I was born in 1942 in Marrakesh. My place of birth protected me. If I had come into the world in Europe, I would perhaps have met the same fate as my grandmother Lisa Goldenberg-Goldenzweig, in Auschwitz.

On my father’s side, we were stateless, like so many Jews to whom Romania refused to grant nationality, thereby depriving them of any identity papers. We didn’t become French until 1947. On my mother’s side, I was a Moroccan Jew of Berber origin, from Oufrane, which my ancestors left first to go live in Mogador, as merchants for the King, and then in Marrakesh.

In this North African land, my family name sounded so strange to everyone that people always butchered it. We weren’t the Goldenbergs, but the Gudambers, the Gautembers, the Goldinberges, the Goldambergers, and sometimes even the Gutenbergs. A mere pronunciation problem? No, rather the rejection of a foreign identity. No effort was ever made to assimilate us under the same label as the Duponts and the Durands, the Levys and the Cohens, or the Fatmas and Moham Edwards. Where were we to fit in all that?

It is true that during the Protectorate, Morocco lived in the most hermetic form of separatism. Marshal Lyautey, the country’s first resident general, in an effort to protect each community’s particularities, deemed it appropriate to segregate these groups that existed side by side in Moroccan cities. This noble decision led to a formidable partitioning. There were no bridges between the Muslim medina, the

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1. The resident general was the official appointed to oversee the French administration in Morocco during the protectorate (1912–1956). In the eyes of international law, Morocco remained a sovereign state and the Sultan (later, the King) retained his status as its symbolic leader. In practice, however, the French exerted an enormous amount of power and influence over nearly all aspects of life.
FIGURE 33. Lucette, the young girl in front, surrounded by her family, in the Mamounia Gardens in Marrakesh in 1946.
Jewish mellah, and the new European town, which together formed Dante's three circles of hell.2

Case in point: the Marrakesh swimming pool was reserved for Muslims on Friday, for Jews on Saturday, and for Europeans on Sunday, when the pool would be drained and refilled for them prior to opening. I didn’t go to the Marrakesh pool. Which day would have been mine? And throughout my first eighteen years spent in Morocco, I never once crossed the threshold of a Muslim or European home, even though I had Christian and Muslim classmates.

I was Jewish, but we were not the practicing sort, and what’s more, my father was Ashkenazi, while the Moroccan Jews were highly religious and Sephardic. As a teacher in the Alliance Israélite Universelle, my father was greatly esteemed by the local Jewry, but with his blue eyes and Parisian looks, he was not considered one of their own. And consequently, nor was I, whom they took to be a French girl, and who therefore never crossed a Jewish threshold either. On the other hand, in the eyes of the French, I was a Jew, since I didn’t attend catechism or Mass and had a name that was hardly Catholic.

So, although I was kept very much at its margins, the Moroccan Jewish world is the one I’m recalling here. This world, which has practically disappeared since nearly all of the four hundred thousand souls that made up this community have sought exile in Israel, France, Canada, or the United States, was also mine, a legacy of my maternal grandmother, Mamada. However charmed I am by this twilight world’s evocation of a bygone time, my main concern here, as a custodian to the legacy it represents, is to enrich and safeguard its memory.

My grandmother was very observant. She would spend hours in the kitchen preparing sumptuous dishes in terracotta tagines that simmered on mezmers, or small charcoal-fed grills. She refused to go modern. Her slow-cooking method gave these delicacies a very particular flavor that came to shape my gustatory memory. Nor would she have anything to do with refrigerators, insisting that cold water made her sick. Nothing was better than water stored in a clay jar sealed with a stopper made of dried grass, to keep the bugs out. This was the only water that could quench her thirst—cool, healthy, and natural. Mamada knew how to blend spices and other ingredients, while keeping an impeccably kosher kitchen.

Her cooking involved the kind of insider knowledge to which few were privy. When I would ask her about even the simplest orange salad with garlic, black olives, and red chili pepper seasoned with argan oil, or about the special way she grilled chili peppers (I never ventured into the intricacies of her more elaborate dishes like stuffed cardoons, lamb with tavras,3 celery and meatballs, stuffed artichokes, or her turnovers—delicate little triangular pastries stuffed with meat), she would give me advice as to how best to prepare them, but I could never reproduce

2. The author may be confusing here Dante’s three categories of sin with his nine circles of hell.

3. Tavras are known in standard Arabic as terfass, translated into English as white truffles, or desert truffles. The dish in question is commonly known as trif or trid, which can be made with chicken or lamb, but which always includes lentils and fenugreek.
her exquisite results. I’d go back to her. Perhaps she had forgotten to include a key ingredient? “No,” she’d tell me, laughing, “you just don’t quite have the touch!”

At Mamada’s, daily life harked back to biblical times. Mouchi, a trusted servant with the wizened face of a Rembrandt elder—as Elias Canetti noted in his *The Voices of Marrakesh*—would sit and tell the stories of Rachel, Esther, and Abraham as if he’d just run into them in the marketplace. Jews lived among Biblical characters as a matter of course.

Her whole life was organized around timeless rituals; I was naïve enough to believe that things would stay that way forever, as they had thus far.

