Vor den Verhältnissen. Frozen Image. Avant la lettre.

Movements of flight with Hélène Cixous, Zohra Drif and Elaine Mokhtefi.

HELENE CIXOUS: Mon Algériance
French in *Les Inrockuptibles* 115, 1997

Englisch translation: My Algeriance, in Other Words: To Depart not to Arrive from Algeria in *TriQuaterly* 100, 1997

in Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata* — Escaping texts. Routledge 1998.

With a foreword by Jacques Derrida and a new preface by the author.
Buchkapitel 17 Seiten
Routledge Classics 2005

HELENE CIXOUS: Letter to Zohra Drif,
French in parallax a journal of metadiscursive theory and cultural practice, Nr 7. 1998

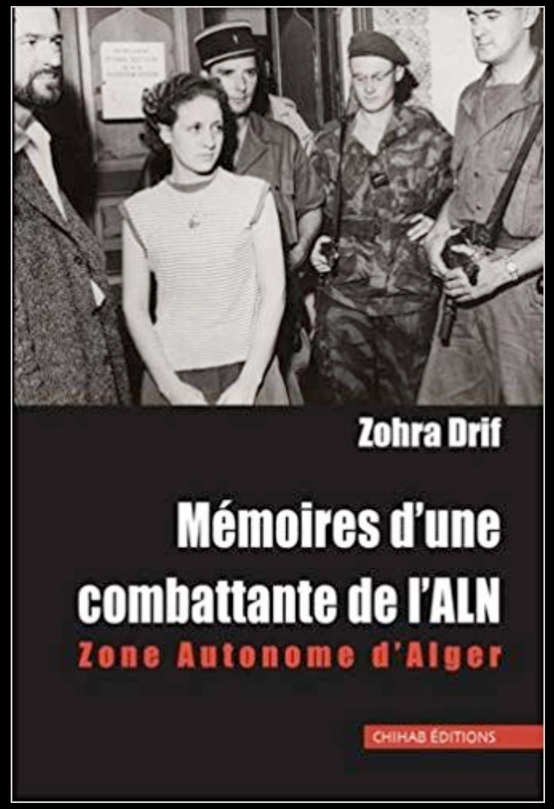
English in College Literature, Vol. 30, 2003.
Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press

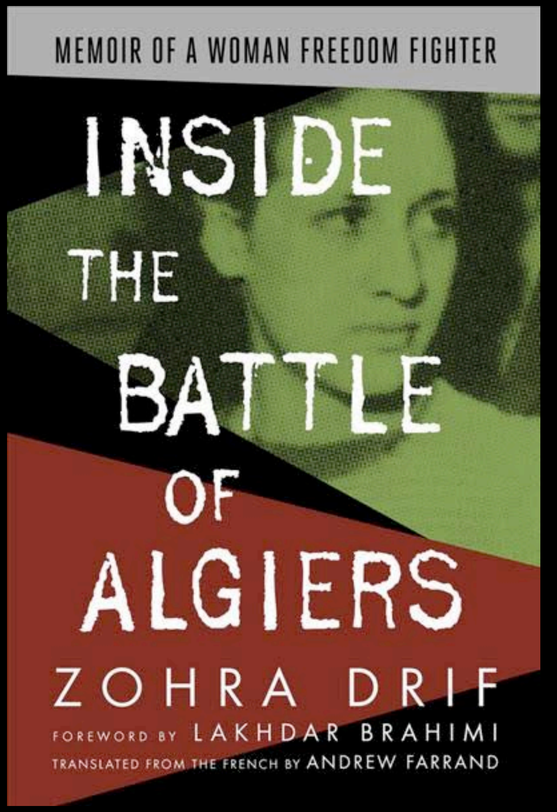
Hélène Cixous, born in Oran, Algerien, am 5. Juni 1937.

Zohra Drif: Mémoires d'une combattante de l'ALN,
Zone Autonome d'Alger
Chihab editions, 608 Seiten, 2013.

English translation: Inside Battle of Algiers,
Just World Books, 320 pages, 2017.

