

Abraham Serfaty: Moroccan Jew and Conscious Pariah

Susan Slyomovics,
University of California, Los Angeles

Abraham Serfaty is renowned internationally and in his Moroccan homeland for his Marxist oppositional dissidence (directed against French colonialism and subsequently homegrown Moroccan repression), his almost two decades of political imprisonment, and his complex positioning as an anti-Zionist Arab Jew. Born in Casablanca in 1926, his biography as an activist and long-serving political prisoner encompassed the World War II Vichy-era of the French colonial Protectorate, the post-war nationalist struggles for independence, and the post-independence royal absolutism of the “years of lead.” His life and writings carry profound implications inasmuch as his lifetime witnessed the precipitous decline of the important Moroccan Jewish population from an estimated high of 250,000 people in 1948 to less than three thousand at the time of his death.¹ His progressive activism on the side of social justice for Palestinians no less than for his fellow Moroccan citizens and co-religionists imbued his identity as a Moroccan Jew to produce radical analyses and actions that profoundly distinguished his trajectory from the majority of Moroccan Jews.

Abraham Serfaty’s own words animate this essay which draws on numerous texts composed throughout his second lengthy incarceration period lasting seventeen years (1974-91) primarily in Kenitra Prison, Morocco’s preeminent penitentiary for political prisoners. Prison, clandestine existence, and exile gave Serfaty occasions to write. An outpouring of manifestos, tracts, articles, communiqués and books—some co-authored and signed, others pseudonymous and anonymous—emerged from spaces of forced confinement. His second exile in France (1991-99) generated reedited reflections on Jews and the question of Palestine which appeared in *Ecrits de prison sur la Palestine* (Prison writings on Palestine) and *Dans les prisons du roi: Ecrits de Kenitra sur le Maroc* (In the king’s prisons: Writings from Kenitra on Morocco). Published in 1992, both volumes of collected essays presented

1. Biographical materials are in “Abraham Serfaty,” *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier: Maghreb*, ed. Albert Ayache with René Gallissot and Georges Oved (Paris: Éditions de l’Atelier, 1998), 212, and Thomas K. Park and Aomar Boum, *Historical Dictionary of Morocco*, 3d edition (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 440-41. See also Susan Gilson Miller, *A History of Modern Morocco* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 158-61.

alternate Moroccan-inflected, Arab-Jewish experiences to challenge the various Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations of the time. A third work from 1993 is the joint memoir he co-authored with his wife, Christine Daure-Serfaty, entitled *La mémoire de l'autre* (Memory of the Other). In addition to my interviews with Abraham Serfaty and Christine Daure-Serfaty at her family home near Troyes, France on July 27-28, 1997, anthropologist Mikhaël Elbaz conducted interviews in 1996 with Serfaty published as *L'insoumis: Juifs, Marocains et rebelles* (The unsubdued: Jews, Moroccans and rebels).² From this corpus of interviews and publications, these main line of inquiry posed by Serfaty are considered: What does it mean for Moroccan Jews to remain in Morocco in the twenty-first century? In what ways are they linked to the fate of Palestinians in the distant eastern Mediterranean? What are roles for a Marxist, leftist, Jewish activist in a Muslim-majority country generally and specifically in Morocco?

Life and Writings

Abraham Serfaty's life was marked by intense periods of political and social activism overshadowed by years of internal exile in Moroccan prisons and external exile in France. He was first incarcerated briefly in 1944 by Vichy authorities at the age of 18 as a member of the Moroccan Communist Youth. Communism arrived to Morocco in the 1920s "in the suitcases of French nationals" as well as through the foundational leadership of Leon-René Sultan, an Algerian Jew, arabophone and French national, who made significant inroads among the growing urban working class.³ On Sultan's death in 1945, the party leader became Ali Yata (1920-1997), a key figure whose political career turns up at critical moments in the history of the Moroccan left's subsequent fragmentation. For Serfaty, a middle-class Jewish and French-educated urban Moroccan who came of age during the Second World War, the Moroccan Communist Party's broad organized resistance to fascism, colonialism, and racism invigorated spaces for progressive forces to build an inclusive membership base irrespective of nationality, class, ethnicity

2. French exile publications are *Ecrits de prison sur la Palestine* [Prison writings on Palestine] (Paris: Arcantère, 1992); *Dans les prisons du roi: Ecrits de Kenitra sur le Maroc* [In the king's prisons: Writings from Kenitra on Morocco] (Paris: Messidor, 1992); *Lutte antisioniste et révolution arabe* [Anti-Zionist struggle and Arab revolution] (Paris: Quatre vents, 1997); and co-authored with his wife Christine Daure-Serfaty, *La mémoire de l'autre* (Memory of the Other) (Paris: Stock, 1993). After his 1999 return to Morocco, his 1996 interviews were published as Abraham Serfaty and Mikhaël Elbaz. *L'insoumis: Juifs, Marocains et rebelles* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001).

3. Jamaâ Baida, "Le communisme colonial pendant la période coloniale (1912-56)," *Orient-Institut* 1 (2012): http://www.perspectivia.net/publikationen/orient-institut-studies/1-2012/baida_communisme. See also Alma Heckman, "Multivariable Casablanca: Vichy Law, Jewish Diversity, and the Communist Party" in this fascicule, 15-34.

or religion.⁴ He analyzed the urban Moroccan Jewish working classes in terms of specific historical, religious and class-based structural distinctions to the extent that he could assert in his 1996 interviews with Mikhaël Elbaz that Communism and Zionism were still practicable alternatives even after 1945, the year he left to study in France. At the same time, he rejected any comparisons between the situation of leftist Moroccan Jews and the Bund, the secular Jewish socialist labor and trade union movement of Eastern Europe. Unlike the Bundists, who claimed that Jews were a distinct nationalist group requiring separate Jewish leftist organizations, he saw the Moroccan Jewish proletariat of the post-war period anchored in the Moroccan working class and integrated into the Communist Party. For the Bund, the existence of a Jewish nation in the modern sense was a given. Perhaps because the Bund emerged from a European milieu of progressive activism, their unquestioned assumption was that a people are grouped into nations, whereas for Serfaty this presupposition was alien. Such striking differences between North African and Eastern European Jews were thematically embedded in Serfaty's thinking even as these lost opportunities were evoked:

... when I returned the following summer, in 1946, the Casablanca Jewish working class milieus were fully behind the Communist Party. In my eyes, they were like proletarians and oppressed class and not according to any "Bundist" pattern, which was foreign to us. The Communist Party did not know, unfortunately, how to build on this achievement.⁵

Except for his engineering studies in 1945-49 at the prestigious École des Mines in Paris where he joined the French Communist Party, there were two lengthy periods of exile that removed him from his Moroccan homeland. A

4. Recent scholarship on Maghrebi Jews under Vichy productively engages with complex issues surrounding Jewish emancipation, French colonialism, Muslim-Jewish alliances in the Communist Party, and nationalist independence movements. See for example, Robert Watson, "Between Liberation(s) and Occupation(s): Reconsidering the Emergence of Maghrebi Jewish Communism, 1942-1945," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 13, 3 (2014): 381-398; Mohammed Kenbib, "Moroccan Jews and the Vichy Regime, 1940-2," *Journal of North African Studies* 19, 4 (2014): 540-551; Aomar Boum, "Partners Against Anti-Semitism: Muslims and Jews Respond to Nazism in French North African Colonies, 1936-1940," *Journal of North African Studies* 19, 4 (2014): 554-570; and Susan Slyomovics, "French Restitution, German Compensation: Algerian Jews and Vichy's Financial Legacy," *Journal of North African Studies* 17, 5 (2012): 881-901. On the Moroccan labor movement, see Robert Montagne et al., *Naissance du Proletariat Marocain: enquête collective exécutée de 1948 à 1950* (Paris: Peyronnet & Cie, 1950).