The calendar year was punctuated by a series of feast days, and we always went to Mamada’s to celebrate them, since she was our family’s faithful guardian of purest tradition. Rosh Hashanah was associated with her seven-vegetable soup, and Sukkot with the meal eaten beneath a sukkah built of braided reeds. Simchat Torah evokes the memory of seeing the normally dour Jewish elders dancing in jubilation right there in the synagogue, holding the sacred scrolls in their arms, head and shoulders draped in their fringed tallits. On Hanukkah, we proceeded to light our tinplate Hanukkiah, which people sometimes made out of old sardine cans decorated with pieces of colored glass. What remains etched in my mind from Purim is the endless megillah reading. I was also dazzled by the sumptuous Jewish bridal gowns worn by the girls who played the role of Esther in the plays performed at my father’s school. I can recall walking to the communal oven to pick up the bread that Mamada had kneaded into a fine loaf for her two little grand-daughters, a bread made with anise seeds, turmeric, and a whole egg tucked beneath a lattice of thin dough strips, which we called Haman’s eye, that I would take pleasure in breaking to avenge ourselves of this fabled traitor.

On the first night of Passover, the whole family would gather around my aunt’s table to read the Haggadah. When my uncle told of the ten plagues visited upon the Egyptians as punishment for seeking to exterminate the Jews, we would all pound on the table with the backs of our spoons, crying “dayenou” (“it would have been enough”)—with each beat. I also recall the tiny glasses of sweet wine from Morocco’s Demnat region; the bland, unleavened matzah that went along with the maror; the bitter herbs to be dipped in haroset, a sweet confection of dates, figs, nuts, and rose petals. When mealtime came, I was always perplexed by the

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4. A Nobel-prize winning writer best known for his work in German, Elias Canetti (1905–1994) was a Bulgarian-born Jew whose mother tongue was Ladino. *The Voices of Marrakesh* is based on Canetti’s three-week stay in the city in 1954, and stands as one of the most important travelogs written about that city. first published in German in 1967.

5. A *tallit* is a fringed prayer shawl worn primarily by Jewish men in more observant traditions.


7. The Haggadah is the text that contains the story of the Jews’ enslavement in Egypt, and their redemption. The Seder is organized around the reading of the Haggadah, which prescribes the stages of the ceremonial meal.
enigmatic empty chair left for the prophet Elijah whose place was always set at the Seder table. We were at last rewarded after all those lengthy prayers with a fresh fava bean soup and a lamb tagine with tavras. Then, at Mimouna, we'd pay visits to family and neighbors, where we would sample their bercok, pearl couscous served with whey, and crepe-like moufletas. It was always a joy to return to making these yeast-based foods that tradition forbade us to eat during the previous eight days.

On Saturdays at noon, we would go to Mamada’s to have some of her srina, which she would have sent to the communal oven to simmer for twenty-four hours. It was a treat every time. We would feast on eggs and roasted potatoes browned from being cooked so slowly in their unctuous chickpea broth. And I can’t talk about food without mentioning Mamada’s sweet-and-savory meat stuffing.

We would then take the time to sip a glass of tea made either with mint or shiba. Out the living-room window, we could see street performers who’d come over from the Jemaa el-Fna Square to entertain the Jews, who would give them a few coins in return. The clowns would have their trained monkeys imitate the Jew digesting his srina. The animal would stretch out on its back, one forepaw behind his head, and pretend to be taking a long snooze.

All those flavors have disappeared forever, as have the moments of family joy, the jokes and stories, the laughter and emotion, shared in Arabic and French, with a few words in Hebrew added for blessing the bread and wine at the start of the meal. Though we did not respect Shabbat, we were always happy to share in the fervor of this meal that meant so much to Mamada. She knew that we drove our car, and went to school, but she took no offense. She understood that the demands of our way of life were different from hers. These two worlds existed side by side, and would occasionally merge, then separate once again, always seamlessly, never colliding. This was the image of 1950s Judaism in Morocco: a mixture of East and West, of tradition and modernity, where Jews wearing both traditional djellabas and three-piece suits all spoke to one another in both Arabic and French.

I left Marrakesh when I was 18, after earning my baccalauréat, and headed to France to attend university. I used to love returning to my home in January, to

8. Mimouna is a traditional Moroccan Jewish festival, celebrated at the end of Passover. It is characterized by lavish food preparations, including special breads, pastry, and other foods that are forbidden during Passover. While the practice was recorded as early as the eighteenth century, its name and origins are a subject of dispute.
9. Srina is likely a deformation of skhina (also called dafina), one of the best-known North African Jewish dishes. It is a slow-cooked stew served typically for Shabbat.
10. Shiba (also written chiba) is absinthe; in Morocco, tea with absinthe is typically consumed in fall and winter.
11. In observant Jewish traditions, people refrain from doing any work on Shabbat, including driving or using other machinery.
12. Resembling the Egyptian jalabiya (or galabeya), the djellaba (or jillaba) is a loose-fitting, long-sleeved outer robe worn in North Africa by both men and women.
my town in the snow-covered Atlas Mountains set against the bluest sky and the fiery red sunsets that highlighted the fine silhouette of palm trees. I was aware I was living my life at two speeds, with one foot in the swirl of intellectual discovery that was forging my personality as I traveled the world in search of answers to my existential questions, and the other foot planted firmly in Moroccan Judaism, from which I’d long been emancipated, though it remained as familiar as always.

When I left Marrakesh at the end of January 1965, I never sensed it would be forever. Like a migrating stork, I thought I’d always have a cozy nest to come home to, unchanged, at the end of my wanderings. But there is no more Jewish life in Morocco, just like all the other Muslim countries that have been emptied of their Jews. All that’s left is memory.

—Translated by Jane Kuntz