

# Place Replaced: Colonial Nostalgia and *Pied-Noir* Pilgrimages to Malta

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## Introduction: A Song in Malta

"I can remember the First World War," Joseph announced. We were waiting for lunch in a dusty coffee shop on the Maltese island of Gozo during a tour organized by former settlers of Algeria of Maltese ancestry. It was Joseph's first visit to Malta. He continued: "They made a giant effigy of William II, filled it with firecrackers, and blew it up!" Joseph was in his early eighties. A tall man, he seemed even more so due to his careful posture and thick shock of white hair. He dressed formally and traveled through hot Mediterranean Malta that summer dressed in full suit and tie, but his grey eyes twinkled each time he set out to tell yet another surprising tale. There were two others at our table, Pierre and Marie.<sup>1</sup> All of my elderly companions were born in Algeria of Maltese descent and were now living in France.

I asked Joseph how it was that he could remember the war. "Well," he exclaimed, apparently pleased with this question. "I was born in 1911—I was seven then. I remember it well because that was when I first met my father." Joseph's father had been fighting in the war in Europe since his son was three. "My mother took me down to the port. Men were coming down the plank of the boat, and she pointed one of them out to me and said, 'There he is, that's your father.'" Joseph explained that his father had joined the French Army as a member of the *Troisième Zoaves*, one of the *régiments sacrifices* (a regiment with a notoriously high death rate). Pierre joined in. "Ah, my father was in the *Troisième Zoaves* too!" he interjected, his voice animated. He was one of the leaders of the social club that had organized our trip. He began to outline details of his own family history for me, but Joseph was not interested. He began to sing, rather loudly, interrupting Pierre. In a Semitic language—Maltese? The Maltese patrons of the café stopped talking and gave each other meaningful looks that I could not interpret; Marie rolled her eyes; and Pierre, after listening intently, burst out laughing. As Joseph took a deep breath and continued with a new verse, Pierre whispered, "It's in *Arabic*!" We all watched while Joseph sang verse after verse to the simple march-like tune. It was a touching yet perplexing moment. Joseph later explained to us that the song was a Boy

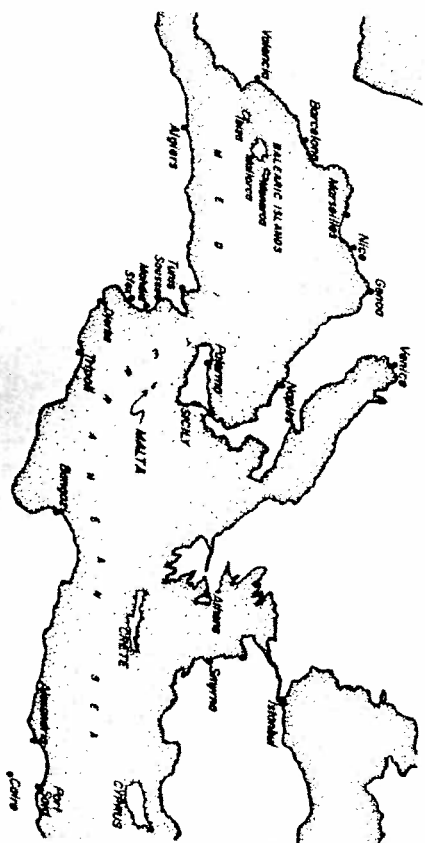


Figure 1  
Malta in the Mediterranean.

Scout anthem translated into Arabic that he had learned as a child for an international Scouts jamboree. This song, and the Arabic language in particular, are important clues in the following exploration of the recent interest in Malta among these former settlers of Algeria.

The journey to Malta that summer and the club that organized it are not isolated phenomena but part of a wider movement. Only a few years after their departure from French Algeria at independence in 1962 and their "return" to France, *pièdes-noirs* (former settlers)<sup>2</sup> of Maltese origin have formed ethnically based social clubs and have been traveling individually and in groups to Malta (see Figure 1). This spontaneous activity has escalated to the point where solo travelers and multiple tour groups representing clubs from different parts of France sometimes meet by chance in Malta, and the Maltese-origin *pièdes-noirs* have become known, sometimes even infamously, among the Maltese. While in Malta for a week my fellow travelers encountered people they had known in Algeria on three separate occasions. In each case, they had not seen each other since they had left the colony almost forty years before and were astonished to meet again in the elevator of our hotel or walking along the streets of Valetta. According to a travel agent in southeastern France, so many people of this background have been making these pilgrimages to Malta that Air Malta rerouted its service to include direct flights to Marseilles, a more convenient location for the *pièdes-noir* population living in southern France. How can we explain this Maltese pilgrimage phenomenon? Why have so many *pièdes-noirs* of this background formed ethnically based social clubs? I spent 20 months with members of one such club, the Association Malte-France, to investigate these questions further.

### Place-Making, Diaspora, and Conflated Places

Recent anthropological literature has challenged the linkages commonly made between culture, people or nation, and a particular terrain (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996:1). New works suggest that we see associations of people, culture, and place as historical and social constructions (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b:4), and there has been an increased interest in understanding place-making ethnographically (Feld and Basso 1996; Lavie and Swedenburg 1996; Myers 1986; Olwig and Hastrup 1997; Slyomovics 1998). Scholars working with diasporic, immigrant, or refugee societies regularly note the significance of re-membered places as "symbolic anchors" of community (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a:39) and that the "homeland" idea often serves as a unifying symbol for such populations (Cohen 1997:23–25; Safran 1991). Because not all diasporas are alike, however, the meaning and power of different homeland constructions will vary and can change over time, as recent research has revealed (Bicharat 1997; Brown 1998; Gilroy 1987, 1993; Gordon and Anderson 1999; Malkki 1997; Poerregaard 1997; Slyomovics 1998). In fact, sometimes "homeland" does not even refer to a specific geographic place (Malkki 1997).

Among diasporic communities that maintain an ideology of return (Bicharat 1997; Slyomovics 1998), the politics of memory and constructions of homeland are mutually implicated. However, what role does homeland play for displaced people who have *no* hope of returning? In this study of exiled settlers, we find that here too the politics of memory plays no less a pivotal role. At first glance, their trips to Malta could be construed as representing yet another instance of a population that has been displaced, doubly in this case, making sacred journeys to their ancestral homeland in conjunction with an ethnic revitalization movement (for instance, see Basu 2001). However, as I show below, the reasons for these trips and the widespread longing for Malta are more complex. Important clues emerged on the trip I took with Joseph and the other association members in September 1995. Although the travelers made the obligatory comments about the sites they were visiting, most of the time they discussed not Malta but their lives *là-bas* (back there), the *pièdes-noir* euphemism for Algeria. When they did discuss Malta, they highlighted aspects of the natural and cultural landscape, including the plants or the older stone houses, and their similarity to those "back home." Language is of special significance here, for Maltese is a Semitic language closely related to North African Arabic. As I illustrate below, for these elderly *pièdes-noirs*, Malta serves not as an ancestral homeland but as a replacement for their "real" homeland, Algeria. When these trips are viewed in the wider context of colonial nostalgia, the politics of memory and of forgetting, and the sensory memory of place, we find here that one homeland, Malta, serves as a metaphor for another, Algeria. Malta has become, for these travelers, a place replaced.

Fernandez (1988) has called our attention to the ways that parts of a place can stand for the whole, such as Andalusia for all of Spain. In particular, he highlights the uses of metonymy in the development of *contrastive places* (1988:32)—places perceived and understood in ways constrastive to another

place, such as in the comparisons often made between Andalusia and Asturias. In this case, however, we find the relationship a synecdochal one in which the very features associated with Algeria, such as the prickly pear cactus or the spoken language, not only symbolize that place, but because these things can also be found elsewhere, they allow people to transpose one place for another. Metaphor thus serves in the development of a quite different argument here, one in which two places are not contrasted, but *conflated*. This conflation is not necessarily a conscious process, however, and I outline the ways that sensory memory and collective forgetting work together to make Malta, more than any other place, the outlet for Maltese pied-noir longing for Algeria.

### Repatriates, Pieds-Noirs, and the French-Algerian War

The Malta-France Association that organized Joseph's trip is based at a thriving community center for overseas French, the *Maison des Rapatriés* (Repatriates' House, or simply *Maison*) situated in a large town in southeastern France.<sup>3</sup> The *Maison* groups over 20 such repatriate organizations. The population served by this community center are among the over two million French repatriated from France's many overseas territories (including Indochina, Egypt, sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and Madagascar) at decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s (Dubois 1994). This extremely diverse population, which in the case of the North African colonies included indigenous Jews and Muslims and settlers from across Europe, was united by the official label *repatriate*, a term probably selected strategically to underscore their unquestioned belonging to the French nation-state (Smith 2003:19). However, the mass migration of nearly one million colonists from Algeria at the end of the French-Algerian War led to the widespread adoption of a new term—*pied-noir*. There are good reasons to distinguish the former settlers of Algeria from the Europeans who arrived from the Protectorates. Morocco and Tunisia, for instance, suffered a less destructive form of French rule than French Algeria, and, consequently, their independence was accompanied by relatively little violence and disruption. Algeria's colonial history provides a striking contrast. It was France's premier settler colony with three coastal departments that were officially incorporated into the French state in 1871. It was also a colony characterized by over a century of violence and oppression. By 1954, over one million settlers lived there, and despite the ongoing decolonization of other parts of the French empire, the French fought a bitter war for nearly eight years trying to retain it. Finally, unlike Tunisia or Morocco, emigration from Algeria occurred precipitously over a period of months at Algerian independence in 1962.