5. Serfaty and Elbaz, *L'insoumis*, 100: "Et quand je revins l'été suivant, en 1946, les milieux populaires juifs de Casablanca étaient entièrement derrière le Parti communiste. A mes yeux, ils l'étaient comme prolétaires ou classe opprimée et non selon quelque schéma bundiste qui nous était étranger. Le Parti communiste n'a pas su, malheureusement, faire fructifier cet acquis." See also Jacob Moneta, *La politique du Parti communiste français dans la question coloniale, 1920-1963* (Paris: François Maspero, 1971); and Michael M. Laskier, "The Instability of Moroccan Jewry and the Moroccan Press in the First Decade after Independence," *Jewish History* 1,1 (1986): 39-54.

first expulsion (1952-56), ordered by France's Resident-General in Morocco, resulted from his role in the December 1952 Casablanca union strikes when he participated in protests over the assassination of Tunisian labor leader Ferhat Hached. Many militant nationalist and syndicalist leaders went underground, were exiled or incarcerated by the French Resident-General, including Ali Yata whose expulsion from Morocco mirrored Serfaty's experiences. Ali Yata's father, an Algerian long resident in Tangier, was legally deemed a French not a Moroccan subject as was his son.⁶ In Serfaty's case, the analogous pretext of his father's seventeen-year residence in Brazil prior to his birth made him both an undesirable and a Brazilian citizen:

The French policy of the Residency proclaimed that Jews are not in favor of independence. So there I was in the middle, pain in the ass as I still am. I was placed with French cadres on the same plane to France. I was notified about a deportation order that I did not sign. I was disembarked at Orly without anyone at any moment informing the French police that there was a Moroccan or a Brazilian on that plane. They did not say "Brazilian."⁷

At independence in 1956, Serfaty returned to Morocco and eventually found work as a mining engineer heading research for the nationalized Cherifian Phosphate Office (OCP), a state-owned monopoly controlling Morocco's immense phosphate reserves. In addition to nationalizing colonial-era resources, the newly independent Moroccan state in the early decades saw the monarchy solidifying its stranglehold over the national security apparatus and governance structures, aided by the fragmentation of the nationalist movement into warring political parties. Social progress in education, employment, and housing stagnated.

The year 1967 began a period of seismic upheavals. The defeat of the Arab armies in the wake of the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War resulted in the illegal Israeli annexation, occupation, dispossession and repression of the Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights. Reverberations from the 1967 *Naksa*, or "setback" in Palestine, were felt throughout the Arabic-speaking world deeply affecting an emerging generation of post-independence Moroccan intellectuals involved in literary and student movements. For example, Serfaty wrote in his 1974 preface introducing Abdellatif Laâbi's book of poems, *L'arbre de fer fleurit*:

6. Ali Yata, *Luttes derrière les barreaux* (Rabat: Éditions Al Bayane, 1996), 113-136.

7. Serfaty and Elbaz, *L'insoumis*, 111: "La politique française de la Résidence clamait que les Juifs ne sont pas pour l'indépendance. J'étais donc là au milieu, emmerdeur comme je le suis encore. J'ai été placé avec les cadres français dans le même avion direction de la France. On m'a notifié un arrêté d'expulsion que je n'ai pas signé. J'ai été débarqué à Orly sans qu'on ait à aucun moment signalé à la police française qu'il y avait un Marocain ou un Brésilien dans cet avion. Ils n'avaient pas dit "Brésilien."

Another fact, what forges the entire current generation of Arab revolutionaries was June 1967. ... In this way love and Revolution unite. In this way love integrates into the Revolution. ... In those moments in history when the conditions for the emergence of revolutionary thought have not yet crystallized, when knowledge is deflected, distorted, transformed into its opposite without any revolutionary response appearing, why is it that some minority of men capable of getting this knowledge can keep alive in the depths of their being the subterranean flame of their childhood, the subterranean flame of their people and their country?⁸

In 1968, Serfaty's active support in Khouribga of the fifty-day September-November strike by 7,000 phosphate miners cost him his job. That same year, he joined the collective editorial enterprise surrounding *Souffles* (Breaths), the influential cultural literary journal founded in 1966 and directed by Abdellatif Laâbi.⁹ Within the *Souffles* group, Serfaty and Laâbi became instrumental representatives of a new militancy drawing on Palestine and the literature of Palestinian resistance then experienced as the vanguard for political and literary revolutions. The ninth issue on Palestine, and subsequent bilingual French and Arabic editions of *Souffles/Anfas* as of May 1971, heralded the formation of a new literary national culture linked internationally to other revolutionary Third World movements.¹⁰ Serfaty, Laâbi and the editorial board

8. Written under the pseudonym Ahmed Tariq, Serfaty's preface and Laâbi's poems were smuggled from Morocco for publication in France. Ahmed Tariq [pseudonym of Abraham Serfaty], "Preface," in Abdellatif Laâbi, *L'arbre de fer fleurit* (Paris: P. J. Oswald, 1974), ii: "L'autre fait, celui qui forge toute la génération actuelle de révolutionnaires arabes ce fut juin 1967... Ainsi s'unissent l'amour et la Révolution. Ainsi s'intègre l'amour à la Révolution... Dans ces moments de l'histoire où les conditions à l'émergence de la pensée révolutionnaire ne sont pas encore cristallisées, où la connaissance est déviée, déformée, transformée en son contraire sans qu'une riposte révolutionnaire apparaisse, pourquoi quelques-uns parmi cette minorité d'hommes qui ont pu accéder à cette connaissance peuvent-ils garder vivante au fond d'eux-mêmes la flamme souterraine de leur enfance, la flamme souterraine de leur peuple et leur pays?"

9. KENZA Sefrioui, *Larevue Souffles: 1966-1973: Espoirs de révolution culturelle au Maroc* (Casablanca: Éditions du Sirocco, 2013). *Souffles* began in 1966 and an Arabic edition *Anfas* in 1971. It was disbanded in Morocco in January 1972 continuing in exile in Paris until 1973. See also Olivia Harrison and Teresa Villa-Ignacio, eds. *Souffles-Anfas: A Critical Anthology from the Moroccan Journal of Culture and Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

10. See issues of *Souffles* made available online: <http://bnm.bnrm.ma:86/pdf.aspx?IDc=464>.

For the importance of Palestine to Moroccan intellectuals, see Olivia C. Harrison, *Transcolonial Maghreb: Imagining Palestine in the Era of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015). On the history of the Moroccan Marxist student movements of the 1970s and 80s, see Mostefa Bouaziz, "Mouvements sociaux et mouvement national au Maroc," in *Émeutes et mouvements sociaux au Maghreb*, ed. Didier Le Saout and Marguerite Rollinde (Paris: Karthala, 1999), 67-78; and Bouaziz, *al-Yasar al-maghribi al-jadid (1965-1979)* [The Moroccan New Left] (Marrakesh: Dar Tinnel, 1993), 35-82. According to Moroccan novelist Abdelkader Chaoui, who was a Marxist student and political prisoner with Serfaty, the movement was a failure because there was no worker participation, see his =

membership overlapped with a variety of radicalized student groups resulting in the production of a short-lived journal (1966-71) known for extraordinary strong writing combined with theoretical and visual sophistication. The French-language version published three times a year had a print run of 2000, while the Arabic-language issues were increased to 10,000 printed journals each month.¹¹

By 1970, multiple internal and external fissures splintered the Moroccan left. The Moroccan Communist Party, disbanded in 1960, returned after 1963 under the name Parti de Libération et Socialisme (PLS) and headed by Ali Yata. Adherents were confronted with stark alternatives: join and work legally with the regime (*communistes marocains makhzénisés*¹²), as did the PLS, or go underground. A vast gulf emerged around the specific core issue of the perceived complicity of the PLS with the regime. The PLS and government support of the December 1969 US-instigated “Rogers Plan” to broker a peace agreement between Israel and Palestine was labeled a betrayal of the Palestinian revolution, and became another reason for rupture in the new Moroccan left influenced in general by worldwide youth movements, the Vietnam war, the Black Panther movement in the US, and the Chinese experience.¹³ All this contributed to the official founding of the clandestine Marxist-Leninist revolutionary group *Ilā al-Amām* (“Onwards” in English and *En avant* in French) whose name, according to Serfaty, was taken from a journal title of the same name issued by another leftist group, “23 March.” Like *Souffles/Anfas*, its leadership included Serfaty and Laâbi who called the first constitutive assembly in Serfaty’s Rabat apartment on August 30, 1970.

