

## People Who Leave No Trace: Dora Bruder and the French Immigrant Community

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They are the sort of people who leave few traces. Virtually anonymous. Inseparable from those Paris streets, those suburban landscapes . . . (20)

—Patrick Modiano  
*Dora Bruder* (1997)

Following in Modiano's footsteps as he tracks the fugitive form of a Jewish adolescent of the 1940s, I emerge from the Simplon metro station, not far from the Porte de Clignancourt, near the building at 41 Boulevard Ornano where Dora Bruder once lived with her parents. As Modiano has done five years earlier, I sit down in the window of a nearby café, where I watch the passers-by on this December Saturday afternoon. I see women whose heads are covered with black scarves or colorful turbans, worn with coordinating boubous. I observe many shades of skin, from the light tones of the *Français de souche* through the many shades of Maghrebians through the darker tones of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa. I recognize the familiar sound of Maghrebian Arabic spoken on the street. Stores sell collections of household goods and assortments of cheap clothing, made colorful by the intermixture of exotic objects: hammered metal trays, African fabrics, gold-embossed tea glasses. A man goes around with posters for a concert by the Congolese singer Papa Wemba, passing the numerous jewelry shops with their glittering window displays that mark an immigrant neighborhood.

Restaurants offer Kurdish food, *spécialités asiatiques* unspecified as to their country of origin, African fast food, and the ever-present North African couscous.

Even today, the Simplon metro station attracts cafés, as Modiano had noted: I count three on this corner alone. I also count an even greater number of butcher shops, all labeled *halal* or *boucherie musulmane*. Some of these shops also sell the sticky sweet rose-colored pastry of the Maghreb. When I enter a shop to buy some packaged *harira*, the thick soup associated with Ramadan, the owner offers me some dates, still attached to the stem, and we engage in a friendly debate about the relative merits of Moroccan dates versus the, in his view, superior Algerian ones. As in the late 1930s, when Dora Bruder lived here with her parents, this neighborhood still shelters immigrants (like Dora Bruder's parents) and their children, who (like Dora Bruder) have been born in France.

These more recent immigrants, however, are almost invisible to Modiano's narrator, who, in this book, is hard to separate from Modiano himself. In fact, we know from correspondence reproduced by Serge Klarsfeld in his 2001 publication, *Mémorial des enfants juifs déportés de France*, that Modiano himself had, like the narrator of his book, come upon a small newspaper ad in a 1941 *Paris-Soir* in which Dora Bruder's parents sought help in finding their runaway daughter. The reprinted letters from Modiano to Klarsfeld record his obsessive quest for information on Dora Bruder, whose name he had located in Klarsfeld's first published list of Jewish deportees in 1978. Although the cover of Modiano's book bears no indication of its status as either fiction or non-fiction, the evidence provided by Klarsfeld assures the reader that both narrator and subject of *Dora Bruder* can be identified with real persons, existing outside Modiano's text. This identity of author and narrator is corroborated by the narrator's account of the composition of Modiano's own previously published novel, *Voyage de noces*, a mention that, for Philippe Lejeune, would be sufficient to establish a sort of *pacte autobiographique*, assuring the reader that the author whose name is on the cover is to be identified with the book's narrator and protagonist. Confirming these autobiographical clues, events in the life of *Dora Bruder's* narrator are recounted once again, although in a different narrative mode, in Modiano's first avowedly autobiographical work, *Un pedi-*

gree, published eight years later in 2005.

As he follows the traces of Dora Bruder on the Boulevard Ornano, Modiano is preoccupied with the desperate adolescent of the 1940s as well as with his own memories of 1965, when he waited (in this café or another?) for his mysterious *amie*. She would appear from an apartment on the rue Championnet at all hours of the night, and they would go off together to a cheap hotel further down the street in Montmartre. Is this the same friend who camped in other people's apartments, from which the young Modiano once stole selected items subsequently resold to a dealer in the Marais, on the rue des Jardins Saint-Paul? Modiano's personal memories of this Simplon neighborhood seem to involve transient living arrangements, marginal incomes, and cheap hotels. But never does he mention the others—the multiple others—who must have been visible to him in May 1996, when he returned to this neighborhood to examine the rusted shutters of Dora Bruder's fifth floor balcony at 41 Boulevard Ornano, with its collection of heteroclite objects.

