

Memory in Moroccan Jewish Novels: A Qualitative Reading of the Past in Ruth Knafo Setton's the Road to Fez.

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Abstract

Memory studies have been instrumental in historical comprehension, yet Moroccan Jewish narratives offer a distinctive avenue for understanding history. Embracing Halbwach's (1992) multifocal approach to autobiographical memory, this novel perspective considers memory as a blend of individual and cultural construction. Memory reconstruction, as examined through Ruth Knafo Setton's *The Road to Fez* serves as a counter discourse to historiography historical forces, especially in the context of post-colonial Morocco's historiographical silence. Aomar Boum's (2013) inquiry becomes pertinent in unravelling how much of the past endures. Delving into the textual representation of Moroccan Jewishness, the article explores how it triggers the writer's memories, identities, and histories. Adopting a space/place perspective, the study interprets the novel as a mediator of memory, scrutinizing the locations and symbols of identification that facilitate Ruth Knafo's journey back to her Moroccan roots after leaving America. Utilizing the life writing category, encompassing autobiography, biography, and more, the narrative embodies the writer's nostalgic yearning for her homeland. This exploration contributes to the memorial possibilities of the Moroccan Jewish Diaspora, unveiling the complexities and anxieties inherent in a micro history shaped by the collection and recollection of memories from those who departed Morocco. In contrast to oversimplified narratives, this article seeks to unveil nuanced angles, acknowledging the intricate viewpoints embedded in the narrative.

Keywords : Memory, identity, history, historiography, exile, national narratives, homeland, return.

Introduction

The investigation into the field of memory studies has been immensely beneficial in grasping historical narratives, and in this context, the narratives of Moroccan Jewish experiences present a unique perspective for interpreting the past. Following the guidance of my respected supervisor, this introductory section initiates a comprehensive exploration into the intricacies of memory within Moroccan Jewish literature, with a specific focus on the impactful creation of Ruth Knafo Setton, "The Road to Fez." Adhering to Halbwach's approach that emphasizes the multifaceted nature of autobiographical memory, this study introduces an innovative outlook, perceiving memory as a complex amalgamation of personal recollections and cultural constructs.

This research centers on Setton's "The Road to Fez," a literary piece characterized by profound themes, cultural complexities, and substantial contributions to discussions on memory poetics. The choice of this particular work is motivated by its exceptional position within Moroccan Jewish literature, providing a fertile narrative ground for a detailed examination of the interplay between memory and identity.

In the following sections, this paper examines the socio-cultural consequences of the Jewish community's migration, the post-colonial narrative of Morocco, and the dynamic interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Maghreb area. The investigation not only delves into the nuanced portrayal of Moroccan Jewish identity but also analyzes the sites and symbolic elements that aid Ruth Knafo in reconnecting with her Moroccan heritage. This study grapples with the intricacies and concerns embedded in the micro-history shaped by the gathering and remembrance of memories from individuals who left Morocco, adding to the commemorative dimensions of the Moroccan Jewish Diaspora.

The designation of "The Road to Fez" as the principal text for this investigation emanates from its distinctive standing within the realm of Moroccan Jewish literature. Positioned against the backdrop of Moroccan Jewish communities, Setton's novel provides a fertile narrative terrain conducive to the nuanced examination of the intricate intersection between memory and poetics. This selection is guided by the novel's thematic profundity, linguistic subtleties, and its capacity to make substantive contributions to the expansive discourse on memory poetics.

This article examines Setton's "The Road to Fez" literary work, focusing on the relationship between memory and identity in Moroccan Jewish literature. It explores the socio-cultural implications of the Jewish population's migration and the post-colonial history of Morocco. The study also examines the fluid boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Maghreb region.

The topic of Moroccan Jewry occupies a special position, as scholars delve deeply into the historical, sociological and cultural aspects of Jewish life in the country and their widespread emigration. However, it was not until the beginning of the 21st century that Morocco turned its attention to its Jewish heritage and introduced it to the Moroccan public through the medium of cinema (Boum, 2012). In particular, works such as Leila Marrakchi's "Marock" (Videau, 2006), Hassan Benjelloun's "Où Vas-Tu Moshé?" (Where to, Moshé?) (2007) and Mohamed Ismail's "Goodbye Mothers" (2007) marked the first examples of Jewish representation in the Moroccan cinema screen.