While individuals were legal and active, the group was illegal, remaining successfully below government radar until 1972 when swift government crackdowns against oppositional political groups swept the country. Laâbi and others were in prison by 1972. Serfaty, too was arrested in 1972, then released, went underground and was rearrested in 1974. In my 1997 interview, he brings together his 1972 and 1974 arrests, which were historically different stages in the regime’s grasp of the movement’s radical transformation. In 1972, the police targeted student leaders never imagining Serfaty as the head of a new revolutionary left movement while nonetheless torturing him as a

= *al-Yasār fī al-Maghrib, 1970-1974* [The Left in Morocco] (Rabat: Manshurat ‘Ali al-‘Aql, 1992). For Serfaty’s history of *Ilā al-Amām* composed while in prison, see his “Vingt années de luttes et de fermeté révolutionnaires: Notes pour une histoire d’*Ilā al-Amām*,” in Serfaty, *Dans les prisons du roi*, 186-206.

11. Interview with Abdellatif Laâbi, Créteil, France, July 29, 1997 who said the authorities confiscated almost all 10,000 journals of the *Anfas* Arabic print run for the number 5 issue.

12. I draw this term from the blog of Ahmed Benani, an exiled Moroccan academic at the University of Lausanne: <http://ahmedbenanilausannech.blogspot.com/2012/01/la-saga-des-yata-toujours-au-top-malgre.html>

13. The *Souffles* editorial of August 17, 1970, no. 18 was the only Moroccan journal to denounce the Rogers Plan, see Ahmed Tariq [pseudonym of Abraham Serfaty], “Preface,” in Laâbi, *L’arbre de fer fleurit*, viii.

Jew. Serfaty insisted that Ali Yata, his former comrade and head of the rival PLS, was the source of the double betrayal, both of the movement and the secret of his leadership. Only in 1974-1976 when these clandestine leftist organizations were destroyed, would his torturers taunt him with his dream of overthrowing the monarchy to become President of a Moroccan republic:

Ali Yata—you can publish that, I don't care in the end—went to find the police to tell them, “These movements are x, y, Laâbi and Serfaty,” like that. The police knew nothing at all. On January 27, it was a Thursday morning, four days there was a holiday for ‘Id il-Kebir falling on Thursday to Sunday at the time. At dawn they come to get us each at our homes to take us to the police station, the mess was such—it was not the top police it was the local political police but from Rabat—that not on Thursday but I don't know what day, we stayed one week in the police station, it had to be on Monday, they left me in an office, in the desk drawer is a questionnaire. There were five questions that showed they knew nothing at all. But I discovered that under torture, I laughed under torture when I discovered. I had two sessions, it was not yet the great specialists of Casa at Derb Moulay Cherif, they were the students, but it was nonetheless torture. And the general theme of the torturers was to say, “Speak or you will die, anyway you lost, damned, it's not worth it, you bet you will be President of the Moroccan Republic you lost, you have only to talk.” That's what they did with the others which always worked moreover, but with us it, didn't work ...

Bizarrely, under torture all these cops were using the not “tu” but the “vous” form: “Do you know Mrs. Chiche?” So she is a wonderful Tunisian Jewish woman, a geographer, who lived in Morocco because she was married at the time to a guy who was in the Communist Party (PC), a Muslim Moroccan. But then in the logic of the cops, I was Jewish, she was Jewish, we were both PC so if I had a relationship it was necessarily a Jewish brotherhood ... I understood right away that they knew absolutely nothing. And suddenly under my blindfold ... the dirty rag that was over the mouth, I was extremely happy because there I had the proof that they knew nothing at all.¹⁴

14. Serfaty interview: “Ali Yata, ça tu peut le publier, mais enfin ça m'est égal, a été trouver la police pour leur dire, “Ces mouvements-là, c'est x, y, Laâbi, et Serfaty,” comme ça. La police savait rien de rien. Le 27 janvier, c'était un jeudi matin, y'avait quatre jours de fête pour l'Id il-Kebir qui tombait à ce moment là du jeudi au dimanche. A l'aube ils viennent nous chercher chacun chez soi pour nous emmener au commissariat. La pagaille était telle—c'était pas le sommet de la police c'était la police locale politique mais de Rabat—que non pas le jeudi mais je sais pas quel jour. On est resté qu'une semaine dans le commissariat, ça devait être le lundi, ils m'ont laissé dans un bureau. Dans le tiroir du bureau se trouve le questionnaire, il y avait cinq questions qui montraient qu'ils savaient rien du tout.=

From 1974-76, the dynamic leadership of the Marxist left, but not the movement's ideas, was dismantled ending up imprisoned, underground or outside the country. A corrupt judiciary handed down lengthy or life sentences preceded by secret detentions, forcible disappearance, torture, and farcical mass trials for political pursuits labeled dissident. Serfaty endured multiple torture sessions and prison stays amounting to almost two decades, counting him among Morocco's longest serving and oldest political prisoners.¹⁵ When twice deported and exiled to France, each time he was stripped of Moroccan citizenship (first under the French Protectorate in 1952 and subsequently in 1991 by King Hassan II) using the same spurious reasoning: he was labeled Brazilian and thereby denied his Moroccan nationality.¹⁶ A 2013 newspaper article points to Ali Yata, who shared Serfaty's French colonial-era expulsion based on a father's foreign citizenship. He returned to historical and structurally parallel conditions to become the source for providing the monarchy with bogus legal means to remove Serfaty permanently from Morocco.¹⁷

Serfaty returned home on September 30, 1999, welcomed back as a hero, militant, and human rights activist. Among his first visits was to the miners of Khouribga whose 1968 workers' strike he had staunchly defended as management for those same mines.¹⁸ He died in Marrakesh, Morocco in 2010 at the age of 84 and was buried in the Ben M'sik Jewish cemetery of Casablanca.

Prison and the Struggle for Moroccan Human Rights

Serfaty idealistically dubbed Kenitra Prison the sole uncensored, freethinking and liberated zone in the kingdom of Morocco (*la première zone*

=Mais ça je l'ai découvert sous la torture, je rigolais sous la torture quand j'ai découvert ça. J'ai eu deux séances, c'était pas encore les grands spécialistes de Casa Derb Moulay Cherif, c'étaient les élèves, mais enfin c'était quand même la torture. Et alors le thème général des tortionnaires c'était de dire: "Parle ou tu vas mourir, de toute façon tu as perdu, foutu, c'est pas la peine d'insister, tu as parié être Président de la République Marocaine, tu as perdu mais tu as plus qu'à parler." C'est ce qu'ils faisaient avec les autres, ce qu'à toujours marché d'ailleurs, mais avec nous ça marchait pas ...