As he travels out to the Porte des Lilas to visit the Caserne des Tourelles, where Dora Bruder was held along with many other Jewish women and girls after her arrest, Modiano carefully traces out another itinerary, stretching from the Marais to the Boulevard Mortier:

On my way there, that Sunday of 28 April 1996, I took the following route: Rue des Archives, Rue de Bretagne, Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire. Then the hill of the Rue Oberkampf . . . Rue de Ménilmontant. The apartment blocks at number 140 lay deserted in the glare of the sun. For the last part of the Rue Saint-Fargeau, I seemed to be traversing an abandoned village. Plane trees line the Boulevard Mortier. At the top, just before you reach the Porte des Lilas, the old Tourelles barracks are still there. (108)

Modiano's point of departure on the Rue des Archives is significant, perhaps ironically designed to underline the fact that the French Archives Nationales, despite the French passion for documentation, contain little or nothing about Dora Bruder or others like her. Only recently, in January 2005, has she been memorialized on the Wall of Names in the nearby Jewish Museum, which has inscribed in stone

the names of 76,000 French Jews deported to the death camps. Even here, the name Dora Bruder, unlike most others, lacks an accompanying date of birth, as it did on the original record of her departure from Drancy in Convoy Number 34 in 1942, this despite Modiano's lengthy but ultimately successful quest to extricate a copy of her 1926 birth certificate from the contemporary French bureaucracy.

Although it by-passes the Rue des Archives, bus number 96 takes much the same route Modiano had chosen: leaving the Marais on the Rue de Turennes, it follows the Rue Oberkampf, the Rue de Ménilmontant, and the Rue Saint-Fargeau, cutting up to the Porte des Lilas above the Caserne des Tourelles, which is only a block away from the terminus. I take pleasure in bringing out my camera and flouting the *Défense de photographier* signs that are much in evidence, as Modiano has noted. The resulting photos show the cold, gray buildings of the old military barracks facing a large but almost deserted boulevard. The gray of the building offers little contrast to the gray sky on this November Sunday.

But if the Boulevard Mortier is almost deserted, the bus has been crowded—crowded with the same types of people I have observed on the Boulevard Ornano. While Modiano's visit to the Caserne des Tourelles took place in an appropriate mood of absence and silence, mine is filled with African music, which arrives on the bus several stops after it exits the now thoroughly-gentrified Marais. Maghrebian fathers joke with their African counterparts about their children, irritable and sleepy after a large Sunday meal. During its long journey on the Rue de Ménilmontant the bus is packed with families of various colors who deal with the crowding with good humor in the relaxed atmosphere of a French Sunday afternoon. Modiano, too, made the trip he describes on a Sunday in 1996, only five years before mine, but he indicates no awareness of the people with whom he must have shared these streets; as he says of the immigrant Bruder family, "They are the sort of people who leave few traces . . ." (20). In both these peripheral Paris neighborhoods, near the Porte de Clignancourt as near the Porte des Lilas, Modiano seems to have erased the contemporary French immigrant community from his narration as thoroughly as the traces of Dora Bruder have been erased from the streets where she once walked.

