain Tamar and Aziza's exchanges, where mockery is a form of attachment.

The banter between Tamar and Aziza shows how religious difference can produce solidarity rather than separation. When Aziza forgets that Tamar cannot attend festivities during the year of mourning, "her face became red as if she insulted Mama's memory by forgetting the Jewish law" (Armbrister 6). She also jokes about the weight of Jewish law: "I've lived with your family for seventeen years and yet, I keep forgetting sometimes. But honest to god, Chabibty, you have

so many laws for everything. How can anyone live like this" (6). Tamar does not read this as hostility. The exchange belongs to a shared domestic language in which disagreement, teasing, and care coexist. As Levin observes, "[t]here was an ongoing and open rivalry between Muslims and Jews as to who were the true believers, with each crediting their own religion as superior, and holding a certain disdain for the other's" (65).

Aziza's motherhood complicates biological and religious definitions of family. Unable to have children of her own, she becomes a foster mother to Tamar and Sima, and her care produces a household shaped by two religions. Her attachment to the Ben Zaken children becomes one of the forms through which kinship is practiced. When Tamar asks Aziza about Israel and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Aziza remains politically neutral: "'I don't have the slightest idea about Israel. Only Allah knows if it's a good or bad idea,' she shrugged. 'All I know is that I hope you never leave'" (Armbrister 136). Semi's discussion of Moroccan responses to Jewish departure gives Aziza's reaction historical depth. Morocco, Semi argues, differed from other Arab countries because it placed importance on maintaining relations with its Jewish community, while the departure of Jews "shocked and startled the Muslim population" ("Double Trauma" 117). Aziza's fear of Tamar's departure gives this historical rupture a domestic form. When that departure finally occurs, Aziza and her Jewish foster daughters are devastated and traumatized: "Aziza was on the floor, kissing Sima repeatedly, but Sima's pleading cries hurt my chest, and I turned my face. My throat burned . . . Meir stepped in and pulled Sima from Aziza's arms . . . Aziza and Abdul just stood there, watching us disappear into the distance" (Armbrister 12-13). Meir must physically snatch the girls from Aziza's arms, a bodily figure for the severing of Morocco itself.

Tamar continuously defines Aziza through maternal devotion. Aziza remains with the Ben Zakens despite their grief and financial decline, and Tamar remembers her care as an act of loyalty: "It would've been easier in a different house, one that didn't have seven sad orphans. But she stayed, and that was her greatness. I always loved her for it, and have never forgotten her" (Armbrister 135). Later, Tamar returns to the same bond. "I thought of Aziza's last words that night. 'I will pay you back one day,' she said behind my back, as if her devotion to my family wasn't enough. I loved her like a mother" (135). Similarly, before Tamar's illegal migration to Israel, Aziza pleads with her Jewish foster daughter to stay in Morocco. When she becomes certain that Tamar is leaving, she begs: "I can't imagine life without you. . . . Please, take us with you" (19). These passages make Aziza central to Tamar's account of Moroccan life. The Muslim foster mother becomes the figure through whom Tamar remembers Morocco as a place of care, loss, and shared female survival (15).

Jewish and Muslim women's shared practices also appear in scenes of ritual celebration. During Tamar's wedding, Muslim and Jewish women put "Chena mix" on Tamar's palms and dance "for hours to the enchanting jaunty lyrics of Arabic music" (Armbrister 89). The wedding scene places Jewish ritual inside Moroccan social practice, where Arabic music, henna, and female gathering cross religious lines. The novel's treatment of motherhood, mourning, and domestic ritual redefines Jewish-Moroccan identity through Moroccan women's relations rather than through nationalist categories. A comparable gendered recovery appears in Ruth Knafo Setton's *The Road to Fez*, where homecoming, women's ritual, and Judeo-Moroccan mythology restore Sephardic female agency while unsettling colonial and Zionist divisions between Arabness and Jewishness (Belahrache and Barhoun, "Sephardic Female Odyssey" 86–89).