The departure of Morocco's Jewish population hides a profound divide that has emotional significance for both individuals and society, affecting both Jews and Muslims. "Their exodus was a fatal blow to the Jewish presence in the country and to its historic ethno-religious and cultural diversity" (Kenbib, 1994). This hidden upheaval has its roots in the mellahs (Jewish districts) of cities such as Fez, Marrakesh, Essaouira, Meknes and Rabat, where remnants of the past still remain. The Star of David is still present and is engraved on the doorways and closures of shops formerly owned by Moroccan Jews. This visual emblem is consistent with the intertwined history of these communities and represents the shared cultural heritage developed through living together.

These feelings of longing and sadness find eloquent expression in the literature and music of Moroccan Jews. Edmon Amran El Maleh, a novelist and activist, emerges as one of the prominent writers who vividly portrayed the experiences of Jews in Morocco. Through his works, El Maleh provides a vivid and complex portrayal, shedding light on the complex emotions and narratives that characterize the collective consciousness of Moroccan Jews.

In the context of re-examining and reassessing Moroccan historiography in the postcolonial context, it is important to recognize that the knowledge produced during the colonial period is an interpretation of indigenous reality (Boum, 2013). Like any other interpretation, this colonial perspective is subject to analysis, criticism and recognition as an independent phase in Moroccan history. Rather than rejecting it simply because of its association with colonial powers, it should be understood and evaluated in terms of its value within the larger historical narrative.

The coexistence of various cultural and religious groups within Mellahs highlights their potential for integration and mutual understanding. This theme is in line with the overarching objective of the Moroccan educational framework, which is to foster inclusivity and cultural cohesion (Boum, 2013). Jews have historically been recognized as "people of the book," and their protected status under Moroccan rule sets an example of tolerance and inclusivity that

can provide valuable context for current efforts to integrate Jewish cultural content into the curriculum.

Jews and Muslims in Morocco shared many cultural practices. They collectively venerated over a hundred saints, some of which were Jewish saints venerated by Muslims, and in at least fourteen cases they were Muslim saints venerated by Jews (Boum, 2013). Pilgrimages to the tombs of these saints were meeting points where the two religions came together. Religious and cultural influences passed from Jews to Muslims and vice versa, despite the status of Jews as dhimmis and minorities. In some places, Muslims gave gifts to their Jewish neighbours on Jewish holidays and vice versa on Muslim holidays (Lévy, 2001). For this reason, Jews and Muslims in Morocco shared numerous cultural practices, including the veneration of common saints, interfaith pilgrimages, and the exchange of gifts on holidays, which is a testament to the rich history of coexistence and cultural exchange between these communities.

Setton's novel distinguishes itself through the abundance of thematic richness, nuanced linguistic expression, and its capacity to make substantial contributions to the discourse on memory poetics. The deliberate choice of this specific novel is predicated upon its discernible narrative richness, encapsulating multifaceted layers of memory, cultural heritage, and the intricate intertwinement of historical dimensions with contemporary realities. Consequently, this novel serves as an exemplary case study, providing a robust foundation for the exploration of the poetic construction of memory within the nuanced context of Moroccan Jewish culture.

In the present investigation, a methodology grounded in discourse analysis is adopted. The efficacy of this approach emanates from its inherent ability to unveil the cultural and emotive dimensions inherent in the representation of memory within literature. Through a meticulous examination of recurrent themes and linguistic subtleties, this method facilitates a thorough understanding of the processes through which memory is fashioned, conveyed, and perpetuated within the domain of Moroccan Jewish literature.

In this current investigation, a methodological framework rooted in critical discourse analysis is utilized. The reason for choosing this approach lies in its effectiveness in revealing the cultural and emotional aspects embedded in the portrayal of memory in literature (Blommaert; Bulcaen, 2000). By carefully scrutinizing recurring themes and linguistic subtleties, this methodology enables a comprehensive and nuanced comprehension of the complex processes involved in the creation, transmission, and preservation of memory within the domain of Moroccan Jewish literature.