Today, the *pieds-noirs* are associated in the French imagination not only with the embarrassing legacy of the doomed colony but also with the notorious French-Algerian War (1954–1962). It is difficult to overstate the degree to which the war wracked not only life in Algeria but also in metropolitan France and to what extent the conflicts raised during this period remain unresolved to this day (see Stora 1992). Mounting war-related expenses exacerbated an already fragile political climate, leading to the successive collapse of multiple French

governments, including the Fourth Republic. At the Republic's fall, as politicians in the metropole tried to form a viable government, military officers in Algeria were organizing a coup, and France itself came close to total civil war.<sup>4</sup> Metropolitan French were further implicated through their military service: approximately 2.3 million French soldiers served in the war effort, of whom some 25,000 perished (Ageron 1991:160). Estimates of Algerian fatalities vary widely: 200,000 to 500,000 seem the most reliable figures thus far.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the war garnered considerable international attention, not only because it was a dramatic and ultimately successful war of liberation that heralded the demise of the French empire but also because of the horrifying revelations that the French Army had turned to the systematic use of torture as one of its principal weapons. This last fact, although known for some time, was suppressed for years and has erupted only recently as war veterans, torture victims, and the French public now debate the problems of public accountability, punishment, and restitution for the perpetrators and victims of these war crimes.<sup>6</sup> The pied-noir connection to this war, and, in turn, the war's association with these horrible "secrets," may go a long way toward explaining why many metropolitan French, on learning about my research subject, would visibly shudder when I mentioned the *pieds-noirs*. Arriving in the aftermath of this nation-wrenching conflict, the *pieds-noirs* became targets of rage and frustration. They were often blamed for the war, for the political turmoil it engendered, for colonialism in general, and in the case of those who lost loved ones in the war, for their personal losses. Not surprisingly, pied-noir assimilation into French society has been difficult and remains incomplete in many ways to this day.<sup>7</sup>

### Pied-Noir Associations in Southeastern France

Due to the difficulties they encountered in their efforts to integrate into French society and their common experience of displacement and exile, *pieds-noirs* turned to each other early on for moral, economic, and social support. People who had been disconnected from both friends and relatives began organizing huge reunions to help locate each other, such as the annual pilgrimage of Notre Dame de Santa Cruz in Nîmes (Slyomovics 1995). In the last four decades, the migrants have formed hundreds of clubs (*Fr. associations*)<sup>8</sup> that have helped to reweave a social fabric among a people who have been scattered across an alien landscape, but their continuing importance suggests the degree to which *pieds-noirs* remain isolated from wider French society. The first included mutual aid and lobbying organizations designed to mobilize them politically in order to secure more favorable legislation and benefits. More recently, *amicales* have been formed, social clubs that unite people from a common institution or profession or around a shared special interest. Many pied-noir *amicales* are geographically based, organized around a specific city or town in Algeria where its members originated. Some are also based around a certain region of France, thus uniting people living in one part of France who were originally from the same place in Algeria, such as, *Amicale des Bâtiments de la Région Parisienne*. Other *amicales* are organized around former schools.

Although the migration experiences of French from other overseas locations such as Tunisia or Morocco were generally less traumatic, these migrants too have formed such clubs. At the Maison, for instance, a club unites the French of Tunisia. The vast majority of members and attendees of the Maison events were *piéds-noirs*, however.

My fieldwork had as its point of departure the local Maltese organization, and I spent much time with its leaders and members. To situate the organization's activities within the wider context of the regional repatriate community, I attended activities of other associations as well, including happy hours, parties, meetings, and lectures.<sup>9</sup> The more active of these clubs attracted between 200–400 participants for their events, which had to be held in large rented halls on the outskirts of town. I soon learned that the Maltese organization I was working with was not unique. Since the late 1960s, at least a half-dozen Franco-Maltese associations have been established throughout France. Through interviews with the founders of three other Maltese associations, I found that the annual calendars of the Maltese clubs are similar and that they in turn closely resemble the calendars of the regionally based organizations.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the Maltese associations are unique among *piéd-noir* organizations in that they alone have been organized specifically around the members' common ethnic heritage.

### The Maltese Associations, Assimilation, and Settler Ethnicity

Maltese *piéd-noir* social clubs should not exist, according to French historians of colonial Algeria and many contemporary French anthropologists.<sup>11</sup> Although more than half of the "French" colonists of Algeria migrated there in the 19th century from Spain, Italy, Malta, or Germany, making French Algeria a colony of remarkable ethnic (and class) diversity,<sup>12</sup> most historical and contemporary sources claim that by World War I all of the non-French settlers of various origins had thoroughly assimilated to French cultural norms, developing into a new French settler society.<sup>13</sup> According to this dominant view, once the foreign settlers became French citizens by legal decree in the late 19th century, the great assimilating tools of the French state, which included the educational system, compulsory military service for men, an array of political and legal institutions, as well as social practices such as intermarriage, acted together to dissolve any remaining cultural barriers. When close to a million of these former settlers arrived in France at the end of the French–Algerian War in 1962, they were treated equally as French repatriates under French law.

The elderly repatriates who participate in the Maltese clubs seem to be living examples of this dominant narrative. They have lived in France since the end of the French–Algerian War, arriving there as French citizens. Most in fact are members of the third to fifth generation in their families born in Algeria, because the Maltese were among the earliest migrants to reach the colony.<sup>14</sup> Some have ancestors who left Malta for Algeria in the 1840s. There is no question in their minds about their French nationality: they speak French and sometimes only that language and certainly not Maltese. They attended French schools

and most of the men served several long years in the French Army during World War II. To them, their "Frenchness" is unquestioned and unquestionable. At first glance, it is only their participation in the Maltese *piéd-noir* social clubs that calls into question the official ideology of complete cultural assimilation. At the same time, we should keep in mind the strong assimilationist ethic that still pervades French society. Whatever one's background, "one is expected to be assimilated, to be simply 'French'" (Gross et al. 1996:128; see also Blum 2002). Even the creation of a social club based around a group's ethnic origins, let alone the inclusion of Malta in the club name, can be viewed as a radical act, as assertions of a distinct identity. Thus, the very existence of these clubs is an indication that the assimilation of settlers in colonial Algeria was a more complex process than most historical narratives would have us believe.

### A Maltese Enigma

One of the first puzzles this work must address is why this phenomenon would apply only to the Maltese. Given the fact that a much larger proportion of the settler population was from Italy and Spain, why do we find no Hispano-French *piéd-noir* associations or those uniting *piéds-noirs* from Italy? We might assume, given the significance of social memory to the consolidation of social identities (Alonso 1988; Brow 1990), that the presence of the Maltese associations would in itself indicate the maintenance of some distinct Maltese social memory. Although the official narrative denies the persistence of ethnic or other distinctions among the *piéd-noir* population, the existence of these clubs suggests another story.

A clue to this Maltese enigma seems to lie in the associations' expansion of their annual calendar to include trips to Malta. These trips are often referred to by association members as "pilgrimages" and are sometimes even considered the *raison d'être* for the clubs. When I asked one member why he thought people took the time to set up the clubs, he replied rather cynically that they did so to get reduced airfares to Malta. On first learning about these voyages, I was thrilled. I envisioned them as ancestral heritage pilgrimages—similar to those found among other diasporic groups (Lowenthal 1996:9–10; see also Basu 2001; Kosansky 2002)—serving to further develop or reinforce the Maltese facets of identity and ties to fellow association members. We might also assume that these journeys would serve to awaken "lost" memories for these travelers, to revitalize their lapsed membership in an imagined ancestral community. Given the centrality of their Catholic faith, I expected that a principal activity in Malta would involve trips to their home villages and parish churches, not unlike the *hillulot* (pilgrimages to saints' shrines) for Moroccan Jews (see Kosansky 2002). These voyages would surely reflect Malta's significance to the maintenance of this collective identity, I believed, and given our knowledge of the significance of homeland to other long-exiled populations, I assumed that Malta itself would play a central role in the group's collective memory.

