

Interview with Nine MOATI CARIÈS on September 30, 2018 Paris, France

WAV M4197001

55 minutes 58 seconds

Nine Moati, married name Cariès, was born on July 27, 1937 in Paris, France, to the well-known journalist and Socialist Party activist, Serge Moati (born 1903) and Odette (maiden name Scemama, born 1905). Nine had an older brother, Yves, he was born in Tunis in 1933.

The couple met when Serge was staging one of his plays in 1927, but they waited 5 years to marry because Serge's mother, from the Italian-Jewish community known as "la grana", was hoping that her son might find a spouse among the other Jewish families of Italian descent, not a native Tunisian "Twansa" family.

Neither Odette's nor Serge's families were religious, although they did go to the synagogue from time to time. Her mother even joked about eating a slice of ham between two pieces of matzot during Passover. Both families spoke French.

Because of his political activism in the Socialist Party, his support for Tunisian independence and the end of the protectorate, and articles in the newspaper he edited, *Tunis socialiste*, criticizing the French authorities, the Resident General Marcel Peyrouton first had Serge arrested and tried for sedition, then expelled him from Tunisia to the mainland in 1935.

The family (Odette and Yves) moved to Paris and Serge made a living as a journalist and was helped by Daniel Mayer, an influential figure in the French Socialist Party, and later an important figure in post-war France. Nine was named after her paternal grandmother Tsia Eugenia, shortened to Nine.

[The following information was culled from books, not from the interview. Nine was barely 2 years old at the time and does not have any memories of her time in Paris then. In 1939, as a French citizen Serge was called up to fight the "drôle de guerre" and sent to Bizerte, Tunisia, to join his brigade. He trained and never really got to fight.]

Nine thinks that she, her mother, and brother Yves took the last boat leaving Marseille for Tunisia to join Serge, sometime in 1940. Before the war, the family lived in the "Quartier Lafayette" in the center, near the Belvedere Park. *[The house was later requisitioned by the Germans during the occupation of Tunisia from November, 1942 to May, 1943.]* During the German occupation, the Moati's lived outside Tunis to the northeast, in the town called "La Goulette", the entry to the port.

One of her earliest memories is when her father was arrested and taken away. She does not know if French authorities or the German occupying forces arrested him during WW II. It was somewhere in 1942 – 1943. He was arrested with a group of other prominent Tunisian Jews, the "notables" with typically Jewish names such as "Levy" or "Cohen-Hadria". They were sent to the Camp of Sachsenhausen. The other Jews were deported to Auschwitz, but for some reason, the German responsible for sorting out the prisoners thought that "Moati" could be Italian or Corse, not Jewish, and he was not sent off to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Apparently, Serge escaped from Sachsenhausen with the help of a dentist. Nine thinks he made his way to Paris and found people to help him hide, but the chronology of events is difficult for her to establish.

Nine remembers the liberation of Tunisia by Allied troops. [*This would have been May, 1943.*] She was a little girl, so an American soldier took her a ride around the city on his jeep and gave her candy.

She also remembers how, when her father returned to Tunisia, he was acclaimed by the crowds and greeted everyone heartily, but when he saw her, he did not recognize her.
[*This has to be in 1945 because her father, according to secondary sources, participated in the liberation of Paris.*]

In 1946, her brother Henry was born. [*Henry now goes by the name of "Serge" and is a producer, director, and writer himself in France.*]

After the war, Nine remembers a calm and happy life. She attended a public school for girls in her neighborhood, where most of the students were Jewish. She does not remember any incidents of antisemitism. She does not mention any of the rallies or demonstrations for independence.
[*Tunisia did gain its independence in 1956 and the transition for the French citizens who were not Muslim was not smooth.*]

In 1957, her mother was diagnosed with a fatal cancer. Her father died of a heart attack in August at the age of 54 and three months later, her mother died at the age of 52.

Nine did receive her baccalaureate, but could not pursue her studies because she had to earn a living to support both herself and Henry. All those being brought to the mainland were given what was known as a "cadre", a large shipping crate for personal belongings, but it did not hold much. She gave away, or left, most of their furniture and personal belongings in Tunisia.

With the help of friends of her parents, Nine found a job preparing the morning news for the official French radio station, the O.R.T.F. Later, she met Hélène Lazareff, one of the founders of the weekly women's magazine *Elle* and had her own column, the "Pense précis". Nine does not really explain what kind of column this was.

When she later met her future husband, François Cariès, a graduate of the elite *Ecole Nationale de l'Administration*, it was love at first sight. They brought up two daughters, both of whom are in the arts. Marie is an actress and her sister Lucie is a film director.

When her eldest daughter was 8 years old, she wrote her first book, entitled, "*Mon enfant ma mère*", linking two of the important women in her life. She went on to write more than 15 novels (see attached list). The most successful was entitled, "*Les Belles de Tunis*", where she explores her background and the Jewish women of Tunisia.

[*She did not mention it in the interview, but she is member of the Jury of the Prize dedicated to the memory of Jean Zay, supporting French citizenship and the concept of "laïcité".*]

Publications

- *Mon enfant, ma mère*, Stock, 1974 (réédition Ramsay Poche, 2006)
- *Le Mariage de Lucie Enriquez*, Pauvert, 1978
- *Les Belles de Tunis*, Le Seuil, 1983 (réédition Le Rocher 2004)
- *Madame Fortunée*, Le Seuil, 1984
- *L'Orientale*, Le Seuil, 1985 (réédition Le Rocher, 2005)
- *La Passagère sans étoile*, Le Seuil, 1989. Prix Barthou de l'Académie française (réédition Le Rocher, 2006)
- *Le Palais de la Neva*, Fayard 1993
- *Rose d'Alger*, Fayard, 1994
- *Perla de Mogador*, Ramsay, 1997
- *Deux femmes à Paris*, Ramsay, 1998 (réédition 2000 et 2005 Ramsay Poche)
- *La Maison aux mirages*, Le Rocher, 2000
- *Villa Week-End*, Jean-Claude Lattès, 2003
- *Une terrasse sur le Nil*, Ramsay, 2004
- *Hannah et les derniers Ottomans*, Ramsay, 2006
- *La Valise de mademoiselle Lucie*, Le Rocher, 2007
- *Le Fil de la vie*, Balland, 2012