Bizarrement sous la torture tous ces flics m'ont pas tutoyé–vouvoyé: "Connaissez-vous Mme Chiche? Alors Mme Chiche c'est une brave juive tunisienne, géographe, Jeanne Chiche qui habitait le Maroc parce qu'elle s'était mariée à l'époque à un gars qui était du PC, un marocain musulman. Mais alors dans la logique des flics, moi j'étais juif, elle était juive, on était tous les deux au PC donc si j'avais une relation, c'était forcément dans la confrérie juive ... J'ai compris tout de suite qu'ils savaient strictement rien. Et du coup sous mon bandeau ... le chiffon sale qui était sur la bouche, j'étais heureux comme tout parce que j'avais la preuve qu'ils savaient rien du tout.

15. See his 1985 article on torture and solitary confinement written and published when he was a political prisoner: Abraham Serfaty, "Face aux tortionnaires," *Les temps modernes* 477 (1986): 1-27. He mentioned to Elbaz that he even in 1996, he still could not reread it, see Serfaty and Elbaz, *L'insoumis*, 154. See also Susan Slyomovics, *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 98-99.

16. For the full dossier on his struggle for return, see Abraham Serfaty, *Le Maroc: Du noir au gris*, 119 onward.

17. In addition to Benani's blog (footnote 10), see Hassan Hamdan, "Le palais flottant de Hassan II," *Telquel* June 26, 2013, cover story.

18. Serfaty interview, Mohammedia, Morocco, January 21, 2000.

*libérée du Maroc*¹⁹), highlighting the irony of a prison administration that grouped together all political prisoners in the same detention sites. Following his sardonic terminology, they convened “bi-annual congresses” (*congrès semestriel*) that reunited every variety of political persuasion over hunger strikes, the right to pursue higher education, health visits, and long term sojourns together in prison wards. Moroccan political prisoner Mohamed Srfi, who experienced nineteen years of political detention, informed me that prison functions as a university where human rights are nurtured. He too maintained that paradoxically it was the only free space in his country. Srfi and Serfaty were imprisoned together for non-violent activities, sharing with many prisoners of conscience elsewhere the emotions of “spiteful euphoria” under oppression.²⁰ According to all relevant indicators, those punished solely because of their beliefs should suffer; they do not thrive. Dissidents, and often their families, occupy the lowest social ranks at the mercy of an authoritarian regime’s practices that include intimidation, torture, deliberate deprivation of adequate standards of health and access to education, and the constriction of emotional well being through minimal contacts with family and friends. Nonetheless, as literary critic Simona Livescu notes, their “abrupt initiation into prison happiness, at times individual and at times collective, infuses political prisoners with unique civic values that reverberate in their communities after release.”²¹ Having demanded their jailers, torturers and politicians adhere to international human rights norms while within prison, they were transformed into the model and focal point for massive human rights monitoring and organizing both inside and outside Morocco.

Propelled to organize by the existence of a large and important political prisoner population, several key organizations, family support groups, and influential European non-governmental entities were established in the late 1970s dedicated to keeping alive the links to those incarcerated for their beliefs.²² Once released into the population, the political prisoners struggle for human rights in Morocco persisted and spread. Journalist Miriam Rosen, for example, reported on Serfaty’s 1991 arrival in France after his second expulsion:

19. Serfaty, *Dans les prisons du roi*, 29, and echoed in my 1997 interview with Serfaty: “Entre 1980 et 1984 Kénitra est devenue le pôle culturel et diplomatique de tout le Maroc (July 28, 1997).

20. Soviet Gulag inmate Vladimir Bukovsky coined this phrase in his *To Build a Castle: My Life as a Dissenter* (New York: Viking Press, 1979), 128. See also Susan Slyomovics, “Happiness, Human Rights, and the Arab Spring,” *American Anthropologist* 114, 1 (2011): 14-15.

21. Simona Livescu, “Deviating from the Norm? Two Easts Testify to a Prison Aesthetics of Happiness,” in *Human Rights, Suffering, and Aesthetics in Political Prison Literature*, eds. Yenna Wu and Simona Livescu (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 185.

22. Marguerite Rollinde, *Le mouvement marocain des droits de l’Homme* (Paris: Karthala, 2002), 163-339.

... the first words out of his mouth, as he [Serfaty] stood in the doorway of the Royal Air Maroc plane that had brought him to France, were: “I have two protests to raise!” Before placing a foot on French territory, he denounced the continued detention of his three comrades from Block A of Kenitra Prison, as well as that of other political, military and ordinary prisoners living in “unbearable and undescrivable conditions,” notably in the secret penal colony of Tazmamart in the High Atlas, and then went on to protest the “farce” of his expulsion from Morocco as a Brazilian citizen. Less than a week later, the 30-odd survivors of Tazmamart, half of the number imprisoned there in 1973, were removed—some to Kenitra, others directly to the hospital—and the infamous prison-fortress was razed to the ground.²³

Many ideas, achievements and personalities contributing to Morocco’s path-breaking 2004-5 Truth and Reconciliation Commission—an entity which pioneered public testimonies, government apologies, financial reparations, medical care, and regional development projects—emerged from the space of prison and the era of the “Years of Lead.”

The Conscious Moroccan Jewish Pariah

To account for the mass migration of Moroccan Jewry, historians point to multiple local and global conditions that constitute what Alma Heckman terms “the tropes of a slow Moroccan Jewish deracination.”²⁴ These explanations include French colonialism and the loss of traditional Jewish occupations, the Westernization of Moroccan Jewish elites and Vichy’s betrayal of French Republican ideals, anti-Semitism, the rising tide of a hegemonic Moroccan Arab-Islamic nationalism that admitted neither religious nor linguistic minorities, Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel, and the Israel-Palestine wars.²⁵ Unlike Jews in neighboring Algeria granted French

23. Miriam Rosen, “For Another Kind of Morocco: An Interview with Abraham Serfaty,” MERIP/Middle East Report 179: <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer179/another-kind-morocco>. See Human Rights Watch World Report 1992: Events of 1991, 814.

24. Alma Heckmann, “*Radical Nationalists: Moroccan Jewish Communists 1925-1975*,” (Ph.D dissertation, University of California Los Angeles, 2015), 245.

25. Selected works from a vast literature are Michael M. Laskier, *Israel and the Maghreb: From Statehood to Oslo* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004); Mohammed Kenbib, *Juifs et Musulmans au Maroc: 1859-1948* (Rabat: Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, 1994); Michel Abitbol, *Les Juifs d’Afrique du Nord sous Vichy* (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve & Larose, 1983); Simon Lévy, “Les juifs et la libération nationale au Maroc,” in Simon Lévy, 63-67 (*Essais d’histoire et de civilisation judéo-marocaines* (Rabat: Centre Tarik Ibn Ziyad, 2001); reprinted from *Perspectives Nouvelles* (1981): 87-90; idem, “La communauté juive dans le contexte de l’histoire du Maroc du XVII^e siècle à nos jours,” *Juifs du Maroc: Identité et dialogue*, 105-52 (Grenoble: La Pensée Sauvage, 1980); idem, “Entre l’intégration et la diaspora (de l’indépendance à nos jours),” in *Les juifs du Maroc: Images et textes*, ed. André Goldenberg, 90-95 (Paris: Éditions du Scribe, 1992).

nationality through the Crémieux Decree of 1870, Moroccan Jews invested in Francophone western-oriented culture were barred from obtaining French nationality. Historians Samir Ben-Layashi and Bruce Maddy-Weizman state the prevailing conclusion: “the alternative, an embrace of Moroccan national identity which was about to be propagated by Moroccan nationalists was not viable either.”²⁶