However, here we encounter another enigma: as I began to identify the principal sites of Maltese pied-noir social memory, I learned that Malta was a memory domain that was completely empty. People never talked about life in the ancestral homeland. Even the stories that people recounted in detail about their earliest relatives had a definite Algerian orientation (for instance, "My great-great grandfather first worked as a stone mason in Constantine"); they rarely commented on the reasons why their ancestors left, never discussed their journeys to the colony, and most did not even know exactly when their families had first emigrated. I eventually tried to prompt discussion on this topic, asking individuals directly what life in Malta had been like, whether they had heard any stories that had actually taken place there, or whether they knew where in the Maltese archipelago their ancestors were from. Their answers were surprising: aside from one man who had a first-generation immigrant parent, most did not even know which island they were originally from, let alone which town or village, nor did they know who had left, when, or for what reasons. This is illustrated in the following excerpt of a taped interview with a husband and wife in their mid-seventies:

- Author:** So, your parents . . . didn't speak too much about their pasts in Malta.  
**Husband:** Never.  
**Wife:** No.  
**A:** So . . .  
**H:** We didn't talk about it.  
**A:** Yes.  
**H:** We talked about *us*—us in Algeria.  
**W:** No.  
**H:** We spoke about our lives in Algeria. We didn't speak about our . . .  
**A:** So, you didn't have . . . any images of Malta, ideas of . . . churches, other family members, anything like that?  
**H:** No.  
**W:** No.  
**H:** No, and along with other Maltese, we socialized with Spanish, Italians . . . and they didn't . . . they didn't speak about their origins either . . .  
**W:** We were French, and that's that, you know?<sup>15</sup>

Some of my subjects had thought about this absence a great deal and proposed reasons for it. One common explanation was that their ancestors were working so hard in the colony that they had little time to maintain contact with their relatives back in Malta. One woman raised the problem of the low literacy rates among the Maltese. Her own grandparents' marriage certificate was signed with an "X," for instance. It would have been difficult, she felt, for those who could not write to keep in touch with overseas relatives in the 19th century. Others seemed embarrassed about this "problem." For here I was, having come all the way from the United States to interview them about their past, and they knew so little about Malta, their putative homeland. Sometimes interviewees became aware of this gap in their knowledge only in talking with me. In the following taped interview, a man in his sixties who had grown up in Algiers and who was quite proud that all four grandparents were Maltese, began to explain to me what Malta had meant to him during his youth:

But we, we never talked about Malta. Even though we spoke about the past. But my father . . . well, my mother didn't tell me much of anything. . . . Well, yes, she talked about . . . we talked about *people*, but not of the country. OK! So . . . which people? Well, my parents spoke to me about their own childhood . . . but, well, this childhood was already in Algiers. . . . So, at the level of Malta, what does this mean? We didn't speak about Malta, per se. But my father spoke about his parents, his father and mother. He *must* have told me that they came from Malta, because I couldn't have made that up.

In these responses, Malta appears absent as a repository of memory, and yet people of this heritage, albeit French citizens for generations, were organizing social clubs around this background with the expressed purpose of traveling there. The reasons for this seemingly paradoxical mass movement, this heritage tourism in the absence of a developed heritage consciousness, begin to surface when we return to the colonial context and consider the formation in the colony of an Algeria-based "Maltese" identity.

### Colonial Liminality

Through my conversations and taped interviews with elderly former colonists over the years, I have found an oppositional social memory among those of Maltese origin. This is a construction of the past based not on a common memory of the ancestral homeland, however, but one rooted in their common experience in the colony of subaltern colonist status and liminality. The official narrative of complete settler assimilation and homogenization masks another, darker reality—the existence of an ethnically marked class hierarchy within the larger settler population of Algeria (as has been well demonstrated in Prochaska 1990). The migrants were incorporated differently into the developing colonial economy, and eventually a hierarchy was formed in which French and naturalized Germans and Swiss occupied elite political and economic positions, settlers of Spanish or Italian origin occupied an intermediate status, and Maltese and indigenous Jews were awkwardly positioned as liminal populations between the "real" colonists above them and the numerically dominant colonized populations below. Within this colonial context characterized by extreme power differentials, the Maltese migrants were in a particularly difficult social position. They had arrived in the colony already quite poor, as a colonized population escaping British rule, and speaking a Semitic language nearly mutually intelligible, by historical accounts, with the local North African Arabic idiom. They were a people that northern Europeans found difficult to define and were viewed by many as closer to the colonized than to the colonists in socioeconomic status, culture, and physical appearance.<sup>16</sup> Ironically, even their strong religiosity, involving a cult of saints (Bois-sevain 1965), identified them in the northern European imagination as more "Oriental" than "Western" (see Donato 1985). Anti-Maltese stereotypes and prejudices were widespread as early as the 1840s. As with liminal populations in other colonial contexts (as described by Stoler 1989, 1991, 1992), the Maltese threatened the stability of colonial categories and, as such, posed a threat to



French rule. Difficult to define, the Maltese were viewed by many of their settler contemporaries with suspicion and distaste.

Anti-Maltese prejudices persist to this day in attenuated form in wider pied-noir circles. In my conversations with "non-Maltese" pieds-noirs, especially those of French origins (referred to by the Maltese as the *vrais* [real] or *purs* [pure] French), I found that the Maltese continued to be a source of fascination, if not derision. At the annual meeting of a large, regionally focused pied-noir organization that unites former residents of Constantine, the association president alluded in his opening address to the Maltese association with which it shared many members in common. He started his commentary by announcing, "Many Maltese are *Constantinois* [from Constantine]—and many Constantinois are *Maltese*!"<sup>17</sup> This seemingly simple assertion led to uproarious laughter, and it was clear from this response that "Maltese" was a label rich in indexicality. Just what qualities were conjured up in the imaginations of the individuals present I could not know, but in subsequent conversations, people elaborated. Some talked about the Maltese with pity or paternalistically, referring to them as *les petits Maltais* (the little Maltese). They were described as the poorest of the colonists, hardworking, but also crude, stingy, and with crass or ostentatious dress and a lack of education or "class." I heard a few men of non-Maltese origin joke about the fact that the Maltese had come to Algeria with herds of goats and few women—an insinuation of bestiality.

The Maltese were not the only liminal population in colonial Algeria, however. Well before the 7th-century arrival of Arabs and Muslims, Jews had been living in Algeria for over a millennium,<sup>18</sup> and by the time the French arrived, they spoke the local Arabic dialect or closely related Judeo-Arabic and shared culinary, dress, and other cultural practices with the surrounding populations (Bahloul 1996:86). Some French Jews who arrived in Algeria in the early decades of the colony were shocked by the standard of living of their Algerian Jewish brethren (Laloun and Allouche 1987:19) and actively engaged in a mission to reform them—a process later scholars have described as a form of "colonization" (see Friedman 1988). This project culminated in the mass naturalization of Algerian Jews to French citizenship by the Crémieux decree of 1870. This naturalization and its wholesale transfer of a subset of the indigenous population of Algeria into the colonist category has been linked by some scholars to the later widespread and virulent anti-Semitism that characterized settler society in the 1880s and 1890s and the 1920s and 1930s, as manifested in periodic anti-Jewish rampages that were largely carried out by settlers (Friedman 1988; Prochaska 1990:138). The naturalized Jews had undermined the legitimacy of colonial domination by making the transition from colonized population to colonist, and they thus became another liminal population in this colonial society (Friedman 1988).<sup>19</sup>

The connections made by non-Maltese pieds-noirs between the Maltese and the indigenous Jews in the past as well as today underscore the liminal social position of these two groups.<sup>20</sup> Given the legacy of anti-Semitism among settlers, as well as the status anxieties that are often associated with liminality,

I assumed that the Maltese in particular would have been major actors in anti-Semitic rioting. I searched the historical records for evidence of this to no avail.<sup>21</sup> On the contrary, I found that Maltese were sometimes the victims of such riots, apparently mistaken by the rioters for Jews.<sup>22</sup> In addition, perhaps because many Jews and Maltese worked in the colony as intermediate traders, these ethnic groups were stereotyped and targeted historically by French officials as ones prone to "suspect" business practices.<sup>23</sup> Such stereotypes were repeated in contemporary contexts. In a strange attempt to challenge dominant stereotypes that nevertheless incorporated and thus reproduced dominant terms and ideologies, contemporary Maltese sometimes proudly explained to me that in the colonies they had been a kind of "super Jew."

The enduring liminal social status of the French of Maltese origin helps us understand how there could still be a distinct *Maltese* understanding of the colonial past. This distinct memory, however faint, can be viewed as an important symbolic resource around which individuals have been able to construct and elaborate a separate collective identity despite the homogenizing processes of the French colonial state. At the same time, Maltese liminality helps us better understand the silencing of Malta in Algeria. In my conversations with French of Maltese origin, I heard at length about their childhood shame regarding their Maltese heritage and the attempts made by their parents to enforce French linguistic and cultural practices. One man explained that his grandparents had purposefully cut all ties to Malta ("ils ont coupé les ponts avec Malte"), and actively tried to erase any cultural distinctiveness to facilitate their children's integration. Another man said that they had always tried to keep a low profile ("on se faisait tout petit"). In the process, they submerged as much of their ethnic identity as possible, even changing their last names.<sup>24</sup> Through its silencing by the previous generations, Malta eventually became an empty symbol in collective understandings of self and identity. The elderly Franco-Maltese pieds-noirs that I met in France were thus bound by their common experience of shame, by their knowledge of their "suspect" origins, by their (typically) lower socioeconomic status, and, ironically, by their collective loss of any memory of their homeland that this shame had induced. Thus, an "Algerian-Maltese" ethnic identity has persisted despite the half-century of *francisation*, occurring first in the colony and then in the four decades of exile in France. However, this identity is not linked to the maintenance of a collective memory of a Maltese homeland but is tied instead to their unique social position in the colony.

Ironically, it may be their very displacement and settlement in France that has allowed the pieds-noirs of Maltese origin to reclaim their ethnic heritage. Now that they are in France, it is the Algerian part of their identities that they must hide, at least from wider French society—hence, the elision of North Africa, Algeria, and/or Tunisia from their associations' names. Many, in fact, did not like to use the term *pied-noir* when others who were not pieds-noirs were present. At the same time, Malta, if thought of at all, does not carry the negative connotations in France as it once held in the colonial context but is instead a

place associated with the Knights of Malta and their "heroic" stance against the Ottoman threat to European Christianity. Their identity as Maltese, in this context, can be openly expressed; as heirs of a heroic past and as the valiant defenders of Christian Europe.