And yet immigrants are very much at the center of this Mo-

diano text. *Dora Bruder* and much of his other work have been shaped by the overarching project of coming to terms with his father, a father who was, like Dora Bruder, the French-born son of Jewish immigrant parents. The multiple migrations of Modiano's paternal family are even more complex than those of Ernest Bruder, although the parents of the Vienna-born Bruder were, Modiano speculates, "almost certainly natives of Galicia or Bohemia or Moravia, having come, like the majority of Vienna's Jews, from the eastern provinces of the Empire" (16). As described in *Un pedigree*, Modiano's grandfather, from a Tuscan Jewish family, was born in Salonica and emigrated to Egypt and Venezuela before establishing himself in France under a Spanish passport. The ironic title of the 2005 autobiography calls attention to Modiano's preoccupation with his multiply immigrant background: "I am a dog who pretends to have a pedigree. My mother and father are not part of any defined social milieu. So dislocated, so wandering that I must make a real effort to find some tracks and trailmarkers in this shifting sand . . ." (13). Although *Un pedigree* records in some detail the troubled life of Modiano's father, it is in *Dora Bruder*, I believe, that Modiano comes closest to understanding his father's experience as he realizes that his father had shared Dora Bruder's plight as an unregistered—and thus improperly documented—French Jew during the Occupation. At one point in *Dora Bruder* the narrator even speculates that the young woman who shared a paddy wagon with his father might have been Dora Bruder herself, although he finally concedes that this was unlikely. As Dora Bruder is linked to his father, she is also linked to Modiano himself, not only in their shared history on the Boulevard Ornano, but, more important, by their shared desire to escape the constraints of an impersonal boarding school to which they had been banished by seemingly uncaring parents.

Although he does not seem to see them on the streets of Paris, at several points in the text Modiano specifically evokes the presence of immigrants from the French colonies, those marginal people who have now replaced Dora Bruder's family in their neighborhoods and in their anomalous status as "foreign-born." On the second page of *Dora Bruder*, as Modiano explores his earliest childhood memories of the Boulevard Ornano, he briefly and unexpectedly evokes the tense atmosphere created by the Algerian War: "I remember the

Boulevard Ornano and the Boulevard Barbès, deserted, one sunny afternoon in May 1958. There were groups of riot police at each crossroads, because of the situation in Algeria” (4). Two paragraphs later he wonders about the function of the Clignancourt barracks, which he remembers from childhood visits to the *Marché aux Puces*, and learns that they were said to house “colonial troops.” Although the era in which these transitory colonial soldiers were present is not specified, it was certainly not in 1965 when Modiano awaited the arrival of his girlfriend in a café near the Simplon metro exit, an era in which French colonialism had ceased to exist. Nor were “colonial troops” in the barracks in the early 1940s when the Bruder family lived in the area, a time when the French army had momentarily ceased to exist. Perhaps their presence dated back to World War I, when troops from the colonies suffered heavy casualties defending a country in which they did not qualify as citizens.

Colonial peoples are specifically evoked a few chapters later, when Dora Bruder’s father Ernest enlists in the Foreign Legion, along with other undernourished and unemployed Austrians and Germans, who, like the later immigrant workers from French North Africa, were willing to leave their homeland to find any kind of work. Like the colonial soldiers who fought for France, Ernest Bruder did not receive French citizenship as a reward for his five years of service, although it left him seriously disabled: one of his identity cards specifies, “100% disabled” (19). But this sacrifice, too, was ignored by French authorities, noted only by the zealous bureaucrats of the French Occupation engaged in documenting Jews for deportation. Although clearly noted on his record, Ernest Bruder’s status as a disabled veteran of French wars did nothing to delay his arrest and subsequent deportation to his death.

Identifying him with similarly disenfranchised colonial troops, Ernest Bruder’s service in Morocco in the early 1920s ironically involved him in the subjugation of rebels who, like himself and his daughter in 1940s France, were engaged in resisting a foreign occupying force. Although Modiano has no information about the details of Ernest Bruder’s military service, he situates him among the thirty thousand soldiers requested by Lyautey to “pacify” Moroccans who resisted their forced enrollment in the French protectorate. As described by Modiano, this was the role of the Foreign Legion: “They

are sent on operations intended to pacify the still rebellious territories of Morocco" (18). Modiano goes on to cite a number of obscure battles in the years 1920 to 1923 in which Ernest Bruder may have been engaged. These battles are identified only by the names of the places in which they occurred, just as later the entire Bruder family will be known only by the places through which they pass. While Modiano lists a series of place names that are almost surely unknown to his reader, historian C.R. Pernell describes a coherent military campaign involving the use of 21,000 French troops against 7,000 Moroccans, an unequal struggle that recalls the German invasion of France: "In 1922 a pincer movement encircled the Zaïne, and resistance began to crumble; by the end of 1922 most of the Zaïne had submitted. . . . In 1923 French columns cut the *Tache de Taza* in two and broke the power of the Beni Ouarain" (187).