From Homeland to Enemy

One Moroccan Woman presents Aliyah as a process of cultural severance imposed on Moroccan Jews in the twentieth century. The novel exposes the Zionist recoding of Moroccan Jews as exiles who must be redeemed from Arab lands and returned to Israel. Through Tamar's family, Armbrister unveils that the realization of this meta-narrative requires the weakening of Jewish-Muslim Moroccan ties and the redefinition of Morocco as a place of danger. In this sense, the novel reveals the fracture between "Jewishness" and "Maghrebiness" as a political construction.

Tamar's relationship with her Muslim neighbors is threatened by Zionist efforts to recast Muslims as enemies. Daniel, Tamar's first husband, embodies this ideological shift. As a Moroccan Jewish Zionist recruiter, he circulates narratives of Arab hostility and Jewish rescue in order to encourage immigration to Israel. He presents his work as sacred obligation:

> "It's a big Mitzvah to help bring the Jewish people to their ancestral land. But first, allow me to give you some background," he said, and I nodded. "We rely on Jewish donations from all over the World to fund the costs of maintaining this facility and the mass immigration," Daniel began. . . . "There are many people to save," he said, and his brows gathered together. I didn't say anything. I wasn't sure why we needed to be saved at all, and from whom. (Armbrister 36)

Tamar's final question is central to the novel's critique. Unlike Daniel, Tamar cannot see why Moroccan Jews must flee to Israel. She refuses to see her people, who are embedded in Moroccan life, as victims in need of salvation. Daniel's language of urgency and salvation collides with Tamar's hesitation, which exposes the gap between Zionist discourse and Moroccan Jewish experience.

The novel's fictional recruiter has a documented historical counterpart. Gottreich records that in Morocco the Zionist organization Kadima "operated under the guise of providing social services and a library" and facilitated the departure of thirty thousand Jews between 1949 and 1951, "mostly from the poorer communities" (163). Shohat likewise argues that "panic and disorientation, rather than desire for aliya . . . was the key factor" in the departures, generated in part by a Zionist policy of driving a wedge between Jewish and Muslim communities ("Rupture and Return" 56). Armbrister's Daniel dramatizes precisely this machinery of manufactured fear.

Daniel and Pnina present themselves as agents of Jewish emancipation, but their activism depends on the promotion of fear and impending Holocaust narratives. Shohat's critique of Zionism clarifies the structure of this narrative. Zionism, she argues, claimed "to be a liberation movement for all Jews," but it functioned primarily for European Jews, while Sephardi Jews were brought to Israel for "specific European-Zionist reasons" and then discriminated against by the same system ("Sephardim" 1).

Mr. Ben Zaken, Tamar's father, also resists the Zionist narrative of return because he views Morocco as a homeland. He rejects the idea that Moroccan Jews must abandon their ancestral place in order to become properly Jewish:

> Papa wouldn't listen to any of the Zionists calling to return and rebuild the land of Israel. . . . "Jews are safe in Morocco," he said to Avram Saadon, his childhood friend. "The Sultan loves the Jews. He wouldn't let anything bad happen to us. Look how the Sultan protected us against those Nazis," he said. . . . "I won't leave Morocco!" Papa said. "It's where my father, and his father's father are from, for generations. It's here

> where my loyalty lies. . . . We are classified as the Protected people of the sacred law of the Shari, and in the Quran." (Armbrister 12)

His rejection of the return narrative unsettles the Zionist premise that Jewish history culminates in Israel. For him, loyalty to Morocco does not contradict Jewish identity. His position also contests the Israeli claim, described by Shohat, that Ashkenazi Zionism "'saved' Sephardi Jews from the harsh rule of their Arab 'captors'" and moved them from "primitive conditions" into modernity ("Sephardim" 3). Armbrister's novel shows that this deliverance discourse requires the distortion of Moroccan Jewish belonging.

