

For students!



**LaGuardia Performing Arts Center, Little Theater**

**LaGuardia Community College**

**May 4-5, 2017**

**Global Learning Co-Curricular and/or  
Extra credit Assignment and Reading**



## Global Learning Co-Curricular and/or Extra credit Assignment

This year we share an excerpt from Zahia Rahmani's memoir *France, Story of Childhood*. Rahmani is an art historian and writer of Amazigh (Berber) descent who was born in Algeria at the end of the Algerian War and immigrated to France as a child. She wrote the memoir as a tribute to her mother who always wanted her to maintain her heritage, even though the French did not recognize it as valuable. Choose one of the options:

- 1) Write a narrative essay or poem addressed to one of your ancestors or grandparents. Like Rahmani, use the second person (you) to say how the person impacted your sense of belonging to a community. You can explore both the good and the painful things the person has done and your own struggle to understand him/her. In your narrative or poem, use Rahmani's story as a model to explore your own life.

- 2) At the end of the excerpt, Rahmani writes about how the French and her own teenage self viewed her community: "My people weren't part of the history of man. I didn't even have a people. I came from no one. My kin never entered the human adventure. " Write a compare and contrast essay about Rahmani's story and a film you see at NYFAF. How do the excerpt and the film address invisibility or the lack of an acknowledged or valued history? How do they establish a new kind of visibility? Then tell us how this relates to your own experience.

*We would love to read student work!  
Please submit writing about the Forum to:  
NYFAF.LaGuardia@gmail.com*

## Info sheet:



### Welcome to the third edition of **The New York Forum of Amazigh Film** May 4 & 5, 2017

The annual New York Forum of Amazigh Film (NYFAF) is a free forum of shorts, documentaries, and feature films by and about the indigenous societies of North Africa, stretching from the Canary Islands to the oasis of Siwa in Egypt. NYFAF's mission is to create a space where filmmakers, scholars, writers and musicians whose work focuses on Amazigh identity and culture can share their knowledge and enthusiasm with a diverse audience. Through parallel discussions with filmmakers and scholars, live performances, art exhibits, and receptions, the New York Forum of Amazigh Film seeks to disseminate Amazigh cinema, promote understanding, and celebrate the history, culture, and language of Amazigh peoples across North Africa and in the diaspora.

“Amazigh” is the singular of “Imazighen” which means “free human” or “free man.” Commonly known as Berbers, these diverse people originally came from North and Sub-Africa and are now spread out across various regions including Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and the larger diaspora. Despite several experiences of subjugation and colonization of the region, including Roman, Arab, Ottoman, Spanish, and French, Amazigh people managed to preserve their language, Tamazight, which is written with the Tifinagh alphabet. Besides Tamazight, and colloquial forms of Arabic from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, Spanish and French are the most common languages presented in the films you will see during this Forum.

The preservation and the unity of the Amazigh culture is a main reason for this film forum. Another is to share this perspective with others. Exposing yourself to films exploring a different culture can open your eyes to a whole new way of seeing the people around you on a daily basis. This experience can not only give you a new outlook on different cultures but also teach you the value and the means of keeping a culture alive despite forms of oppression and domination. The Amazigh people are models of resistance.

Bringing awareness to the relevance of our many cultures is critical today, especially considering our government’s current policies. Issues like the travel ban affect people who may belong to the Amazigh culture. It is therefore imperative, now more than ever, to be a part of the preservation of cultures.