Modiano's description of this combat is notable for its failure to name the Foreign Legion's Moroccan adversaries. Again, colonial peoples remain invisible. He does, however, characterize them as "insoumis," their lack of submission suggesting a parallel with Bruder's daughter Dora, whose character is repeatedly described as "rebellious" (31, 85). In Modiano's characterization, Ernest Bruder thus becomes an unwitting agent of repression in two different Occupations. He is portrayed as subjecting rebellious peoples to a bureaucratic structure that will crush their independence, first in Morocco in the 1920s and, twenty years later in Occupied France, when he enlists the power of the French authorities to bring his runaway daughter under control, thus facilitating the process by which she would be sent to her death. While the former colonized peoples are absent from the streets of Modiano's Paris, the evocation of French colonialism at the outset of his text signals their presence in the book, if only *en filigrane*.

In fact, the story of the bureaucratic subjugation of the Bruder family suggests parallels with issues affecting immigration in the book's narrative present in 1996 and 1997, dates clearly specified in the text. Dora Bruder was not the only child of immigrants suddenly caught in the snares of an all-powerful French bureaucracy and expelled from her home. Bertrand Tavernier's 2001 documentary, *Histoires de vies brisées*, tells the story of Maghrebians, raised in France since childhood, who suddenly find themselves deported

to Tunisia or Algeria, countries of which they have no memory and whose language they cannot speak, much as Dora Bruder was sent “back” to Central Europe. The more recent deportation of legal immigrants from the Maghreb is the result of a cruel and unexpected application of the *double peine*: condemnation for a crime, often minor, brings on a further penalty of deportation to the “home” country. Protests against this practice were going on as Modiano was writing *Dora Bruder*, and in 1998 they culminated in the hunger strikes in Lyon filmed by Tavernier, which eventually brought about some changes to the law.

At the same time, in the years 1996 and 1997, a public debate was raging about changes made to the French Nationality Code in 1993, in the so-called “Pasqua laws” which made it more difficult for French-born children of foreign immigrants to claim their right to French citizenship, which had historically been based on the *droit du sol*, place of birth taking precedence over ethnic identity. Rosemarie Scullion, among others, has noted the parallels between these new laws restricting immigrant rights and the Jewish Statutes of the Vichy government, inspired by a growing resentment of ethnically and culturally “exotic” Jewish immigrants from Central Europe. As a result of widespread protests, the “Pasqua laws” were significantly modified in 1998. Modiano’s repeated insistence on Dora Bruder’s birth in France makes the reader aware of the particular anomaly of her arrest and deportation under a policy originally described as applying only to those of foreign origin. Even though they are apparently absent from Modiano’s book, the highly-publicized issues of immigration and citizenship in the 1990s cannot have been far from the mind of Modiano or his French readers, and the implicit parallel with the case of Dora Bruder creates a disturbing resonance.

As a resident of Paris, Dora Bruder was subject to the regulations of the German Occupation rather than those of Vichy, but French officials have long been accused of outdoing the Germans in their willingness to deport even Jewish children born in France, an accusation widely publicized in discussions of the children held in the detention center at the Vel d’hiv in July of 1942. Although he does not specifically refer to this incident, Modiano is relentless in accusing French *fonctionnaires* of complicity in Dora Bruder’s death. Central to Modiano’s text is the destructiveness of the French bu-

reaucracy in its obsessive quest to classify human beings: "The very people whose job it is to search for you are themselves compiling dossiers, the better to ensure that, once found, you will disappear again—this time for good" (68). At one point, the narrator wonders what it meant for Ernest Bruder to be a Jew in Occupied France, and he answers with a description of this bureaucratic classification: "When it came down to it, what exactly did the Bruders understand by the term 'Jew'? For himself, he never gave it a thought. He was used to being put into this or that category by the authorities and accepted it without question. Unskilled laborer. Ex-Austrian. French legionnaire. Non-suspect. Ex-serviceman 100% disabled. Foreign state laborer. Jew" (38). In Occupied France Jews are people who cannot give the "right" answers to the questions asked by the police: "the surname, first name, date and place of birth, family status, occupation, domicile, and nationality of the statutory detainee" (86). For Dora's father Ernest Bruder, being Jewish was to be a foreigner (ex-Austrian) without a country: in the list of those leaving Drancy for Auschwitz he is registered as stateless, despite his service to French colonial enterprises in the Foreign Legion.