Why then would so many individuals who share such a background travel to Malta? What does this place represent to them, and why do they choose to orient their lives around social clubs whose main activity is to organize annual trips there? In following a group of club members on a trip to Malta, I discovered that these pilgrimages can be understood best in terms of their intense longing for their "other" homeland, Algeria.

### Colonial Nostalgia

The nostalgia of former settlers for French Algeria is such an integral part of pied-noir culture that pieds-noirs themselves have coined an expression for it, *nostalgérie*. As Joëlle Hureau (1987:86) suggests, this term applies to an imaginary landscape, a land of memory, delimited by nostalgia. In France, this nostalgia is viewed largely with derision—as representing a nostalgia for colonialism per se. It is often understood by nonsettlers as representing a desire to return to an anachronistic and unjust way of life characterized by unequal power relationships, a time of former prosperity replete with live-in servants, cheap farm labor, and the exercise of power and authority. Although this depiction may indeed characterize the past for some, these were not the aspects of Algeria talked about by the pieds-noirs that I met. Instead, theirs was largely a place-based yearning, one filled with the images and sounds of their natal land.

For many pieds-noirs I encountered, the tug of *nostalgérie* was all pervasive, and they lived a split life—physically in France, but mentally in Algeria. This living in both worlds simultaneously was evidenced by linguistic slips that occurred with surprising frequency, such as confusion of verb tense. Individuals often talked to me at length about Algeria in the present tense before catching themselves. When the adult children of these speakers were present, they immediately and sometimes harshly corrected their parents, in a manner that suggested to me that slips of this kind were not unusual. During a visit with an alert elderly widower of Maltese origins at his tiny apartment in Aix, he at one point got up to show me a book of images of his hometown. He pointed to a photograph of the coastline. "Look!" he exclaimed, "There is the lighthouse you can see from my house. There, that's my house—that is where I live, right there. OK, now this . . . this is another view of my house. This is the view you see from my living room window, and that, there, is the main street in the center of town." We continued to look as he turned the pages. "There again, that's where I live, I mean, where I lived." He caught himself only after several minutes and seemed embarrassed. This was the most animated I had seen him during our many conversations, and his wistful looking at old photographs of his beloved house and former hometown, which he had not seen for over three decades, left a poignant impression.

Even when individuals are aware of the regressive aspects of their continued attachment to Algeria and try to move forward in establishing their new lives in France, they still have difficulties making themselves feel rooted in their new home. During a taped interview, Louise, a dynamic older woman, became somewhat confused when trying to explain exactly what year she had left Algeria for France. As almost an aside, she explained that although her family was going to their *patrie* (fatherland, nation), France was not their *pays* (country). "It's our patrie, but it isn't our country. The most beautiful country in the world is the one in which one is born." She went on to explain a bit more of her feeling of not being entirely a part of France. "I am not completely integrated . . . a part of France . . . to the extent that I don't feel *chez moi* [at home]. When I go to California, it's as if, as if . . . I were in France. What I mean is that in California, I feel as much at home as I do in France." She went on to admit that, of course, California is different from France, for instance, the language and cuisine are quite different. "But," she continued, "as far as nature is concerned, I feel better in California than in France!" She seemed a bit surprised at this declaration and tried to explain it. "You see, in France, *nothing* reminds me of my country [pays]. I can go from the north to the south . . . and I don't find the . . . plains, the, the *mountains*, the, the, the same *landscapes* [*paysages*], the same *smells* . . . the same colors, like *chez nous*. Thus, I get the feeling that I'm always traveling [*en voyage*] in France. I'm floating."

The nostalgic yearning to return to a better time or place can also be viewed as representing a disappointment with the present time and place, a "disenchantment and disengagement from the here-and-now" (Nosco 1990:5). For the pieds-noirs, the feeling that they are not in their "homeland," their country, is underscored by the poor reception they feel they had received by the metropolitan French on arrival and the hostility they continue to face today. At the end of the French-Algerian War, tensions in France were high. Many metropolitans were concerned that the former settlers were securing the best jobs and housing during a period of economic hardship. I heard many tales of surprising cruelty: people purposefully blocking pied-noir cars, graffiti calling for their expulsion from France, the theft of their belongings from military warehouses, hotel managers refusing one after another to house them. During my fieldwork, I too encountered anti-pied-noir sentiments that were quite strong: one middle-aged friend who worked in the local tourist office, after finally learning the specifics of my research topic, exclaimed in horror, "Oh, the pieds-noirs? I hate those people!"

### Initial Pilgrimages as Rites of Passage

That anti-pied-noir sentiment and *nostalgérie* are linked and that these in turn are connected to Malta is indicated by the stories some people told of their initial journeys there. Three different men, living in different parts of France, each of whom had traveled to Malta independently of each other and had, subsequently, founded Franco-Maltese associations, recounted their journeys with no prompting from me with strikingly similar narratives. The long and convoluted

itineraries of these journeys intensified their meaning as sacred voyages that hold great symbolic value in the travelers' sense of self and identity.

When these men first traveled to Malta in the mid-1960s, it had only recently achieved independence from the British and was still a poor country that was extremely difficult to reach from France. In narrating their journeys, these men were representing their determination to reach the isles: first traveling for days by multiple trains across France and down to southern Italy, then sailing by boat to Sicily, where they proceeded overland across an impoverished Sicilian landscape, and then, again by boat to Malta. The speakers also outlined their initial motivations for undertaking such a voyage. These were linked less to a nostalgic attachment to Malta than they were to their difficulties integrating into their new home in France. Mr. Grech, for instance, began his journey narrative as follows:

It is with the shock of 1962, when we had to leave our birthplace, our fatherland [patrie], but our fatherland in the French context, that . . . we found ourselves without roots. This was even more so because there was a real . . . kind of civil war between the French from Algeria and the French of the Metropole. Huh? The mayor of Marseille said about us: "We should hang them, shoot them, and throw them into the sea." Gaston Defferre. See? So, we were rejected, we had to show our identity papers, we were [treated like] suspects. And we found ourselves really . . . completely cut from our country [pays], our roots. Me, I think it's this, that, personally, instinctively . . . and I questioned myself. Because I said to myself, sure, I'm French, but I'm not from here. Whether I'm in Marseilles, in Paris . . . it will never be my home. So, I said, I'm going to try to get to know Malta . . . So, what happened was a . . . story that marked me. So, we get off the boat. We get off the boat, and I have my French passport. And there was a customs agent down below, an old customs agent, while in France, in 1962 . . . and the old customs agent, when we show him our passports, he looks: "Grech! Maltese!" and I could have kissed him. I saw in this man my grandfather. I said, "Finally, I am welcomed. Finally, I am recognized/accepted. Finally, I am not in a foreign country where they chase us, where they cannot accept us." This was an, an, an . . . awakening. "Grech, Maltese!" That, I will always keep close to my heart. "Grech, Maltese!" So, there, afterwards, I said, I am going to . . . and I began to research my family history.

Grech decided to visit Malta after his hostile reception in France and says that he was seeking a place where he felt he belonged. Although many pied-noirs of French origins have responded to similar urges by conducting genealogical research to locate their ancestral village(s) in France, those of foreign origins have no such outlet. Malta, it would seem, serves instead. Grech was particularly struck when the customs agent in Malta recognized his last name as Maltese and also by his apparently immediate and warm acceptance of him as an insider, a reception that contrasted completely in his mind with the one he had received earlier in France, his "fatherland."

However, as I noted above, the voyages to Malta do not fit the classic case of a group of people returning to their homeland. The vast majority of the original settlers of Maltese origin had left the islands over a century before and had long ago lost contact with any relatives who had remained behind. During



Figure 2  
In the medieval city of Mdina.

the trip in September with Joseph and his companions, I was surprised by the fact that most of these travelers had no idea what island of the Maltese archipelago their family was from. A lack of connection was apparent by our choice of activities during our week there as well. This trip was not unlike that of any other package tour. We stayed in a large deluxe hotel designed to accommodate hundreds of guests and spent our time visiting the main tourist attractions: the impressive fortifications of the Knights of Malta in Valletta, the working class neighborhoods of the Three Cities, the medieval town center of Mdina (see Figure 2), the Neolithic ruins that dot the southern part of the island and Gozo, the impressive baroque churches on both islands, an artists' colony created for tourists housed in the former barracks of the British Royal Air Force, and the painted boats of the harbor towns. At first glance, it could seem that Malta for these travelers was a simple diversion, distinguished from other destinations only by the added frisson of knowing that distant relatives had once lived there. However, additional motivations for the Malta-mania that has gripped pied-noirs of this origin since the first "pilgrims" returned and established Franco-Maltese organizations in France were revealed through conversations, songs, and casual remarks made throughout their journey.

### Place as Metaphor

Mr. Dumont, who had spent his youth in Morocco, was one of the passengers in my car throughout our week-long vacation in Malta. He was fascinated by the landscape. On a rough back road through rural Malta on our way to see





Figure 3  
"On dirait Maroc."

the film set for *Popeye* known as "Popeye village." Dumont suddenly asked me to stop the car. Along the way, he had been repeating to himself, "On dirait Maroc. . . Oh, on dirait Maroc" [One could say it was Morocco]. He leaped out of the car with his camera to take photos and finally returned, beaming, announcing to his wife that he would show these pictures to his friends and tell them that they had just been to North Africa (see Figure 3).

