Queer Roots for the Diaspora

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Whereas accusations that *Roots* was a lie have been countered at every level, a different kind of accusation points toward another kind of danger with roots, the one implied, for example, in the title of Donald R. Wright’s “Uprooting Kunta Kinte” (1981). In 1977 John Darnton wrote of how the village of Juffure had taken in Haley and accepted him as its child. Because of the many promises Haley had made, villagers’ hopes were high. Indeed, the village would soon become a major destination for African American tourists returning to their own roots. Almost twenty years later, however, in “Gambians Criticize Noted *Roots* Author” (1995), Stephen Buckley wrote that Haley and his family broke promises to build a high school, provide scholarships for study in the United States, build a hotel and mosque, and provide villagers with new farming tools: “When Alex Haley first visited this village more than two decades ago, residents embraced the writer as more than a distant son returning home. They saw him as their savior... While in Juffure, villagers say, Haley made a spate of promises... Today Juffure, with 500 residents, has electricity and water and at least 10,000 tourists annually. But bitter villagers say they expected much more” (13A). Others have pointed out how Haley’s representation of Africans in *Roots* redeploy Anglo-American stereotypes of a primitive Africa (Courlander) and the noble savage (Blayney). Furthermore, Wright argues that Haley irrepa-
rably contaminated Juffure’s oral tradition, since oral epics now include Haley’s version of Kunta Kinte’s story, which may very well be an African American invention that now makes it impossible to recover the “true” oral tradition of Juffure. While Haley portrayed his reconnections with African origins as the reestablishment of a kind of harmony, Juffure villagers’ opinions suggest dissonance instead. What happens when other people live where we want to plant our roots? Do we have a responsibility toward them? Is it possible to uproot others as we plant our roots? If the reassertion of roots on the part of the uprooted can result in the policing and homogenization of identity within the collective identity, those from without may be subjected to an even more violent exclusion than my discussion of the political paradox has heretofore suggested.

These questions have a particular resonance with any consideration of queer roots because efforts to root contemporary lesbian and gay identities in a recovered past often attempt to “plant” roots in a similar way. Winston Leyland’s *Gay Roots: Twenty Years of Gay Sunshine* (1991), for example, a collection of essays from the 1970s and 1980s, includes, under the heading “Gay History,” Marc Daniel’s “Arab Civilization and Male Love,” which examines “gay love” from the seventh through the eleventh centuries; Winston Leyland’s “Living in Truth: Akhenaten of Egypt (Reigned 1379–1362 B.C.),” which treats Akhenaten as a bisexual; Simon Karlinsky’s “Russia’s Gay History and Literature from the Eleventh to the Twentieth Centuries”; Rictor Norton’s “Gay London in the 1720s: The Great Raid on Mother Clap’s Molly House”; and Maurice Kenny’s “Tinselled Bucks: An Historical Study in Indian Homosexuality.” Just the titles of the last three essays should be enough to make social constructionists cringe. Like one of the founding texts of gay studies—John Boswell’s *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1980)—these texts assume that gay individuals can be found throughout history.

Such a notion of gay roots extending ad infinitum back through history has been almost entirely discredited through the lengthy debate in lesbian and gay studies between essentialism and social construction, which, coming to a head around Boswell and his critics, called into question such a notion of a “gay” past. According to the constructionist position, if it might be a stretch to say that homosexuality appears or is invented, it nonetheless develops in certain historical contexts, and the history of its “construction” can be written. Historical work from this perspective has added such constructions as heterosexuality (see Katz, J.), sexual identity, sexuality tout court, and even homophobia (see Chauncey) to the list of what could be similarly historicized. If I rehearse
part of the history of lesbian and gay studies here, it is because certain
constructionist narratives of history have been used to insidious politi-
cal ends (witness the comments by Mugabe and Museveni discussed in
chapter 2). At the other end of the spectrum from the homophobic
antics of the likes of Mugabe, a version of antihomophobic construc-
tionism created narratives of progress according to which the modern
homosexual represents an evolution over his or her ancient, pre-, and
eye modern ancestors.

The colonial implications of such narratives of progress through
which homosexuality was often historicized would be challenged toward
the latter half of the 1990s in a parallel critique that emerged in the sub-
field that was increasingly becoming known as queer postcolonial stud-
ies. This critique revealed that other paradigms of same-sex eroticism,
sexual behavior, and desire on the one hand and, on the other,

“homosexuality as we know it today,” as the cliché goes[,] are often
ordered in a narrative sequence that looks a lot like a coming-out sto-
ry. And in this coming-out story, even contemporary cultural others
are associated with a prior time that is also thought of as being more
primitive. In this model, queer history becomes a narrative of devel-
opment, of civilization, and therefore of colonization. By coming out,
the contemporary “lesbigay” subject leaves the dark continent of her
past behind; by becoming homosexuality, same-sex desire does the
same. A number of scholars have pointed out the parallel between
the narratives of the civilizing mission and those of psychological
development, but it should give one pause that in Freudian models of
sexual development, nonnormative sexualities are what is relegated
to this primitive past. In other words, in the coming-out model of
lesbian and gay history, the homosexual has merely taken the place
of the colonizer-heterosexual in narratives of both economic and psy-
chosexual development. (Hayes, Higonnet, and Spurlin 16–17)

Gay roots, in other words, can share the same colonial implications as
rooting as a political project.

Of the multiple essays from the *Gay Roots* anthology listed above,
Kenny’s “Tinselled Bucks: An Historical Study in Indian Homosexual-
ity” stands out as having particular relevance to a theorization of the
potential for one’s roots to uproot others. Though about the work of
Will Roscoe, Ramón A. Gutiérrez’s “Must We Deracinate Indians to Find
Gay Roots?” criticizes precisely the impulse Kenny’s work exemplifies:
“By finding gay models where they do not exist, let us not perpetrate on We’wha or U’k yet another level of humiliation with our pens. For then, the ‘conspiracy of silence’ about the berdache which Harry Hay had hoped to shatter will only be shrouded once again in romantic obfuscations” (67). “Yet another level of humiliation,” however, refers less to colonial violence here than to Gutiérrez’s description of the social status of the so-called berdache. “Berdache status was one principally ascribed to defeated enemies. Among the insults and humiliations inflicted on prisoners of war were homosexual rape, castration, the wearing of women’s clothes, and performing women’s work” (62). In other words, what Evelyn Blackwood calls the “colonization of Native American transgender/lesbian/gay studies by predominantly white anthropologists” (197) is less an issue for Gutiérrez than the romantic idealization of such practices by those wishing to root contemporary lesbian and gay identities in a non-European past; he is interested less in violence done to Native Americans by Europeans than in the denial of violence done to berdaches by non-berdaches. I would suggest, however, that the idea suggested by Gutiérrez’s title is also an important one to consider. What would it mean to plant roots that uproot others? In what kinds of contexts could such uprootings occur? How might they be avoided?

The primary example of roots that uproot under consideration in this chapter is the constitutive narrative of Zionism as exemplified in the contemporary Israeli state. The uprooting that occurred as a result of the very literal return to roots that characterizes Zionism (whether it could have been otherwise is a different question) seems to me to be quite different from the ones named in Wright’s and Gutiérrez’s titles. On the one hand, the uprooting Wright accuses Haley of cannot be separated from the latter’s colonial and neocolonial privilege in relation to the actual inhabitants of the site of his African roots. Likewise, the uprooting Gutiérrez discerns in Will Roscoe’s work on Native American two-spirit peoples (commonly referred to as berdaches by Europeans and Euro-Americans) is inseparable from the history of the genocide of Native Americans. On the other hand, however, Haley and Roscoe cannot be said to cause the physical uprooting of Africans and Native Americans in the way that Zionism (again, as institutionalized in the Israeli state) has uprooted Palestinians in another example of the political paradox of roots narratives.

Steve Reich’s 1993 work of musical theater The Cave (which some have called an opera in spite of his own off-and-on resistance to the
term) provides a unique narrative about the conflict resulting from a specific return to roots (the establishment of the state of Israel) and the uprooting that resulted (because Palestinians were removed from the site where Israeli roots were to be planted). In particular, *The Cave* makes amply clear that sharing a common ancestor—indeed, sharing a family tree—has not, as of yet, been able to pave the way toward peace in the Middle East. I will also be reading Reich in conjunction with two Jewish Maghrebian writers, Memmi and Derrida, whose writing (unlike their explicit political positionings in at least Memmi’s case) can be read as exemplifying what James Clifford calls “diasporist anti-Zionism” (“Diasporas” 326).

*Rooted in Zion*

*The Cave* takes its name from the Cave of Machpelah in present-day Hebron, where in both biblical and Qur’anic traditions Abraham (Ibrahim in Arabic) and Sarah (Sira) are buried in a cave. For a large portion of the world’s population, the story of Abraham constitutes the founding narrative, and as the account of descendants from a common ancestor it provides a particular paradigm of the roots narrative. The three acts of Reich’s work juxtapose Jewish, Palestinian, and American interpretations of the biblical story of Abraham and Sarah’s burial site in the form of videotaped interviews conducted by video artist Beryl Korot (Reich’s wife). These videos serve, in lieu of a libretto, as the origin of the “opera’s” text, and the three places where interviews were conducted—Israel, Palestine, and America—serve as the setting for the opera’s three acts. As Korot describes in an interview Jonathan Cott conducted with her and Reich, “[T]he work is a narrative told three times from the points of view of three different cultures” (13). *The Cave*’s composition consisted of isolated clips of Korot’s videotaped interviews and superimposed music over dialogue, music that mimics the rhythms and tones of the interviewees’ responses. Verses from the Hebrew Bible and passages from the Midrash are sung in English by members of the performing ensemble. Also included are recorded passages from the Torah and Surah from the Qur’an chanted in Hebrew and Arabic, recorded background noise from inside the cave (which Reich describes in the program notes as an “implied A minor”) accompanied by an “A minor drone” (39), and “typing music”—a syncopated percussion “overture” whose programmatic
reference (and the accompanying video images) suggests a mimetic relation with the rhythm of typing at a keyboard as texts appear on the giant video monitors that make up the set designed by Korot.\(^5\)

The eponymous cave is thus a place where the roots of both Jewish and Muslim identities are planted, since Abraham/Ibrahim in both the biblical and Qur’anic traditions is the common ancestor of Jews and Arabs. In both traditions, his disinherited eldest son Ishmael (Ismail), borne of his wife’s handmaid Hagar (Hajar), is considered to be the father of all Arabs, and his second son Isaac (Ishaq), borne of his wife, is considered to be the father of Israel. This familial relationship is eloquently evoked by one of the interviewees, Ephraim Isaac, for whom Abraham represents the originary figure of a family tree:

Who is Abraham? Abraham, for me is my ancestor—my very own personal ancestor. . . . My father, when I was a young person, well, actually a child, used to count the names of our ancestors starting with Adam going all the way down to the Twelve Tribes. And I remember how we used to learn: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Yered, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noach, and then we would go on down, Noach, Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah, Abraham, and then we used to say, Abraham, Yitzhak, Ya’akov, and then we used to say the Twelve Tribes, our ancestors’ names, just memorize all of them, Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehuda, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naftali, Gad, Asher, Josef, Benyamin, and then go all the way down and come down to my great, great grandfather whose name was Shimon, and then Shalom and then Shalam and Harun and Mesha, and Yizhak and myself. So for me there is a chain of ancestral relationship to Abraham. (30–31)

For Ephraim Isaac, this family tree structures a personal relationship with biblical narratives of Jewish history (Abraham is his “very own personal ancestor”) and, in fact, goes all the way back to the creation myths told at the beginning of Genesis. The Cave of Machpelah itself is the site where this connection is rooted, since, as another interviewee points out, “The Midrash says that Adam and Eve were buried there” (38). Reich and Korot’s opera also quotes the appropriate passage from the “Midrash, ‘Chapters of R. Eliezer,’ 36”: “He ran to fetch a calf. But the calf ran before him and into the Cave of Machpelah. And he went in after it and found Adam and Eve on their biers, and they slept, and lights were kindled above them, and a sweet scent was upon them. (And Abraham
returned to his guests)” (52). The cave is thus a site intimately connected with biblical trees of begats, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, begin with Adam and Eve. Ephraim Isaac thus provides a more detailed narrative, structured genealogically, by which we might understand Alph Hade’s identity in *Un mensonge*, an identity simultaneously asserted and denied. For Isaac’s family tree marks the perfect alignment of the familial and the collective, and his proper name names him as a son of Isaac, both Yizhak Isaac and Isaac, son of Abraham. Indeed, in the character and person of Ephraim Isaac (the documentarylike quality of *The Cave* makes the character a particularly vivid embodiment of personhood) a number of narratives collide (Genesis, Adam and Eve, Abraham’s covenant with God) and mark him as a particularly acute example of identification with genealogy, of the embodiment of an identity structured genealogically, of an identity constructed through narrative.