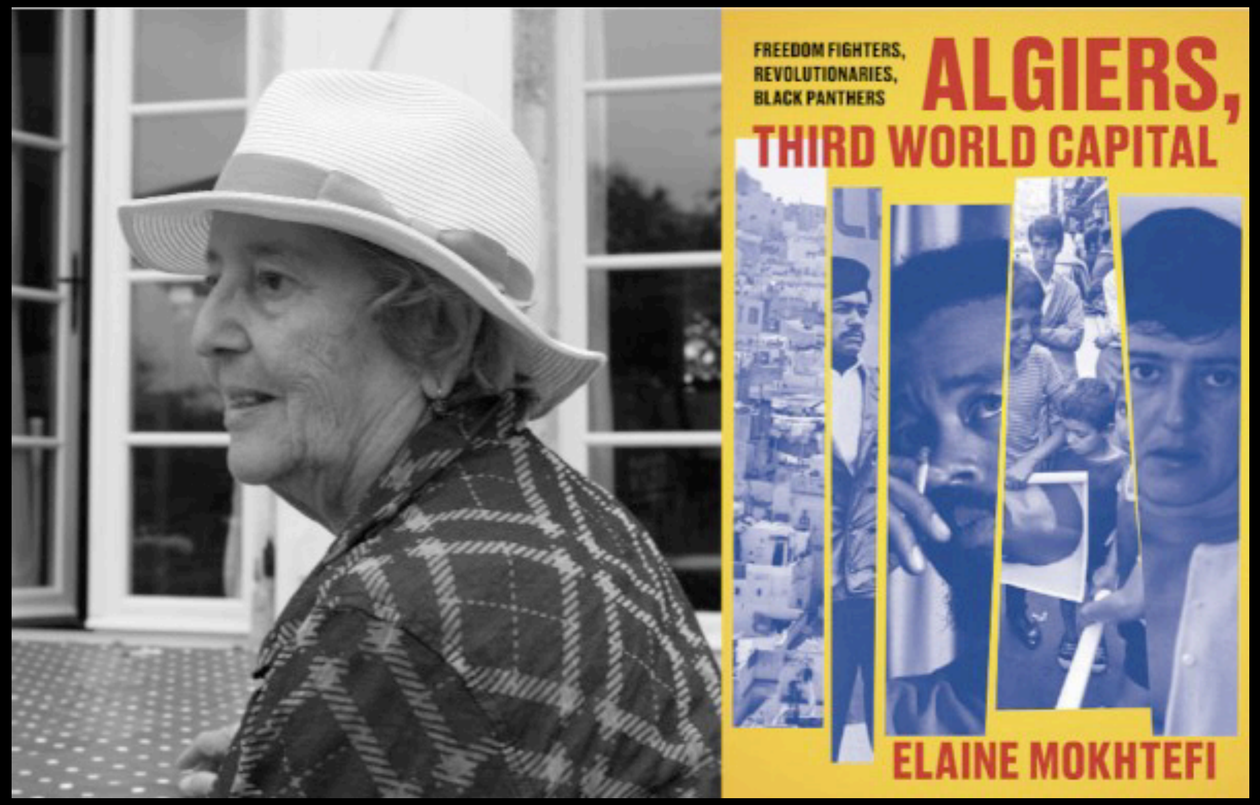
Zohra Drif, born in Tissemsilt, Algerien, 28 December 1934.





Elaine Mokhtefi: Algiers, Third World Capital —
Freedom Fighters, Revolutionaries, Black Panthers

Verso, UK, 242 Seiten, 2018.



Elaine Mokhtefi, born Klein, in New York, 1928.

Before…

Beginnings

Histoire(s) History Lesson

Memories Memoirs

Elaine Mokhtefi with Kathleen Cleaver, ca 1969

Hélène Cixous, 1970

It all began in January 1957.

When I wanted to write my letter to Zohra Drif. Such an impulse broke out in me. I was reading in the Paris newspapers what was happening in Algeria.

[...]

From the bottom of my voluntary internment in France, as a spectator without earth, without roof, without nationality of the soul, I watched the play that was showing in the sacred places of my antiquity. Shakespeare in Algeria. The Act of the Casbah. Enter: Zohra Drif. This is fate and it halts. I might have been born Zohra and I was Hélène but a bit of Zohra in me had never stopped chafing at the bit. Enter Zohra. I know the footpaths and the roof terraces well. It is in the Casbah that my mother the Kabla delivers babies. The Casbah, place of nativities.

I cried out with joy. So there was a woman who was freeing the Casbah. She has blond frizzy hair, a calm body—I must stop—I shall return

Samia Lakhdari, Zohra Drif, Djamila Bouhired and Hassiba Ben Bouali

First Act

This whole story had begun in the preceding act in 1947.
The set: Lycée Fromentin, the antithesis of the Casbah.

At the end of secondary school, from ’51 to ’53, in my class where I was the only Jew, there were three Muslim girls. Their way of being in the last row and half smiling. My way of being angry and in the first row. I knew immediately that they were the Algeria that was in store. I held out my hand to them, I wanted to ally myself with them against the French. In vain. For them I was France. They never opened. I understood their caution. (Cixous, Mon Algériance, 1997)

In December 1951, I boarded the Dutch ship Veendam in Newport News; Virginia, destination Europe. (Mokhefi, Algiers...)

That was when three Muslim girls appeared at the school, in my class. They immediately entered, with an absolute privilege, into my memory forever. In one season they became unforgettable for me. And I knew nothing. Except that for me they were the incarnations of the truth. But which truth?