People commented regularly on the similarity between the native flora of Malta and those of North Africa. We spent a good hour in a parking lot in the blazing sun inspecting some greenery growing up the side of an old Crusader wall several yards away from us. One of the *pieds-noirs* thought it might be a caper plant. Another man, originally from Tunisia, insisted that capers only grow as bushes. The discussion became heated until finally the club secretary consulted the amused parking attendant sitting nearby and determined, to the satisfaction of the Algeria-born contingent, that these were, in fact, caper plants.

The plant most associated with North Africa and their past lives there for these elderly *pieds-noirs* was the prickly pear cactus (*figuiers de Barbarie*, lit. North African or Barbary figs).<sup>25</sup> A woman in her eighties, also in my car, kept pointing out to abundant stands of these hardy cacti. She once cried out, "Wow, this is *really* the area of the Barbary figs!" and we all looked over to where she was pointing to find them growing wild, like weeds. From time to time, the passengers in my car would ask me to slow down when the stand we were passing was particularly well kept or had abundant or especially ripe fruit, so that they could take photographs or simply admire them.

Elements of the natural landscape indexed Algeria. Conversations wandered from commentaries on the olive and fig trees, orange groves and grape vines, or the local fare to reflections on their similarities with North African varieties of flora and fauna and then to North Africa more generally. While eating at a fish restaurant, I overheard Carmel Schembri and Mr. and Mrs. Attard discussing their respective homes: "It was a paradise, a real paradise, we had everything there!" Over the course of their meal, they retraced the shoreline, describing it in detail from Carmel Schembri's beloved western Tunisia to Mr. and Mrs. Attard's Philippeville in Algeria. "Did you ever go fishing over in X cove?"

This reveling in nostalgia for the North African landscape culminated on the last day of the trip. While waiting for the ferry to take us back from Gozo to Malta, we parked on a hill overlooking the bay. It was cold and damp, and the sun was setting. But just next to the parked vans along the side of the road was one of the most abundant stands of Barbary figs we had seen. It was just too much. Giggling like children, the old folks in the car ahead of me began making a commotion, taking photos of each other and rummaging through their bags. It was time for a Barbary fig feast! The secretary of the organization had come prepared with special pairs of thick leather gloves and began picking off dozens of fruits. Men had brought pocketknives for the occasion and began cutting away the spines. Everyone began gorging themselves on the delicious ripe fruits, taking photos of their friends with the red juices dripping down their mouths. One usually rather tense, brittle woman began to talk with enthusiasm for the first time on the trip. "Oh, this is just like my youth!" she kept exclaiming. "You know, it has been 33 years since I've eaten these," she told me. "Thirty-three years. How they remind me of the good old days!"

### Place, Cultural Habitus, and Language

If it were only the landscape of colonial Algeria that Malta replaced, the elderly *pieds-noirs* could easily travel elsewhere. In fact, Malta is notable today for its lack of natural features, particularly following the building craze of the past few decades that has covered much of the archipelago (especially the main island of Malta) with massive concrete high-rise hotels. There is, in fact, very little nature left there at all (see cover photo). Other Mediterranean islands could perhaps better serve as a suitable proxy, such as Sardinia or Corsica. But there are additional aspects of this particular place that I believe makes it an ir-resistible site for a pilgrimage back in time and space to colonial Algeria, and most notable among these would be the Maltese language.

Maurice Halbwachs (1941, 1992) wrote about the importance of landmarks in the development of a society's collective memory, and since then many anthropologists have brilliantly explored the role of place in social identity formation and collective representations of the past (Bahloul 1996; Basso 1996; Feld and Basso 1996; Slyomovics 1998). Halbwachs's own research highlighted the dynamic role of sacred sites in the development of the Christian faith (1941). However, knowledge of place may have significance beyond its use as mnemonic device in the consolidation of collective memories. As Edward

Casey has suggested, knowledge of place is not subsequent to perception but is an ingredient in perception itself: "To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in" (1996:18). Knowledge of place is an embodied knowledge, for we learn of place by means of the body. This point is underscored in Steven Feld's work on sound and acoustemology (1990, 1996). He suggests that when we talk of a "sense of place," we should focus more closely at how it is that a place is sensed (1996:91). Although much of the work to date on senses of place has been dominated by a European visualism (1996:94), Feld suggests that we move beyond this tendency and toward a "multisensory conceptualization of place." His work underscores the importance of the acoustic dimension in sensing place, involving sound, hearing, and the voice (1996:97).

A multisensory understanding of a place need not be limited to knowledge of the natural world. As Casey has written, "perceiving bodies are *knowing bodies*, and inseparable from what they know is culture as it imbues and shapes particular places" (1996:34). Casey thus calls our attention to the importance of our knowledge of a place through "cultural habitus" (1996:36). Places are rich in culture; they "gather." I believe that what is often overlooked in pied-noir nostalgia is a longing for cultural aspects of the colony as well, including the sounds of the Arabic language, which in turn indexes Algerians.

A sense of loss or longing for Algerians was never communicated to me directly or overtly by *piéds-noirs*. Due to the horrors they or their associates inflicted on Algerians even before the war as well as their strong emotions associated with the war years, *piéds-noirs* may never be able to acknowledge even to themselves this particular loss. It is also for this reason that most have never returned to Algeria: many fear retribution. However, other non-*piéds-noirs* in France have remarked on this quality of their exile. At the reunion of the Souk-Ahrasians, I had been talking for the previous three hours with a boisterous group of gentlemen of Maltese origin at whose table I had been seated. After they got up to visit another table, Hélène, a woman from northern France in her late sixties now married to one of the men, moved closer. She whispered, "There is something you must know, Andrea. They are just drenched in Arab culture. *Drenched*. They miss that culture, that world, terribly." Hélène's assertions of an underlying "Arab" quality to *piéd-noir* culture was repeated more than once by other metropolitan French during the course of my fieldwork.

There are oblique clues to this longing and this sense of loss. Unlike other examples of imperialist nostalgia (Rosaldo 1989:69), I did not find much evidence of the Orientalist fetishism that was observed by Smadar Lavie in homes of left-wing Israelis (1996:71–72). *Piéd-noir* homes are modest, often one- or two-bedroom apartments in hastily constructed concrete high-rises in newer parts of towns. Some had brought back hammered bronze serving platters, for instance, but rugs, sofa fabrics, and wall decorations were invariably purchased in France and featured French themes. Prints of Cezanne's many paintings of Mount St. Victoire, for instance, were common in homes I visited in southern France.

Cuisine was different. As is often noted, tastes and smells associated with a prior place and time can become important symbols of immigrant identity, childhood, and home (Diner 2001; Hieu 1997; Tuchman and Levine 1998). I was served couscous in a whole array of preparations at approximately one-third of the meals I ate as a guest in *piéd-noir* homes, and it became clear that this was not only on my account. *Piéd-noir* events also featured grilled sardines and cumin-spiced chickpea appetizers; often the main course was lamb *meschoui* (lamb roasted on a spit).

However, these dishes have also entered mainstream French culinary repertoire to a certain extent, making language an even more potent vehicle for nostalgic yearnings for a lost North African cultural world. In Algeria, Maltese men, especially, were more likely than other settlers to speak Arabic (and some even spoke Kabyle). This may have been due to their humbler socioeconomic status: many were still involved in smaller farming enterprises and thus worked directly with Arab and Berber labor. They were also more likely to have grown up in rural village settings, and many people I knew had parents who had been small shopkeepers—bakers, hardware store owners, and so forth—who had served, at least in part, an Arabic-speaking clientele. Conversations among *piéds-noirs* often turned to the question of Arabic and Berber terms, and it seemed clear from the undercurrent of competition present at these occasions that individuals valued the extent of their linguistic knowledge. One man came back from doing errands in downtown Marseilles to report with glee about a conversation he had started in Arabic, for no apparent reason, with a North African vendor. He seemed quite proud of the fact that the vendor finally asked him where he was from, after incorrectly guessing that he was Lebanese. Arabic was also used regularly among *piéd-noir* men of a variety of origins for greetings, serving an in-group, gate-keeping function. At bingo games, older men amused themselves to no end (and succeeded in exasperating their fellow female players who often did not share their language skills) by shouting out the numbers not in French but in Arabic.

Language becomes a central piece to this Maltese pilgrimage puzzle, because Maltese is a Semitic language closely related to Arabic.<sup>26</sup> It is notable, moreover, that this is *not* how the language is viewed by the elderly *piéds-noirs*. The first time I met the leaders of the Malta-France Association, the president informed me that his distinctive last name, Buttigeig, was Phoenician in origin as were those of many "original" Maltese families. He was not the only one to maintain such a position; the belief that the Maltese language is descended from Phoenician, not Arabic, is widespread among *piéds-noirs* of Maltese origin, and was common in Malta in previous centuries as well.

Research on language ideologies might help us to understand this apparently willful ignorance. Judith Irvine and Susan Gal write that linguistic differentiation is embedded in the politics of a region and its observers (2000:38). For the Maltese, the debate over the origins of the language is also a debate about the islanders' ambivalent relationship to Europe. From the 16th to 19th centuries, the archipelago was viewed as the last bastion of Christendom facing

an encroaching Islam. It was important in this geopolitical context to demonstrate that Malta belonged to Christian Europe and stood in opposition to the Ottoman Empire, Islam, and Africa (Luttrell 1977:105). The Muslim rule of the islands from the ninth to eleventh centuries thus posed a problem for scholars, who went to considerable lengths to argue for a continual Christian presence (Luttrell 1977). Linkages made between the Maltese and Arabic languages, therefore, were to be minimized if not denied outright, and Maltese scholars sought among their many conquerors other (more "European") ancestors. In so doing, they discovered the mysterious Phoenicians. Not only did the Phoenician colonization occur long before the arrival of the North Africans but also little else was known about its legacy or its language. A Phoenician origin thesis for the Maltese language was first promoted in the 16th century (Luttrell 1977:127), and by the 19th century, it had become widely accepted as Maltese linguists and archaeologists alike reveled in a "Phoenician mania" (Szyzycer 1972:148; Wetinger 1986:88).