Yet the seemingly straightforward and unbroken “chain of ancestral relationship to Abraham” is itself a family tree with its own ghosts. First, with the exception of a handful of generations extending back from the present, there is a huge, gaping hole in Ephraim Isaac’s family tree. The names in the first part of this genealogy are nothing that cannot be found in Genesis; with a little time, anyone could become just as familiar with them as he. Even these familiar names hide their own ghosts. One name, Abraham, is the result of a divinely ordained name change from Abram at the moment of covenant. The other, Jacob (Ya’acov) was, again at God’s orders, changed to Israel. It is interesting that in the case of Abraham the God-given name is used, whereas in the case of Jacob it is not. And the name elided in the latter case is the very one that would make this family tree a justification for the Israeli possession of Palestine. In other words, whereas both the biblical and Qur’anic roots of the Middle East crisis are explored in depth, the opera also explores alternative biblical and Qur’anic roots for a mediation to the conflict. In response to Cott’s question in the interview quoted above, “So the seed for peace is already in the book of Genesis itself, isn’t it?” Reich answers, “Yes—Isaac and Ishmael come together to bury Abraham” (15).

In the “libretto” itself, one Israeli interviewee describes Ishmael/Ismail as a “fighter” (34); another states, “But the children of Ishmael—we can see them in the streets” (34). Yet another states, “He’s our relative” (34). Interviewee Francis E. Peters sums up the political implications of the biblical/Qur’anic narratives the interviews are based on: “You’re talking about our common ancestor, so the stakes are fairly high in a place like that” (51). Indeed, even in the biblical version of this
story (Gen. 21.13) in Reich’s contextualization, God seems to justify a Palestinian state: “[F]rom the son of the slave woman / I will make a Nation, for he is your seed” (36). Likewise, Surah 3 of the Qur’an seems to promote a peaceful settlement inasmuch as it urges “people of the book” (i.e., Christians, Jews, and Muslims) not to dispute over Ibrahim, and one Palestinian interviewee notes that “Ibrahim or Abraham is this bridge between the two cultures” (40).

Although a rhizomatic model of rooted identity (at least as Glissant rereads it), which is both plural and singular, would suggest that the people of Israel could share origins and roots (and therefore territory) with Palestinians without uprooting them, the radical difference between the discursive possibilities suggested by The Cave and the political reality of violence in the Middle East demonstrates the practical limitations of a political project based on roots, queer as they may be. In other words, although roots narratives are always political, their politics can be constructive or destructive, and often a single narrative of roots, helpful to one group, may be harmful to another. Put differently, The Cave is thus a chthonic site of origins for two separate diasporas and provides an ample illustration of Glissant’s description of the nature of roots.

Yet the cave is also a place where the tensions between conflicting versions of the same roots are very palpable. These tensions exploded in February 1994 when Baruch Goldstein walked into the mosque at this site (called the Ibrahimi Mosque by Muslims and the Tomb of the Patriarchs by Jews) and shot over 150 worshiping Palestinians, killing 29 of them, with a rifle issued by the Israeli army. He was subsequently beaten to death by survivors as he attempted to reload his gun. In response to the massacre, the site was closed for eight months, and a curfew was imposed on mostly Arab Hebron, a curfew that only applied to Arab residents, who complained that they were the ones who bore the brunt of these security measures even though they were the target of the violence that led to them. An Israeli inquiry on the massacre concluded that Goldstein acted alone; even though Israeli soldiers discharged weapons during the melee, they claimed that none was aimed at Palestinians.

This was not the first instance of interethnic violence in Hebron. In 1929, during the British Mandate, Arabs killed 69 Jews there. After the 1994 massacre, even the third point of what Noam Chomsky has called “the fateful triangle,” the United States that is, was drawn into this history of conflict as resentment against Goldstein on the part of more secular Israeli Jews stoked anti-American sentiments (Haberman). But these events still lay in the future as Reich composed The Cave. Follow-
ing the 1994 massacre, Reich and Korot reflected on the incident in a response entitled “Thoughts about the Madness in Abraham’s Cave,” in which they express skepticism regarding the potential for musical works to influence political change: “We do not think that The Cave or any other artwork can directly affect peace in the Middle East. Pablo Picasso’s Guernica had no effect on the aerial bombing of civilians, nor did the works of Kurt Weill, Bertolt Brecht, and many other artists stop the rise of Hitler” (180).

This statement echoes an earlier interview with Reich regarding another composition, Different Trains (1988): “I want to make clear that no piece of music can have the slightest effect on any political reality, or rewrite history. I’m not going to change the Holocaust. I can’t bring back six million people. I can’t even affect the quality of train service on Amtrack!” (Schwarz, “Steve Reich” 35). Composed for string quartet and tape recorder, Different Trains makes use of compositional techniques similar to those of The Cave; instead of videotaped footage, however, the former takes as its point of departure audiotapes of the interviews on which the work is based. In his essay with the same title as the piece, Reich describes Different Trains as a recollection of traveling between New York and Los Angeles during his childhood after his parents’ divorce. Since these trips occurred during World War II, he later realized, “[I]f I had been in Europe during this period, as a Jew I would have had to ride on very different trains” (151). The recordings themselves consist of the following:

1. Record my governess Virginia, now in her seventies, reminiscing about our train trips together.
2. Record a retired Pullman porter, Lawrence Davis, now in his eighties, who used to ride lines between New York and Los Angeles, reminiscing about his life.
3. Collect recordings of Holocaust survivors Rachella, Paul, and Rachel—all about my age and now living in America—speaking of their experiences.
4. Collect recorded American and European train sounds of the 1930s and ’40s. (151–52)

Like The Cave, this piece imitates the “music” of the interviewees’ spoken English, as well as using stringed instruments to imitate “train sounds,” just as The Cave uses percussion instruments to make “typing sounds.”

The compositional technique of imitating recorded sounds (whether
on video- or audiotape) dates back to some of Reich’s earliest compositions, such as *It’s Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966), both of which “took recordings of people speaking and searched within those recordings for moments when speech was, for various reasons, almost song—when people speak, they sometimes sing” (Schwarz, “Steve Reich” 32). *It’s Gonna Rain* takes as its point of departure a recording of an African American minister preaching in Union Square, San Francisco. Unlike *The Cave* and *Different Trains, It’s Gonna Rain* involves what Reich characterizes as “the process of gradually shifting phase relationships between two or more identical repeating patterns as an extension of the idea of infinite canon or round,” and its performance consists of the following process: “Two loops are lined up in unison and then gradually move completely out of phase with each other, and then back into unison” (Reich, “It’s Gonna Rain” 20). *Come Out* (1966) incorporates a taped interview with Daniel Hamm, one of the African Americans (who became known as the Harlem Six) arrested and convicted of murdering a white shop owner during the 1964 Harlem riots. In this recording, Hamm describes scratching a bruise inflicted during police torture so as to cause bleeding (to make the blood “come out”) in order to be sent to the infirmary and thereby avoid being further harmed or killed in custody. In these earlier pieces, however, only a very small fragment of the recorded narrative is used, with the result that their narrative context might seem neglected in favor of a more “purely” musical or aesthetic appreciation of the recorded sounds (if one adheres to the frequent but problematic division between the political and the aesthetic). While in and of itself this piece might not seem political, therefore, it was composed and first performed in a context that highly was.

In “Transethnicism and the American Experimental Tradition,” musicologist David Nicholls explicitly connects the political significance of later works like *The Cave* to that of the aforementioned pieces (584). Nonetheless, whereas Reich and Korot saw *The Cave* as being incapable of exerting political influence, they nonetheless acknowledge that the Cave of Machpelah “resonated not only with the events of the ancient past but with the present Israeli-Arab conflict as well” (“Thoughts” 178–79). Thus, while *The Cave* does not have a direct impact on the Middle East crisis and certainly did not prevent the Hebron massacre, it can, according to Reich and Korot, contribute to new ways of understanding and contextualizing the conflict there: “The recent massacre of Muslim worshipers . . . was also an attack on the legacy of Abraham, who fed strangers, was not ensnared by the idols of his day, and deeply loved both
of his sons, Ishmael and Isaac” (“Thoughts” 179–80). And they remain optimistic about how much such works can reframe thinking about conflict in the Middle East: “With the aid of Muslim and Jewish advisers, we rooted The Cave in the biblical and koranic figures of Abraham/Ibrahim and his family, not only because they formed a classic story for music theater but also because we feel that without a spiritual rapprochement there can never be real peace in a land where these traditions run so deep” (“Thoughts” 180).

One often talks of the roots of the Middle East conflict but never of the roots of its resolution much less of how these two sets of roots might be intertwined. The Cave, however, suggests potential roots for thinking about how peace might become thinkable in the Middle East. In short, The Cave represents Reich’s return to his own musical roots in the form of returning to both certain aspects of his earlier compositional techniques and his commitment to social commentary (even if it marks a more sophisticated awareness of the politics of appropriating the voices of other peoples).

Furthermore, if Paul Hillier can write about “[t]he Jewish element in Reich’s music” (65), in “Steve Reich and Hebrew Cantillation,” Antonella Puca writes that Reich’s “interest in Hebrew cantillation dates from the mid-1970s and is accompanied by the rediscovery of his own Jewish background, by the study of the Hebrew language and of the Hebrew Bible, and by extended periods of residence in Israel” (537). She even argues that Reich’s compositional techniques, described above, are related to this interest: “[I]n the works that Reich composed after his studies of Hebrew cantillation, the preservation of the semantic meaning of the words becomes for him a central concern, and . . . sound aspects of spoken language, such as intonation, timbre, melodic cadences, and metric accentuation become the defining elements of musical structure” (537). In other words, his return to Jewish roots has also played a role in the change in compositional techniques described above, so that semantic meaning is now kept when music imitates spoken language and the African and Jewish diasporas increasingly overlap. Furthermore, the Jewish influences on his music have their own connection to a different kind of roots, those articulated in Genesis and examined by Sapho: “While in Jerusalem, he pursued fieldwork research in the area of biblical cantillation, recording the first five verses of Bereshit (Genesis) chanted by older Jewish men from Baghdad, Yemen, Kurdistan, and India” (Puca 538–39). And, like Sapho, he has expressed an interest in the Kabbalah (Dadson 32). His most explicitly Jewish work in this regard is Tehillim
Reich’s setting of Psalms to music. Nonetheless, in his interview with Hillier, Reich stresses the disconnect between his interest in the musical roots of Judaism and the thematic return to Jewish roots that occurs through the context of some works (Hillier 68). Indeed his interest in Psalm cantillation underscores a disconnect from roots:

And the psalms are a musical text, we know that. Fortunately for me, the tradition in the West is totally unknown. What passes for psalm singing in synagogues today is basically very bad 19th-century Christian hymn-tunes that would make any self-respecting hymnist roll over in his grave. So the only Jews who have a tradition of singing Psalms are the Yemenites, and of course I’m not a Yemenite. The Yemenites are losing their tradition, having left Yemen and gone to Israel, where they’ve become westernized. (qtd. in Hillier, 66)

In short, Reich’s return to Jewish roots through music often affects his composition in ways that are not straightforward. Indeed, one could say, often these roots more closely resemble rhizomes.

In addition, the Jewish roots of his diasporic identity might also be linked to Reich’s interest in another diaspora, that of Africa. Reich himself studied drumming techniques in Ghana. Drumming, especially, is often said to have been heavily influenced by Reich’s apprenticeship in Ghana (see Lannes). Yet at times Reich has downplayed the “ethnic” in his music, whether in terms of its relation to his Jewish identity or his African influences: “[A]ll music is ‘ethnic’ because everybody comes from an ethnicity. They may not perceive that, because when you look at a distance at Africa—that is, the Africa of the past—you think of drums” (qtd. in Vorda, 14). In their treatment of African American cultural material and politics, therefore, both Come Out and It’s Gonna Rain might be understood as diasporic pieces as well (the latter being a reference to the deluge in the Hebrew Bible on the part of an African American preacher). And in The Cave the Jewish and African diasporas intersect in the third act when an African American woman living in Texas is asked to discuss Hagar and responds, “When I think of Hagar, as a black female, I really think of myself” (48).