Samia Lakhdari, Leila Khaled, Zohra Drif. One brunette, one redhead, one blond. One smiling, one laughing, one serious. It is very difficult to tell a story that had no events. This story happened to me. What was happening to me, this I knew, was Algeria. This arrival of three young girls had a prophetic dimension for me, that is how I experienced it. Alone. There were no names for it. It was Biblical. I had the message. Not that they themselves gave it to me. But I had received it. I was attached to their presence. (Cixous, Letter to Zohra Drif, 1998)

My "enlightment" came on May Day, 1952. I'd been living in Paris for several months I discovered the "lie". It happened as I stood on the rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine, midway between Nation and Bastille, watching the annual worker parade. [...] Banners announced who they were: the electricias' union, the office workers' union, the autoworkers'union, the national teachers' federation, the national council of French women, the students of the African Democratic Assembly. When the central commmitee of the French Communist Party, headed by Jacques Duclos—wearing a dashing felt hat with a wide brim—came into view, the crowds on the sidewalks cheered and waved.

Many of the banners bore political messages: "Free Henri Martin," "No, to the European Defense Community," "Reinstate Family Allocations for Italian Workes," "Social Security for Algeria."[...]

In the early afternoon, as the parade was breaking up, thousands of men appeared out of nowhere, running in formation, ten to twelve abreast. They sped in cadence, arms splayed as they sought to catch up with the vanishing demonstrations. They kept coming, more and more—young, grim, slightly built and poorly dressed. They shouted no slogans, carried no flags, no banners. They were Algerian laborers.

They had been scheduled to participate in the parade. Yet at the last minute, the CGT had backtracked on its agreement to include them and then attempted to block the Algerian protestors. I understood why a few weeks later when their leader, the Algerian activist Messali Hadj, was arrested. The CGT had wanted to prevent any demands for Algerian independence at a time when the French government was hell-bent on containing political insurgence against French rule in North Africa. On May 14, as Messali Hadj attempted to address a public meeting in Orléansville, a town in central Algeria, the police opened fire, leaving many wounded and two dead. Messali was whisked away and placed under house arrest in France. A year later, the CGT performed an about-face and included Messali's organization, the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Freedom (MTLD), in its Bastille Day parade in Paris. The French police struck again, opening fire on the Algerian demonstration, beating and wounding hundreds and killing seven.

That May Day 1952 parade was my first contact with Algeria. The events I witnessed gave the live to French egalitarianism: the famous motte *liberté, egalité, fraternité* was flipped upside down. Colonialism and racism stood out as the two pillars of power and supremacy. I was shocked into reality.

The next day, I began classes in the sixth grade's second section. (Our grade had three sections, each with thirty students.) I was the only "native" in my grade. Gradually, I discovered that there was a "native" girl in the seventh grade, another in eleventh, and one in twelfth. In other words, when I entered the Lycée Fromentin in 1947, there were just four "native" girls among the 2.000 students there! I would spend seven years at this school and throughout my time there, our number never exceeded eight. I remember that because, at our peak, we managed to fill a whole table in the dining room, making our own pork-free-table — not even 1 percent of the student body!

[...]

I had no idea where all this was taking me, but I was having a wonderful time. The men and women I travelled with were not necessarily older, but they were more sure of themselves. They seemed to know where they were going. I felt like a child in comparison. What I had not understood was that their lives were carved out in advance. Their manners, work and education were codified by class. Once on a track there was danger in changing directions. Soon, I began to see that I had a different outlook: I was from a different place. I was freer, I could change tracks. (Elaine Mokhefi, Algiers ...)

In seventh grade, the arrival of another "native" girl would forever change my life and hers.

One day midway through the first quarter, just after the gym class that I loved so much, I noticed a girl I had never seen leaning against the fence beside the field. Her features, facial expression, posture, and especially her gaze all said that she was Algerian like me. I immediately walked toward her and blurted out in Arabic, "You're Arab!" She responded just as spontaneously, "Yes! And you too!"

It was Samia Lakdhari, a new arrival, who from that moment would become my best friend, my alter ego, my eternal accomplice. I was no longer alone. (Zohra Drif, Inside Battle of Algiers)

We took a taxi through the city, passing along Rue d'Isly, past the Central Post Office, then Rue Michelet, the Governor-General's Palace, the Saint George Hotel, the hillside neighborhood known as La Redoute, and finally my new school: the Lycée Fromentin. After passing through the large entry gates, the taxi followed a long, wide driveway and pulled to a stop before the dormitory administration, where a dense crowd of European women clustered, accompanied by their daughters.