The language ideology asserting that Maltese is descended from Phoenician is rooted in processes of fractal recursivity and erasure. Fractal recursivity involves "the projection of an opposition salient at some level of relationship onto some other level" (Irvine and Gal 2000:37–38). Here, the opposition between Christianity and Islam and between Europe and the Ottoman Empire/Africa—powerful conceptual models in the Mediterranean for centuries (Frendo 1988:186–187)—is projected onto the relationship between the Maltese and Arabic languages: Maltese/Phoenician is to Arabic as Christianity/Europe is to Islam. However, considerable erasure is also necessary to produce this effect. In this process, "facts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go unnoticed or get explained away" (Irvine and Gal 2000:38). What had to be "explained away" in this case was the preponderance of evidence of the Arabic roots of the Maltese language.

Most linguists now agree that Maltese is a Semitic language descended from early Tunisian Arabic. This language in all probability was brought to the islands by Berber-Arabs who conquered the islands in the mid-9th century and controlled them until the Norman Conquest of C.E. 1090 (Salloum 1997:34). The "thoroughly Arabic character of the local place-names," along with the absence of evidence of the earlier language, whatever it may have been, suggests to contemporary scholars that during the Muslim conquest, the local people may have been expelled and replaced with Arabic speakers (Wetinger 1986:95). The history of Maltese thus begins with the Arab invasion and the complete replacement of the previously spoken language with North African Arabic (Brintat 1991:93), followed by a slow and cumulative Latinization beginning in the Norman period that continues to this day (Acquolina 1976:3; Brintat 1991:94).

Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, most *pieds-noirs* of Maltese origin are still attached to the language ideology of Phoenician linguistic origins. When we consider what their ancestors had endured in French Algeria due to their liminal social status, we can understand why it was especially important

for them to assert a *European* rather than an Oriental heritage and why elderly *pieds-noirs* still cling to the Phoenician argument as if it were a matter of vital importance. Having been well versed in their language ideology myself, I was struck during my first visit to Malta at how many villages and cities had Arabic names, for example, Mdina, which is Arabic for town, or had names that were identical to sites in North Africa, for example, Rabat, which is Arabic for suburbs. Many of Malta's countless place-names of Arabic origin are descriptive or anthroponymic (Wetinger 2000:452–453) and thus meaningful to Arabic speakers, including the travelers in my car. The Dumonts, for instance, were a "pure" French couple who had grown up in Morocco, a colony that had few Maltese settlers. As a result, they were unfamiliar with Maltese but knew Arabic. Throughout the trip, I heard Mr. Dumont's running commentary on the language and its "uncanny" similarity to Arabic. He was particularly intrigued by the street signs: just like Arabic, he declared, but written in a Latin alphabet and thus easier for him to read. While I drove across the busy roads, he pointed out signs to his wife, exclaiming again and again, "Look, this is in Arabic too!" *Marsa*, he knew, meant port, and he was bubbling with excitement when on the third day we skirted the coast, coming across the towns of Marsaxlokk and Marsascala. He began to use terms from his memories of Morocco to refer to elements of the Maltese landscape, calling the old Crusader fortresses we kept passing *ksars* (Arabic for fortress or citadel). "Ah," he would announce, "here's another *ksar*!"

The built environment resembled Algeria as well. Not only were many of the older buildings constructed of blocks of stone, as were many buildings in the colony, but the cars and even the music appeared as if frozen in time. The shop signs, in particular, brought up colonial memories. Mr. Grech, who has accompanied over a half-dozen groups to Malta, later explained to me the reaction of people of his generation to Malta:

Malta has been a *conservatoire* of the 1950s, the 1960s . . . the music one hears, "Strangers in the Night" . . . all of that, the atmosphere . . . and then, there are the little details. I don't know if you saw that, in contrast to what you see elsewhere, in Malta, the stores don't have signs . . . there are *names* of the storeowners. So it's Pisani, Fargueta, Buhgjar. The people with the last name Pisani, when they come, or even if that isn't their name, they say, "Hey look, I used to go to that store!" Even the non-Maltese *pieds-noirs* when I take them to Malta, the folks from Algeria, they say, "Look, there is the name Missoud, remember!" That establishes a link. There is a visible link . . . There are maybe other things as well.

Some people on our trip had never learned the ethnic origins of common settler last names and thus did not know that many of the shops in Algeria were owned by Maltese. One woman in particular was puzzled by this and later told me in confidence that she thought it was odd that all of the stores in Malta had names just like those she had frequented in Algeria. The simple shop signs found throughout the tiny islands thus became powerful mnemonic devices conjuring up memories of Algeria.

Of all of the multiple reminders of Algeria, the linguistic or acoustic "cues" were particularly pervasive, yet due to the oppositional language ideology, these cues may have operated on a more subconscious level. This may explain why people sometimes seemed to forget where they were. Joseph's Boy Scout song makes sense when viewed in this light. He had spent the trip discussing his earliest memories: his father's return from the war, his own war service, his first job. Why that particular song at that time? Perhaps after spending time in Malta in the company of pieds-noirs, it made sense to resurrect the only Arabic that he still remembered. He finally had a context in which the song made sense, a context that in turn reminded him of the song. It is noteworthy that several of his companions resurrected their Arabic language skills during our trip as well. In an incredible testament to the power of erasure in language ideologies and the tenacity of the latter, some people who had never learned Maltese took advantage of its similarity to Arabic and began employing the North African Arabic idiom they had learned in the colony to communicate with the people of Malta, such as local shopkeepers and parking attendants, all the while maintaining that Maltese is Phoenician and *not* Arabic! Along with exasperating their anthropologist-companion, this language practice caused the Maltese residents, in turn, a real confusion. The locals would take another look at the travelers—their dress, hair styles and jewelry (the women often wearing gold crosses)—squint, and then exclaim, often in English, "Who are you—Arabs?" In a paradoxical twist, however, it was not the Arabic-speaking former colonists who became the "Arabs" on this journey, but the Maltese. Malta was serving as a stage, allowing the former settlers to imagine themselves transported in time and space back "home" to French Algeria. Malta became Algeria and the Maltese themselves stood in place of indigenous Algerians. It may be for this reason that friction erupted between the locals and the visiting pieds-noirs more than once on our trip. Although their contact with Maltese residents was generally restricted (again, one cannot help but note parallels to the colonial context), on one occasion the elderly women traveling with us got into a real spat with some Maltese women of roughly the same age who were tating lace tablecloths at a port-side tourist spot. The pieds-noirs women tried to bargain; the Maltese women refused to lower their prices and seemed insulted by the very idea. Their refusal to negotiate outraged the pieds-noirs, who later complained about the vendors' "obstinacy." Although at the time I found the incident rather odd, it now seems clear that they were insisting on carrying out practices with the Maltese that they remembered from their upbringing in Algeria and perhaps their encounters there with subordinate indigenous populations (or, maybe, even former Maltese shopkeepers in the colony).

### Why Malta? Silences and the Politics of Memory

If the pieds-noirs yearn to return to Algeria but cannot for personal and political reasons, why don't they travel instead to a neighboring North African country, such as Tunisia? In fact, three members of our group were former residents of Tunisia,<sup>27</sup> all members of the same family. Each had returned to Tunisia at

some prior time. They related their ability to do so to the fact that they had departed the colony initially on good terms. Two intended to visit again, but the woman who did not seemed unperturbed by this decision. All three seemed troubled by their break with their "homeland" and saw their move to France at least partly their own choice for a better future, a stance similar to that of many Moroccan Jews interviewed by Kosansky (2002:371). This less-troubled relationship with the former colony mirrors colonial history, and again, we are reminded of how different have been the experiences of the French from Algeria. Throughout nearly two years of research, in contrast to the Tunisian Maltese, I heard the Algerian Maltese rarely if ever address the central traumas that had defined them, neither their departure from the colony nor the war years.<sup>28</sup>

For these pieds-noirs, neither Tunisia nor any other North African country, can serve as proxy for Algeria in the ways that Malta can. This is due to the politics of remembering and the ways that place and time are fused in pied-noir nostalgia. The Maltese pieds-noirs wish to return not only to a *place*, a certain combination of geography and the human imprint on the landscape, but also to this place in the *past*, this place at a certain point in time. For this reason, no contemporary North African destination, not even Algeria, resembles the fused time/place that they miss. Superficial differences become significant. Because most learned Arabic while working and living with Algerians and not in school, they cannot read it. Thus Tunisia would not do: the signage is largely in Arabic script and not exclusively in the Latin alphabet as in Malta. Moreover, few shops if any in these former colonies are still owned by Maltese and thus the important shop-sign "props" are not there to prompt their memories of the colonial past. These countries have moved forward in time.