Furthermore, I think it is possible to connect the political content of Reich’s music in terms of its expression of diasporic identity with what I have been calling his compositional techniques. In his essay “Music as a Gradual Process,” he outlines what he finds to be the most important of these “perceptible processes,” writing, “I want to be able to hear
the process happening throughout the sounding music” (34). The title of this essay is perhaps the best indication of the way he conceives of making audible to the listener the very process of musical development: “To facilitate closely detailed listening a musical process should happen extremely gradually” (34). Perhaps the clearest example of making this “gradual process” audible is Pendulum Music (1968), for which two “or more microphones are suspended from the ceiling by their cables so that they all hang the same distance from the floor and are all free to swing with a pendular motion” (“Pendulum” 31). All are pulled back, released in unison, and allowed to swing freely. As they drift out of and back into sync, “a series of feedback pulses are heard which will either be all in unison or not depending on the gradually changing phase relations of the different mike pendulums” (31). Indeed, in “Music as a Gradual Process,” one example Reich gives of his title concept bears a remarkable resemblance to Pendulum Music: “Performing and listening to a gradual musical process resembles . . . pulling back a swing, releasing it, and observing it gradually come to rest” (34). On the one hand, the term gradual process most frequently refers to music as an audible text whose structure unfolds in a way that the listener can hear: “We all listen to the process together since it’s quite audible, and one of the reasons it’s quite audible is because it’s happening extremely gradually” (“Music” 35). On the other, Reich occasionally uses this term to describe not the performance of the musical text but its composition (at least in the sense of the conception of process music): “What I’m interested in is a compositional process and a sounding music that are one and the same thing” (35).

Pendulum Music, like It’s Gonna Rain and Come Out before it, is thus characterized by “gradually shifting phase relations” (“Phase” 38). In all three, because “the process of phase shifting [is] gradual enough, . . . minute rhythmic differences . . . become clearly audible” (38). But only It’s Gonna Rain and Come Out involve “identical tape loops moving out of phase with each other” (Drumming” 66). If I insist on these earlier pieces, it is because Reich himself has described how his early experimentation with electronic music paved the way for compositional strategies that could also be performed by musicians on more traditional instruments (“First” 54). Drumming (1971) is one such piece. It consists of a series of repeated measures with no time signature, the first of which contains only a simple eighth note following four quarter rests and followed by an eighth rest and a quarter rest. Subsequent measures gradually add notes one at a time to create more and more complex rhythms. As rhythm and, in the case of marimba parts, melody evolve, instruments
in this piece shift in and out of phase. Thus the gradual phase-shifting process that was first only obtainable electronically has been transferred here to music composed and performed more conventionally, a technique that also produced such works as *Piano Phase* (1967) and *Violin Phase* (1967).

On the one hand, Reich has said that he abandoned this compositional technique ("Clapping" 68) and even stated that the entire essay "Music as a Gradual Process" does not apply to his works after 1972. On the other, I would argue that the relation between videotaped interviews and instrumental and vocal music in *The Cave* nonetheless makes audible the process of composition because the transposition of the "music" from spoken interviews (like the taped voices of *It’s Gonna Rain* and *Come Out*) into music composed for singing voices and musical instruments is so clear. It is for this reason that I would propose that *The Cave*, like the works that Reich acknowledges himself to be examples of "music as a gradual process," be characterized (in line with narratives studied in previous chapters) as an allegory of its own composition and therefore an allegory of listening to the very process of its composition and performance. For a work to be understood as an allegory of "reading" in the de Manian sense (with the difference here that "reading" encompasses listening in the case of musical works), it must also be "readable" as narrative. While a work by Reich such as *The Cave* might more easily be understood as narrative (because of the biblical and Qur’anic narratives it relies on), works such as *Drumming* and *Pendulum Music* are perhaps more difficult to understand as such. Even works like *Come Out* and *It’s Gonna Rain* seem to create rhythm at the expense of the narrative context in which the voice recordings at the root of their composition were made. Indeed, minimalist music in general has often been characterized as nonnarrative in addition to repetitive.

But one of the ideas that a so-called new musicology has brought to musical analysis is an understanding of all nonprogrammatic (or "absolute") music (music like most symphonies and concertos that are not attached to stories as, say, an opera, ballet, or overture to a play would be) as narrative. In fact, one of the insights of new musicologists like Susan McClary is the potential relevance of poststructuralist thought such as deconstruction to the study of music. Certainly Reich has understood his own music, even when less or not at all programmatic, as telling a kind of story, and the story is that of the composition of the very music that is being played. As the music composes then decomposes itself (e.g., sections in *Drumming* slowly return to the same simple rhythm with
which they began), Reich’s allegories of listening become narratives of their own deconstruction, just as The Cave deconstructs the very Jewish/Arab binary (or the “fateful” Israeli/Palestinian/American “triangle,” to repeat Chomsky’s expression) that the Cave of Machpelah is used to root in the traditions of the various Abrahamic religions, and by deconstructing this binary he goes to even greater lengths to highlight the political paradox of roots narratives (in this case that of Zionism) than any of the other roots narratives considered here have done thus far. And as an allegory of listening, The Cave draws attention to the narrative of its own composition even as, in a self-referential way, it highlights the “composition” of roots as a narrative that paradoxically creates its own beginning as effect not cause.

Furthermore, I would argue, it is not a coincidence that the new musicology overlaps with an emerging queer musicology. McClary appears as an important name in both these trends, as well as that of feminist musicology. In Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality, for example, she even uses a once common musical term (an ending was considered “feminine” if it occurs on an unstressed and therefore “weak” beat) to theorize the gendered implications of closure along the lines discussed in chapter 3. Similarly, the queer possibility of the musical text arises in The Cave with Reich and Korot’s inclusion among the interviewees featured in the third act of Lisa Rogers, a “[g]raduate of the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest, and program director of Out Youth Austin, a lesbian and gay youth peer support group” (29). In response to the question “Who is Hagar?” Rogers responds, “She gets kicked out. . . . The first single mother” (48). By suggesting a queer role for Hagar in the third act, “set” in the United States, a place within both Jewish and Palestinian diasporas, Reich and Korot offer diaspora as a place for the potential queering of both Jewish and Muslim identifications with Hagar. (Although Israeli interviewees distance themselves from Hagar, Palestinian ones do identify with her and American interviewees whose biographies suggest a Jewish identity are much more sympathetic.) Again, highlighting the political and narrative paradoxes in The Cave also involves the sexual paradox.

Memmi’s Queer Zionism

As for Hagar, she also figures prominently in the fictional work of Jewish Tunisian writer Albert Memmi. His second, partially autobiographical
novel *Agar* (French for Hagar) carries her name and tells the story of a French-educated Jewish Tunisian doctor who has married a French Catholic woman whom he brings back to live in Tunisia where he opens a medical practice. Given Memmi’s later pro-Zionist essays, it might seem odd that, through this title, his autobiographical protagonist would allude to his own *French* wife through the mythical mother of all Arabs, including Palestinians. In one of these essays, *Liberation of the Jew*, Memmi writes, “The Diaspora must cease to be a Diaspora” (286), thereby placing his hope for Jewish liberation in the realization of the Zionist project through the modern state of Israel. Memmi would later confirm his assertion of the Israeli state as the essence of Jewishness: “Israel is the heart and the head. Israel is now our heart of hearts . . . but the Diaspora is the great, suffering body” (*Jews* 67; 2nd ellipsis Memmi’s). Through a mind/body binary, Memmi presents diasporic identities as degraded and inauthentic, as the corporeal supplement to a Jewish essence (and this in spite of his conscious decision to remain in diaspora throughout his life).

This understanding of Jewishness stands in stark contrast to anti-Semitic racializations of Jews as pure embodiment (see Gilman), but is Memmi’s project the only possible route to Jewish liberation? For those for whom diaspora is the “essence” of Jewish identity, would Memmi’s project not signify annihilation? Memmi himself states that “the existence of a Jewish nation will at last permit the disappearance of Jewishness” (*Liberation* 301). According to Ammiel Alcalay, state Zionism is founded on precisely such a desire: “Official discourse spoke matter-of-factlly of the ‘elimination of the Diaspora,’ a slogan that even slipped into the ‘elimination of the Jews’” (221). When Memmi writes, “[T]he Jew has to find a total solution” (*Liberation* 277), he not only suggests the disturbing implications of the “disappearance” he envisions but also conjures up (in the English version at least) a resonance with the final solution.

Yet, whereas Memmi understands returning to Israel as a remedy for the uprootedness that characterizes his vision of diaspora, in this section I seek out alternative returns within Memmi’s work itself. Memmi did not come to his explicitly pro-Zionist position right away. He was first known for his theorization of the situation of the colonized, his anti-colonial writings, and his support for *Arab* nationalism. His first essays are directly related to his first, semiautobiographical novel—*La statue de sel* [*The Pillar of Salt*], to which *Agar* might be read as a sequel even though its characters have different names and the narrator’s profession has changed. In the first novel, a kind of Bildungsroman, Memmi revives
Jewish identity through a different kind of narrative, one that plants its roots not in Palestine but in a predominantly Arab North Africa. In direct opposition to the passages from Memmi’s essays cited above, and with what Ella Shohat calls “the Zionist rejection of the Diaspora” (272), Memmi’s novels retrieve a biblically based model of Jewish identity in which diaspora and connection with a homeland are not at odds. In a later interview, Memmi would redeploy the same heart/mind rhetoric he used to describe Israel: “Many of my readers . . . themselves have a Hara in their hearts and minds” (Terre 12). Here, however, he reverses his previous associations, so that the Hara—Tunis’s Jewish quarter—becomes the heart and reason of Jewish identity. This statement conjures up the ghosts that haunt Memmi’s Zionism, ghosts of the very diaspora he has condemned to death.

Whereas Memmi’s return to a collective past in the Hara might at first seem to parallel Zionist narratives that claim to return the Nation of Israel to its prediaspora origins, by reading Memmi’s first novel against his later Zionist essays, one can revive the ghosts of a diasporic body left to die in the latter. And this body returns with its Jewishness inscribed onto the site of the circumcised penis, a site of both a difference from and connection to the Arab world of which Memmi is a part. If Alcalay describes a body of Arab Jewish texts from Israel in which the promised land has become a land of uprootedness and broken promises, Memmi’s early fiction reroots Jewish identity in a Hara of the mind, where the Arab/Jew opposition is deconstructed as in Alcalay’s reconception of Mediterranean culture. Traditionally, the circumcised penis is a sign of man’s alliance with God; it is thus the place where a phallocentric genealogy is inscribed onto the male body, making him a member of the Nation of Israel. (As Howard Eilberg-Schwartz writes, “[O]ne must have a member to be a member” [Savage 145].) Yet this site on which patriarchy is founded nonetheless signifies the potential for its undoing, for circumcision also threatens to negate the masculinity that undergirds the Zionism on which the Israeli state is founded. By reviving the emasculated diasporic penis, therefore, The Pillar of Salt reroutes Jewish identity through alternative origins, which will also serve here as my point of departure for some reflections on the emerging field of queer diaspora studies.

Memmi’s novel can thus be situated in relation to a body of work on Jewish masculinity. In The Jew’s Body, for example, Sander Gilman examines anti-Semitic constructions of the Jewish male body as degenerate, castrated, and (through the antifeminist notion of femininity as lack)
feminized. Conversely, without embracing the anti-Semitic feminization of Jewish men, both Daniel Boyarin and Eilberg-Schwartz seek to reclaim this alternative masculinity in an avowedly feminist recuperation of a more traditional Jewish masculinity from biblical and rabbinic sources. Both have also described circumcision as a key component of this alternative masculinity (see Boyarin, “This”; Eilberg-Schwartz, *God’s Phallus*). Boyarin describes circumcision as making the Jewish man “open to receive the divine speech and vision of God” (“This” 495). Since “God is the husband to Israel the wife” (97), according to Eilberg-Schwartz, “men may meet God only as women. And circumcision makes them desirable women” (174).