The Zionist movement in the novel also works through the language of emergency. Daniel repeatedly insists that Moroccan Jews must leave before it is too late:

> Either we'll be too late to save the Jews of Morocco, or Israel won't withstand Arab hostility from all four borders. . . . "Tamar, we're not perceived anymore as just the Jews of Morocco, but rather as a nation, a group of people that share a religion and identity," Daniel said. "We're now solidified with Israel wherever we are. The Agency is determined to act early this time before a second Holocaust occurs. . . . Most of the Jews that left are from the countryside." . . . "They're easier to convince because they have nothing to lose." (Armbrister 37-38)

Daniel's speech replaces Moroccan Jewish specificity with a universal Jewish nationhood tied to Israel. His reference to a "second Holocaust" imports the European catastrophe into Morocco to produce fear and compliance. The rural poor are described as "easier to convince" because their vulnerability makes them more susceptible to promises of liberation. Boum shows that Zionist success among the rural Jews of southern Morocco drew not only on hardship but on "traditional messianic Zionism" and on these communities' imagined connection to Palestine ("From 'Little Jerusalems'" 51-52). Armbrister therefore presents Zionist recruitment as a political pedagogy that trains Moroccan Jews to see Morocco as exile.

The novel connects this pedagogy to the creation of an Arab-Jew divide. Shohat writes that Zionism situated "Arabs and Jews . . . as enemy identities," whereas Arab Jews had previously been seen as colonized Arab subjects before the partition of Palestine recoded them as simply "Jews" (*Taboo Memories* 131). Daniel's argument follows this shift. He tells Tamar that Jews are no longer "just the Jews of Morocco" but part of a transnational Jewish identity "solidified with Israel" (Armbrister 37-38). This formulation erases the Moroccan component of Jewish life and defines belonging through Israel. Mr. Ben Zaken, under this pressure, refuses to accept that his happiness in Morocco is illegitimate: "I'm not against a Jewish state, but who guarantees that we'd be safer there than here. . . . I donate a lot of money to the cause, but I'm happy here" (13-14).

Daniel's recruitment work turns shared Jewish-Muslim history into an obstacle to be overcome. Recruiting Jojo as "my voice in the Mellah," he promises that in Israel "no one will discriminate against you for being Jewish," while he "travelled to remote Jewish villagers, helping them liquidate the villages of any Jewish presence" (Armbrister 49-59). The phrase reduces centuries of rural Jewish life to a logistical problem; the rhetoric of protection conceals an operation of removal, and the later Israeli chapters expose the promise of non-discrimination as false.

Armbrister also links Zionist silencing of Maghribinity to French colonial assimilation. Before Aliyah, the French Protectorate has already encouraged Moroccan Jews to identify with European culture and to distance themselves from Muslim society. Tamar acknowledges this change in her own family:

> . . . French presence in the urban cities influenced everyone, slowly changing the face of our society. Even Papa remarked that many families became more secular and modern, much as Meir and me. We preferred the French education and its culture to the Muslim one, thus assimilating the French ways gradually became a way of life for everyone, a life we'd embraced gladly. (Armbrister 46)

French schooling and culture prepare the ground for a separation between Moroccan Jews and Muslim Moroccans. Roumani maintains that "[t]he Sephardim of the French colonies distanced themselves more and more from their relations with Muslims and adopted the habits of Europeans" and that Alliance schools "contributed to the demise of the age-old relationship between Jews and Muslims" (216-17). Massoud Hayoun likewise contends that "transnational Judaism was not naturally intuitive to many Jewish Arabs" but was a framework introduced by Alliance schooling, so that Zionism exploited a rupture colonial education had already begun (166). In the novel, French colonial assimilation and Zionist nationalism both contribute to the weakening of Jewish-Muslim Moroccan bonds.

"Ma'asalame": Colonial Distortion and the Dissolution of Moroccan Belonging

The Ben Zakens' departure is produced through the combined pressure of Moroccan decolonization, Zionist mobilization, and an emergency narrative that increasingly reduces Moroccan Jewish life to danger. Earlier scenes of Jewish-Muslim tolerance, contact, and friendship are therefore displaced by a narrative of fear. When the possibility of taking Aziza and Abdul to Israel is raised, Tamar contends that "the Jewish Agency didn't even consider such a ridiculous idea. There was hardly room or money to rescue the Jews, let alone elderly Muslim servants" (Armbrister 135). The language of redemption is reserved for Jews, while Abdul and Aziza, despite their intimate place in Tamar's household, are excluded from the moral economy of salvation. The agent assigned to Meir and Tamar promises that "the Israeli government will provide the housing," yet the family is betrayed by this promise in Israel (135). A Jewish eyewitness quoted by Gottreich called the departures "an exodus that no one truly desires," in which "the people are not fleeing Morocco, but their own misery" (164), a judgment the novel's Israeli chapters bear out.