The travelers miss a certain iteration of that place in the past—an idealized reconstruction not unlike the visions of homeland shared by exiled Iranians in the United States (Naficy 1991:299). Here the past place was a decidedly *colonial* place. In this regard, it is significant that despite their awkward liminal social status, unlike the Algerian Jews, the Maltese were also *colonists*. The colonial memories and nostalgia we are concerned with here are those of a settler population. Travel to Morocco or Tunisia would mean traveling to a land now ruled by the native population. The contrast between the power dynamics in these new countries and those that they remember from Algeria would be dramatic; it is very probable that they would not know how to act and/or would feel alien in this transformed North Africa. Thus it may be the very *absence* of real Algerians that makes Malta so desirable a pilgrimage site. Malta serves as an idealized French Algeria, a sanitized version of the colonial past.

### Place, Memory, and Forgetting

Representations of the past shared by a population are strongly shaped by the needs of the present, a point made long ago by Halbwachs (1992:224). Because peoples and political agendas change while memories pile up, processes of forgetting are necessary for the consolidation of any collective memory, as many anthropologists have recently noted (Battaglia 1992; Carsten 1995). Indeed,



remembering anything at all would be quite impossible without forgetting. As Lowenthal writes, "memories must continually be discarded and conflated; only forgetting enables us to classify and bring chaos into order" (1985:205). It is especially important to note that forgetting, like remembering, often occurs in patterned ways. Freud long ago explored the effects of emotional states such as guilt on the processes of remembering. Everyday forgetting, in his view, was a clue to deeper psychological processes at work. He outlined an array of parapraxes, which include "slips of the tongue," the forgetting of names, and other errors in everyday life (Freud 1965:25), and he interpreted these behaviors as resulting from our often unconscious yet masterful ability to steer clear of difficult emotions. We are disinclined to remember "anything which is connected with feelings of displeasure and the reproduction of which would renew the displeasure" (1965:75). When memories are imbued with terrible feelings of shame, guilt, anger, or grief, the subject may protect him or herself from them by their repression, a process that is itself often denied. It follows that when many individuals have endured a similar ordeal, this process can lead to amnesias on a collective scale. Collective forgetting can also be deliberate: as Diana Gittins writes, "silence and power work hand in hand." As a result, even whole historical eras "can become cloaked in silence." Finally, the politics of silencing are historically contingent: what is mentionable in one era may not be at another point in time (1998:46-47).

The effect of repression and denial on the collective memory of the Maltese *pieds-noirs* is apparent when we consider which aspects of the past are discussed and highlighted and which have been "forgotten" or remain unsaid. The years of Maltese liminality feature prominently in their discussions and either have persisted as a form of "subaltern colonialist" oppositional memory or have resurfaced since the Maltese *piéd-noir* exile in France. These memories are powerful enough to nourish a distinct collective identity and to prompt the formation of the Franco-Maltese clubs. Algeria features prominently in their collective memory as well, and they spend much of their time together discussing "the good old days *là-bas*." These discussions recreate a highly selective vision of colonial times, however, which contains interesting zones of amnesia. Algerians, violence, and repression are excluded from public discussion. Even though many individuals I spoke with were proud of their Arabic language skills and enjoyed discussing in detail the warm *ambiance* they remembered from their rich social life in Algeria, they rarely discussed individual Algerian Arabs or Berbers, a pattern also found among the North African Jews interviewed by Valensi (1990). Interestingly, although the sounds of the language are essential sensory elements of that lost universe, the *pieds-noirs* seem to have blocked its *speakers* from their consciousness. Given the fact that their last encounters with Algerians would have been greatly strained by the French-Algerian War, we might assume that their memories of these encounters would be entangled with strong emotions. Some Maltese *pieds-noirs* would have hired Algerian or Berber servants, nannies, or workers, and many had childhood friends of "colonized" ethnicities. Confusion about their own

difficulties navigating the tension between personal relationships and group loyalties—a tension that would have become severe during the war—and feelings of abandonment, guilt, betrayal, or anger may all be at work here. Although they miss their former home terribly, their vision of that world has been reconstructed to exclude aspects associated with difficult memories or that are unmentionable today. The Maltese *pieds-noirs* are keen on remembering the ways in which they had been subordinated by other more dominant peoples, but are less able to perceive the ways in which they dominated as well.

### Diasporas Compared

How do these Maltese experiences compare to those of the other thousands of French who left Algeria in 1962? People forced to leave their home and unable to return will experience longings of some kind for that lost place or time. As Casey writes referring to Navahos displaced in recent years, such an experience can be disastrous (1993:34-39). The strategies of other French in exile from Algeria vary with ethnicity and the degree to which a prior homeland played a role in collective understandings of the past and self. I have found that many *pieds-noirs* of French origin have worked to replace Algeria with France, a homeland they had learned to love while at school in the colony. Some have delved wholeheartedly into the endeavor to become acquainted with this place—their *parrie*, their fatherland. This was the case of the "Moroccan" Dumonts, whose ancestors had left France so long ago that they had lost all contact with their relatives there. Once repatriated, they embarked on a conscious journey to "get to know France," and during every vacation over the past several decades, they have journeyed to the different *contrées* (regions) of their new home. In the process they have developed an impressive collection of postcards and photographs, displayed lovingly in separate photo albums organized by region.

What about the many "French" with no clear family heritage in France, however? The pilgrimage of Notre Dame de Santa Cruz, organized by The Association of the Friends of Santa Cruz of Nîmes, recreates in France a practice that had its origins in Oran, a city in Algeria that was dominated by settlers of Spanish origin throughout much of its colonial history. The ritual commemorates the Virgin's role in ending a cholera epidemic in Oran in 1849. This ritual persisted in colonial Algeria and was continued in France when the statue of the Virgin was brought there in 1964 (Slyomovics 1995:343). Perhaps because so many of the participants are of Spanish descent, this is not a healing ritual. As Slyomovics writes, "the pilgrimage is a temporary substitute, or consolation for loss, at the same time as it is continually preoccupied with rupture" (1995:347).

Algerian Jews who left Algeria at independence with the other French citizens also have been coping with their break from their home—one that they inhabited for over two thousand years. In her study of North African Jewish autobiographies and oral accounts, Lucette Valensi finds that many individuals focus on a space (a house, a neighborhood or town) that they describe as an



"enclosed place, protected and warm," where one hears one's mother tongue (1990:92).<sup>29</sup> However, Valensi found that her interviewees describe and evaluate their migration experiences differently, according to individual personalities and life trajectories. Jewish culture has been marked by a prior and enduring narrative of exile and return, and on leaving North Africa, many Jews returned instead to the original homeland, Israel. Valensi found that some of those who made such a journey now view their departures from North Africa not as traumatic but liberating. Chouraqui, for instance, felt free only after becoming an Israeli citizen (1990:96). But others had a different experience. As a woman from the extreme southern part of Algeria told Valensi, "When I left Ghardaia for Jerusalem, I learned that the true Jerusalem was Ghardaia" (1990:97). This woman's experience greatly resembles that of the Maltese *pièdes-noirs*. Like Valensi's interviewee, or the pilgrims in Nîmes for whom pilgrimage seems less about healing and more about rupture, the Maltese travel to Malta not to find a liberating journey home (it is significant that few ever decide to move there) but an ultimately unfulfilled journey back to Algeria. In these cases, as Valensi writes, there is exile but no possibility of redemption; only mourning remains (1990:97).

### Conclusion: Conflated Places and Silenced Memories

For the *pièdes-noir* travelers of Maltese origin who traveled to Malta that year, the trip was not so much a pilgrimage to the ancestral homeland as it was a symbolic journey to the travelers' "real" homeland, their pays: French Algeria. As I was driving these elderly individuals around Crusader castles, churches, and monuments, they were talking almost exclusively about life *là-bas* in French Algeria. Although Malta is a place they travel to in part because it feels welcoming to them, most have abandoned any hope of finding their former families there. They travel there not so much for Malta itself but to be able to return to a certain version of Algeria—an Algeria without anti-Maltese discrimination, an Algeria with "pseudo"-Algerians, an Algeria that never was. Trips to Malta represent pilgrimages of nostalgia.

The Malta-for-Algeria replacement was never articulated openly. Just as similarities between the Maltese and Arabic languages are denied, so too is this conflation of place. This may explain why *pièdes-noir* brochures and promotional materials feature classic Maltese tourist destinations such as the Crusader sites or Neolithic temples they visit. Elements of the landscape that might index Algeria are notably absent from such literature, unlike the brochures described by Kosansky designed to attract Jews from the Moroccan diaspora that purposefully feature images of the landscape to evoke a nostalgia for a lost North African homeland (2002:359). On the surface, everyone agrees that they are traveling through Malta, but mentally they are elsewhere.

The Maltese pilgrimages provide yet another example of the powerfully creative ways humans have coped with the grief of home-loss (see also Gross et al. 1996; Kugelmass and Boyarin 1998; Naficy 1991; Silyomovics 1998; Wachtel 1990). This grief may be especially difficult to surmount when the departure

was not a choice and when there is no hope of return. Here, the exiles have found an outlet, however temporary, and have replaced one place with another. Their two "homelands" are linked in multiple ways. The presence of characteristic flora, the landscape, the Mediterranean sky and shoreline, the climate, as well as the sounds of the local language and elements of the built environment, call forth memories of Algeria, allowing people to share in sensory memory-induced collective journeys of the imagination back home. In an interesting contrast to many other homeland pilgrimages, the place they visit is not a classic site of memory, however. In his work on Scottish Highland heritage tourism, Joseph Basu writes that memory can be externalized in the landscape, such as in the case of the ruins of villages depopulated by the Highland Clearances visited by later descendants of the Scottish diaspora (2001:340). Here, the Maltese landscape is devoid of memories. In fact, this may be the very point. Devoid of memories, it serves as a receptacle for a particular constellation of memories uprooted from somewhere else.