Daniel Boyarin discusses more recent implications of the anti-Semitic view of Jewish masculinity as defective in *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* as regards the consolidation of Zionism in nineteenth-century Europe. To assert Israel as a nation of manly men among nations of men, a repudiation that finds its epitome in Max Nordau’s “Muscle-Jew,” this consolidation required a repudiation of the Jewish man abjected as feminine by anti-Semitic discourses. For, inasmuch as the Zionism that led to the Israeli state claims to return the Nation of Israel to the promised land, it is not merely a return to roots; it is also a narrative of progress, of gendered progress (see also Biale 176–203). Although Boyarin is careful to limit his findings to Ashkenazi traditions and warns against seeing a continuity in the parallel between ancient and rabbinic writings on the one hand and pre-nineteenth-century northern European Jewish cultures on the other, his conclusions are nonetheless relevant for understanding Memmi’s relation to Zionism. Given that the Zionist state establishes an Ashkenazi hegemony at the expense of Arab Jews, the diasporic male body in Memmi’s early fiction, without explicitly resisting the Zionist masculinization that finds its epitome in Max Nordau’s “Muscle-Jew,” nonetheless returns to haunt it.

*Agar* details the conflicts between the new wife and her husband’s family, and the key event in these tensions is the decision about whether to circumcise their first son. Indeed, nearly all of the second half of the novel results from their disagreements about circumcision. Eventually, the narrator comes to agree with his wife’s opposition to circumcision (required in the absence of a religious marriage if the son is going to inherit according to Jewish family law), but in the end a circumcision is performed for medical reasons. The novel ends with the wife pregnant for a second time and planning to leave her husband and have an abortion. In short, circumcision is divisive in *Agar*, even though the biblical
character named in its title has a circumcised son (at least in the Islamic tradition) just like Abraham’s wife Sarah. In *The Pillar of Salt*, however, circumcision connects Tunisians across confessional divides. Within this novel, whose narrative is framed as a looking back (its narrator Alexandre Mordekhaï Benillouche remembers his childhood as he is sitting for an exam), there is a particular chapter that consists of looking back within the looking back: “Au kouttab” [At the Kouttab School] begins as Alexandre, at this point a high school student, witnesses a peculiar scene in a streetcar. A grocer from the island of Djerba (known for its historically large Jewish population) singles out a two-year-old Muslim boy for teasing after inquiring whether he is circumcised. When the boy’s father says no, the grocer attempts to “purchase” the boy’s penis at higher and higher prices and, after a series of more and more adamant refusals, reaches into the boy’s pants and pretends to snatch his penis without paying. In this lesson of phallic privilege, the little boy fights off the aggressor and defends his penis against the threat of castration.

Even as the game begins, the narrator identifies with its victim across ethno-confessional lines:

Visiblement, il connaissait la scène, déjà on lui avait fait la même proposition. Moi aussi, je la connaissais. Je l’avais jouée dans le temps, assailli par d’autres provocateurs, avec les mêmes sentiments de honte et de concupiscence, de révolte et de curiosité complice. Les yeux de l’enfant brillaient du plaisir d’une virilité naissante et de la révolte contre cette inqualifiable aggression. (186)

[Quite obviously, the boy knew this whole routine and had already heard the same proposition before. I too, knew it all, and had myself played the game some years ago, attacked by other aggressors and feeling the same emotions of shame [and sexual excitement, of revolt and complicitous curiosity]. The child’s eyes sparkled with the pleasure of his awareness of his own growing virility, and with the shock of his revolt against such an unwarranted attack. (167)]

This identification is so strong that the narrator experiences a physical sensation in his penis, which he takes to be the same as what the little boy is feeling:

Lorsque l’enfant hurla, je sentis mon sexe frémir à l’appel brusquement resurgi du fond de mon enfance. . . . Oui, je le connais bien ce
frisson désagréable et voluptueux. Avant d’aller à l’école primaire, je fréquentais un kouttab. (188)

[When the boy in the streetcar screamed with fear, I felt my own [sex] quiver as if in response to a [call surging] suddenly from the depths of my own childhood. . . . Yes, I know well that unpleasant but voluptuous [shiver]. Before going to grade school, I used to go to the kouttab. (169–70)]

This sensation functions as a sort of Proustian madeleine that revives an identical feeling from his much earlier past, thereby bringing an entire scene into the present. One day at the kouttab, or Hebrew school, after the rabbi leaves the room, a class of boys decides to stage a circumcision ceremony.

They choose the smallest among them to be circumcised, and yet again, Memmi’s narrator identifies with the frightened victim, so totally in fact that he experiences the very same fear:

Mais le risque m’avait lié à la victime, avait déclenché en moi les affres du calvaire. Je ressentais l’angoisse du tout petit tremblant, porté sur les épaules du surveillant comme un agneau de sacrifice. (191)

[But the mere threat had bound me closely to the victim and [set off inside me] all the terrors of a real calvary. I could feel the anguish of the small boy who, all trembling, was now being carried, like the sacrificial lamb, on the shoulders of our [monitor]. (172–73)]

Since the boy is already circumcised, the excitement that drives their play-acting is, to a great extent, the tension and fear that the boy might “really” be “circumcised” again, which would necessarily involve the removal of something other than a foreskin:

Mon cœur battait de peur et d’émotion confuse. Qu’allait-il lui arriver ? Allaient-ils vraiment lui couper le membre ? J’en avais une douleur vague et cependant non désagréable au bas-ventre. (192)

[My heart beat faster, under the pressure of fear and [embarrassed] emotion. . . . Were they really going to cut off his penis? The mere thought of it gave me a vague but not unpleasant pain in my [groin].” (173)]
He again experiences this identification as a physical sensation at the site of his own penis, which tingles with excitement.

This scene ends climactically, and quite literally so, since the narrator describes his own reaction as an explosion of jouissance:

Ce fut physiquement intolérable, et je me sentis défaillir lorsque la main droite du sacrificateur, armée du rasoir, descendit lentement vers le petit bout de chair blanche qui émergeait entre l’index et le majeur de sa main gauche.

Brusque fut la délivrance, explosèrent d’un seul coup ma peur, ma honte, ma jouissance, mon dégoût et l’insupportable tension du silence angoissé de tous : à bout de nerfs, la victime venait d’éclater en sanglots. (193)

[It was physically intolerable, and I felt truly faint when the High Priest’s right hand, armed with a razor, came slowly down toward the tiny bit of white flesh that [protruded] between the index and the second finger of his left hand.

But my sense of having been liberated was sudden, and all my fear vanished explosively, together with my shame, my [jouissance], my disgust, and the unbearable tension that was born of the anguished silence of all of us: unable to stand it any longer, the victim had just burst into tears. (174–75)]

These passages could serve as textbook examples of what Boyarin has called “Jewissance,” a pleasure that comes from “an extraordinary richness of experience and a powerful sense of being rooted somewhere in the world, in a world of memory, intimacy, and connectedness” (Unheroic xxiii). Jewissance à la Memmi is much more concrete than Boyarin’s pleasures of the mind and of being a member of a collective identity; Memmi’s Jewissance is a physical pleasure emanating from his member:

Je ressentais dans mon sexe cette peur voluptueuse se traduire en frissons électriques. Comment oublierais-je cette complicité ? Oui, je participais à la cérémonie, à la pâture collective, ancestrale. (193)

[[In my sex, I felt this voluptuous fear translate into electric shivers.] How shall I ever forget my complicity? Yes, I was playing my part in the ceremony, in the ancestral and collective ritual that was food for the mind. (174)]]
In fact, Memmi’s Jewissance is jouissance in all the meanings of the word: il jouit de sa judéité. That is, he enjoys, benefits from, and relishes in his Jewishness, which also brings him sexual ecstasy. In this passage, at least, the liberation of a particular Jew (“my sense of having been liberated”) takes on quite different contours from those outlined in The Liberation of the Jew. Furthermore, his penis not only makes him quintessentially Jewish, but it also connects him to other penises, those of other Jewish men. Although his circumcised penis inserts him into a phallic understanding of Jewish identity, however, the circumcision that writes this Jewishness onto his penis also signifies his emasculation: “J’avais mal au bas-ventre, au même point, comme si le couteau allait me blesser” (193) [“[M]y groin ached[, at the same spot,] as if the knife were about to wound me” (174)]. And, although the narrator shares this threat, the possibility of castration is an inextricable component of his physical pleasure.

Yet, whereas his circumcised penis is supposedly what defines him as Jewish, that is, as not Christian or Muslim, it actually gives him an intimate connection with those from whom he is supposed to be different. The most intimate connection is reserved for the Muslim penis, which tinges in complete sync with the narrator’s own (at least as the two are brought together in the mnemonic space of his mind). For identification with/through the penis is a tactile process: “Pourrai-je jamais oublier l’Orient alors qu’il est greffé dans ma chair, qu’il me suffit de me toucher pour vérifier sa marque definitive ?” (188) [Will I ever be able to forget the Orient, since it is grafted into my flesh, and it is enough to touch myself to verify its definitive mark?]. And we remember that it is indeed by touching the uncircumcised penis that the Djerbian (and through him, the other men present) participates in a collective experience of circumcision. In the space of the streetcar, “Toutes les races se trouvaient représentées” (185) [“All the races of our city were represented” (166)]: “Décidément, nous nous sentions en famille, entre Méditerranéens” (187) [Decidedly, we felt like family, among Mediterraneans]. This rhetoric of kinship unites Jewish, Muslim, French, Bedouin, Sicilian, and Djerbian, and it is precisely this genealogy, this “Orient . . . grafted into my flesh,” that marks his penis not only with Jewish difference but also as being in relation with non-Jewish Mediterraneans. The streetcar thus serves as a metaphor for a diasporic Jewish identity, for in it Alexandre experiences his Jewissance as he and his fellow travelers (get in) touch (with) their penises along the shared routes to their identities rooted in collective memories. The streetcar scene might therefore be
read as a circle jerk in which Memmi’s narrator only gets in touch with his Jewishness by figuratively touching other penises.

In a later chapter, this figurative contact is literalized in Memmi’s characterization of the homoerotic nature of a specifically Mediterranean sexuality:

Jamais je n’avais pu accepter les jeux sexuels des garçons. Je refusai avec mépris et scandale lorsqu’on m’apprit qu’un grand élève s’offrait pour caresser précisément et jusqu’à la jouissance tous ceux qui le désiraient. Mes camarades organisaient ces parties de plaisir collectif dans un terrain vague non loin du lycée. Ils s’alignaient, paraît-il, le dos au mur et Giacomo passait devant chacun, à tour de rôle. Dans la salle des surveillants d’internat, j’étais le seul à refuser de raconter mes aventures, le seul à ne pas évoquer, à ne pas décrire avec complaisance les attributs féminins et masculins, mille fois par jour. Je trouvais cette promiscuité de fort mauvais goût et d’ailleurs je n’avais rien à raconter. (257–58)

[I had never been able to [approve of] the sexual games of boys. When I was told that one of the older pupils offered to caress, with enough skill to cause an orgasm, anyone who wished, I refused with scorn and horror. My comrades organized these parties of collective pleasure out on a vacant lot not far from the school. Apparently, they all lined up with their back[s] to the wall and Giacomo passed [in front of them] one by one. I was the only one in the [lounge for the boarders’ monitors] not to talk of my adventures or to describe with [self-indulgence] the sexual attributes of men and women a thousand times a day. To me, such promiscuity was [in very bad taste]; besides, what had I to tell? (239–40)]

The very passage that admits the homoerotic nature of this community of men bound through the connections they feel in their penises serves to deny the narrator’s participation in its homoeroticism. Yet Alexandre certainly knows a lot about something he has supposedly never done, enough to repeat in great detail descriptions of that from which he pretended to recoil in horror.

In a previous reading of these and other passages from *The Pillar of Salt*, I situated these erotic scenarios from Alexandre’s past within the novel’s narrative of colonial assimilation and alienation. There I under-
stood Memmi’s denial of being implicated in the “parties of collective pleasure” as part of a narrative of sexual development that parallels the civilizing process of Alexandre’s colonial assimilation. As Memmi’s narrator leaves behind the dark continent of a primitive past, of a childhood marked as polymorphously perverse, he comes closer to achieving the goal of French education for the colonized. Yet *The Pillar of Salt* quite clearly details the price of such an assimilation—alienation—and in the end its narrator rejects French civilization altogether when he fails to hand in the exam he has been taking (or more accurately not taking, since he was remembering his childhood instead). Because he ends up rejecting his previous rejection of the “Orient” (itself a colonial construct), this second rejection logically entails a reversal of his rejection of “Oriental sex” in the above passage. The very narrative structure of the novel, therefore, brings the remembered childhood into conflict with its framing (the French educational system and its civilizing mission), brings the queerness of the past into conflict with the present. In other words, the novel not only represents queer childhood episodes but also offers a narrative structure for queering the present by returning to the past and returning the past to the present.