Yet the narrator also acknowledges the role of the Ben Zakens' loyal Muslim servants in protecting the family from rising violence. Framed as parental figures, Abdul and Aziza save Tamar and her children from the fire, so the novel's movement toward fear never fully cancels its earlier world of attachment. Tamar "insisted on staying in Morocco" and "day-dreamed of Aziza's cooking" during her departure. Her dream of remaining there ends only when departure becomes unavoidable: "when the night faded away and morning crept in, so did my dreams of growing old in Morocco" (Armbrister 143). At the moment of departure, Tamar looks "back to the shore" and sees "a Muslim man" in traditional dress waving to her. She mouths "Ma'asalame," and Morocco becomes condensed into a Muslim presence that is familiar, mourned, and left behind (141-42). This structure of loss was not one-sided. In Boum's *Memories of Absence*, older Muslim informants recurrently remember Jewish departure as a social and economic loss. One elderly speaker recalls, "I wish Jews were still here," adding that when Jews left Akka, "we lost the thriving religious and economic center Akka used to be" (Boum, *Memories of Absence* xvii).

"We Are Israelis Now": Palestinian Erasure and the Making of Moroccan Jews into Israelis

The Ben Zakens join other Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews on clandestine boats to Israel. The journey is harsh and dangerous, and disillusionment begins before the family reaches Israel. Yet arrival is still framed as the fulfillment of promise. Seeing Israel's shores from afar becomes a spiritual moment: "The cabin door opened. 'Israel's shores in the sea on the horizon,' the man shouted. 'You've never seen anything as beautiful as this in your life!' A great relief washed over me. For the first time, I anxiously awaited reaching Israel" (Armbrister 148). Tamar initially receives Israel as a new beginning and imagines it as the place where her family will finally settle. She declares, "I would learn to love Israel. We would raise our children there and grow old. It was our new home" (148). The sentence is important because Tamar does not yet speak from experience. She speaks from anticipation, from the Zionist promise that arrival will repair deterritorialization.

The arrival scene is filled with biblical language and Zionist mythmaking. The Ben Zakens and the other passengers are encouraged to read their arrival as the fulfillment of divine promise. Their migration is not presented as political settlement in a contested land, but as return, destiny, and religious completion:

> "It's a new start, my love. You will see. It will be great," he said. Everyone cried from happiness. Sixty people gazed at the approaching shores of Israel. A spontaneous circle of dancing broke. Men hugged each other, and children laughed. I felt close to those foreigners. We shared the same fate. We shared a human spirit. . . . "Blessed are you, Lord, our God, ruler of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion." . . . "Do not be afraid, for I am with you. I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west." . . . "God fulfilled his promise to us. It's our turn now to understand and believe his words." He wasn't being accusing. I envied his sense of purpose and faith. "Welcome home." . . . Then he covered his heart with the blue and white flag and kneeled to kiss the ground. I couldn't turn my eyes from him. (Armbrister 148)

The passage turns arrival into a collective religious rite. Tears, dancing, prayer, biblical quotation, the flag, and the kissed ground naturalize the passengers' presence in Israel and transform the immigrants into "New Jews" before they have entered the country. The language of promise and return conceals the political reality of Palestine. At no point does the novel name Palestinians as a people with prior claims to the land, and this absence shows how thoroughly the Zionist narrative organizes the terms through which Tamar is allowed to imagine Israel.