This article shows how interconnected place and social memory can be. In unraveling the contours of a group's collective memory, anthropologists may wish to attend to place; at the same time, a consideration of a group's past helps us understand the power today of specific places. Attending to which places can and cannot serve as substitute sites of memory can elucidate the underlying processes of collective memory formation, especially when the collective memory in question involves a difficult, traumatic, or devalued past—elements of which may remain unstated, unsayable, or which may be consciously and collectively avoided. This example also underscores the power of nostalgia, the ways mourning for a place is also a mourning for a lost time, and the strong ties between nostalgia and the evocative power of sensory memory. Tastes, sounds, and smells can evoke a whole associated landscape of memory (Kondo 1996:107). People displaced thus may find alternative sites that can evoke this sensory memory and allow them to collectively relive and reconstruct the past when their place of memory can no longer be inhabited, or as in the case of French Algeria, when it no longer exists.

### Notes

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1. All names of individuals and organizations have been replaced with pseudonyms.

2. *Pieds-noirs* means "black feet." This term originated in France during the French-Algerian War to distinguish the French of the colony from those of the metropole. Originally derogatory, it is now claimed by many repatriates who use it to self-identify. The French who arrived in the early 1960s from Algeria were a very heterogeneous population, however, and included naturalized indigenous Jews and Muslims as well as European settlers of diverse origins with an array of political affiliations, and consequently not all claim the term. For instance, Friedman reports that some Algerian Jews she interviewed in the mid-1970s embraced the term and identity for themselves (1988:123, 126), however, other scholars distinguish *pieds-noirs* and Algerian Jews (see Benayoun 1993, 1996). Some repatriates use the term today to refer to French from Tunisia and Morocco as well as from Algeria, however, *piéd-noir* purists I spoke with felt that this was inappropriate given their distinct heritages. Although usage varies in France today, the term here is synonymous with "settlers born in Algeria."

3. The name of the center and its specific location are not identified to protect the interviewees.

4. Military officers in Algeria were planning parachute drops in Paris and managed to take Corsica on May 24, 1958, without any resistance. On May 27, with total disregard for the constitution, de Gaulle announced his plans to form a government; this action led to the establishment of the Fifth Republic. For a succinct summary of the main events of the war, see Stora 1995.

5. Ageron (1994:160-161) estimates Algerian war-time casualties at 203,000. Stora writes that 500,000 people of all backgrounds, but primarily Algerians, perished in the war (1995:91).

6. On the revelation that torture had become standard French practice and the difficulty French officials and the public have had in acknowledging this fact, see Stora 1992. Vidal-Naquet (1983) showed that government officials not only knew about this practice but managed to order it without actually putting their orders in writing. The topic has recently gained much public attention following the publication of a wartime memoir by Aussaresses (2001). The way in which the war years shaped my conversations with *pieds-noirs* is discussed at length in Smith n.d.

7. A certain economic integration has occurred but varies regionally. Most *pieds-noirs* settled in cities along the Mediterranean, regions that were economically depressed in the 1960s (Bailet 1975:304). Six years after their arrival, repatriates from Algeria had more than double the overall unemployment rate of metropolitan French (Hunt 1983:558). French government attempts to encourage them to move north were not only unsuccessful, but those repatriates who had initially settled in the north later began moving southward. Bailet interprets this migration as a result of their difficulties in forging new social relationships with the metropolitan population and their desire to be closer to old friends and relatives. By the 1970s, more than half of all *pieds-noirs* in the country

were living in the southern departments (1975:304). See Jordi 1993, 1995, 1996, 2003 on the difficulties incurred by *pieds-noirs* arriving in Marseilles and the tensions generated between *pieds-noirs* and metropolitans. The ways that history now features in *piéd-noir* attempts to claim a place in the nation are outlined in Cohen 2003.

8. The right to associate without prior state approval was definitively granted in France with the law of July 1, 1901, which allowed for the creation of associations, a specific type of institution created by two or more people who share common interests. There are thousands of associations in France today, ranging from volleyball clubs to quasi-state organizations responsible for providing social services. Each association must register with the state according to specified procedures and many receive state subventions. See Debasch and Bourdon 1995. The numbers of *piéd-noir* organizations ebb and flow with the interests and energy levels of their organizers. As one club folds, its members may regroup or join others. Thus, estimates of the number of *piéd-noir* associations vary widely. Jordi suggests that there are approximately four hundred (1993:199), whereas Calmein estimates a much higher figure of 800 (1994:15).

9. Over the course of my first 18 months in France, I was introduced to, and spoke with, individuals numbering in the hundreds. Because I was working with a group that felt disliked by the larger society and because I wanted to talk with people about potentially difficult or painful subjects, I let potential interviewees select themselves. I never lacked for interlocutors, however. Not unlike other elderly people, my informants found few others in France who were interested in colonial Algeria or willing to talk with them about that time, not even their own children. I also met with people on an individual basis. This work is based on my conversations and taped interviews with over 60 people with whom I achieved personal closeness. The majority were from Algeria and of Maltese origin. Fifteen consultants were from Tunisia, including 12 of Maltese origin, and two were from Morocco of French origins. Aside from two unusual cases, all of these informants were elderly, between 60 and 87 years old. The average age was 72.

10. The first event of the yearly calendar is an annual meeting held in early February to elect association leaders. Social events such as dinners are held in the spring and/or fall, and outings are held invariably on Ascension Day in May.

11. For historical references, see Note 13 below. Before I left for fieldwork in France, some French anthropologists warned me that my project was untenable because, they felt, ethnic distinctions between *pieds-noirs* had "melted" in the Algerian melting pot long ago.

12. Stoler points out in her seminal article (1989) that although settler societies often share the illusion of homogeneity, they are often rife with internal distinctions based on class and race. The case presented here highlights ethnicity as another important dimension of settler difference.

13. See for instance Ageron's classic volume 1979:127-139. See also Ageron 1991:63; Baroli 1967:8; and Crespo and Jordi 1991:9.

14. Maltese began leaving the archipelago for Algeria with the first advances by the French troops in the 1830s. Migration to Algeria all but ceased by the end of the 19th century. See Price 1954.

15. This passage is reported directly without modifications from a taped transcript, as are the other longer passages that follow. Translations from the French are by the author.

16. See for instance Bard's writings on the Maltese (1854:99).

17. In contemporary settings involving pieds-noirs, an individual's ethnic origins were often used as a shorthand for their identity, as in *le Maltais* (the Maltese man) or *la Sicilienne* (the Sicilian woman), even though such usage is in fact incorrect because the individuals referred to are French citizens.
18. Jews arrived in North Africa in successive migration streams, beginning perhaps as early as the ninth century B.C.E. On the history of North African Jewry, see Chouraqui 1968.
19. Friedman 1988. For a discussion of Algerian Jewish liminality, see Bahloul 1996:86–91.
20. It should be noted that the Maltese were able to work their way more comfortably into the colonizer faction over the long term by identifying themselves as fellow Christians, whereas Algerian Jews continued to be treated by European settlers as suspect and were even stripped of their French citizenship status in 1940 when the Vichy government revoked the Crémieux decree.
21. Of course this does not prove that Maltese were *not* active in the rioting or in generating anti-Jewish beliefs.
22. This occurred during anti-Semitic riots in Constantine, September 1899. Archives d'Ouare Mer, Box GGA 7G9, "Troubles Anti-Semites."
23. Members of both groups suffered similar treatments in the first decades of the colony. In separate incidents (but occurring in the same region of Algeria and during the same time period), indigenous Jewish traders and Maltese migrants were expelled from the colony in perpetuity for allegedly participating in "unfair" business practices. In each case, the Army, at that time the biggest purchaser of goods and services, seemed frustrated by the ability of Maltese porters, on the one hand, and Jewish traders on the other, to hold their ground in the fluid wartime situation. By expelling these groups, the Army demonstrated its hegemony and placed itself in a monopoly position from which to better exploit the remaining local traders. See Nouschi 1961:160–187.
24. Maltese last names are distinctive. One classic trick for those whose last names started with the letter *x*, one man told me, was to reverse the characters. Thus the Maltese name Xuereb becomes frenchified as Berux.
25. In fact, this archetypal "Algerian" plant was originally brought from the Western Hemisphere by Spaniards. Interestingly, in Israel it serves as a shorthand for Israeli-born Jews (*Sabra*), and ironically, can be used as an indicator for lands formerly owned by Palestinians who used the plant to create hedges and boundaries (Lavie 1996:59).
26. Linguists describe Maltese as the result of the convergence of two unrelated language families, North African Semitic (Maghrebi Arabic) and Southern European Romance (Bricat 1991:91).
27. These individuals included one of the association coleaders, his brother, and their female cousin.
28. In contrast to Evans (1997), who found that French who had joined the Algerian resistance during the war talked in detail about this period of their lives, I found that pieds-noirs I met rarely spoke about the war years and never did so in public. On the ways that the French–Algerian War was silenced in conversation, see Smith n.d.
29. A sophisticated exploration of the centrality of the home in such narratives is Bahloul 1996, which outlines the role in family memory of the author's former home in Séfif, Algeria.

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