What about those Moroccan Jews who choose precisely that alternative and become a self-declared, widely acknowledged and viable exception? Serfaty reminded me in our 1997 interview that fellow Communist Party members spoke of his defense of Palestinians in 1967 as cementing his status as “the exception of the exception of the exception” (*l’exception de l’exception de l’exception*). Exceptionalism was a two-way street: the exceptional Jew would be treated differently. Despite a comprehensive 1994 royal pardon bestowed on many political refugees, Serfaty exceptionally was not permitted to return to his homeland until King Mohammed VI’s succession to the throne in 1999. Serfaty believed that King Hassan II singled him out for an endless exile precisely because he was a Jew who broke the age-old pact of “dhimmitude” which governed relations in the pre-colonial Muslim-majority state between Moroccan monarchs and their second-class Jewish subjects:

Why am I the only exile whose return home is refused unless in the prisons of the king? The *makhzen* cannot and did not tolerate us having a citizen’s voice. The *makhzen* does not date back to Hassan II. You know it, the first *mellah* of Fez was founded by the Merinids in 1438. This was the guardianship [*tutelle*] of the Jews that they remain unheard, except the court Jews whom they made use of. A Jew in opposition, that’s unthinkable ... Obviously unbearable, Simon Lévy was the opposition in the PC [Communist Party]. He was accepted but the authorities [*Pouvoir*] tortured him almost to death in 1965. This was not by chance.²⁷

26. Samir Ben-Layashi and Bruce Maddy-Weizman, “Myth, History and *Realpolitik*: Morocco and its Jewish Community,” in *Muslim Attitudes to Jews and Israel: The Ambivalences of Rejection, Antagonism, Tolerance and Cooperation*, ed. Moshe Ma’oz (Brighton, Eng: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 132-133. Their point of view also informs Walter Laqueur, “Jews and Communists in the Islamic World: A Note on Abraham Serfaty and Henri Curriel,” in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* (Dark Times, Dire Decisions: Jews and Communism) 20 (2004): 227-235.

27. Serfaty and Elbaz, *L’insoumis*, 143: “Pourquoi suis-je le seul exilé don’t on refuse le retour chez lui, fût-ce dans les géôles du roi? Le *makhzen* ne peut et ne pouvait tolérer que nous ayons une voix citoyenne. Le *makhzen* ne date pas de Hassan II. Tu le sais, le premier *mellah* à Fès a été fondé par les Mérinides en 1438. Ce fut la tutelle des Juifs qui devaient rester inaudibles, sauf les Juifs de cour dont il se servait. Un Juif opposant, c’est impensable. ... Évidemment insupportable. Simon Lévy était l’opposition du PC. Il était accepté mais le Pouvoir l’a torturé à mort en mars 1965. Ce n’est pas par hasard.”

Although Serfaty's writings have recourse to a similar configuration of explanatory tropes for the departure of Moroccan Jewry, he arrives at strikingly different conclusions. Not only did he point to Arab nationalists in Morocco effacing the undeniable rootedness of Moroccan Judaism and the Jewish presence in the Maghreb over millennia, he also emphasized a shared heritage of Muslim and Jewish *convivencia* carried across the Mediterranean from al-Andalus and Sefarad. "New Andalusias" in North Africa were visionary possibilities even in 1998, one year before his last return was finally authorized, when he penned from exile in France a plea entitled, "Why I want to return home!":

At such times when the hope of peace, justice, brotherhood in the Holy Land is being challenged in the name of a Judaism of hatred and fanaticism, I must testify, in this country where my roots are, that the Judaism of our fathers is not like this. I must continue to bear witness to my last breath. Perhaps my life, here and there, will contribute to (strengthening the fervor of) fomenting New Andalusias of the future.²⁸

The glories of Islam and Judaism in creating Spain's Golden Age once transplanted to North Africa had continued to flourish in a second encounter with centuries of a pre-Islamic Jewish presence entwined in Arab-Muslim-Berber cultures of Morocco. Not in medieval Spain but rather in Morocco, Serfaty insisted, were to be found genuine historical relations and symbiosis between Muslims and Jews.²⁹ Indeed, he traced his surname Serfaty and his ancestry to the twelfth-century Torah commentator Rashi, the acronym for Rabbi Shlomo Yitskhaki, known as *ha-tsorfati*, the "Frenchman." His family in Tangiers claimed a collateral lineage from Spanish rabbis bearing the name Serfaty, who belonged to waves of expelled Andalusians fleeing the Reconquista to Morocco. For Serfaty, it was in the Jewish minority quarters of each *mellah* that were to be found the veritable Jerusalem.³⁰

28. "En ces temps où l'espoir de paix, de justice, de fraternité en Terre Sainte est remis en cause au nom d'un judaïsme de haine et fanatisme, il me faut témoigner, dans ce pays où sont mes racines, que le judaïsme de nos pères n'est pas celui-là. Il me faut continuer d'en témoigner, jusqu'à mon dernier souffle. Peut-être ma vie aura-t-elle contribué à ce que, ici et là-bas, prennent force les ferments des Nouvelles Andalousies de l'avenir," Abraham Serfaty, "Pourquoi, je veux rentrer chez moi!" *Le journal* (3 August-6 September 1998), 11 reprinted from Abraham Serfaty, *Le Maroc: Du noir au gris*, 119-20, dated July-August 1996.

29. For *convivencia* as an elite trope of performing interfaith relations without substantive change, see Aomar Boum, "The Performance of Convivencia: Communities of Tolerance and the Reification of Toleration," *Religion Compass* vol. 6, no. 3 (2012): 174-184.

30. Serfaty interview, 1997. These claims also appear in the Serfaty family tree found in "Arbre généalogique de la famille Hassarfati-Serfaty," *ETSI: Revue de généalogie et d'histoire Sepharade* 29 (June 2005), available at <http://www.sephardicgen.com/HaserfatyFamilyTree.pdf>.

Yet Serfaty's claims for his own authenticity and primacy as both a Moroccan and a Jew signal how rarely he wrote and spoke about issues of Jewishness or traditional Moroccan Judaism except as cultural and religious counterweights to an imported, corrupting Zionism. Aware that his universalist leftist convictions distanced him from the Jewish social milieu, he was, in his own words, "progressively dejudaised" (*progressivement une déjudaisation*).³¹ His worldview disregarded rural and poor Jews carrying traditional beliefs about the longed-for messianic return to Zion. Thus, he maintained his fight against what he deemed their tragic fusion and confusion with Zionism's urgent message that Israel was the sole refuge for world Jewry.³² Serfaty was too steeped in the French republican values of liberty, social justice and equality, despite historical evidence that the Protectorate, notably during the Vichy years, would never support such principles for their colonial subjects. Certainly his 2002 introduction to Arlette Berdugo's fine-grained ethnography of educational and religious structures of the post-independence Moroccan Jewish community retained a focus on what still mattered most to him, which was the confluence of citizenship and nationality, an issue always a question mark for Moroccan Jews:

Moroccan Jewry claimed right from the start of independence for Morocco a change of status to one of a citizen, as if the protection of a modern king, as King Mohammed VI today, is not enough.³³

Against the prevailing Zionist teleology of Jewish history, which posits the ingathering of worldwide Jewry from diasporic exile to Israel, Serfaty declared, "*Je ne suis pas en exil* (I am not in exile)."³⁴ Serfaty shared with a minority Jewish community of those who remained in Morocco a remarkably parallel and double vision of exile and homeland in relation to diasporic Moroccan Jews: "their place in Casablanca was part of a global Jewish diaspora but also was a homeland for a Moroccan Jewish diaspora."³⁵ Consequently, Israel is the principal diasporic location for Moroccan Jews

31. Serfaty and Elbaz, *L'insoumis*, 100.

32. Aomar Boum, "From 'Little Jerusalems' to the Promised Land: Zionism, Moroccan Nationalism, and Rural Jewish Emigration," *Journal of North African Studies* 15, 1 (2010): 51-69.