Our arrival had a predictable effect—deafening silence and dumbstruck stares. My father's commanding presence made us particularly remarkable. Oh my, an Arab and his daughter in this seat of French culture and knowledge! We were greeted by an elegant woman, Madame Guenassia, the chief supervisor of the dormitories.
[...]
I was the only girl accompanied by her father, but he was absolutely perfect.

Drif, Inside Battle

It is the most beautiful school in the world. A mythical place. Imagine an old Moorish palace in terraced gardens, where amongst the enormous trees stood the flower birds with orange beaks of the Strelitzia. The path that led to the classroom buildings is flanked with bushy slopes. The fine house on a small hill, nested on the heights of Algiers. But on these primitive beauties a warlike masquerade is spread: during the World War which is moving further and further from its walls this school was the headquarters of high French political and military authorities. So the house was adorned with a camouflage that remains and monumentalizes it.

...this school is governed right to the depths of its soul by the spirit of the *numerus clausus*. The spirit of Vichy. What is the "Numerus Clausus?" The *closed number*. These Latin words ennoble a mental leper: Closed number means exclusion: Even yesterday the beautiful school had closed its doors to Jews, as had all public places, but not totally: the law made it an obligation to exclude the Jews while including one or two percent of alibi and hostage Jews.


http://alger-roi.fr par B Venis
Alger - Lycée Fromentin
Photo : Hélène Fredouille
1956_1957

The beginning before the beginning

History Lesson 02

I am a mass of continents, contradictions, compatible incompatibilities. I was born in Algeria and am the result of the history of the world at a very specific era, an era rife with violence, revolt, promise, hope, and despair. I was born in 1937. My mother, a German Jew, left Germany in 1933. As soon as Hitler came to power, she understood it was necessary to leave. My story begins before I was born, with the Jonas, Klein, and Cixous families, which already had a long history of cultural and political adventure. My mother's family, for instance, encompasses the totality of European history.

I grew to be careful, even mistrustful, of my reactions. I taught myself to stop and think. I was integrating into a society whose rules were not those of my native country, nor of the Western European countries in which I had lived. The place of women, and of foreign women in particular, had to be taken into account. The forms of respect for one's elders, the way one dressed, one's manners, the requirements of religious beliefs and etiquette, while not totally absent from my education, were nowhere as regulated as they were for Algerians. To them, I was an American who spoke French. The fact that I was from a Jewish family did not define me.

Elaine Mokhtefi, Algiers.... (ca 1963)

My mother, born in 1910, arrived at Osnabrück in 1918 and was raised in Germany. Hitler came to power; my mother left. She was 19 and went to England to learn English, then to France to learn French. In Osnabrück, Jews had now been banned from the swimming pool. My mother said to her sister, three years her junior: "Come to the pool in Paris!" My aunt followed my mother, who was always quick to grasp the political situation, though never trained for anything of the sort. My mother always said that her country was Europe. As a young woman, she was already rejecting any kind of nationalism. It was to be banished, and Europe set up in its place. // http://purple.fr/magazine/fw-2015-issue-24/helene-cixous/

His family was from Spain. There are administrative records that go back to the French colonization; the family then followed French colonization in Northern Africa. My father's ancestor, from Gibraltar, crossed the strait and followed France's conquests into Morocco, Algeria, etc. My paternal grandmother and grandfather were born at the border of Morocco, and followed the French path to settlement. In 1867 — before the Crémieux Decree, when Napoléon III, who was much less colonialist than the French Republic, offered French citizenship to Algerians, generally referred to as Arabs, as well as to Jews — my family took French citizenship. [...]

My father went to Paris to defend his thesis in 1935. There he met my mother, through a friend, at a family pension. She had veered off the European path, and my father off the African path. When Omi, my German grandmother, found out that her daughter was going to North Africa, she thought she was going to marry a monkey, a Jew with a tail.

http://purple.fr/magazine/fw-2015-issue-24/helene-cixous/

One evening my father came home and found me in tears, my history books unfolded before me. I explained that I was crying for Roland, the French knight mortally wounded by the treacherous Saracens [Sarazen]. Sprawled upon a rock, his sward in hand, he had blown his horn to alert Emperor Charlemagne [Karl der Große], despite his fatal injury. I wept for Roland, hating every one of the cruel Saracens and hoping that Charlemagne would slice them to pieces. When I finally finished explaining to my father why I was crying, he burst into laughter. Then he spent the rest of the evening explaining to me who the Saracens were and how I should read and interpret the history lessons they taught me in school. Thanks to him, I learned that the Saracens were my ancestors, who fought against Charlemagne to defend their rights and their property. He showed me several examples of how the same historical facts could be recounted in different ways, depending on the interests of the storyteller, I think it was because of this episode that my father always wanted to act as my personal tutor. He knew that in the colonial education system I would only hear France's imperialist version of history. So until I finished high school, every history lesson I learned at school was retaught, dissected, and analyzed at home with my father. As a result, I learned early on that we Algerians had our truth while the French had their own. My father always told me, "Whoever learns a people's language will be safe from their plots."