Dora's mother Cécile, born in Budapest, seems to have been considered less dangerous to French security, since she was arrested and subsequently, if briefly, released from the transit camp of Drancy in July of 1942. But her answer to the question regarding place of birth serves to separate her forever from her husband and daughter, leaving her to undertake the trip to Auschwitz months later, now properly classified with other Hungarian Jews. Sadly, she remains separated from her family even on the Wall of Names, where deportees remain classified by their year of deportation. Although mothers may be separated from their children, as they were following the Paris roundup at the Vel d'Hiv, the administrative mechanism remains intact.

Dora's parents also bore the stigma of residing in the transitory space of a hotel. Their address at 41 boulevard Ornano was clearly identifiable as a hotel where the family lived in a single room, cramped conditions that Modiano sees as one of the explanations for Dora's refusal to stay "at home" after running away from the convent school. Although the Bruders lived at this address for a number of years, they were clearly transients in France, a status that led them

to the transit center of les Tourelles and the transit camp of Drancy. Without a fixed residence, Dora's father was also recorded as having no profession: "Next to the words trade or profession on the file that they had drawn up on him during the Occupation . . . it says 'None'" (23), his status as a former factory worker not recognized as having any importance.

Born in a hostile foreign country, without nationality, without a fixed residence, without profession, Ernest Bruder was an easy target for ejection from the French scene. For his daughter Dora, born in France, things should have been different. However, she had done two things that endangered her administrative status. First, she had failed to register as a Jew when required by law, her parents having believed her safe in the convent school. She had compounded this problem by running away from the school in which she had been duly registered and, later, from the hotel on the Boulevard Ornano, which is belatedly given the official status of a "domicile." It is by then, however, only a "maternal domicile," since Dora's father has already been lodged in the transit camp of Drancy, another temporary residence. Ironically, Dora is being penalized for her failure to stay "at home," in a home that has been hardly recognized as such by the French authorities. Dora's crime, and the immediate cause of her arrest, seems to have been her refusal to accept her assigned place in the prison-like regimen run by the charitable but austere nuns, or in the crowded hotel room on the fifth floor of 41 boulevard Ornano.

Of course, even if she had not refused to stay in her place, and especially if she had accepted her registration as a Jew, Dora Bruder might eventually have been arrested, perhaps along with her mother in July 1942 or along with the Jewish children and adolescents across the street from the convent, at 48 bis rue Gare-de-Reuilly. Despite the courageous commitment of the sisters of Saint-Cœur-de Marie to saving Jewish children, it would have been hard for her to escape the bureaucratic net tightening around her. Yet the factor that prompted her arrest at the point when it occurred was clearly the irregular situation in which she had placed herself, irregular as defined by an arbitrary and constantly changing bureaucracy. While her father is penalized for his failure to fit into any of the categories proposed by the French bureaucrats, Dora is punished, ostensibly, for her failure to remain within the categories to which she has been assigned.

Modiano's quarrels with the French bureaucracy extend into the narrative present, as he details his laborious efforts to obtain Dora Bruder's birth certificate, in order to remedy the omission of her birth date in the record of her deportation. As he repeatedly encounters roadblocks erected by French bureaucrats, in a moment of anger he accuses them of being "sentinels of oblivion" (11). But it is the active role of these same bureaucrats in facilitating rather than preventing the deportation of Jews that is the real target of his ire, an attitude expressed in a letter he wrote to Serge Klarsfeld on May 26, 1978, a good twenty years before writing *Dora Bruder*: "I know that it does no good to go over it and think about what might have been, now that it is all over, but it would have been easy for the police and the French bureaucracy to disorganize things—especially in the unoccupied zone—and to destroy the records held by the police" (537).