33. "La communauté juive marocaine a revendiqué dès les prémices de l'indépendance du Maroc, son passage du statut à celui de citoyen, comme si la protection d'un Roi moderne, comme l'est Mohammed VI aujourd'hui, ne lui suffisait pas," Abraham Serfaty, "Note lumineuse," in Arlette Berdugo, *Juives et Juifs dans le Maroc contemporain: Images d'un devenir* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 2002), 5.

34. "*Je ne suis pas en exil* ... Car, aujourd'hui, transplantés dans cette entité sioniste ou tout leur est étranger, les juifs arabes sont en effet en exil," in Serfaty, *Ecrits de prison sur la Palestine*, 63 (italics in original).

35. André Levy, "A Community That is Both a Center and a Diaspora: Jews in Late Twentieth Century Morocco," in *Homelands and Diasporas: Holy Lands and Other Places*, ed. André Levy and Alex Weingrod. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 69.

while France and Canada merely trace new migration routes. Serfaty goes further by insisting that it is these communities of deracinated Moroccan Jews in France, Canada, and Israel who are in point of fact in exile. This is because the existence of Zionism was contrary to the existence of Arab Judaism (*judaïsme arabe*). Inevitably Moroccan Jewry must suffer and live these contradictions according to the logic of dialectical materialism in which Zionism is not only in opposition to Arab Judaism, it is the very negation of its core values:

Zionism is fundamentalism, we can fight it only by opposing the other side of religion, that of justice and love of neighbor. This aspect is very present in all the biblical texts, and even more in the Zohar, which remains central to Moroccan Judaism. The conception of the Zohar is radically different from classical Jewish orthodoxy. It recalls that the prophecy of the Messiah is not for Jews only in Palestine but through Jews dispersed throughout the world, to all humanity. This is the deep spirit of Moroccan Judaism.³⁶

Serfaty's conception of Kabbalism and the Zohar participates in a heterodox version of Judaism that by the seventeenth century had arrived to Tripoli (present day Libya) in the person of Abraham Miguel Cardozo, a major thinker for the Sabbatean movement. What may have circulated even further westward to Morocco, perhaps brought by itinerant scholar rabbis confronting a deeply-rooted Maghrebi Judaism, was a reinterpretation, indeed a radical reversal of Lurianic Kabbalistic principles around the meaning of the Messiah. While this connection remains historically conjectural, it is the case that an influential number of Jewish mystical thinkers in North Africa explicated core precepts such that the Messianism espoused in the Zohar, a core text for Serfaty and his father, need not conclude with the "return" to Israel. Cardozo, three centuries before Serfaty, insisted that he too did not experience exile in Amsterdam or Tripoli, but rather the coming of the Messiah meant the Jews would be a free and equal people:

When the Redeemer comes, the Jews will be living among the Gentiles even after their salvation is accomplished. But they will not be dead men, as they had been previously. Through their

36. "Le sionisme est un intégrisme, on ne peut le combattre qu'en lui opposant l'autre versant de la religion, celui de la justice et l'amour du prochain. Cet aspect est très présent dans tous les textes bibliques, et plus encore dans le Zohar, qui reste central pour le judaïsme marocain. La conception du Zohar est radicalement différente de celle de l'orthodoxie juive classique. Il rappelle que la prophétie du Messie n'est pas destinée aux seuls juifs en Palestine, mais, à travers les juifs dispersés dans le monde, à l'humanité tout entière. Voilà l'esprit profond du judaïsme marocain." Abraham Serfaty, *Ecrits de prison sur la Palestine*, 24.

redemption they will experience happiness, enjoy dignity and honor.³⁷

Thus, Serfaty's responses as to why he remained in Morocco went beyond his territorial birthright, natural affective attachments to a homeland, or nostalgia for igniting a new *convivencia* on behalf of the twenty-first century Arab world. Certainly the memory of his political comrades' incapacity to grasp his position as an anti-Zionist Moroccan Jew in 1967 still gnawed at his consciousness in 1996. Marxism and Judaism may appear contradictory but in the person of Serfaty they were mutually reinforcing. During those times when he should have felt trapped between the two intransigencies of Arab nationalism and Zionism, instead he insisted that his Jewish identity was strengthened:

Never had I felt my Jewishness more strongly. When I was ten, I recall my father telling me in the synagogue: "Zionism is against our religion." I remembered the pilgrimage with my parents, at the age of fourteen, to the tomb of Rabbi Amran Ben Diwan, under the olive tree of Asjen near Ouezzane. What did it matter to no longer believe in God, this past, I could not tear out this olive tree of the land from my being, this age-old olive tree under which so many of my ancestors had prayed. My roots were there, in the depths of the soil. Would I accept that my Moroccan Jewish brothers go to the Holy Land, that land of Palestine where Rabbi Amran came from, to tear out olive trees? Would I accept that they go there to execute half-naked Palestinians? I screamed out against all this. And I added a call "to my Arab brothers." Without really believing in it. To save somewhere in me this principle.³⁸

37. Abraham Miguel Cardozo: *Selected Writings*, trans. and introd by David J. Halperin (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 48-49. I thank Gabriel Piterberg for introducing me to the works of Cardozo and pointing me to Cardozo's insistence that he was not in exile outside the Holy Land. See Gabriel Piterberg, "'But Was I Really Primed?': Gershom Scholem's Zionist Project," in *Historical Teleologies in the Modern World*, eds. Henning Truper, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 275-299.

38. Serfaty and Elbaz, *L'insoumis*, 18: "Jamais je n'avais senti plus vive ma judéité. Je me souvenais de mon père lorsque j'avais dix ans, me disant à la synagogue: Le sionisme est contraire de notre religion." Je me rappelais ce pèlerinage avec mes parents, à l'âge de quatorze ans, au tombeau de Rabbi Amran Ben Diwan, sous un olivier d'Asjen près d'Ouezzane. Qu'importait de ne plus croire en dieu, ce passé, je ne pouvais pas plus l'arracher de mon être que cet olivier de la terre, cet olivier séculaire sous lequel tant de mes ancêtres avaient prié. Mes racines étaient là, dans les profondeurs de ce sol. Allais-je accepter que mes frères juifs marocains partent en Terre sainte, cette terre de Palestine d'où était venu Rabbi Amran, pour en arracher les oliviers? Allais-je accepter qu'ils y aillent pour exécuter des palestiniens à demi nus? Je criais contre tout cela. Et j'ajoutais un appel "à mes frères arabes." Sans vraiment y croire. Pour sauvegarder quelque part en moi un principe,"

Serfaty began writing these analyses in 1967, a watershed point in time for Moroccan Jewish and Muslim relations occasioned by the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. In my 1997 interviews while he was still exiled in France, Serfaty claimed he “returned to the world” after 1967 when he was recalled to activism after reading the “Manifesto of the 5 June 1967” by Lebanese poet Adonis, which was republished in French translation in *Souffles*:³⁹