Materials and methods

The article utilizes a qualitative directed content analysis approach, aligning with Mayring's (2000) assertion that employing a directed approach in content analysis introduces a heightened level of structure compared to conventional qualitative content analysis methods. In the context of our investigation, the objective is to intricately examine representations of memory in literature, emphasizing the cultural and historical experiences of the Moroccan Jewish community. This intentional adoption of a qualitative methodology seeks to amplify individual and collective narratives present in the novels, facilitating a profound immersion into the subtleties and complexities of memories. This structured analytical approach is guided by specific themes and parameters, enhancing the precision and depth of our research objectives. The logical framework employed in this article encompasses both deductive and inductive reasoning (Azungah, 2018). Commencing with an exhaustive comprehension of overarching themes pertinent to memory in Moroccan Jewish literature, we employ deductive reasoning to derive specific insights from the text of "The Road to Fez." Concurrently, we utilize inductive reasoning to extrapolate broader conclusions regarding the significance and implications of memory within the milieu of Moroccan Jewish novels. This dual methodological approach facilitates a nuanced exploration of the subject matter.

This research explores the complex subject of memory in Moroccan Jewish literature, specifically analyzing Ruth Knafo Setton's influential work, "The Road to Fez." The title, "Memory in Moroccan Jewish Novels," highlights the primary focus on the portrayal of memory within a broader literary framework. Through a detailed examination of Setton's narrative, this research delves into the intersections of cultural and historical memory, putting more emphases on the significance of revisiting and critically evaluating the past. The subtitle urges readers to delve into the intricate historical narratives embedded in the chosen novel, suggesting a multi-layered reading of memory.

The study is grounded in Setton's literary work, contributing specificity to the title and establishing a foundation for a comprehensive examination of memory in Moroccan Jewish literature. The deliberate selection of the term "Re-Reading" signifies a scholarly endeavour to transcend surface-level interpretations and foster a more profound scrutiny of historical narratives. The title encapsulates the core of the research, emphasizing the interconnection of literature, cultural memory, and the process of revisiting historical events within Moroccan Jewish novels. Special attention is given to the intricate narrative woven in *The Road to Fez*.

Results and discussion

Ruth Knafo Setton's Novel combines several genres; it is equal parts novel, autobiography, and history, switching between fictional narrative, documentary and back again. The Road to Fez is about a young woman's decision to return to her country of birth, Morocco. After her mother's death, Brit, the 18-year-old woman and who was born to Sephardic-Jewish parents, decides to go through a spiritual journey to find a sense of belonging especially that she left her homeland when she was six, an age that means a lot to her and her birthplace, holding a huge repertoire of memories to stand face to face with past. It is also in order to full fil her mother's lasting wish to go on a pilgrimage to Fez and to vist Syleika's tomb After her mother's passing. Brit Goes to search for confort and a sense of home through visiting the tomb, a 19th century martyr venerated by both Jews and Muslims. Syleika a Tangler native Sol Hatchuel, also known to Muslims as Lalla Suleika decided to commit suicide rather than deny her faith (Vance, 2011). She was later executed for apostasy. During this visit to her birthplace, Setton's protagonist and main character Brit falls in love with Gaby, her uncle. Brit's family tries so hard to stop her unacceptable and taboo emotional desire away from Gaby and reminds her to realise her mother's wish to pay a visit to Syleika's tomb, which is, one of the reasons why she came to Morocco. The writer frequently uses a narrative that incorporates autobiographical memories of her own past to picture, in a fictional way, what she was going through.

After spending a dozen years in the United States, she decides to visit Morocco, where she becomes embroiled in a tale of forbidden love and a cross-border quest for identity. As a Moroccan American Jew she acquires her sense of dislocation and displacement from her ancestors' experiences as immigrants and exiles. Setton establishes a cogent vision of Morocco as "the blue door," the long-desired entrance to self-knowledge, and from the very first page of his novel. These formal choices include the chapter title, epigraph, and opening scene. The epigraph, a tiny entry in Brit's journal, depicts the little girl as conflicted loyalties are born as a result of exile. Brit's job is to turn separation into wholeness.

When the older generations were no longer available to serve as eyewitnesses, it was the lack of any personal memory of the pivotal events in twentieth-century Jewish history that inspired many Jewish writers to pick up their pen (Nora, 1992). Regarding this, Pierre Nora's assertion that "generational memory is stocked with remembrances not so much of what its members have experienced as of what they have not experienced" (1992, 525) appropriately describes the starting point invested in Ruth knafo's novel.