In apparent agreement with Pierre Nora's insight that memory can be crystallized in a physical location, a *site of memory*, Modiano systematically revisits the sites of the Bruder family's life. Yet he finds little trace of their presence, except for his own palpable sense of their absence: "It is said that premises retain some stamp, however faint, of their previous inhabitants. Stamp: an imprint, hollow or in relief. Hollow, I should say, in the case of Ernest and Cécile Bruder, of Dora. I have a sense of absence, of emptiness, whenever I find myself in a place where they have lived" (21). This sense of absence is, as Pierre Birnbaum has asserted, the result of a persistent failure of commemoration that has characterized the treatment of Jewish immigrants in France, the erasure of Jewish *lieux de mémoire*. In his essay in Nora's collection, Birnbaum writes: "Traces of Jewish memory are thus the exception in the landscape of France" (380). Even the most important candidate for the status of Jewish *lieu de mémoire*, the Vel d'Hiv, Birnbaum notes, was not able to claim protected status, despite the fact that it was used as a detention camp for the greatest roundup of Jewish men, women and children ever seen in France. Its former emplacement near the Bir Hakeim metro station has given way to modern apartments and a large French government ministry. In 1991 Birnbaum was able to write: "In . . . Paris, a determined visitor may catch a glimpse of a small marker, located between two modern high-rises and next to a gas station, indicating the site of the old Vel d'Hiv (Vélodrome d'Hiver). . . . This place

of remembrance *par excellence* has simply vanished" (380). A similar fate awaited the transit camp of Drancy, from which the Bruder family and many other French Jews were deported to Auschwitz: "The camps at Drancy through which nearly 70,000 Jews passed in total destitution on their way to Auschwitz and other death camps is today just a station on the suburban express railway" (380). Since the publication of Birnbaum's article in 1992, the French government has created a memorial park on the banks of the Seine near the emplacement of the old Vel d'Hiv, complete with a moving depiction in sculpture of the detainees at the stadium and a promenade lined with flowerbeds. It is a beautiful memorial, arranged with taste and respect. What is perhaps also significant is that it is all but invisible to the casual passer by, and even long-time Jewish residents of the neighborhood seem unaware of it, although it is clearly marked on tourist maps. And, although Birnbaum does not mention it, there is a small museum in Drancy, located in part of the La Muette housing project, where Jews were held for deportation. Ironically, as recorded in Daniela Zanzotto's 1998 documentary, *Les Voix de la Muette*, the rest of the large HLM is now occupied by regular tenants, who include a number of immigrants.

As I retraced the steps of Modiano in the fall of 2001, I also attended commemorations of another historical event involving immigrant people, one that, like the roundups of the Vel d'Hiv, was long concealed by official French history. Only on their fortieth anniversary was there widespread French commemoration of the events of October 17, 1961, when Algerian immigrants, marching peacefully through the Paris streets, were attacked by the police. Many were killed, shot, beaten or drowned in the Seine, deaths that were denied by Police Prefect, Maurice Papon, and successfully erased from the historical record. Official records of this event remain inaccessible, and some have apparently been destroyed, like those of the wartime French Jewish police. It was only when Papon was put on trial for his participation in the deportation of Jews that his role in the 1961 attacks on Algerian immigrants finally received the publicity it had long been denied. As Olivier Milza has noted, the record number of 11, 538 arrests in October 1961 was matched only by those made on the occasion of the roundup of the Vel d'hiv (119), and a book published by Jean-Luc Einaudi and Maurice Rajsfus, entitled *Les silences*

*de la police*, directly compares the two events. It has taken years for historians and witnesses to reconstruct the events of October 1961 and to register them in the public consciousness, a process that had gained visibility by the late 1990s, when Modiano was completing his work on *Dora Bruder*.