The faintest reference to Palestinians appears later, when Tamar and an Arab Jewish community settled near a Palestinian village become the targets of so-called Arab "Fedayeen" (Armbrister 168). Even here, Palestinians are not clearly named as Palestinians. Although the description of these fighters as armed resistance figures suggests Palestinian resistance, the novel labels them as "Jordanian." Palestine is therefore absent from the map, while Palestinians are displaced into other national labels. The land appears as Israel before the characters ever encounter it as Palestine, and Palestine itself is replaced with a biblical and national fantasy of return.

Similar to the narrative's demonization of the Moroccan independence movement, Palestinian resistance is presented in derogatory and dehumanizing terms. Palestinian fighters are cast as inherently violent transgressors who come "from outside of Israel," racially othered

bodies to be watched, contained, and eliminated, while the Ben Zakens appear as frightened victims in an isolated settlement:

> "We just need to pay attention, and be aware of possible Fedayeen attacks," he said. I stared at him confused, "Who?" "They're called Fedayeen - groups of infiltrators and terrorists that come in from outside of Israel to kill Jews. We need to arrange a guarding force and take turns at nights, just to make sure we're prepared if they attack here." A shiver ran along my spine. "I heard that some of them used to live in nearby areas. They're coming from Jordan to seek revenge," Meir said. . . . Someone should tell these attackers that we don't want to be here. (Armbrister 168)

The passage strips Palestinian resistance of its anti-colonial context and refigures it as irrational violence. Palestinians appear as an alien presence rather than a colonized and dispossessed people; they become trespassers and invaders instead of the invaded. Tamar and her family, by contrast, see themselves as rightful cultivators of the land, and Meir's guns turn him into a landowner defending his country rather than an occupier defending a colonial settlement. The passage therefore reproduces the Zionist reversal through which Palestinian resistance is criminalized while occupation is naturalized as self-defense.

This subversion also appears in the family's journey to Kiryat Gat. On their way there, Tamar notes, "None of us knew where Karyat-Gat was, but we knew we were headed south. We couldn't read the signs, they were either in Hebrew or English" (Armbrister 155). Arabic is absent from this linguistic field. The pre-existing Palestinian presence, architecture, and place-memory are similarly denied. Palestine is rendered as a vacant space waiting to be built by diasporic Jews, without the narrator ever acknowledging any history of Palestinian partition and eradication.

Kiryat Gat, the settlement project to which the Ben Zakens are sent in the novel's 1951 chronology, is not an empty frontier but a space made possible by Palestinian deracination. The immigrants are told that Kiryat Gat is "the city that will be created very soon" and that they will be "the first residents" who will "build it together" (Armbrister 164). The forced eviction of Palestinians and the destruction of their villages are completely effaced. The pre-existence of Palestinian villagers and the Palestinian geography upon which these settlements were built are occluded. Tamar looks up to the Ashkenazi settlers of Kibbutz Gat with admiration:

> The residents of Kibbutz Gat were entirely different, yet to be admired. Despite how different they were from us, I looked up to them. It was the first time I met Jews that originated from Eastern Europe, mostly Poland, Yugoslavia, and Austria. They were fundamentally different from any people I'd known, not only by appearance, but in customs as well. The Kibbutz was founded in 1942, and by now it was the only modern thing around us. It was well-established, with vineyards, a fishpond, a dairy factory, and a health clinic. They even had a swimming pool! The good thing was that we were only three kilometers south of them. I looked at them as the salt of the earth, and despite the fundamental cultural differences and language barriers, we managed to communicate, and collaborate when needed. (Armbrister 171)

The ethnic cleansing of Palestinians that made these settlements possible is reduced to Israeli effort, immigrant endurance, and national construction. Palestinian villages, Arabic place-memory, and the violence of removal remain outside Tamar's field of narration (see Shohat, *Israeli Cinema* 253, 276). This absence matters because the novel's nation-building scenes

depend on it. The landscape can appear available only after Palestinian history has been removed from the story. The novel thus performs, at the level of narration, the disavowal that Sabbagh-Khoury locates in the archives of the kibbutzim themselves, and that Rashid Khalidi's history places within a hundred years' war of settler colonialism and Palestinian resistance.