Looking back, I realizedt that, if my father was not the man he was or if he had been absent from my childhood, in the best case I would have been totally assimilated by France and pressed into her service, since the entire education system trained students only for service to France. In the worst case, I would have gone mad. My father saved me from both these fates. I consider him to have been my first instructor in politics.

All I know is that the world is more than one world. I have known since I first started walking that the world is at least two worlds. There were two worlds plus two worlds plus two worlds. It was a universe of conjunction and disjunction: on one side, there were worlds that met, as in the extraordinary meeting of my mother's and my father's respective worlds. That was a no-no: the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews were not to meet, not to mix. The Jews of North Africa, of Hispano Arabic origin, didn't even know other Jews existed. The Ashkenazi were horrified when they saw Sephardim. The Ashkenazi passed for aristocrats. I learned both of the plurality of these universes and of the racism, the vermin infecting all humanity. Prejudice ran very high in Algeria. It was a country founded on racism. There was colonialist racism, the dominant form, which was virulently anti-Arab: The "Arabs" were of course to be seen as inferior peoples, afflicted with every vice, with every shortcoming, with every weakness. There was the racism of Arabs toward Jews, and vice-versa. I was protected by the Enlightenment because my family was miraculously driven by a sense of humanity. They were sensible people, well aware of the horror, of the plague, of the various types of racism. Through memory, experience, and a spirit of justice.

I soon had only one thing in mind: to leave Algeria as soon as possible; it was an abominable place filled with violence, hatred, contempt for other human beings. I was sure the place would one day explode, and I eagerly awaited that day. I was completely in favor of the Algerian people. My father had worked in solidarity with clients that were referred to as "Arabs." My mother's clientele was also essentially "Arab." She worked in the casbah. I knew from the time I was a little girl: this is a world of total alienation, a world of people blind to their fellow human beings. My mother had found a purpose for herself, bringing babies into the world.

When I was little, I wanted to flee; I wanted to get out of that repugnant world. I found a solution: I would climb a tree, taking books up with me.

I was absolutely mad for books and would read them in alphabetical order. For me, they were all equal. I could vaguely sense a small difference between Dumas and Edgar Allan Poe, but my reading was scattershot. I lived, then, in the other world. The second world was literature

I said to myself: "That's the path for me." Down the path of languages, literature, and books. I'd be a reader; I'd live in books.

I began living in that world. That's where I settled. [...] I had to live by books. I couldn't do otherwise. It was the only thing that could tolerate me and that I could tolerate. The political world I already knew. I had seen it up close. I was good in history precisely for political reasons, because I kept track of the fate of all the peoples I knew. I was an expert in evil. I dreamed of books: we were poor, and my father had left us in dire straits.

....and I got married, partly in order to get out of there. I was 18.

Algerians had lived alongside the French in their own land, ignored and despised, robbed and exploited. Racism had become codified in education and politics. The Jews of Algeria were Arabic-speaking neighbors, subjected to the same slights of colonialism as the Muslim population, despite the Crémieux Decree of 1870 which gave them automatic French citizenship, setting them on the road to advanced education and Europeanization. In contrast, the Muslim population was governed by the infamous Indigenous Code, series of rigid, discriminatory laws. It was the same population separated by religious adherence. French colonialism confronted the entire native population to a permanent state of subordination. During the Second World War, Muslim Algeria had shown solidarity with their Jewish compatriots and shielded them. However, the war for independence would change their relationship more than the Crémineux Decree had. In the end, the Jews would reject solidarity and rush to France, and to some degree Israel, to live out their lives. For many of them it was exile; they, the offspring of the sunbaked Maghreb, would find it difficult to adapt in France. Their tears have never ceased to flow.

I felt comfortable with the Algerians. They were dedicated, affectionate, and generous combatants. I dug their sensitivity. Like them, I saw myself as American, not as Jewish American nor as American Jew.

Second Act

It was possible to not see

For me it was the land of the eyes: we sent looks at each other, we saw, we couldn't *not* see, we knew and we knew that we knew we knew, we were nude, we were denounced, threatened, we flung taunts, we received glances. It was the land of the other, not of the fellow human being.


The cafe, rue Michelet.


The milk bar, rue d'Isly.


They'll be set outside the Casbah.


Taleb is waiting for you
at the fish market.


But then you must hurry.
You only have 30 minutes to place them.


Good luck.