In that earlier reading, I stressed the implications of this queer haunting for *Tunisian* nationalism, since the Jewish presence revived in *The Pillar of Salt* comes to contest a politics of purity that would define the Maghrebian nation as Arab and Muslim. This questioning of the nation was also a queering because the multiple connections of the rhizomatic origins of Tunisian identity were not just homoerotic (in a way whose denial can so easily slide into homosociality) but homoerotic in a way that involved the emasculation of any homosociality that might result in a justification of male privilege. It was the return of a preheterosexual childhood (preheterosexual because it was prior to a mature adult sexuality—even an “indigenous” one—and, since childhood allegorizes the precolonial, prior to the heterosexuality imposed by colonialism) that made this ghosting queer.

My point in this section has been to carry out a parallel reading of Memmi in relation to Zionism, in relation to Israeli as opposed to Tunisian nationalism. For, inasmuch as the Zionism that led to the Israeli state claims to return the Nation of Israel to the promised land, it is not merely a revival of the past or a return to roots; it is also a narrative of progress, of gendered progress, one that requires the masculinization of its men in relation to (other) European nations. No matter how many Zionist essays Memmi pens, the emasculated “Oriental” penis of
his first novel will always stand in contrast to the gendered politics of Zionism described by Boyarin and resisted by both Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin in their more explicitly anti-Zionist writings. This rather queer penis may also provide one way to understand the potentially queer role of diaspora within what James Clifford calls “a diasporist anti-Zionism,” of which, for him, the Boyarins and Alcalay serve as prime examples (“Diasporas” 326). In their jointly authored “Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity,” Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin propose an alternative “genealogy” of Jewish identity, one based on diaspora as a counter to Zionism. In direct opposition to the passages from Memmi’s essays that begin this section and with what Ella Shohat calls “the Zionist rejection of the Diaspora” (272), they retrieve a biblically based model of Jewish identity in which diaspora and connection with a homeland are not at odds.

In the specific context examined by Gopinath in Impossible Desires (as I discuss in the introduction to this volume), nation and diaspora are seen as much more compatible (at least in the hegemonic models of diasporism she critiques) than within Zionist discourses. Gopinath’s retrieval of queerness within diaspora thus leads directly to a queering of the nation. It is probably the case, however, that diaspora haunts the nation differently for Zionism, which actually envisions the elimination of diaspora. One can thus not only locate queerness within the diaspora but also understand diaspora as having a queer relation to the Israeli nation. In contrast to Gopinath’s project, rather than queering the Israeli state, retrieving the Jewish diaspora as queer in Memmi’s fiction contributes to an imagining of the undoing of Zionism as a political project by allowing the rhizomatic connections of diaspora to return in the process of returning to origins in a homeland of the mind. Memmi thus allows us to carry forward Gopinath’s queering of diaspora by allowing us to tease out the queer potential of the very concept of diaspora itself.

While Memmi’s revival of his penis relies on the same phallic genealogy Helmreich alludes to in his etymological definition of diaspora as the spreading of seed/sperm, his Jewissance entails spilling his seed rather differently. Indeed, it is not through heterosexual reproduction that he plants the seeds of a Zionist state; rather, the promised land flows forth like milk and honey every time he touches himself “to verify [the] definitive mark [of the Orient].” Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin retrieve an antimasculinist diasporic anti-Zionism by performing “the double mark of the male Jew,” that is, their circumcision and head covering, thereby undoing the body/mind opposition Memmi’s Zionism relies on (“Self-
Exposure” 16–22). Yet, whereas they write (about) their penises, Memmi has a wank. Indeed, for Memmi “l’alliance avec Dieu était sexuelle” (190) [the covenant with God was of a sexual nature (171)]. But instead of getting in touch with God as he touches himself, Memmi touches (the penises of) fellow Arabs. The home of Jewish identity is thus not a state that pushes out the Other; rather Muslim and Jewish penises rub together, acknowledging that they share an alliance with God signed by Abraham. The Nation of Israel that comes into being through a kind of circle jerk with (other) Arabs makes for a rather queer Zionism, which is more like no Zionism at all. Unlike the tree of begats recited in The Cave, a homoerotic affiliation counters the models of filiation on which the Zionist roots narrative is founded. If there are few examples of more violent effects of the political paradox of roots, the sexual paradox in Memmi’s fictional work may be mined to challenge the politics of his essays.

Indeed, Memmi shows us that the very narrative structure on which Zionism relies offers a strategy for its undoing. The very gesture of looking back is evoked by the novel’s title; The Pillar of Salt is a biblical reference to Lot’s wife, who—disobeying God’s command not to look back on a burning Sodom—turns into a pillar of salt. Memmi explicitly connects his fate to hers:

[J]e meurs pour m’être retourné sur moi-même. Il est interdit de se voir et j’ai fini de me connaître. Comme la femme de Loth, que Dieu changea en statue, puis-je encore vivre au-delà de mon regard? (368)

[I am dying [from] having turned back [on my]self. It is forbidden to see oneself, and I have [finished knowing] myself. [Like Lot’s wife, whom God turned into a pillar of salt, can I still live beyond my gaze]? (335)]

Since Memmi looks back on himself as Lot’s wife looked back on Sodom, he equates his own past with Sodom. Furthermore, since Memmi’s use of the verb to know recalls the very reason for Sodom’s destruction— “[T]he men of Sodom, compassed the house round. . . . And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them” (Gen. 19.4–5)—“knowing” could be read here in the biblical sense. Lot declines to let the men of Sodom “know” his guests and offers up his own daughters instead. In contrast, Memmi opts to know himself by get-
ting in touch with other Mediterraneans. When knowing oneself is the equivalent of touching oneself (which is the equivalent of touching the penises of other Jews and Arabs), the mind/body binary on which Memmi founds his explicitly Zionist position begins to collapse as surely as the city of Sodom. As with the Hara, however, there will always be a Sodom of the mind. “Next year in Jerusalem,” then, becomes the equivalent of “Tonight in Sodom,” as Zion surges from every wank in a certain streetcar of the mind, a streetcar named desire.

**Derrida’s Queer Root(s)**

The queering of diaspora through the pleasure derived from emasculation that Memmi feels at the site of his circumcision is taken a step further by Jacques Derrida. Like *La statue de sel*, “Circumfessions”—a sort of footnote running the entire length of Geoffrey Bennington’s “Derrida-base,” both of which together constitute their jointly authored *Jacques Derrida*—returns Derrida to the moment of his circumcision with the result that his circumcised penis becomes a figure for his Jewish Algerian roots. Unlike the numerous representations of circumcision in Franco-Maghrebian fiction that return to circumcision in memory only to bring it back as trauma, however, Derrida’s discussion evokes a “Jewissance” that parallels Memmi’s. Reading Derrida’s penis through the model provided by Memmi, then, allows us to understand that when Derrida’s penis enters his writing it stands as a site for his emasculation consistent not with the erection of phallogocentrism but with its deconstruction. Of Derrida’s autobiographical texts, “Circumfessions” lavishes the most attention on his own penis (or root) and the circumcision of that penis as a figure for his Jewish Algerian origins (or roots). Written around his penis, these origins are also doubly circumscribed by seemingly opposing limits, the limits of both identity and its deconstruction. By focusing on the homoerotics that arise when Derrida’s penis enters his writing, this section brings his autobiographical writing into contrast with deconstruction and argues that this contradiction is at the heart of a queering of identity, for which deconstruction might be read as an allegory. Once autobiography intrudes into Derrida’s deconstructive writing, deconstruction turns out to have been, in part, about identity all along.

On several occasions in this study, I have already considered Derrida’s deconstruction of origins in *Of Grammatology*. By asserting their *après-coup* constitution, Derrida implies that searching for and then “finding” one’s
roots does not consist of returning to preexisting origins; rather the very return posits them after the fact as if they existed prior to it. At first glance, this deconstruction of origins (a critical component of the deconstruction of essence since Derrida’s earliest writings) might seem contrary to the articulation of identity through narrative returns to origins or roots. If the notion of roots literalizes identity’s essence as an organic attachment to its origins in a material, geographic site, for Derrida a metaphysical search for origins is actually a writing of origins as fiction (in short what I have called the narrative paradox). Yet Derrida increasingly wove an important autobiographical thread into writings like “Circumfessions” and The Monolingualism of the Other with the result that, in spite of his deconstruction of origins, origins keep coming back in the form of narrative returns to his Jewish Algerian roots. Derrida’s later texts (and their deployment of the autobiographical) therefore offer rich pre-texts for unraveling the ties that bind a metaphysics of origins to accounts of identity as rootedness, as well as a strategy for dealing with a rooted identity that resists such an unraveling.

In “Circumfessions,” Derrida returns to his Algerian childhood by reading Saint Augustine’s Confessions. Writing his own autobiography by reading the autobiography of another, Derrida gives the queering of identity a literal component in two explicit mentions of homosexuality. In one passage, Derrida queers his North African literary forebear: “[J]’ai la vision de sA, lui aussi, en petit Juif homosexuel (d’Alger ou de New York), il a tout refoulé, se convertit en somme assez tôt en don Juan chrétien par peur du sida” (161) [I have the vision of SA, too, as a little homosexual Jew (from Algiers or New York), he has repressed everything, basically converts himself quite early on into a Christian Don Juan for fear of AIDS (172)]. Here, through his Berber pre-text, Derrida returns to a pre-Muslim, pre-French Algeria, thereby unconverting Saint Augustine and recasting his Christianization as repression. In addition, he could be said to equate queering with rendering Jewish. In another passage, this queering extends to Derrida himself:

[M]on homosexualité impossible, celle que j’associerai toujours au nom de Claude, les cousins-cousines de mon enfance, ils débordent mon corpus, la syllabe CL, dans Glas et ailleurs, avouant un plaisir volé, ces raisins par exemple sur le vignoble du propriétaire arabe, de ces rares bourgeois d’El-Biar. . . . [D]epuis je suis les confessions de vol au cœur des autobiographies, la ventriloque homosexuelle, la
Derrida’s reading of Saint Augustine thus occurs as a homosexual encounter that equates reading with queering, both of which are also the means by which the autobiographical subject identifies with his pre-text and becomes (one with) it.

Furthermore, these two queerings occur through several returns: to an Algerian childhood episode of stealing; and to Derrida’s own previous writings, namely, *Glas*, in which, as we shall see, he lavishes much attention on penises and erections. By extension, in mentioning Rousseau’s theft of a ribbon, he not only inserts himself into a genealogy of autobiographical forebears (from Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* to Rousseau’s to his own), but he also recalls his own reading (and queering) of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*, his reading of Rousseau’s confessions of masturbating. If Derrida can transform the autobiographies of others into his own, if queering Saint Augustine is simultaneously a self-queering, then reading Rousseau masturbating is a way of masturbating (with) him. This practice of reading (as) a sexual act would thus be the “homosexual ventriloquy” that consists of making his pre-texts speak or, further, throwing his voice to fool us into believing that they are the ones that are speaking instead of Derrida.