Laâbi like all of us was shattered by what happened in the East. I recall one of the next issues [of *Souffles*], he had published this poem of Adonis, the Lebanese poet who said, I believe that it began with the verse, “On June 5, I came back to the world,” meaning that the Arab intellectual who was outside and there was faced with this reality. Good. So that I experienced just like Laâbi just like Adonis experienced it but I experienced it as an Arab Jew, a term that did not yet exist in people’s minds or in mine at the time. I discovered because in my technical work I had remained a little behind of Morocco’s social realities in the preceding years and that both Muslim and Jewish communities who had always lived in fraternity until 1960 to 1961—we should relive this period after independence that was a tremendous momentum to everyone, Muslims and Jews, to build a modern Morocco—and suddenly, I realized that these two communities was opposed to each other, face to face, and that was terrible. And it was all the more terrible for me as I realized that within the Moroccan Communist Party, which nevertheless should have gone beyond this confrontation, things were the same way. And I understood moreover also in this context that there the only outcome was revolutionary, while being deeply convinced, by the famous line by Victor Hugo: “If there is only one left, I will be that one.”⁴⁰

39. Adonis, “Le Manifeste de 5 juin 1967,” *Souffles* 9 (1968): 1-11: <http://bnm.bnm.ma:86/pdf.aspx?IDc=717>, first published in French translation by Mirèse Akar and Renée Asmar: “Ali Ahmad Said, (Adonis), ‘Le Manifeste de 5 juin 1967,’ *Esprit* (Nouvelle série) No. 369 (3) (March 1968): 431-445 available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/24258234?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

40. Serfaty interview, 1997: “Laâbi comme nous tous avons été bouleversé par ce qui s’est passé en Orient. Je me rappelle un des numéros suivants, il avait publié ce poème d’Adonis, le poète libanais qui disait, je crois que ça commençait par le vers, “Le 5 juin je suis revenu au monde,” c’est à dire que l’intellectuel arabe qui était en dehors et qui là était face à cette réalité. Bon. Alors ça j’ai vécu comme l’a vécu Laâbi comme l’a vécu Adonis, mais je l’ai vécu comme arabe juif, un terme qui n’existait pas encore dans les têtes des gens ni dans la mienne à l’époque. j’ai découvert parce que dans mon travail technique j’étais resté un petit peu en retrait des réalités sociales du Maroc dans les années précédentes que ces deux communautés musulmane et juive qui avaient vécu toujours en fraternité jusqu’en 1960-61—il faudrait revivre cette période d’après l’indépendance qui a été un élan formidable de tout le monde, musulmans et juifs, pour construire un Maroc moderne—et tout d’un coup, je réalisais que ces deux communautés était opposées l’une à l’autre, face à face, ça a été terrible. Et ça été d’autant plus terrible pour moi que je réalisais que au sein du Parti communiste Marocain qui pourtant devait avoir dépassé cet affrontement, les choses existaient de la même façon. Et j’ai compris d’ailleurs dans ce cadre-là qu’il n’y avait d’issue que révolutionnaire. Tout en étant profondément convaincu, c’est le fameux vers de Victor Hugo: “S’il n’en reste qu’un je serai celui-la.”

Eventually, he embraced the revived 1960s compound appellation of “Arab Jew” (*juif arabe* and *al-yahudi al-‘arabi*⁴¹), one that most Moroccans found unintelligible because in Morocco one was either an Arab or a Jew.

As a Jewish-Moroccan, the necessity for radicalism was much more obvious than for a Muslim-Moroccan. Or one had to leave. For me the choice was not even to remain by accommodating to the system. It was to confront this system or leave.⁴²

Adjectives to describe Serfaty were *indésirable* (undesirable), *insoumis* (rebellious), *emmerdeur* (pain in the ass) and *irréductible* (diehard). In the 1969 special issue of the journal *Souffles* dedicated to Palestine, he returned to the particularity of the Jewish diehard given the latest fresh wave of mass departures by Moroccan Jews in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War:

They will say, they have said: why continue to be concerned with Moroccan Judaism today? Let this community be reduced (*se réduire*) to its simplest expression, through departure, the few diehards (*irréductibles*) will no longer pose a problem.

[Footnote a: Of these, two categories. Those who simply want to live at home, here. It is their right, and no one has the right to challenge them. Those who think themselves conscious and responsible men no longer have the right to ignore that their first duty, as a Moroccan Jew, is the struggle against Zionism in the Moroccan Jewish community.⁴³

Obviously assimilation to the Muslim-majority Moroccan society was inconceivable even as his name and accent always designated him a

41. On the category and revived use of “Arab Jews,” see Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion and Ethnicity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 9. Albert Memmi would repudiate his prior use of this term in his “What is an Arab Jew?” in *Albert Memmi, Jews and Arabs* (Chicago: J. P. O’Hara, 1975), 19-29, first published in French in 1974.

42. Serfaty interview, 1997: “En tant que juif-marocain, la nécessité d’une radicalité était beaucoup plus évidente que pour un musulman-marocain. Ou alors il fallait partir. Pour moi le choix n’était pas même de rester en s’accommodant du système, c’était d’affronter ce système ou partir.”

43. “On me dira, on m’a dit, pourquoi, aujourd’hui, se préoccuper encore du judaïsme marocain? Laissons se réduire à sa plus simple expression, par les départs, cette communauté les quelques irréductibles (a) ne poseront alors plus de problème. [Note a: (a) Parmi ceux-ci, deux catégories. Ceux qui souhaitent simplement vivre chez eux, ici. C’est leur droit, et nul n’a le droit de le leur contester. Ceux qui se veulent hommes conscients et responsables n’ont plus le droit d’ignorer que leur premier devoir, en tant que marocain juif, est la lutte contre le sionisme dans la communauté juive marocaine.” Abraham Serfaty, “Le judaïsme marocain et le sionisme,” *Souffles* vol 15, no. 3 (1969): 24. Available online: <http://bnm.bnm.ma:86/pdf.aspx?IDc=464>. See also translation by Lia Brozgal and Olivia C. Harrison in Olivia C. Harrison and Teresa Villa-Ignacio (Ed.). *Souffles-Anfas: A Critical Anthology from the Moroccan Journal of Culture and Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015). On the *Souffles* group’s writings on Palestine, see Olivia Harrison, “Cross-Colonial Poetics: *Souffles-Anfas* and the Figure of Palestine,” *PMLA* 128, 2 (2013): 353-369.

Moroccan Jew. Despite decades of exile, he retained both his Moroccaness and Jewishness. Consequently, his additional goal was an appeal to his fellow Moroccans to transform the nationalist Arabo-Islamic polity, intent on repressing Jewish, Berber, and Judeo-Berber communities, by acknowledging and ultimately valuing these hitherto repressed presences.⁴⁴

Without ignoring the specificities of post-independence Morocco, in many ways Serfaty's life shares features with the figure of the conscious pariah. This concept owes its illustrious intellectual genealogy to Bernard Lazare and Hannah Arendt, then subsequently revisited by Gabriel Piterberg. Arendt's description of the conscious pariah designates:

...those who really did most for the spiritual dignity of their people, who were great enough to transcend the bounds of nationality and to weave the strands of their Jewish genius into the general texture of European life (...) those bold spirits who tried to make of the emancipation of the Jews that which it really should have been—an admission of Jews as Jews to the ranks of humanity, rather than a permit to ape the gentiles or an opportunity to play the parvenu.⁴⁵

Arendt's definition echoed typologies by French Jewish literary critic Bernard Lazare, who first discussed the Jewish condition of pariah or parvenu in relation to Western European Jewry. What Arendt concluded about Lazare applies to Serfaty:

What he [Lazare] sought was not an escape from anti-Semitism but a mobilization of the people against its foes... The consequence of this attitude was that he did not look around for more or less antisemitic protectors but for real comrades-in arms, whom he hoped to find among all the oppressed groups ... Lazare came to realize that the real obstacle in the path of his people's emancipation was not anti-Semitism. It was (...) a people revolted only by persecution from without but not by oppression from within, revolutionaries in the society of other but not their own."