The accounts of Knafo, feelings of nostalgia and the attachment to the country of origin are clearly expressed in a way similar to what we find in writers of Moroccan origin, nostalgia for

the country's roots, its religious and cultural specificities, and above all, the desire to dig into the historical roots of the country left behind, "a cloud of tart-sweaty memory that assures she (Brit) will never forget" (2011, 13). Ruth Knafo Setton, as belonging to the third generation of Moroccan Jewish writers, sees a special link between Moroccan Jews and memory. This is notably articulated in the novel where memory is provoked by the notion of forgetting and loss.

A common narrative device is the rediscovery of the past and the meticulous recreation of it; the "forgotten" and the memories of the past are recreated in equal measure with fullness and fidelity. Brit expresses her cultural amnesia: "I wish I could forget. But memories are branded into me. I feel as if I'm recreating a world that's dying before my eyes. We have been in this country for seven centuries, and no one remembers anything! When I look back into our past as Moroccan Jews, it's dark like mellah. A dark line broke by glimpses of sun..... we suffer from a sort of cultural amnesia (74)". Paradoxically though, the shortage of 'the real' information that the novel seems to advocate appears implausible in a narrative that claims to be autobiographical. This paradox is compounded by the claim that the narrator purportedly lost most of her past especially that Brit and her family left Morocco long time ago.

The protagonists of Ruth Knafo Setton, so as to collect the pieces of the fragmented identity, must go through the experience of returning to her country of origin in search of the motifs that exiled people had gone through customs and memories of the past they had encountered. Within this line of thought Setton writes, "Mani says, 'I work with Arabs all day at the factory. Sometimes a whole day goes by, even two, and we're just people, brothers, doing our work, laughing at the same jokes. Then the news comes on the radio. Someone mentions Israel, and the mood turns ugly. Eyes that were friendly a minute ago watch me. Most Jews I know won't even go into work whenever anything happens in Israel. How long can we live with that kind of fear? (2011, 19)". These words express the sentiments of Moroccan Jews, which led them to emigrate. It seems that Moroccan Jews are not very excited about leaving their home, according to Setton's writing. This is why the novel's entire recounting of memory, all Setton's problems with remembering, can be seen to picture the problem not of Brit's own memory, of course, but of her imagination as it encounters her own past. "I thought we were rootless, I forgot we'd ever had home (13)", Brit says. The imagined 'Morocco' turned into a wanted homeland. It is even from the first beginning, as a flashback, the protagonist rails against the anti-Arab sentiment that has permeated his Moroccan-Jewish community's discourse and refutes the proof of the Moroccan Jews' cultural affinity for the Arab world: "What will remain of you if you remove the Arab part of yourself, for it is in Arabic that your mother dream. (20)".

A Close reading of the novel reveals a self-distance taken by the author from the America reality and from associating with the "Americans." This is a reversal of the exile-vs.-redemption debate, where America is now the country of exile and the writer's abandoned country, which was previously thought of as the place of exile, now the homeland. Knafo has arrived in a promised homeland that turns out to be an even greater exile and makes her long for her prior exile after she has left her country, a supposedly exiled land. "Morocco, that dim memory, had already retreated, crouching in the corners of my room in Pennsylvania (2011, 39)", the writer sadly justifies. Ruth Knafo's main character, Brit, suffers from cultural amnesia, and while she is uprooted from her physical surroundings, she is also ripped from her identity. She is exiled in her own way, but what characterises her tale is this dualism and sense of being exiled from two ways, their physical exile from The native Morocco, as well as her exile from the newly Jewish identity.

Ruth Knafo, who was born in Safi and immigrated to the United States as a child at the end of the 1960s, has a dark but colorful past. "When I look back into our past as Moroccan Jews, it's dark, like the mellah. A dark line, broken by glimpses of sun (2011, 85)". However, these memories are not always terrifying as they are; on the contrary, a source of relief, of empowering identity, of narrative creation, a necessary mechanism in adjusting the new land of exile, thanks to writing. Morocco, in this regard, is turning to a new type of a homeland. Yesterday's land of exile has turned, finally, into a symbol of centrality. America becomes for her a place that represents "her" diaspora. This paradox at the level of transforming Morocco from a normal diaspora into a diaspora that is a centre nurtures the nostalgic feelings towards the writer's diasporic homeland. Moroccan-born Jews are perceived as her diasporic community.