In addition to these explicit mentions of homosexuality, *Jacques Derrida* carries out another, more subtle queering of Derrida in a photo of Bennington standing behind Derrida, who is sitting at a computer. The caption to this photo reads, “Carte postale ou tableau vivant . . . ‘prêttexte dérobé pour y inscrire ma propre signature derrière, dans son dos’” (15) [<“Post Card or tableau vivant . . . ‘a hidden pretext for writing in my own signature behind his back’” (11)], thereby asserting a visual parallel between this photo and the eponymous image of *The Post Card*, an illustration taken from a “*Fortune-telling book du XIIIe siècle (Prognostica
This image represents Plato standing behind Socrates as if the latter is taking dictation from the former in an inversion of the conventional wisdom regarding which philosopher is transmitting the other’s thoughts in writing. It is undoubtedly this inversion between teacher and student—an inversion of the conventional primacy of the spoken word over writing—that first attracted Derrida to this image, but he goes on to push this inversion toward queerer limits by sexualizing the “postcard”:

[I]e vois Plato bander dans le dos de Socrate et l’ubris insensée de sa queue, une érection interminable, disproportionnée, traverser comme une seule idée la tête de Paris et la chaise du copiste avant de glisser doucement, toute chaude encore, sous la jambe droite de Socrates, en harmonie ou symphonie de mouvement avec ce faisceau de phallus, les pointes, plumes, doigts, ongles et grattoirs, les écrivai-前期 mè la sorte. . . Il plonge sous les vagues que font les voiles autour des fesses dodues, tu vois le double arrondi, assez invraisemblable, il plonge droit, rigide, comme le nez d’une torpille, pour électrocuter le vieux et l’analyser sous narcose. . . Tout cela, que je ne sais pas ou ne veux pas voir encore, revient aussi du fond des eaux de ma mémoire, un peu comme si j’avais dessiné ou gravé la scène, depuis le premier jour où, dans un lycée d’Alger sans doute, j’ai entendu parler de ces deux-là. (La carte postale 22–23)

[I see Plato getting an erection in Socrates’ back and see the insane hubris of his prick, an interminable, disproportionate erection traversing Paris’s head like a single idea and then the copyist’s chair, before slowly sliding, still warm, under Socrates’ right leg, in harmony or symphony with the movement of this phallus sheaf [this bundle of phalluses], the points, plumes, pens, fingers, [finger]nails and grattoirs, the very pencil boxes which address themselves [rise up to one another] in the same direction. . . It plunges under the waves made by the veils around the plump buttocks, you see the rounded double, improbable enough, it plunges straight down, rigid, like the nose of a stingray to electrocute the old man. . . All of this, that I do not know or do not yet want to see, also comes back from the bottom of the waters of my memory, a bit as if I had drawn or engraved the scene,
from the first day that, in an Algiers lycée no doubt, I first heard of those two. (Post Card 18)]

By reading the elongated object protruding from beneath Socrates’ leg as Plato’s penis, Derrida suggests that the latter is fucking the former between the legs. Socrates is thus taking more than dictation, Plato giving more than the spoken word. *Platon prend Socrate, qui lui donne son cul.* Or, we could say, Plato gives it to Socrates, who in turn takes it (between the legs).18 Yet even the text that *Jacques Derrida* sends us back to (*The Post Card*) sends us back even further to Derrida’s Algerian adolescence (the kind of looking back that turns one into a pillar of salt) as if a return to his Jewish Algerian roots were inseparable from his reflections on the possibility of two of his philosophical pre-texts and forebears engaging in intercultural intercourse.

Derrida’s queer reading of the give-and-take between Socrates and Plato in *The Post Card* returns in *Jacques Derrida* to inflect his relation with his translator and commentator. By reading the above passage from *The Post Card* into the photo in *Jacques Derrida*, we could say that Bennington gives it to Derrida, who in turn takes it (up the ass). This photo thus turns Bennington into Derrida’s top just as Derrida’s autobiographical reflections are positioned at the bottom of the page. We could also say that, as Derrida’s autobiography undergirds Bennington’s account of his life’s work, the top becomes an allegory of the bottom. Perhaps I, too, become Derrida’s top in my reading of his work. Or is it deconstruction that is constantly being not undergirded but undermined, screwed, that is, by the insertion of the autobiographical (penis)? “Circumfessions” is thus not only the text in which Derrida most literally inserts his penis and his autobiography into his writing; it is also the text in which the penis of another is inserted into him. To read Derrida, to turn him into the pre-text for (in this case, queer) theorizing is also to penetrate him (i.e., to sodomize as well as understand him).

If we might also read the particular give-and-take I have just described as a queering of Derrida’s writings on the gift, one text, in particular, seems to give more than others: *Glas*, in which each numbered page consists of two columns (each containing multiple subcolumns or inserts). The one on the right, devoted to Jean Genet, offers the most explicit penises, which should not surprise given their abundance in Genet’s own writings. The left-hand column is devoted to the Hegelian dialectic and Hegel’s reflections on the relation among
Christianity, the family, civil society, and the state. According to Derrida, claims to truth in Hegel’s narrative of progress from Judaism to Christianity rely on the bourgeois family and religion, and Hegel’s reflections on religion and the dialectic depend on the notion that Christianity represents the fulfillment or teleology of Judaism (like the synthesis, or *Aufhebung*, of the dialectic) in which the three terms of the lifting up become a kind of Holy Family: “*Aufhebung au sein du christianisme d’abord, puis *Aufhebung du christianisme, de la religion absolue relevée dans la philosophie qui en aura été la vérité*” (H99) [*Aufhebung first in the heart [sein] of Christianity,¹⁹ then *Aufhebung of Christianity, of the absolute revealed religion in (to) philosophy [of the absolute religion raised up or highlighted within philosophy that will have been its truth]*] (H70).²⁰

In fact, Derrida’s deconstruction of Truth as both Christianity and heterosexuality occurs precisely through a sexualization of *Aufhebung*:

[L]e procès de la copulation vise à conserver cette différence tout en l’annulant.

Il la relevé : l’*Aufhebung* est très précisément le rapport de la copulation à la différence sexuelle.

On ne peut comprendre la relevé en général sans la copulation sexuelle, ni celle-ci en général sans la relevé. (H156)

[Copulation relieves [highlights/raises up] the difference: *Aufhebung* is very precisely the relation of copulation and the sexual difference.

The relief in general cannot be understood without sexual copulation, nor sexual copulation in general without the relief. (H111)]²¹

Passages such as these serve to associate the lifting or raising up of *Aufhebung* with erection; indeed, Derrida turns the *Aufhebung* that is Christianity back against Christianity to get a rise out of it. In fact this rise occurs in part by turning the Last Supper into the scene²² of a homosexual orgy in which penetration is again sexual as well as epistemological:

La pénétration identificatoire de Jésus en ses disciples—Jean d’abord, le disciple chéri—, du Père en Jésus et à travers lui en ses disciples—Jean le premier—, subjective en un premier temps, puis objective, redevient subjective par l’ingestion. La consommation intérieurise, idealise, relevé . . . Pourvu qu’il nomme, qu’il engage un discours, le mouvement de la langue est analogue à la copulation dans la Cène.
Derrida here reverses/inverts Hegel’s heterodialectical understanding of Christianity, thereby deconstructing the Christianity/Judaism distinction, turning Judaism against Christianity in order to queer the latter. In fact, if Derrida refers to absolute knowledge throughout *Glas* as “Sa” (*Savoir absolu*), this abbreviation inverts the capitalization of the abbreviation for Saint Augustine in “Circumfessions” (sA) much as he turns sA into an invert and a Jew. In addition, through both Sa/sA’s relation to the homonym ça (the id), Derrida further sexualizes knowledge as penetration. In Saint Augustine (sA), we also see Sa as an inverted truth, the truth inverted, inversion as Truth.

From *Aufhebung* as erection, Derrida proceeds through the French colloquial term for having an erection, *bander* (more accurately “to get a hard-on”), to multiple parallels with Genet’s penises and Hegel’s erections. The strongest of these parallels is found in Derrida’s own writing on both Genet and Hegel, which takes the form of two bands of text. In fact, Derrida suggests rather strongly that content shapes the form of *Glas*, which itself becomes a kind of double hard-on: “il *bande* double” (G280) [he bands erect double (G201)], “DOUBLE *BANDE* . . . *Bande* contre *bande*” (G92) [DOUBLE BAND(S) . . . Band contra band (G66)]. We might then read this *double bande* as not only a visualization of the Hegelian dialectic but also its queering, since the erection of Christianity as Judaism’s *Aufhebung* is literalized on the page and forced to rub against Genet’s erect penises in a kind of theoretical *frottage* or dry humping. In addition, Hegel’s synthesis (Christianity) becomes just another

Tout cet analogon ne se forme, ne *tient debout* et ne se laisse saisir que sous la catégorie des catégories. Il se *relève* tout le temps. C’est une *Aufhebung*. (H96–97)
thesis for which Genet’s penises serve as the antithesis in a queering of the Hegelian dialectic.

Furthermore, as if the mechanics of this theoretical maneuver needed a little greasing up, Derrida inserts some lubrication through one of Genet’s fetish objects, the tube of Vaseline described in *Journal du voleur* (20–24) [*The Thief’s Journal*]. Derrida glorifies this object—“La langue (française) doit donc chanter, fêter le petit tube de vaseline” (G226) [The (French) tongue then ought to sing, to fete the little tube of vaseline (G162)]—and sexualizes it even beyond Genet’s own allusions to its potential sexual uses: “Et le crachat dont s’enduirait le mât glissant devient très vite, la plume est trempée dans une glu très fluide, de la vaseline. Et même, sans avoir à forcer, un tube de vaseline goménolée” (G200) [And the spit with which the gliding mast would be smeared becomes, very quickly— the pen is dipped into a very fluid glue— some vaseline. And even, without forcing, a tube of mentholated vaseline (G143)]. As if the tube of Vaseline were insufficient, Derrida even adds a little spit to the mixture as his pen becomes a penis (as does Plato’s in *The Post Card*). Furthermore, this pen(is) needs its own lubrication: “Essayez donc avec le tube de vaseline . . . avant le début du livre” (G201–2) [So try with the tube of vaseline . . . before the beginning of the book] (G143–44). And if, in *Glas*, writing is equated with the insertion of a penis (the literal subject of “Circumfessions”), by turning the pages of *Glas* the reader rubs erection against erection, an act facilitated by the textual lubrication provided by Derrida (and Genet). In other words, the Vaseline does more than provide the textual lubrication to ease the turning of pages in *Glas* in order to rub erection against erection; it also eases the insertion of Derrida’s own penis in the form of *Glas*’s most prominent autobiographical references.

One of these references is a passage over two pages long in which Derrida describes an Algerian synagogue in which the Torah is brought out from behind curtains:

La Thora porte robe et couronne. Ses deux rouleaux sont ensuite écartés comme deux jambes, elle est soulevée à portée de bras et le sceptre du rabbin suit approximativement le texte dressé. Les bandes dont il était entouré avaient d’abord été défaillies et en général confiées à un enfant. (G335)

[The Torah wears a robe and a crown. Its two rollers are then parted [écartés] like two legs; the Torah is lifted to arm’s length and the rab-
Derrida also speaks of the rabbi “raising the two parted columns” [élever les deux colonnes écartés] and states, “Il fallait ensuite, le texte sacré, l’enrouler et bander de nouveau” [Afterwards, they had to roll up the sacred text and wrap [bander] it all over again (G336 for the French, G241 for the English)]. Here Derrida thus compares the doubly erectile structure of Glas to the two rollers of the Torah. Or, conversely, we could say that he uses the form of Glas to sexualize, read queer, the Torah, and vice versa as well, since we could also read this passage as converting the erect bands into spread legs.

In spite of the implied homoeroticism of bringing so many penises into contact, there is a way in which Derrida’s predilection for the penile in Glas is not queer. It is by no means the only text in which he displays an affinity for penises; almost all his writings have something to do with penises since, with only a few exceptions, all the writers he has written about presumably have or had one. That he would come to focus on his own in a few texts might thus come as no surprise. For a writer who has consistently aspired to a deconstruction of phallogocentrism, and who sounds its death knell in Glas—“Glas du phallogocentrisme” (G315)—his writings could be read as phallocentric. Could he then be claimed to reinforce the very phallocentrism he claims to deconstruct? But to do so in the case of Glas would be to equate the penis with the phallus (which of course cannot be completely separated from it) and therefore to circumvent further dislodging the phallus from its supposed corporeal referent. Or by literalizing the phallus as erect penises, which he then brings together to rub against one another in homosexual contact, does Derrida use a male queering to deflate the phallus and the phallogocentrism that is Christianity? Indeed, bringing penises together in Glas brings about a perversely emasculating effect.