Upon arrival in Israel, Tamar and Meir discover that the promised return is experienced as humiliation. The state that claimed to retrieve them treats Moroccan Jews as backward, Arabized, and in need of discipline. The immigrants immediately confront the demand to abandon Moroccan language, customs, and memory:

> Everyone started shouting and yelling simultaneously. . . . We were betrayed. We were lied to for years. We thought we were coming to the land of milk and honey. . . . What were we thinking? We should've never come to this forsaken place. We should've known. Did Daniel know? Did he too lie to others shamelessly? All the people we'd entrusted our lives with thought of us as stupid, unworthy people. "I want to go back to Morocco, please," Meir said. . . . "You're very lucky to be here. Morocco is over with, and you'd better get used to it. It's no longer your future, just the past. . . . Israel is in a state of creation. . . . Your lives there were in danger. Didn't you notice the changes? Do you know how much power radical Islamic groups are gaining. . . . Israel is a melting pot. We're all Israelis now, not Moroccans anymore. You need to abandon the Arab ways, that culture, the symbols, and the foreign traditions you brought with you. . . . The faster you assimilate, learn Hebrew, and abandon the Moroccan ways, the easier your absorption will be." (Armbrister 165)

This passage condenses the novel's critique of coercive integration into Israeli national culture. The immigrants are told that "Morocco is over" and that their future depends on abandoning Arab ways. Tamar and Meir are required to disown the cultural forms that made their Jewishness Moroccan. The language of the "melting pot" becomes coercive because it demands the suppression of Maghrebi identity as the price of Israeli belonging.

In Israel, Tamar gradually becomes more critical of the state's propaganda and of its discrimination against Sephardic Jews, especially Moroccan Jews. Moroccan Jews are sent to development towns, moshavs, and border zones, while Ashkenazi Jews occupy more established cities such as Tel Aviv. Before they reach the settlement, they are placed under the authority of Israeli officials who speak to them as dependents to be managed: "climb in the back and sit tight next to each other. There are two rows of benches. This supports ten people on each side. Children don't count, they should sit on your laps. Keep your legs tucked in as we need to fit your luggage in the middle. It's not going to be comfortable, but at least this truck has benches. Some people have to stand all the way" (Armbrister 153). The passage reverses the promise of national redemption. The immigrants who have just been welcomed with prayer and flags are handled as transportable excess. Children "don't count," and bodies must fold themselves around luggage. The placement of Moroccan Jews in development towns and state-planned border spaces marks their subordinate position within the Israeli state. Tamar later understands that this ostracism is part of a policy that separates "modern" European Jews from supposedly backward North African Jews:

> Rumors traveled that in many other areas, the Moroccan Jews, or the Sephardic weren't treated well, but I didn't feel it as much. Maybe because I spoke French, maybe because my ways seemed less "barbaric" in the eyes of the Eastern European Jews, or maybe because Meir was educated. But in truth, only a fraction of the Moroccans I even met came from the large cities of Morocco as we did. Once again, I realized how

> exceptional my life in Morocco had been. I was privileged to earn a French education, socialize with the upper class, and have the option for higher positions and liberal professions. . . . It was easier to dump us in Moshavs, developing towns, or the outskirts of the country. For Meir and me, learning to speak and read in Hebrew was crucial. Meir wanted to assimilate as fast as possible, to adopt the ways of the senior residents of Israel and those who called themselves Sabra—the native-born Israelis. . . . Meir and I wanted to be part of the contribution to better our life, we wanted to prosper, as opposed to being perceived as second class citizens. (Armbrister 172-73)

Tamar's French education and urban background temporarily protect her from the full force of anti-Moroccan prejudice, yet they also expose the internal class distinctions among Moroccan Jews and show how colonial French hierarchies traveled with her into Israel. At the same time, the Israeli state's decision to "dump" Moroccan Jews in moshavs, development towns, and border spaces confirms that the promised return to the Jewish homeland is organized through spatial segregation. Hebrew, Sabra identity, and assimilation become conditions of survival, while Moroccan identity is rendered an obstacle to citizenship.