The narrative's flow is disrupted by moments of reflection or glimpses into the memory of the past. Knafo's work is stripped down, as if she had finally reduced identity to the pure universality of desire after searching it for defining the world around her. Brit is looking for her mother, who requested that Brit visit Suleika's mausoleum before she passed away, as well as her mother tongue. "I nod. Words can't exit my mouth. Not yet. I am undergoing a strange metamorphosis. More than the webbed animal hands. My teeth are sharpening, cutting through my cheeks. I want to bite. To devour. To slash and kill. Lydia? Or Gaby?" (2011, 31). The pursuit of absolutes hidden within the realities of physical existence is known as pure reduction. As if Brit's incestuous passion for Gaby were the ideal marriage of culture and biology, it is as though she was trying to stabilize the swirl of cultures and history around her in biology itself. It's possible that incest is a common theme in love literature, where desire constantly overcomes

social, cultural, and historical boundaries, which explains why Setton seems carefree about this most sinister of all taboos. It's also possible that Setton wants us to understand that, despite her optimism for such a transcendence, it is impossible to achieve in its entirety. Brit reacts maybe stereotypically as she recovers from what amounts to a second exile, but she is not to be blamed. She becomes obsessively devoted to the cuisine and customs of her former life. She continuously repapers her kitchen in a pinnacle act of estrangement, until one day she hooks her foot in a ladder rung and falls to her death. Brit's most vivid memories reflect her parents' plight:

Sheba takes up residence in the bedroom, where she spreads her photographs from Morocco around her. In the living room, Joseph spins his globe faster and faster, his laughter almost demonic as he urges Brit to "Pick a place. Any place. Pick a name. A religion. A nationality. You can be anyone. Born anywhere. ... A mad dictator surveying his provinces. France, he said. No more Jews from Morocco. From now on we're Christians from Paris. A good choice (2011, 38)".

The visit to Lalla Solika's tomb in the Fes cemetery is one pretty popular referential identification topos. Lalla Solika was a Tangier girl who, in 1834, chose martyrdom over renunciation of her faith. Her tomb is still a popular destination for pilgrims, and her narrative has been told in a variety of ways (2011). The narrative revolves around the tale of Lalla Solika, which is especially important for Ruth Knafo Setton who immigrated to the US. Lalla Solika is viewed as a trespasser and a symbol of change rather than perseverance in Knafo Setton:

"She crossed from the Jewish world to the Arab world. In those days there was no mellah in Tangier, but still the separation was distinct, an invisible wall. I used to wonder how long it took to cross from the Jewish house to the Arab house. An eternity. Or a second. A breath, and you're there, in the other world (2001, 46)".

A major theme in the novel involves the discourse of collective memory. Brit is recollecting the past and reflecting upon the future and her need to construct a new existence, this is why she returns to her past, often under the guise of a trip to the land of her birth, a nostalgic and memorable pilgrimage to the homeland. A memoir which resurrects an entire Moroccan Jewish lived reality from the past, one where "The globe whirled (38)". By adding missing facts and, more importantly, by giving the anonymity of a public archive a human touch full of emotions, the novel helps to create a collective memory and a more diverse history through individual memories. In the novel, actual experience replaces fictitious intrigue, and first-hand knowledge takes the place of invention. Ruth emphasizes that memory refers to everything that represents the past in its present form, including dramas and fractures of the history of the

century, of the worlds that are missing or endangered, local heritage, national and regional identities the same way as Halbwachs' ideas on collective memory are discussed (2016). It is the view of memory as a social phenomenon that only arises via interactions with other people (2016).

Within the same line of thought, the tale problematizes the relations between people, nation, border and home. A major claim of Knafo's novel is that although Brit lives in "the West" she still carries Morocco in her heart. She lives in America and she is introduced to the cultural values and lifestyle of the new home country. Her memories are still with Morocco; a country she has left since she was a little child. Here, home becomes a fluctuating element moving between the two homelands. The novel not only questions borders, but also questions how the process of crossing represents itself a home to those intending to immigrate, and more importantly insinuates a history where people and borders are in a constant flux. History is a rolling stone.