44. Susan Slyomovics, "Morocco: Self-Definition as Self-Determination," in *Negotiating Self-Determination*, ed. Hurst Hannum and Eileen F. Babbitt (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 135-157.

45. Hannah Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition," *Jewish Social Studies* 6, 2 (1944): 275. See also Gabriel Piterberg, "Zion's Rebel Daughter: Hannah Arendt on Palestine and the Jewish People," *New Left Review* 48 (2007): 42. See also Heckman, "Introduction," "Radical Nationalists: Moroccan Jewish Communists 1925-1975," where she presents Serfaty, Simon Lévy and Edmond Amran El Maleh as conscious pariahs. We both studied the concept of conscious pariah under Piterberg's tutelage, although I consider Serfaty alone to inhabit fully this category.

Ill would it serve the cause of freedom, thought he, if a man were to begin by abandoning his own.⁴⁶

Paradoxically Arendt might not have recognized Serfaty as a conscious pariah because she did not challenge the fact of French nationality as the foundation of Lazare's position as a conscious pariah. Arendt's sole venture into North African Jewish studies was her article, "Why the Crémieux Decree was abrogated?"⁴⁷ In 1943, she argued for the reinstatement of French nationality and citizenship on behalf of the majority of Algerian Jews, a status granted them under the 1870 Crémieux Decree and subsequently revoked in 1940 under Algeria's World War II Vichy government. Arendt's discussion of Algerian Jews was influenced by the Holocaust and the fate of European Jews for whom statelessness was one precondition for mass extermination. In contrast, in the Algerian context, many voices were raised against the conferral of French citizenship for the native Jewish population, although for radically different reasons and from all sides. In addition to European settlers obviously opposed to the mass movement of a community deemed both ethnic and religious from the category of "native Israelite" to French citizen, Jews themselves were subjected to cultural, linguistic and religious violence that accompanied a French colonization visited upon them.⁴⁸ During World War II, Algerian voices on the left argued for maintaining the indigeneity of the Jewish population despite antisemitic Vichy laws that had returned them to their prior autochthonous parity with the Muslim majority in a settler colonial context.

Similarly, Abraham Serfaty was vocal in arguing for the North African Jew as native and not French. He best exemplifies a comparable tradition for the Moroccan Jew as pariah, consciously aware of his pariah status, who was a social outcast within his own Moroccan Jewish community. Although the contexts of pre-colonial dhimmitude, colonial quasi-emancipation, and the post-colonial mutual rejections between the majority of the Muslim and Jewish communities differed for Serfaty in relation to Arendt's definition of the conscious pariah, the outcome was his exceptional insight into the dynamic unfolding possibilities for the anti-Zionist Arab Jew uniquely anchored in a Muslim country precisely because he uncontestedly belongs. Serfaty's urgent existential political choices enjoined him toward radical political acts as the

46. Hannah Arendt, "Herzl and Lazare" in *Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron Feldman (2007), pp. 339-340, originally published in 1942.

47. Hannah Arendt, "Why the Crémieux Decree Was Abrogated?" *Contemporary Jewish Record* vol. 6, no. 3 (1944); reprinted in *The Jewish Writings* (New York: Schocken, 2007), 222-253. See also Susan Slyomovics, "French Restitution, German Compensation: Algerian Jews and Vichy's Financial Legacy." *Journal of North African Studies* 17/5: 881-901.

48. See Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

fundamental pathway to bearing witness to Jewish indigeneity in North Africa, one that must be anchored by his actual physical presence, even if he became among the last of Moroccan Jews. Arendt's characterization productively applies to Serfaty:

As soon as the pariah enters the arena of politics, and translates his status into political terms, he becomes perforce a rebel. Lazare's idea was therefore, that the Jew should come out openly as the representative of the pariah since it is the duty of every human being to resist oppression.⁴⁹

Serfaty believed that he must always act both as a Jew but also an agent for social change. In sum, he remained a rebel and a politically conscious revolutionary who fought for universal rights and social justice but from the position and subjectivity of the Jew.

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ملخص: أبراهام السرفاتي: اليهودي المغربي الواعي المنبوذ

يشتهر أبراهام السرفاتي دولياً وفي المغرب بانشقاقه كمعارض ماركسي (متمرد ضد الاستعمار الفرنسي والقمع المغربي المحلي)، بما يقرب عقدين من السجن السياسي، وبصعوبة تحديد موقعه باعتباره مغربي مناهض للصهيونية واليهود. وبناءً على المقابلات التي أجريتها وكتابات "سرفاتي"، يستكشف هذا المقال تعريفاته الذاتية كإنسان "يهودي عربي" غير قابل للخضوع، بالإضافة إلى كثير من ملامح حياة "سرفاتي" المشتركة مع شخصية منبوذة واعية يهودية، وهو مفهوم متداول عند "برنارد لازار" و"حنة أرندت".

الكلمات المفتاحية: أبراهام السرفاتي، يهود مغاربة، الحزب الشيوعي المغربي، الماركسية، المنبوذ، إلى الأمام، أدب السجن، عبد اللطيف اللعبي، أنفاس.

Résumé: Abraham Serfaty: Juif marocain et pariah conscient

Abraham Serfaty est connu mondialement et au Maroc pour sa dissidence d'opposition marxiste (dirigée contre le colonialisme français et la répression marocaine), ses deux décennies d'emprisonnement politique et son positionnement complexe comme marxiste et juif marocain antisioniste. Basé sur des entretiens et les écrits de Serfaty, cet article explore non seulement ses autodéfinitions en tant que "Juif arabe" et insoumi, mais aussi les nombreuses façons dont la vie de Serfaty partage des traits avec la figure d'un paria juif conscient, concept emprunté à Bernard Lazare et Hannah Arendt.

Mots clés: Abraham Serfaty, juifs marocains, Parti communiste marocain, Marxisme, paria, *Ilā al-Amām*, littérature carcérale, Abdellatif Laâbi, Souffles/ Anfas.

Abstract: Abraham Serfaty: Moroccan Jew and Conscious Pariah

Abraham Serfaty is renowned internationally and in his Moroccan homeland for his Marxist oppositional dissidence (directed against French colonialism and subsequently homegrown Moroccan repression), his almost two decades of political imprisonment, and his complex positioning as an anti-Zionist Moroccan and Jew. Based on my interviews and Serfaty's writings, this essay explores not only his self-definitions as an "Arab Jew" and *insoumi* but also the many ways Serfaty's life shares features with the figure of a Jewish conscious pariah, a concept owed to Bernard Lazare and Hannah Arendt.

Key words: Abraham Serfaty, Moroccan Jews, Moroccan Communist Party, Marxism, Pariah, *Ilā al-Amām*, prison literature, Abdellatif Laâbi, *Souffles/Anfas*.

Resumen: Abraham Serfaty: judío marroquí y paria consciente

Abraham Serfaty es reconocido internacionalmente y en su patria marroquí por su disidencia de oposición marxista (dirigida contra el colonialismo francés y posteriormente contra la represión marroquí), sus casi dos décadas de encarcelamiento político y su compleja posición como marxista y judío antisionista. Basado en mis entrevistas y escritos de Serfaty, este ensayo explora no sólo sus definiciones de sí mismo como un "judío árabe" y *insoumi*, sino también las muchas maneras que la vida de Serfaty comparte características con la figura de un paria judío consciente, un concepto debido a Bernard Lazare y Hannah Arendt.

Palabras clave: Abraham Serfaty, Judíos marroquíes, Partido Comunista Marroquí, Marxismo, Paria, *Ilā al-Amām*, Literatura de prisión, Abdellatif Laâbi, *Souffles/Anfas*.