The dehumanization becomes explicit when the immigrants are sprayed with "white powder" upon arrival. Tamar reacts with humiliation, asking, "What are we, cockroaches?" The Israeli employee's answer is callous: "You'll meet a lot of cockroaches . . . Don't get too sensitive. You're in Israel now" (Armbrister 152). The scene condenses the violence of state-managed relocation. The immigrants are treated as bodies to be disinfected before they are treated as citizens, in a colonial sanitation ritual that handles racialized subjects as carriers of infestation. The state that promised redemption first receives Tamar as a contaminated body. Orit Bashkin documents a parallel trajectory among Iraqi Jews, whose reception in the transit camps combined disinfection, spatial sorting, and cultural condescension.

The discrimination faced by Moroccan Jews in Israel confirms Shohat's account of the Zionist denial of Arab Jewishness. Shohat argues that official Israeli ideology urges Sephardim and Mizrahim to see their "only real identity as Jewish," while Arabness is treated as a "Diasporic stain" to be cleansed through assimilation ("Invention" 5-6). Armbrister dramatizes this process through housing, language, and social hierarchy. European Jewish immigrants are placed in cities such as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, while Jews from Muslim lands are sent to the margins because "the government didn't want the less modernized people to inhabit the largest cities" (Armbrister 172). Tamar and Meir learn Hebrew and attempt to adopt the ways of the Sabra, but their Moroccan background marks them as inferior. Their Sephardic identity is treated as too close to Arabness, and therefore as a problem to be managed.

The Ben Zakens therefore occupy an ambiguous position, caught between Zionist promises and Israeli discrimination. Tamar grows increasingly aware of the state's racism and of the reduction of Arab Jews to laborers cultivating the land, yet she never fully renounces the state; her criticism remains contained within a larger Zionist attachment. She both exposes the violence of state policy and participates in the narrative that legitimizes Jewish settlement in Palestine, becoming the mouthpiece through which Armbrister reclaims a distant Moroccan Jewish heritage while affirming Zionist claims over the land.

Tamar resists de-Maghrebization by insisting that Morocco remains part of her identity. Before leaving, she and Meir explicitly reject the idea that Zionism can take Morocco from them: "'We are Moroccans. . . .' 'I don't want to go to Israel,' I said. 'Morocco is my country.' Meir's eyes cleared. He seemed to awaken from a dream. 'We are Moroccans,' he said. 'No one will ever take that away from us'" (Armbrister 131). This declaration is not nostalgia in its simplest form. It is a refusal to accept the Zionist recoding of Morocco as exile. O'Hanlon's

account of subaltern historiography is useful here because she describes the rewriting of history from the perspective of "the dispossessed of that periphery," whose "subjectivity, experience and agency" must be restored to history (190). Tamar's insistence on Moroccan identity gives narrative form to that restoration. In Israel, that insistence takes communal shape:

> I missed everything; real couscous, the smells of the streets, Arabic music, the souk, the language, the people—home! I cried until I could cry no more. . . . we all dwelled on Morocco in one way or another. The past was already remembered nostalgically, better than it was. . . . Its residents [of Uza city] were more observant than we were and most of them originated from Libya. We didn't speak the same language; still, we shared a similar flavor for food and culture. They too originated from an Arab country, and a wonderful friendship evolved. . . . Adults and kids alike hang outside, chatting, playing cards, smoking cigarettes, laughing, crying, dwelling on our beloved Morocco. (Armbrister 171-73)

The passage shows that Moroccan longing in Israel is communal rather than private. The catalogue of losses runs from couscous and street smells to Arabic music before ending in the single word home, and the friendship with the Libyan Jews of Uza indicates that this nostalgia builds a shared Arab Jewish sociality on the margins of the state.

By the end of the novel, Tamar is a grandmother and is depicted as a woman formed by two worlds. Her husband never fully recovers from Morocco. On his sickbed, he says that "the world is disappearing and coming to its end," as if the world he knew has collapsed beyond repair. Tamar, by contrast, has been remade by Israel without fully losing Morocco. She has internalized the language of Israeli belonging and sees Palestine as the promised land that she helped build. She becomes the "New Jew," the Zionist ideological figure imagined as Hebrew-speaking, rooted in Israel, productive, strong, and freed from the supposed weakness and humiliation of diaspora. Shohat explains that classical Zionist discourse constructed the "New Jew" against the "exilic" Jew, whose "fear, weakness, and humiliation came to be despised" (*Israeli Cinema* 37). Tamar's final declaration fits this model: "No one in Morocco left to ask. The chapter of the Moroccan Jews was closed. We are now a flip in the pages of history. We are Israelis now" (Armbrister 216).