Once Brit realizes that "every home is a borrowed one" that she must build a spiritual home within herself, she can perform her ultimate act of self-assertion. The progressive evolution of Bri's thinking, which occurs every time recollection interferes with her daily experience in Morocco, takes up a large portion of the novel. The most important discoveries she has during the Passover seder occur toward the end of her stay in El Kadja, just before she packs up once more and departs for Fez.

Brit's alone times of thought and analysis receive a lot of Setton's attention. By breaking her habit of becoming passive during larger family gatherings in the Passover scene, Brit forges such a time for herself. The topic of the Afriat family's planned expulsion from El Kadja comes up after the Seder dinner, shortly before they sip the tea Brit made with the love potion for Gaby. The family has studied this issue from every perspective but has not found a solution. The collapse of Jewish life in Morocco is an old story. A collapse that is well justified if deeply looking into its different frameworks. The family's inaction frustrates Cousin Mani, who questions how they can keep saying the Seder's customary closing, "next year in Jerusalem (97)", while doing nothing. They argue the same worn-out arguments in the discussion that follows, with Uncle Haim supporting the status quo and the others being more cautious. They oppose change for as long as they can, even though it means making a perilous adjustment in an America that does not want them. Brit almost instinctively enters into these discussions. She encourages immigration to America despite her personal past of mistreatment there. So naive a belief in "the land of the free" is mocked by Gaby.

Home is juxtaposed with broad philosophical inspirations, pictures of the traditional Moroccan life with searing examinations of the land. Whatever tendencies this novel has tackled, it has always stemmed from a particular place, Setton's childhood environment of the old Jewish Morocco. The author suggests that Brit is trying to create a sense of home in the novel, a homeness, one that goes beyond the present formulation of Arabness and Jewishness. Morocco, in this regard, is turning to a new type of home. Yesterday's land of exile has turned into a symbol of centrality. "King Hassan loves us and has sworn to protect us (98)", repeatedly mentioned in different occasions by Brit. America becomes for her a place that represents "her" diaspora. This paradox at the level of transforming Morocco from a normal diaspora into a diaspora that is a centre nurtures the nostalgic feelings towards the writer's diasporic homeland. Moroccan-born Jews are perceived as her diasporic community. To say it differently, Morocco becomes a space for longings and nostalgia. In this respect, Morocco's position in her memories reassembles America.

Knafo is to visit a "golden period" that is now lost forever because to the memories that she invokes from a long-gone past. The literary process serves as a means for her to deal with the psychological and emotional harm that has been inflicted. by having to start over in a new location after losing her home, to make the memorial feeling of restorations of location come to life. This process of rooted is designed with the goal of marking her individual and familial destiny in time, tracing her paths, and giving them significance in the process. From vast open spaces to the closeness of the family home. The aim of the writer is to recreate the texture of long-gone locations, recreating the feelings, sounds, and smells of the past.

This discussion confirms that the study of the Moroccan location as a collection of lieux de mémoire ('sites of memory') represented in the text *The Road to Fez* is based on the theoretical vision articulated by Nora; it does not focus on the history of the country in the traditional sense of the word but instead addresses what is collectively remembered by those who identify themselves as Moroccans and expresses the singularity, specificity and value of their memories, the way in which these memories are valued (1999). The author of the *Road to Fez* looks for Moroccan-specific national, local and cultural treasures. She uses the city as a place to create fresh lieux de mémoire and her individual memories as source of inspiration. This literary accounts of memory serves as historical sources at the nexus of history and fiction.

Photographer Justine drives Brit to the plain synagogues in the mellah, the El Kajda slas, a hunger for spiritual and historical unity. Despite Justine's recent immigration to Paris, she is fundamentally Moroccan: "Look at this place,' she says. 'My dark decaying heart. Why do I keep coming back? . . .Why do I insist on returning here? ... A great blur of darkness buries us.

I fight it by taking photos of doors and windows and faces.” Brit's response expresses a similar need, inchoate and unsatisfied: “I feel that way sometimes, as if I'm glimpsing words and images I should remember for a story I need to tell - but as soon as I try to see them clearly, they disintegrate (2011, 85)”. The past gives the present its significance while the present looks back to the past, to the *mellah*.