We see this effect in the above description of the Torah, which transforms two erections into opened legs, legs opened not to the penetration of heterosexual coitus but to the pointed finger of the scepter used to read a sacred text that cannot be touched by human hands. This sex change occurs in a number of other passages in Glas as well, for no sooner does Derrida erect penises (and textual columns) than he begins to cut them down:

Si j’écris deux textes à la fois, vous ne pourrez pas me châtrer. Si je délinéarise, j’érige. Mais en même temps, je divise mon acte et mon
désir. Je—marque la division et vous échappant toujours, je simule sans cesse et ne jouis nulle part. Je me châtre moi-même—je me reste ainsi—et je “joue à jouir.” (G91)

[If I write two texts at once, you will not be able to castrate me. If I delinearize, I erect. But at the same time I divide my act and my desire. I—mark(s) the division, and always escaping you, I simulate unceasingly and take my pleasure nowhere. I castrate myself—I remain(s) myself thus—and I “play at coming” [je “joue à jouir”]. (G65)]

In his discussion of Genet, Derrida stages a castration that is not one, a castration that then has to rub against his association in the opposite column of circumcision with castration:

La circoncision est une coupure déterminante. Elle permet de couper mais, du même coup, de rester attaché à la coupure. Le Juif s’arrange pour que le coupé reste attaché à la coupure. Errance juive limitée par l’adhérance et la contre-coupure. Le Juif n’est coupant que pour traiter ainsi, contracter la coupure avec elle-même. . . . À cette castration symbolique sur laquelle glisse le discours hegelien, Abraham associe l’endogamie. (H58)

[Circumcision is a determining cut. It permits cutting but, at the same time and in the same stroke [du même coup], remaining attached to the cut. The Jew arranges himself so that the cut part [le coupé] remains attached to the cut. Jewish errance limited by adherence and the countercut. The Jew is cutting only in order to treat thus, to contract the cut with itself. . . . With this symbolic castration that Hegelian discourse lightly glides over, Abraham associates endogamy. (H41)]

Here Derrida establishes an analogy between the cutting of circumcision (and the castration associated with it) and Abraham’s cutting himself off from his original people to wander elsewhere and found a new nation. Jewish identity, cut into the member of the male members of the group, depends on an attachment to circumcision/castration: “Ça bande, la castration. L’infirmité elle-même se panse à bander” (G193) [It (Ça) bands erect, castration. Infirmity itself bandages itself [se panse] [thinks itself/is thought] by banding erect” (G138)]. Circumcision/castration is thus a kind of pharmakon that marks Jewish identity as wounded while healing the very wounds it produces; it is the cut that separates Jews from Gentiles and that binds [bande] (at least male) Jews together.
In “Circumfessions,” circumcision will, furthermore, become a source of jouissance:

[L]a jouissance suprême pour tous, d’abord pour lui, moi, le nourrisson, imaginez l’aimée (me) circoncisant elle-même, comme faisait la mère dans le récit biblique, provoquant lentement l’éjaculation dans sa bouche au moment où elle avale la couronne de peau saignante avec le sperme en signe d’alliance exultante, ses jambes ouvertes, les seins entre les miennes, . . . se passant les peaux de bouche à bouche comme une bague. (202–3)

[[T]he supreme enjoyment for all, first of all for him, me, the nursling, imagine the loved woman herself circumcising (me), as the mother did in the biblical narrative, slowly provoking ejaculation in her mouth just as she swallows the crown of bleeding skin with the sperm as a sign of exultant alliance, her legs open, her breasts between my legs, . . . passing skins from mouth to mouth like a ring. . . . (217–18)]

Here the jouissance results from heterosexual (yet Oedipal) fellatio, though one that is paradoxically based on the emasculation of a circumcision associated with castration. This curious obsession with bloody fellatio is articulated though a chain of associations, the first with a traditional aspect of the circumcision ceremony: “[T]ant de mohels des siècles durant avaient pratiqué la succion, ou mezizah, à même le gland, y mêlant vin et sang, jusqu’à ce que la chose fût abolie à Paris en 1843 pour raison d’hygiène” (68–69) "[S]o many mohels for centuries had practiced suction, or mezizah, right on the glans, mixing wine and blood with it, until the thing was abolished in Paris in 1843 for reasons of hygiene" (69). Derrida further associates mezizah with the biblical story of

Zipporah, celle qui répara la défaillance d’un Moïse incapable de circoncire son propre fils, avant de lui dire “Vous m’êtes un époux de sang” devait manger le prépuce alors sanglant, j’imagine en le suçant d’abord, ma première cannibale aimée, l’initiatrice à la porte sublime de la fellation. (68)

[Zipporah, the one who repaired the failing of a Moses incapable of circumcising his own son, before telling him, “You are a husband of blood to me,” she had to eat the still bloody foreskin, I imagine first by sucking it, my first beloved cannibal, initiator at the sublime gate of fellatio. (68)]
By characterizing his mother as Zipporah’s descendant, Derrida provides a matrilineal alternative to the genealogy inscribed onto the Jewish penis, which connects men to their fathers, circumcised, like them, in a chain leading all the way back to Abraham.24

Derrida’s roots are thus cut into his root, which is the site of a sexual pleasure that Daniel Boyarin calls “Jewissance” (xxiii):

[L]e mélange sur cette cène incroyable du vin et du sang, le donner à voir comme je le vois sur mon sexe chaque fois que du sang se mêle au sperme ou à la salive de la fellation, décrire mon sexe à travers des millénaires de judaïsme. (“Circonfessions” 145)

[[T]he mixture on this incredible [last] supper of the wine and blood, let people see it how I see it on my sex each time blood is mixed with sperm or the saliva of fellatio, describe my sex throughout thousands of years of Judaism. (“Circumfessions” 153)]

Having one’s freshly circumcised penis sucked by the moist lips of the (ancestral) mother connects one to previous penises similarly sucked in a kind of communion (and of making the Last Supper Jewish—which of course, as a Passover seder, it already was). The recuperation of castration in an Oedipal relation with the mother, of course, need not result in a decentering of phallogocentrism or even masculinity; castration founds the very masculinity it threatens in Freudian models of gendered development. Derrida, however, emasculates quite differently by turning the penis into an orifice through another complex chain of significations. Already in Glas, therefore, Derrida offers his own version of an anti-Oedipus in that, in spite of his desire for the mother, the emasculation that this desire entails undoes what Deleuze and Guattari call the “triangle papa-maman-moi” (L’anti-Œdipe 60), but as always, contra Deleuze, this Derridean deconstruction of Oedipus nonetheless retains a love for what it deconstructs.

In Glas, the reversibility of sex is part of the cutting down of erections: “Elle [l’erion] entoure le cou, le con, la verge, l’apparition ou l’apparence d’un trou en érection, d’un trou et d’une érection à la fois, d’une érection dans le trou ou d’un trou dans l’érection : elle entoure un volcan” (G93) [The golden fleece surrounds the neck, the cunt, the verge [the penis], the apparition or the appearance of a hole in erection, of a hole and an erection at once, of an erection in the hole or a hole in the erection (G66)]. Like the castration that is not one, this erec-
tion that is not one further complicates any association one might make between Derrida’s cutting and the castration foundational to Freudian masculinity. Whereas Freudian castration cuts men off (separates them) from women by also cutting the latter (defining them as castrated, as being not-men), Derrida’s castration, as will become even clearer below, carries out a deconstruction of sexual difference. Further distinguishing Derrida from Freud is the jouissance the former derives from self-castration. In “Circumfessions,” it is circumcision itself that, while cutting the penis, removes an orifice that nonetheless remains attached. In turn, Derrida turns the foreskin, a kind of ring, into a wedding ring (alliance in French), marking the alliance of Jewish men with God and their covenant with him. In Glas, this ring is sexualized and becomes a site of sexual penetration:

Le présent de la coupe qui rend possible la copulation dans l’alliance, ce présent n’est pas donné, il n’est pas présent. Il ne se présente que dans l’attente d’un autre accouplement qui viendra remplir, accomplir (vollenden) celui qui s’annonce ou s’entame ici. (H96).

[The present of the cup that makes copulation possible in the covenant [alliance], that present is not given, is not present. It presents itself only in the expectation of another coupling that will come to fulfill, accomplish (vollenden) what is announced or broached/breached here. (H86)]

This ring is even described through imagery strongly suggesting a sphincter:

L’anneau est trop serré. N’abandonnons pas. Ce que je cherche à écrire—gl— . . . c’est ce qui se passe, plus ou moins bien, par la stric-ture rythmée d’un anneau. Essayez, un jour anniversaire, de pousser une bague autour d’un style érigé, outré, tendu. (G153–54)

[The annulus [or ring] is too tight [serré]. Let us not give up. What I am trying to write—gl—is . . . what passes [or happens], more or less well, through the rhythmic strict-ure of an annulus. Try, one anniversary day [or birthday], to push a ring around an erected, extravagant, stretched style [or stylus]. (G109)]

This eroticization of the foreskin even inflects Derrida’s relation with Bennington. Although Derrida characterizes the text he offers Benning-
ton as uncircumcised—“de tout ce que G. peut attendre de moi, un écrit soi-disant idiomatique, inentamable, illisible, non circoncis, tenu non plus à l’assistance du père, dirait Socrate” (181) [everything G. can be expecting of me, a supposedly idiomatic, unbroachable, unreadable, uncircumcised piece of writing (194)]—the content of that text is his own autobiography, given to Bennington for incorporation into Jacques Derrida. Derrida gives himself over as text in a gift, most literally, of his penis, or perhaps its removed foreskin. This ring, sacrificed to seal an alliance with God, becomes a wedding ring (alliance) offered to Bennington.

One might think that all this cutting and bleeding would be enough to make most men go limp, but the loss of erection—like the loss that is castration—nonetheless keeps what is cut off:

Il tourne en dérision tout ce qui se dit au nom de la vérité ou du phallus. Il joue l’érection dans l’être à poil de son écriture. La dérision ne fait pas simplement tomber l’érection, elle la garde mais en la soumettant à ce dont elle la garde, déjà, la fêlure du nom propre. (G96–97)

[The erion [or golden fleece] derides everything said in the name of truth or the phallus, sports the erection in the downy being [l’être à poil] of its writing. Derision does not simply make the erection fall; it keeps the erection erect but does so by submitting the erection to what it keeps the erection from, already, the crack of the proper no(un) [du nom propre]. (G69)]

And, according to Derrida at least, this unbinding (débander) of penises challenges the phallus as opposed to upholding it (and holding it up). In other words, Derrida erige (or erects) in Glas pour débander or to make his theoretical writing lose the very erections he inserts into it by turning each of them into an “érection débandée” (H165). In addition, this cutting down or turning off of erections is not simply one specific example among many of what deconstruction can accomplish through the insertion of penises—including Derrida’s own—into his writing; it describes the act of deconstruction itself. For it has often been pointed out that etymologically deconstruction and analysis (“to loosen again” or “untie again”) are quite close. From Glas we can also say that the action designated by the verb débander (which also carries the additional sense of loosening bands or ties) could, like analysis, be
used to name deconstruction. The cutting down of erections, like the cutting of penises that is circumcision, therefore allegorizes deconstruction. In fact, if in *Glas* Derrida suggests replacing essence or being with hard-ons—“je propose qu’on essaie partout de remplacer le verbe être par le verbe *bander*” (G186) [I propose that one try everywhere to replace the verb *to be* with the verb *to band erect* (G133)]—the term *débander* becomes an equivalent of the analysis of essence and therefore, again, of deconstruction.

And it is not only in its bringing down of erections that Derrida challenges the phallogocentric; deconstruction could be said to become an equivalent of queering in what Derrida calls “[é]nantiose homosexuelle” (H314), a homosexual putting into opposition that understands the two elements of a binary as a homosexual couple:

> Et si elle *relève* la différence, l’opposition, la conceptualité elle-même, est homosexuelle. Elle commence à le devenir quand les différences sexuelles s’effacent [sic] et se déterminent comme la différence. (H312)

> [And if the sexual difference as opposition relieves [raises up] difference, the opposition, conceptuality itself, is homosexual. It begins to become such when the sexual differences efface themselves and determine themselves as the difference. (H223)]

Derrida then allows this homosexual couple to mate: “[L]a copule couple, accouple la paire, resserre dans le même ligament (Band) (H94) [[T]he copula couples, mates [accouple] the pair, draws closer in the same ligament (Band) the thing and the attribute thus becoming party again to *Sein* (H67)]. The copula (i.e., the verb *to be*) binds (bande) what it couples; by making this erection literal, Derrida unbinds (débande) and undoes the essentialized ties signified through the copula. If his reading of Hegel teases out the heterosexuality of Truth and the dialectic, the going limp that happens once Hegel’s erections touch Genet’s penises results in a queering of all these terms and, in the case of Christianity, a reversal of Hegel’s narrative of religious progress, a reversal that renders it Jewish. Since Derrida constantly associates the *double bande* with the double bind—what better definition for the aporia, that figure for an irresolvable question or problem of the sort Derrida so fondly rests his gaze upon—the double band and the *double bande* that is *Glas*, the rubbing of Genet’s penises and Hegel’s erections, is a visualization of not
only a queering of the dialectic but also a deconstructivist understanding of binaries that quite literally involves a queering, a very male queering admittedly, but one that is then emasculated.