Yet the same final scene unsettles this declaration. Even as Tamar announces that the Moroccan Jewish chapter is closed, she is "sipping from my Nana tea," enjoying the summer in a habit carried from Morocco, a habit that "hasn't changed" (Armbrister 216). This detail prevents the ending from becoming a complete Zionist closure. The Moroccan Jewish past survives in domestic practice, tea, memory, and the habits of the body. This domestic persistence resembles the gendered archive identified in Chochana Boukhobza's *For the Love of the Father*, where food, family stories, and women's everyday practices preserve Judeo-Maghrebi continuity after physical return has become inaccessible (Belahrache and Barhoun, "Diaspora and Belonging" 12–13). In this sense, *One Moroccan Woman* both participates in and exposes the coercive process through which Moroccan Jews were made Israeli. It celebrates Israel as home while showing the humiliation, racialization, and cultural loss through which Moroccan Jews relinquish their Maghrebi world, exposing the cost of Zionist erasure while repeatedly returning to the national frame. Through Aziza, Tamar, Meir, and the Moroccan Jewish immigrants in Israel, Armbrister reconstructs Sephardic identity as a layered formation shaped by Jewish ritual, Muslim proximity, Moroccan belonging, French colonial pressure, and Zionist dispression. Its central contradiction is precise. Moroccan Jewish identity cannot be understood if Arabness and Jewishness are treated as opposites, yet the novel constantly submits

that identity to the very Zionist structure it also exposes. Tamar's memory of Morocco keeps that discrepancies open.

Conclusion

One Moroccan Woman is strongest when read through its unresolved political ambivalence. It recovers a Moroccan Jewish world of Muslim mothers, Arabic sounds, domestic care, food, mourning, and female solidarity, yet it also participates in the Zionist grammar that removes Palestine from view. It is a narrative in which Moroccan Jewish injury and Palestinian silencing are produced within the same settler frame.

Read through Shohat and Harrison, the novel demonstrates that de-indigenization and Palestinian dispossession are not parallel stories but one process observed from two positions. The rupture that tears Tamar from Aziza is prepared by the same discourse that later hands Meir a gun on the perimeter of Kiryat Gat. What Zionist recruitment dismantles in Marrakesh, the settlement absorbs beside ruins it will not name. In this respect the analysis extends Semi's account of counter-narrative and Sabbagh-Khoury's account of disavowal toward a single literary case, showing how one text can perform both at once. Tamar remembers against the melting pot and forgets on behalf of the state, sometimes within a single page.

The concept of settler countermemory names this doubleness and gives it analytical use beyond the present case. It invites scholars of Mizrahi and Sephardic writing to ask not only what minority memory recovers but where that memory settles, and it invites scholars of Palestine to attend to the racialized Jewish migrants through whom settlement was partly carried out and who paid for it in their own cultural effacement. Novels by Bensimhon, Carlibach, and other Maghrebi-Israeli writers await similar readings, as do the community memoirs that Moreno and Bitton examine. A comparative study across these corpora could test whether the structural tension traced here belongs to the genre rather than to one text, and whether women's narratives, organized around foster mothers, kitchens, and mourning rooms, carry the ambivalence differently than the masculine national plots they quietly unsettle.

The stakes are not merely literary. As long as Moroccan Jewish memory is celebrated in Israel as folklore while its Arabness is treated as a stain, and as long as Palestinian history remains unspeakable within that celebration, the wound Armbrister's novel both exposes and conceals stays open. Tamar's nana tea, sipped in a town built over erased villages, is a small and stubborn archive. Reading it honestly requires holding her loss and the loss she was made to overlook in the same hand.

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