Published two years after *Dora Bruder*, Leila Sebbar's 1999 novel centered on this event, *La Seine était rouge*, focuses on the process of inscribing immigrant memory on the streets of the city, much as other historical figures have been memorialized in street names and plaques. In a text that uncannily mirrors Modiano's, Sebbar describes young first- and second-generation immigrants wandering through the streets of Paris in 1996, in search of the tragic events of 1961. A filmmaker records oral testimony of the massacre, while others go around the city with cans of red spray paint, adding deaths of Algerian protesters in 1961 to the omnipresent markers commemorating the Liberation of Paris. Near the Saint-Michel fountain, where a plaque commemorates "THE MEMORY OF THE SOLDIERS OF THE FRENCH FORCES OF THE INTERIOR" the filmmaker adds, in red letters, "HERE ALGERIANS DIED FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF ALGERIA ON OCTOBER 17 1961" (118). As Sebbar's novel makes clear, despite the omnipresence of historical markers in the streets of Paris, there are indeed, like Dora Bruder and her family, "people who leave no trace."

If Dora Bruder has left no trace on the Boulevard Ornano, the same fate surely awaits its current Maghrebien residents and their relatives, housed in peripheral neighborhoods whose structures will not survive or will eventually house other immigrant groups. The lack of historical commemoration that marked the arrival and deportation of French Jews will certainly continue to plague immigrants from the Maghreb, who will largely disappear, some deported and the rest presumably assimilated into the French mainstream without a trace, which seems to be the goal of the French concept of universal citizenship. The *baraquements* once inhabited by Polish Jews that Modiano remembers from his childhood visits to the Marché aux Puces at the Porte de Clignancourt are now gone for good—as are the *bidonvilles* once inhabited by Maghrebians in Nanterre. Like the French police assigned to Jewish questions, who made sure they destroyed their carefully prepared records at the end

of the war, French housing authorities have systematically erased these and other reminders of a less than admirable past.

It is normal and even praiseworthy to replace *bidonvilles* with decent housing. What is not praiseworthy, and perhaps not even inevitable, is the persistent erasure of all traces of whole categories of the French population. Perhaps it would be impractical to preserve old buildings simply because they evoke memories of minority communities in France. The convent school in which Dora Bruder and other Jewish girls sought refuge during the Occupation must inevitably give way to modern apartments, despite its heroic past, a past that seems to have first received wide public recognition in Modiano's book. A certain lack of visible commemoration, we may argue, is normal. Cities change, with little regard for the memories of all but the most powerful of their residents. Baudelaire remarked on this fact in the nineteenth century: "Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville/ Change plus vite, hélas! que le cœur d'un mortel)" (125) [The old Paris is no longer (the form of a city/ Changes more quickly, alas, than the heart of a mortal)]. Baudelaire's poem, "The Swan," in which these lines appear was, after all, a lament on the destruction of a neighborhood inhabited by workers and artists, in a move evidently designed to remove all traces of these undesirables from the center of Paris. Baudelaire is lamenting the effects of urban renewal projects, not unlike the one described by Modiano on the rue des Jardins Saint-Paul in the Marais. In the 1960s a young Modiano had seen the gutted interiors of devastated buildings, "rooms that had been home to young people of Dora's age until the day when the police had come for them in July 1942" (113). According to Modiano, these particular buildings, once inhabited by Jews rounded up for deportation by French police, were methodically destroyed after the war "in accordance with a government plan" (113), a bureaucratic decision whose motivation can only be implied.

This area of the Marais, once emptied of Jews during the war years, became home to Maghrebian immigrants hired to help with the postwar reconstruction, although again they are absent from Modiano's vision. In the 1970s, when I lived in this neighborhood, these immigrants could be seen emerging from dilapidated residence hotels, much like those on the Boulevard Ornano in the 1940s, where they lived while apart from their families. Now, in the

late 1990s, as Modiano reminds us, the area has been transformed by an impersonal and ahistorical gentrification: “They have obliterated everything in order to build a sort of Swiss village in order that nobody, ever again, would question its neutrality” (113).

Despite their remarkable absence from the streets of Modiano’s Paris, French immigrants of the narrative present become in his text, like Dora Bruder, visible through the traces of their absence, their history of colonial and postcolonial oppression offering ghostly echoes of long-repressed histories of war and Occupation.

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