Today I have trouble recalling that walk from Bab El Oued to Place Bugeaud and Rue d'Isly, that epicenter of the European city, the French government, and the French army. Human existence seems to me to be interspersed with moments such intensity and such violence that in truth we live them as if they weren't real, or as if we were drugged. I have lived these moments but have never known how to describe them. I know and am sure of one thing: what guided me that days was absolute necessity, the sacred duty to succeed in my mission so that my people would not despair.

Suddenly the Milk Bar was before me, all white, transparent, and shining: the hubbub of happy conversations, laughter, questions, youthful voices, summer colors, the smell of pastries, and even the distant twittering of birds in Bresson Square. All this enveloped me. I entered through the door facing the Rue d'Isly, which was closer to the counter and less crowded. Luckily, the center stool at the bar was free.

L'ÉCHO D'ALGER

15 FRANCS

Hier soir entre 18 h. 35 et 19 h. à Alger :

3 BOMBES A RETARDEMENT

"30 septembre 1956"

Au "MILK-BAR", place d'Isly

à la "CAFÉTÉRIA", rue Michelet

et 2, boulevard Amiral-Pierre

60 BLESSÉS hospitalisés dont 3 mourants (2 femmes, 1 enfant) et 22 gravement atteints

12 AMPUTÉS 7 d'une jambe 5 d'un bras

abattus dans la région de Seddouk

- Embuscades à Laperrine et El-Marsa : 9 militaires tués et 9 blessés
- Un terroriste déchiqueté par une bombe à Constantine. 10 autres musulmans blessés
- Grenades dans des cafés à Bougie et Mansourah : une femme tuée, 10 blessés
- Bombe dans l'« Inox » Oujda-Oran : 8 blessés
- Sept Européens blessés par une grenade à Zemmora
- L'autocar Alger-Michelet échappe à la destruction

Nations unies

I walked calmly and perched myself atop it. I set my heavy beach bag on the ground in front of me, between my legs, my shoes braed on the metal circle that surrounded the stool's high legs. I set my handbag in front of me on the counter. I arranged my long bohemian dress to completely surround and conceal the stool. Look natural: those were my instructions. [...] Panic began overtake me when I realized how quickly the hands of my watch were turning. I had only nine minutes left to pay the bill, plus tip, for which I had the exact amount ready in my wallet, readily accessible in my handbag. [...] I let myself slide gently off the stool, quietly picked up my handbag and made the few steps that separated me from the exit onto the Rue d'Isly. An invisible hand was crushing my neck, and I fought my legs and feet to force them to stay at the speed befitting a calm young girl on her way home. I was forcing myself to walk normally, but my neck was getting more and more stiff, as if it were my head that was about to explode, and not the package that I had just left in the Milk Bar. I forced myself to finish descending the ramp to reach the seaside boulevard and catch the trolley to Saint-Eugène. I was walking, my head in a vise, when a huge explosion shook me, followed by the sound of shattering glass. My whole body was trembling and I realized that I was paralyzed, utterly unable to move forward. My head was empty, my limbs no longer obeyed me, and I no longer heard anything. I wanted to sit down right there in the street.

The sight of people screaming and running everywhere reanimated me and made me realize that I had reached the end of the Rampe Bugeaud, facing the stairs that led up the Rue de Tanger.

While working at the APS, I gained my one claim to fame: a role in Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*. The film was being shot just a few streets away from the APS headquarters. An assistant came seeking extras for the press conference scene, the in which a French colonel presents Larbi Ben M'hidi, the freedom fighter (*fellagha* in French parlance), to the press. I appear in that film of films for at least thirty seconds (!), clearly visible in the lower right-hand corner of the screen.

Then I read the newspaper: Zohra Drif armed in the Casbah. Alongside Yacef Saadi. It was the message. The summary of the books written above us. We are characters in a great narrative. We go line by line on the page without ever seeing the volume in which we figure. But it happens that the Author lifts us one day out of the chapter and, holding us above the plot of our existences, briefly reveals to us the architecture of the whole, the coordination of details, the concordance of metaphors and, for an instant, we see exterior to ourselves the face of our story.

I had my vision. I was taken with exultation. The incandescence murmured: write a letter to Zohra. Yes, yes, a letter to Zohra Drif. Something, a hello, a joy.

I did not write it. Not with words. It lay in my desire in patience. It searched for its words, its forms, its tone, its address. I searched. Where should I address it? False question. Once written it would have found a way to Zohra in the Casbah. That was not it. I did not write it. It fluttered near my shoulder. I smiled sideways to it. I would write it soon. I would write: Zohra, it's Hélène. No that's not it.