In “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary,” Judith Butler theorizes, through readings of several texts by Freud and Lacan, the installment of the penis in the imaginary as an erotogenic site. The penis is projected onto a bodily surface made whole via a chain of signification originating in the gaping hole of a toothache:

Freud’s discussion began with the line from Wilhelm Busch, “the jaw-tooth’s aching hole,” a figure that stages a certain collision of figures, a punctured instrument of penetration, an inverted vagina dentata, anus, mouth, orifice in general, the spectre of the penetrating instrument penetrated. Insofar as the tooth, as that which bites, cuts, breaks through, and enters is that which is itself already entered, broken into, it figures an ambivalence that, it seems, becomes the source of pain analogized with the male genitals a few pages later. This figure is immediately likened to other body parts in real or imagined pain, and is then replaced and erased by the prototypical genitals. This wounded instrument of penetration can only suffer under the ideal of its own invulnerability, and Freud attempts to restore its imaginary power by installing it first as prototype and then as originary site of erotogenization. (61–62)

It is through this process, which requires the denial or erasure of the signifying chain leading back from the penis to a gaping hole that the penis becomes phallic. Derrida’s textual penises, however, which are also at least in part autobiographical, openly acknowledge and eroticize their gaping wounds, still fresh with blood. His body is “in pieces,” as Butler might say (83); it conjures up the specters of its wounds.

With so many penises on the pages of Derrida’s writing, one might wonder whether, instead of deconstructing phallogocentrism, as I have suggested, these penises reinforce a phallic from which they cannot be dissociated (see Gallop). While my comments on Derrida’s penises might seem at first glance to contradict feminist critiques of such understandings of castration, it is my hope that they will instead contribute to a response to second-wave feminist Germaine Greer’s call, first made about forty years ago but arguably still relevant today: “[W]omen must humanize the penis, take the steel out of it and make it flesh again”
I also hope that my comments here might contribute to a feminist writing about the penis, as well as to the already rich engagement with Derrida on the part of a number of feminists.

Derrida’s penis is therefore haunted, and in *The Post Card*, it also haunts:

P.S. Je les ai encore surchargées de couleurs, regarde, j’ai maquillé notre couple, tu aimes ? Tu arriveras sans doute pas à déchiffrer le tatouage sur la prothèse de plato, cette troisième jambe de bois, ce membre-fantôme qu’il se réchauffe sous le cul de Socrates. (71)

[PS. I have again overlooked them with colors, look, I made up our couple, do you like it? Doubtless you will not be able to decipher the tattoo on plato’s prosthesis, the wooden third leg, the phantom-member that he is warming under Socrates’ ass. (64)]

Cut off from its biological roots, the penis can circulate; by cutting it off, Derrida transforms it into a dildo. This dildo, like the numerous penile pre-texts he plays with (Rousseau’s in *Of Grammatology*, Genet’s in *Glas*, Plato’s in *The Post Card*), is an avatar of Derrida’s autobiographical penis in “Circumfessions,” a fictional penis or root that stands in for Derrida’s fictional roots. In *Glas* this prosthetic penis, a “prothèse qui bande toute seule” (G194) [prosthesis that bands erect all alone (G139)], also stands up to the erection of the Hegelian dialectic: “[T]oute thèse est (bande) une prothèse” (G235) [[E]very thesis is (bands erect) a prosthesis (G168)]. The subtitle of *Monolingualism of the Other—The Prosthesis of Origins*—further associates this dildo with roots. Because in French the Greek prefix *pro*- becomes *pro*-i.e., the title not only transforms Derrida’s root(s) into a dildo; it also names the deconstructivist understanding of origins as a fiction that involves putting (*thesis*) them forth (*pro-*), putting them in front (where the penis presumably is on the male body), putting them at the beginning in an acknowledgment of the narrative paradox of roots narratives.

The *après-coup* construction of origins with which this section begins puts in front only by looking back (through the return to origins that is the roots narrative), similar to the looking back named in Memmi’s title: “Je ne suis accessible, lisible, visible que dans un rétroviseur” (*Glas* G117) [I am accessible, legible, visible only in a rearview mirror (G84)]. And if what is in front is such an obsession in “Circumfessions,” *Glas,* The
Post Card, and Monolingualism, Derrida derives great pleasure from putting it in back, in the/his behind. For it is from behind that Plato sticks his pen(is) into Socrates’ “inkwell”:

Il est trop évident, je reprends tes mots comme toujours, que S. ne voit pas P. qui voit S., mais (voilà le vrai de la philosophie) seulement de dos. Il n’y a que du dos, vu de dos, dans ce qui s’écrit, voilà le dernier mot. Tout se joue en retro, et a tergo. . . . Tout au plus, trempant sa plume ou plus voluptueusement l’un de ses doigts dans ce qui fait office d’encrier (ci-contre, j’ai découpé pour toi le calame et l’orifice dudit encrier . . .). (55)

[It is too obvious, to use your words as always, that S. does not see P. who sees S., but (and here is the truth of philosophy) only from the back. There is only the back, seen from the back, in what is written, such is the final word. Everything is played out in retro, and a tergo . . . . At the very most, dipping his pen, or more sensuously one of his fingers, into that which has the office of inkwell (attached, I have cut out for you the calamus [le calame] and the orifice of said inkwell . . .) (48)]

It is by becoming behind and bottom that Derrida inserts his pro(s)thetic root(s) into his corpus:

[T]out est toujours attaqué de dos, écrit, décrit par derrière. A tergo. Je suis déjà (mort) signifie que je suis derrière. Absolument derrière, le Derrière qui n’aura jamais été vu de face, le Déjà que rien n’aura précédé, qui s’est donc conçu et enfanté lui-même, mais comme cadavre ou corps glorieux. Être derrière, c’est être avant tout—en rupture de symétrie. Je me retranche—derrière—je saigne au bas de mon texte. (G117)

[[E]verything is always attached de dos, from the back, written, described from behind. A tergo. I am already [déjà: also J.D.] (dead) signifies that I am behind [derrière]. Absolutely behind, the Derrière that will have never been seen from the front, the Déjà that nothing will have preceded, which therefore conceived and gave birth to itself, but as a cadaver or glorious body. To be behind is to be before all—in a rupture of symmetry. I cut myself off, I entrench myself—behind—I bleed [je saigne] at the bottom of my text. (G84)]
Like “Socrates [qui] a ses règles” (Carte postale 145) [Socrates [who] is having his period” (Post Card 133)], Derrida transforms that centuries old anti-Semitic trope of the menstruating Jewish man (itself often associated with the blood of circumcision) into a queer figure for deconstruction. The wound of Jewish identity that heals nonetheless keeps bleeding as a sign of the covenant (alliance) that ruptures the ring of the an(nul) us. By taking (it up the ass, offered up as a sacrifice), Derrida gives us what is potentially the most explicit definition of what it might mean to use queer as a verb. And if queer is often considered to be that which challenges identity, Derrida’s articulation of deconstruction as a queering nonetheless retains a sexualized identity whose root(s) is/are the site of a “Jewissance,” the pleasure of a deconstructivist analysis that unties, questions, and cuts down (débande) the very identity it erects.

If the roots narrative of Edmond Jabès—whose intersecting diasporas Derrida shares to a certain extent (as examined in the previous chapter)—can be characterized as Zionist, in its acknowledgment of the narrative paradox it is indeed a queer Zionism. Is it a coincidence that Jabès’s Book of Questions preceded Derrida in questioning rootedness as signified by a site of origins? This shared critique extends into the realm of political discourse in Jabès’s diasporist understanding of the expression “people of the Book,” by which “the Book” becomes both the homeland of the diaspora and the promised land to which return narratives can make “territorial” claims. Derrida would echo this queering of Zionism in his reading of Jabès, in which he also writes, “Le retour alors ne reprend pas possession. Il ne se réapproprie pas l’origine” (L’écriture 430) [The return . . . does not retake possession of something. It does not reappropriate the origin” (Writing 295)].28 I suggest that this sentence be read as rejecting Zionist territorial claims. In his quite literal queering of the narrative paradox, therefore, Derrida reveals, like Reich and Memmi, the structural violence inherent in the political paradox of Zionism as a roots narrative.

Furthermore, a comparison between Memmi’s and Derrida’s looking back and the queer South Asian diaspora that Gopinath theorizes (as discussed in the introduction to this volume) highlights a certain instability with regard to the relation between roots and diaspora. Some diasporic discourses presume stable roots that can ground a stable identity. Others promote diaspora as a destabilization of any roots that might ground identity in a homogenized community whose purity could thereby be policed. The “overlapping diasporas” of the Jewish Maghreb thus constitute an ideal site for bringing queer diasporas like the one Gopinath
theorizes into comparison while nonetheless retaining careful attention to the specificities of individual diasporic cultures. In carrying out such a comparatist practice, one is better positioned to seek answers to a number of questions that might be considered fundamental to any attempt to define the field of queer diaspora studies. Where is the queer in queer diaspora or roots? Does one have to queer roots in order to queer diaspora? or vice versa? Does the one necessarily lead to the other? Will queering diaspora entail queering roots in every diasporic context? Is either diaspora or roots inherently queer in relation to the other?

One of the reasons why Derrida and Jabès—like Memmi, Sapho, and Condé—can be said to queer both roots and diaspora, is that they all bring the narrative paradox out of the closet. Yet, if this were the only reason, queer here would only be queer in a rather abstract way, far too removed from the critique of sexual normativity that has proved to be the strength of queering as an analytical move. Like Condé, Sapho, and Memmi, however, in queering roots and diaspora, Derrida outs not only the narrative paradox but also the sexual one, both of which are just as intertwined in Derrida’s writing as in Condé’s mangrove. If Helmreich understands diaspora as an insemination whose root is the penis qua phallus, Derrida might be said to offer an alternative understanding best characterized as a dissemination, another key term within Derrida’s understanding of writing:

[L]a multiplicité numérique ne survenant pas comme une menace de mort à un germe antérieurement un avec soi. Elle fraye au contraire la voie à “la” semence qui ne (se) produit donc, ne s’avance qu’au pluriel. Singulier pluriel qu’aucune origine singulière n’aura jamais précédé. Germination, dissémination. Il n’y a pas de première insémination. La semence est d’abord essaimée. L’insémination “primaire” est dissémination. Trace, greffe dont on perd la trace. (La dissémination 337–38)

[[N]umerical multiplicity . . . serves as a pathbreaker for “the” seed, which therefore produces (itself) and advances only in the plural. It is a singular plural, which no single origin will ever have preceded. Germination, dissemination. There is no first insemination. The semen is already swarming. The “primal” insemination is dissemination. A trace, a graft whose traces have been lost. (Dissemination 304)]
Derrida thus scatters his seeds not in service of the reproduction of heteronormative models of homeland, diaspora, and the relation between the two but to sow a diasporic model of identity through a queer return to roots in writing. Along with the death knell of phallogocentrism that tolls in *Glas*, the key concept of dissemination in Derrida’s writing might be read as a queerer model of diaspora than what Helmreich offers. When read alongside Derrida’s treatment of his body in its more material manifestations, the penis that has been instituted as a kind of root for diaspora—that which disseminates it—turns out to be a cultural artifact that can be written in multiple ways, some of which consist of cutting into the very “thing” that is written. Commonly considered to be the origin or root of masculinity, its writing/cutting can also sever the very link it is usually considered to institute.

If Derrida’s earliest writings carry out a deconstruction of origins, therefore, his more recent autobiographical writing literalizes those origins as his own Jewish Algerian roots. If de Man characterizes every narrative as an allegory of reading that is also an allegory of its own deconstruction, Derrida has instead inverted the de Manian hierarchy by retrospectively providing the more literal autobiographical narratives that allegorize his earlier, more abstract deconstruction of origins. Derrida’s queer roots thus appear as having already been deconstructed; they disseminate impossible origins and can be planted only in diaspora. Derrida’s own rites of return thus take us back not only to his Jewish Algerian roots but also to the Jewish roots of diaspora as a concept. These roots help us to queer diaspora in part by understanding it as a deconstructivist dissemination that is both theoretical and literally sexual. Yet the heteromasculinist associations behind the literal image that figures diaspora as a sowing of seeds are nonetheless resisted in a manner consistent with the diasporic tradition of the emasculated Jewish man described by Daniel Boyarin and Eilberg-Schwartz, in which Jewish, queer, and diasporic are as inextricably linked as the roots of a mangrove.