Ruth is thus remaking her history, bringing into the surface a reconstruction which will be regarded as more ‘authentic’ than what could be perceived as ‘original’, as in much postmodern cultural reproduction for film and television, museum and heritage site (Lyotard, 1985). The question of originality and authenticity are thus represented in the material features of the novel, as in much postmodern cultural repertoires. Similarly, new historicists in the United States base their arguments on the idea that history is subject to the same subjectivity and relativity as literature, or fiction (Barthes 1970). As a result, every historical narrative is the result of numerous intricate discourses between social, economic, political, and cultural forces, a narrative that comes to fill in the gaps brought by the so called ‘History.’

The novel is alternately narrated by Brit and Gaby (2011), a tale of difficult and complicated interactions between genders. Another potent attempt to reclaim a ‘mythical history’ is woven into the brilliant description of the traditions surrounding Suleika, a woman who refused to give up her Jewish faith in favour of Islam. Her tomb is still a popular destination for pilgrims. The narrative revolves around the tale of Lalla Solika, which is especially important for Ruth Knafo Setton who immigrated to the US. These different historical stands make any perception of Moroccan Jewry in the novel a complex attempt that involves taking into accounts colonial intervention, local cultures, and Jewish status.

The explicit reason for her trip is a pilgrimage to the grave of the Jewish saint Suleika, however the covert reason is to visit her uncle Gaby, with whom she is dangerously in love. Brit's exile issue has two causes, each of which makes up one half. The Suleika tale serves as the main plot device for Setton's investigation of forbidden love and self-integration. Through it, Setton also explains Brit's unique background and faith, which have moulded her in ways that are still baffling to her. The Suleika stories eerily parallel Brit's own experience as she searches for love and independence. Lalla Solika is viewed as a trespasser and a symbol of change rather than perseverance in Knafo Setton:

“She crossed from the Jewish world to the Arab world. In those days there was no *mellah* in Tangier, but still the separation was distinct, an invisible wall. I used to wonder how long it took to cross from the Jewish house to the Arab house. An eternity. Or a second. A breath, and you're there, in the other world” (46).

Setton captures the core of this transition by contemplating the transient process of moving from the Jewish dwelling to the Arab residence. This action hovers ambiguously between an enduring span and a brief instant, as if a mere breath could transport an individual into an entirely distinct realm. This thoughtful examination of borders, encompassing both tangible and symbolic dimensions, mirrors the complex strata of identity and transformation interwoven within the narrative.

Conclusion

In this culture of patriarchal dominance and occasionally violent religious conflict, Suleika's irrepressible feminine soul shines as a paradoxical beacon. Suleika is driven by tradition as much as by freedom and melds these contrasts. The Suleika stories eerily parallel Brit's own experience as she searches for love and independence. Setton builds Suleika's story into a complex existential crossroads with the clear intention of using it as a mirror for Brit's. It depicts the dangers, temptations, and fatalities associated with bridging cultural divides; it makes comments on the influence and arbitrary nature of taboos; it invites us to think of history as if it contained the hidden patterns of art; and it challenges us to look deeper into this fiction to discover the historical pressures that shape it and to look deep into those small social details so as to add them to whatever history is being written. Setton has grounded the action of the book in clear and vivid bits rather than a dynamic storyline because she is trying to do so much on so many different levels. Each chapter ends with an excerpt from a foreign traveller to Morocco's history, an account from the past, an interview, or a song, all of which detail a different facet of Suleika's tale. Scenes from Brit's inner and outer life are interspersed with these fragments, including her memories of her time in Pennsylvania, which are themselves referred to as parts of future memoirs, archive reports, oral histories, or popular folklore.

As a result, it's striking how dominant and large some themes are in *The Road to Fez*. Themes of exile, displacement, rupture, and confrontation with the writer's own Otherness, all of which are derived from her situation as a cross-cultural migrant. The novel demonstrates that Ruth as one of Moroccan Jewish writers, ones who have been marginalized for years are capable of creating writing that boldly critiques hegemonic literature, language, and discourse. The writer's experiences with the homeland Morocco and its culture are what she is concerned with, not the ethnic distinctiveness that existed before. The moment the encounter with the homeland happened she made new ties to her collective histories, earlier languages, and ancestors' cultures.

Yet the tale under reading did not generate any findings; rather, it explored the process of remembering with its complexities and anxieties in the novel. Moroccan Jewish memory is still a fresh topic for further investigation in the future. We can say that in the ultimate deconstruction of memory discourse of exile, an important role will have to be played by Moroccan researchers, Jews and Muslims.

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