I approached the newspaper, which was laid open to the two central pages. A headline in bold capital letters read: HOW THEY TORTURE IN ALGERIA. I was followed by a detailed exposé. [...]
For several months I had thought that we were leading the fight alone, cut off from everyone else, but here was the rejuvenating, intoxicating evidence that we had never been alone or cut off from our leaders. My quick skim was enough to recognize my own style and flourishes and Si Mourad's shocking phrases: everything was there, down to the tiniest details. I checked the front page, curious to see what newspaper had had the courage to publish an exposé so thoroughly documented and damaging to our enemy. I was sure I was hallucinating: *El Moudjahid!* We have a *real* newspaper, just like them! [...] I think at that moment I experienced what my people would experience on July 5, 1962: *El Moudjahid*, in the form of a true modern newspaper, confirmed the truth that my country would inevitably be free.

Ali [la Pointe] wanted to take a photo of all four of us there on the Belhaffaf's rooftop. Samia and I expressed our strong refusal, obsessed with the security rules and all that we had learned about clandestine living. But Ali insisted, declaring that he was the happiest of brothers and the proudest of men since God could not have sent him more wonderful sisters than the four of us. Eventually we gave in. Like a child enthralled by his toy, Ali officiated. He distributed a weapon to each of us, instructing us how best to hold and aim them. He took the photo, happy as a kid. Facing the camera, Samia who hid her face behind the extended gun, couldn't stop ruminating throughout the following days about our incredible carelessness—especially that of our leaders.

Alas, fate would prove her right, because this picture would fall into the hands of the security services and help them to identify us. Before the photo betrayed us, nobody knew who we were, despite the arrests of brothers with whom we had worked. I tell the story of this photo because it expresses just how human, brotherly, and affectionate Ali la Pointe was.

It was my life that was transported onto another planet.
I was the one who needed them, their future freedom,
so that mine would be able to blossom.

Suddenly, from amid the human gauntlet the soldiers formed around us, a bright light blinded me and left me blinking. After a few seconds, I realized that these were flashes from photographers and journalists. The photo of Si Mohamed handcuffed leapt directly to my mind: I had to face them with dignity. I stood straight upright and looked them up and down, trying to send a message: "We are fighters from the ALN and proud of it. We are enemies of your arrogant world. Your brute force will not diminish us. Free and independent Algeria will live, despite everything!

It was pure departure. I had no aim or vision of an arrival, no goal, no desired country, I was in deferment and flight.

The possibility of living without taking root was familiar to me. I never call that exile.

I did not lose Algeria, because I never had it, and I never was it. I suffered that it was lost for itself, separated from itself by colonialization. If ever I identified it was with its rage at being wounded, amputated, humiliated. I always lived Algeria with impatience, as being bound to return to its own. France? I did not know it and I knew no one there. My German Jewish family had emigrated to twenty different countries but not France.

I was a French person without France and I was the first of the family to take it as goal or as recourse.

Cixous, My Algeriance

In 1954 Algeria and I went to sea in the same year. I waited for it, I knew it, it was the movement of life itself. I took my leave like a bird, like a liberation: to drop pretense, errors, pains and penalties. Given wholly over to my momentum.
I went toward France, without having had the idea of arriving there. Once in France I was not there. I saw that I would never arrive in France. I had not thought about it.

I am always passing by, in *passance*. I like the progressive form and the words that end in *-ance*. So much so that if I went toward *France* without mistrust, it is perhaps because of this ending which gives the present participle its lucky chance.

To depart (so as) not to arrive from Algeria is also, incalculably, a way of not having broken with Algeria. I have always rejoiced at having been spared all 'arrival.' I want *arrivance*, movement, unfinishing in my life. It is also out of departing that I write.

When I began turning my attention to women I was 22, 23 years old. I was no longer fleeing into literature. By then literature could become the most democratic of the world's possible tools. One needed only have access to it. [...] I arrived in France in 1955. We were then entering a period of decolonization. There was the Algerian War, the so-called "events" in Algeria. I was relieved; it changed my life. [...] But I didn't have a life of my own. Algeria had alienated me from it. Once Algeria had set about liberating itself, I found I was liberated as well. Landing in France at 18, I was greeted with a surprise: when I entered rooms or lecture halls nobody yelled out "dirty Jew," the daily insult in Algeria. [...] For a few years, until 1962, the givens of anti-Semitism were attenuated. The Jews of France had been deported. French people of my generation had never seen any Jews. They were all dead. But when I went to the university, I encountered something that I had never known in Algeria: misogyny, everywhere. I was from a world that liked women. The women of my family were strong; they carried the family. And in France I suddenly realized that the world was split in two and governed by the pretentious cretins who played at being university professors. I understood then that the chief battle was going to be to deconstruct a phallocracy.

I will never stop paying hommage to these women: they not only maintained the fire in the hearth of our hearts so that the flame would never be extinguished even in the worst of storms, they also served as our rear guard. We were nothing without them—without them being the first to confront the noise and fury of the French soldiers, their police, and the harki traitors who collaborated with them.