Again, we thank you for being a part of this experience,

The NYFAF Team:

Habiba Boumlik & Lucy McNair, (co-curators)  
with Wafa Bahri, Yahya Laayouni, Lamees Fadl, and Mustapha Akhoullou

**For more info on the NYFAF visit our website and Facebook page:**

<http://www.lpac.nyc/berber-film-festival-2017-7fd9>  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/604608269689831/>

**Source:** Jasmine Peralta, NYFAF Intern and LaGuardia Community College student

## NYFAF 2017 Reading

Zahia Rahmani is an art historian and writer who writes in French. She was born in Algeria in 1962 to a Kabyle or non-Arab, Muslim, native Amazigh family. Her father was a local councilman who was accused of fighting on the French side during the War of Independence. **Considered a “Harki” or traitor after the war, he had to flee with his family to France in 1967. Unlike most North African immigrants, many Harki families like Rahmani’s settled as refugees in rural towns.**

In this excerpt from her memoir, the narrator addresses **her ill mother. She belongs to a lineage of “amusnaw”** which in the Kabyle tradition are the learned people who retain the oral stories and wisdom of the people and are highly respected. Her native language is Tamazight. **This is Rahmani’s third book and has been translated from the French.**

- Notes from Prof Lucy McNair,  
English, LaGuardia Community College

# France, Story of a Childhood

Zahia Rahmani

*Translated by Lara Vergnaud*

Yale UNIVERSITY PRESS • NEW HAVEN AND LONDON

A MARGELLOS

WORLD REPUBLIC OF LETTERS BOOK

**Y**ou came into the world one spring. In 1930, when the West's gold had turned to paper, you arrived outside of Europe. And though that continent's claws were digging in deeper and deeper, your Kabylie mountains loomed like ramparts. Blessed with the power of inertia, they forced back a thousand and one incursions. Your father chose a name for you. Ourida, Woman of the Rose. He had five daughters, and on each he bestowed a carefully thought-out name. He owned his land in Tizirt. Fifteen hectares facing the sea that, you would tell me, he used to gaze upon while holding his daughters close. Not so long ago, you could still find all kinds of fruit and shade there. As young girls, you were able to walk from the family house to the shore without being seen by strangers. Long after his death, when you were living in France, they took his land from you. They wanted to build an Algerian Miami. A new palace for the newly rich. On the waterfront, of course. In this respect, wisdom was lacking.

They built quickly atop a buried town. Yet the history of the place warned of shaky ground. But what could five widowed daughters do before the arbitrariness of a newly elected official who expropriated their lands? A dark decade extolling God's justice inflicted this indignity on you. In short, your father died a second time. A poorer man. Five daughters whose existence must always remain shameful. They left a small plot of land to each of you and new constructions blurred the landscape of your childhood. One from before time was erased. However, the rumor goes, the cinder block towers will one day fall into the ocean. They're already sinking.

Emma Halima—your mother, my grandmother—built your family home up high, hidden under the trees. She carefully painted the interior of the stone square structure, whose ruins you would later unearth. They say that even though my grandmother was strong enough to lift three men, there was no better testament to the respect she had for nature and its crea-

tures than in her actions. In Algeria, such was her medical knowledge that more than once she saved me as a child, to the surprise of the doctors who predicted I wouldn't make it. Your delicate demeanor and appreciation for silence comes from her. Your father had an engraved copper chest containing all his precious objects, including his books. He used to read in English, Arabic, and French. He worked little and traveled a lot, too often for his family's liking. As a child, I continually shut myself off to your past. I listened to you describe your childhood as happy, and I made myself forget it. I had inherited a revolution that brushed away family sagas. In Algeria, they destroyed a miserable past for a unification with no future. I refused to believe that before, in this country of men without rights, some had spread joy by holding on to their lore and their dignity. About this, your memory never faltered.

I should tell the story of how a saber sliced off your father's fingers . . .