From one day to the next, from mother to daughter across an unbroken chain of generations, they maintained the vast, deep garden of our history—in the face of regular and methodical devastation by our enemy, going back to 1830—weaving and reweaving the fine threads of our collective memory. They taught us that we had indeed existed as a people, that we existed today as brothers, and that we had indeed existed as a people, that we existed today as brothers, and that we would exist as a future nation of free citizens. Of course, they could neither read nor write, but they held immensely rich, diverse knowledge of life that no historian, no anthropologist, no academic could challenge, muss less dispute.

I see everything in terms of the future, and I've always seen it that way. Otherwise, I'd have long since been dead. When I got involved in the women's movement, which I hastened to do, out of pragmatism, I thought: "We'll never get out of this; we're in for a 300-year wait." Some say the battle will come to an end and, we must hope, to a resolution. The same goes for democracy: 500 years, if not 3,000. It's like anti-Semitism and other such plagues: I have never thought that we might wipe anti Semitism from the face of the earth, or that misogyny will come to be treated as a disease and suddenly disappear. We must always think of these scenes as battles that take place at specific locations and times, that are violent, and that must be fought and won. Any victory is secured momentarily; soon the battle will move elsewhere and revive.

N.B.A few names and dates:
1997: Forty years later:
—Zohra Drif, my mother says, was a great resistance fighter.
—She's a very important woman, says my friend Nourredine, a young

Algerian born in 1964, all of Algeria knows her. She's not someone who has been forgotten. The terrorist group of Yacef Saadi. Djamal Hamani, a poet, who was in his group, talks about her all the time. You see Zohra Drif a lot on TV. She talks of Democracy. When you say: Yacef Saadi and Zohra Drif, you say: "the Battle of Algiers."

"The Battle of Algiers," January 1957, fateful month in the history of the war. Point of no-return.

November 1954: The Algerian War breaks out. It is commanded by seven "historical leaders" of the FLN (National Liberation Front).

(1955 I arrive in France I am the first person in my family to imagine staying there.)

September 1956: Bombs explode in the cafes popular amongst the "French" of Algiers, in the center of the city. These are the famous attacks of the *Milk Bar*, of the *Cafétéria*. The persistence of fear spreads in the arteries of the City. The French army is everywhere. There will be 450,000 men enlisted in the war.

End of 1956: Several of the principal leaders of the FLN hide in the Casbah. The Casbah: the oldest neighborhood of Algiers, entirely Muslim.

January 1957: Larbi Ben M'hidi, one of the great leaders of the FLN sug- gests the idea of an insurrectional strike. It will take place on 28 January. It will catch the imagination of the world and attract the attention of the UN. The strike is preceded on 26 January by a spectacular series of bomb attacks.

Yacef Saadi is charged with executing the most sensational of the episodes in this tragic play. Time bombs fabricated in the Casbah are placed in the most familiar, famous cafes in the center of Algiers, by the hands of the young girls of the group. (Zohra Drif, Samia Lakhdari, Djamila Bouhired, Djamila Bouazza.)

La Cafétéria, the *Coq Hardi*, the *Otomatic*, are blown up with many victims. Algiers no longer sleeps. The old Casbah makes the gilded young French Algiers tremble.

In vain, two thousand paratroopers comb the Casbah. Yacef Saadi and his companions, in the Casbah, stay no longer than two days in the same hide- out. He is hidden at 14 rue du Nil. With Zohra Drif and Larbi Ben M'hidi.

He is hidden at 5 rue Caton.

He is at 7 Impasse de la Grenade. The French Army searches without stopping.

It is time to leave the Casbah, they think.

Larbi Ben M'hidi goes to hide with friends in the European neighbor- hood. On 23 February he is arrested. On 4 March he is "interrogated" to death by a Special Section of Paratroopers. Continually supported by Zohra Drif, Yacef Saadi avoids all the traps. He goes disguised as a woman, covered with a Haik, his face veiled. They escape all the dangers.

1962: Algeria is Independent.

Rue d'Isly, one of the two main streets of Algiers is henceforth called rue Ben M'hidi Larbi. In 1947 my father had opened his Radiology clinic there. That is where my midwife mother remained until 1971. A hundred meters from the Milk Bar.

—Today Yacef Saadi has retired from politics.

—Zohra Drif married one of the seven historical leaders, Rabah Bitat, who was the president of the National Assembly and several times minister. He is the only one still living. In Algeria he is called "the Authentic."

1981: Large women's marches were organized in Algiers to protest against the "Code of the Family," which the Algerian feminists call the "code of infamy." At the head of the procession, I am told, the elders marched, the famous resistance fighters Djamila Bouhired and Zohra Drif.

1984: The code of infamy, close to the Charia, is voted. It annuls the Constitution of 1976 that guaranteed civil rights for women.

Translated by Eric Prenowitz