\* \* \*

According to legend, a cargo of gold from a German ship that sank during World War I washes up on your shores. Once the water is calm, men set out across miles of steep rock looking for bullion. This seductive cargo forces the French military to enlist the local caïds to use their influence against the clans and the thieves. There are certainly plenty of the latter in this impoverished region, where people robbed of their futures, and unable to flee, are starving. In springtime, the search resumes and lasts for several years until a rumor reveals that one family (whose name I omit out of respect) had made off with the treasure. The family is brought in for questioning, but refuses to return what is theirs by right. The authorities try to make them listen to reason, they talk, they negotiate, new alliances and promises to come, but nothing works. The family doesn't want to relinquish the gold to the occupiers. Among the people of Kabylie, honor is at stake. A man is as good as his word, and your uncle—a caïd perched

on his sorrel, proudly wearing a burnoose embroidered with gold thread, a white turban, and black leather boots—had given his to the French. The clans challenge each other and it's war against family X. There's a sword fight on horseback in the largest square in town. In the history of Kabylie, you say, no one had ever witnessed a greater spectacle. Your uncle is killed, and your father, though he had refused to act as judge (having taken a vow of wisdom and piety), finds himself in the fight as a result. With one fell swoop his hand is cut. (You become so animated each time you describe what the warriors are wearing that for a long time I believed you had witnessed the scene firsthand.) The army steps in and arrests all the warring parties. There is a trial. Fifteen men, including seven from your family, are found guilty. Deported to Devil's Island. Your father's one of them. He will stay there only a few months. When he returns, he'll want to free his relatives and will dedicate everything he has to endless judicial proceedings. He'll rent out his lands and find employment in

France, Spain, and England. He will bring them all back. Every last one. But the interminable legal battle leaves its mark. It alienates your mother, Emma Halima, for a time. The daughter of a theologian who was the head of a very old brotherhood, she shuns conflicts between Muslims. Especially when they benefit the occupier. She leaves your father to protect her name and that of her forebears. The separation will last seven years. You've just turned three years old. For seven years, you and your family resignedly accept this temporary divorce caused by a profound disagreement among kin. I belatedly understood the strength of your bond with your father. You lived with him during those years of estrangement, reuniting with your mother only occasionally, at night and in secret, because of the code of honor giving her the right, so rarely invoked, to leave husband and children for dignity's sake.

This woman, your mother, whose very beautiful portrait you bequeathed to me, allowed

herself to be photographed without a headscarf. People have written here and there that women uncovered their heads at the behest, and to fulfill the needs, of the French administration. They wanted this rumor to be true, given all that it implies about the colonial interlude and its humiliations. But you have only to see my grandmother's face to discover an entirely different story—that of a woman of astounding pride who appears exactly as she did in life. Strong-willed and happy with little. She was satisfied with reigning, even from a distance, over her hill facing the sea.

Below her shoulders, the open folds of her burnoose reveal a chest covered with metal brooches and tassels. Two braids frame her face. They are tied with thin cotton threads.

As a child, I liked to believe that in reality she was the granddaughter of a great Indian chief. A Cherokee far away from his American lands. In a fit of pique, my ancestor would have left his people in search of a Homer who could teach him the secrets of the beggars, the hungry Euro-

pean masses encroaching on his territory as if on promised land.

Passing the Strait of Gibraltar, and seeing in the distance some Roman vestiges dominating the port of the town of Tizirt, he would have come closer. Seeking shelter first on an island off the coast, he saw in these people dressed in woolen blankets, in these calm and peaceful men ignorant of deep-sea fishing or slavery, a certain resemblance to his brothers. He advanced and made shore. They welcomed him, he made himself understood, and they knew that he was a good man. Then they wished him a happy union with a noble family and my grandmother, his descendant, was their worthy heir.

In France, I could have nothing but unusual and heroic ancestors. This transfer of family history through fable occurred thanks to my mother's skillfulness. All other realities were denied me. My people weren't a part of the history of man. I didn't even have a people. I came from no one. My kin never entered the human ad-

venture. They were neither discoverers nor vanquishers and made the mistake of never putting an end to anything. Absent from history are the silent, the eternal dreamers struck by the warrior as they sleep. The dreamers, who didn't know that such violence could befall them, hadn't armed themselves. And I, whom they trained with sword and spear, had to become a conqueror or die.