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### **Summary of Oral Interview with Pierre Schapira**

**Born:** December, 1944 in Algiers

**Father:** Jacques Schapira

**Grandfather:** Louis Schapira, born in Poland, and was an engineer in a large energy company in Bordeaux. He came to Paris when he was two in 1882 and eventually went to Bordeaux in 1900 for his job.

**Grandmother:** Madeleine Meyer. Her father, Henri Meyer, was the Radical Socialist mayor of Issy-les-Moulineaux.

His grandparents had four children, three sons and one daughter. In 1935, his father Jacques went to study in Paris, returning to Bordeaux in 1939. In June, 1940 he went to Bayonne, when De Gaulle asked for men to enlist in the war effort. Jacques told his parents he's leaving, and joined by his friends, boarded a boat. They were in a terrible storm and ended up in Morocco. His older sister, married to an Algerian, had a villa, so Jacques decides to go work in Algiers. He became a teacher after proving he had a bachelor's degree, replacing a socialist teacher who was fired from the high school. The family stayed in touch with this teacher until the 1990's. Jacques taught in Abida but was excluded from the university because of racial laws. He left and went to Algiers, where a course was created for Jewish students excluded from the university. Pierre Schapira mentions that Jacques Derrida came to the courses, and that his father became president of the Jewish students. The course may not have lasted long, however. Eventually, he went back and was reintegrated into the university. Other names of Jewish students who were there at the time are also mentioned. His father stayed in Algiers.

Pierre's parents were married in 1943. His father studied law and later took over his father's business. He was mobilized and left for Paris in November 1944, where he was in charge of the press. Pierre was born in December 1944, and his father came back to Algeria in 1945. Jacques's parents were in Bordeaux. They were warned to leave in 1942 because they could be arrested. Pierre's grandfather was a decorated officer in the Legion of Honor and didn't think they'd be stopped, but his grandmother convinced him to leave. His grandparents went to a neighbor's house so when the police came, there was no one home. They spent the end of the war hiding with a family but he doesn't know their names. His memories of this period are vague, since his parents didn't talk much about it. His grandfather died when Pierre was 10 yrs. old. His grandmother died in 1979.

His uncle Robert studied medicine in Bordeaux, and was probably in Algeria in 1943 for the marriage of Pierre's parents. His other uncle, Lionel, studied math in Grenoble. They, along with other members of Pierre's family, all passed through Algiers. Lionel ended up in aviation as part of a group of French pilots who worked for the British. The plane he trained in crashed and he died in London in 1944. He was buried in London but repatriated to Paris later. Schapira was contacted by someone doing a study of this group of pilots. His father, brothers and other family

members were all very engaged in the war, including WWI. Fighting for their country was important for his family.

In 1945 Pierre's father went back to Algiers. His maternal grandfather imported and exported medicinal plants, flour, grains, cereals etc. and his father worked in the business in Boufarik, a little village. His maternal grandfather died in 1940. His paternal grandfather was an executive with Babcock and Wilcox, where he stayed until 1962. In June, 1962, Pierre's parents came to Paris, as did his entire family. In December, 1962 his father went back to settle things in Algiers. Someone else had taken over their house.

Pierre had been in Paris since July 1961, but this was a complicated period for him. He wasn't well received because of the ambiguity of his family's status. He mentions the *pieds-noirs*. (**Note:** *Pieds-noirs* refers to French people born in Algeria during French rule who returned to France after Algerian independence). His parents didn't consider themselves colonists, however. His brother was very badly treated by one of his teachers when he arrived in 1962. Later Pierre met this teacher reminded him how badly he had treated his brother.

It was hard for him to continue his education alone in Paris, always listening to news about Algeria while his family was still there. He knew people killed during the Algerian war from his village. He tells how in 1960 he had attended lectures in his village of Boufarik at the Cine-Club, where professors, writers, journalists, and others were invited to speak as part of a study group. He describes an incident in November, 1960. He wanted to attend a big party where there was a famous orchestra but his parents forbid it. His father wanted him to see the film "La Mort d'un Cycliste (Death of a Cyclist) at the Cine-Club. But, a bomb had been placed in a bike, and some of his friends died. People ran to a pharmacy across the street when another bomb exploded. These incidents all affected him, and when he left Algeria, he lacked the psychological and emotional support he wanted. He had trouble focusing on his studies because of all the things that had happened. Eventually, he became a dentist and was politically active as well.

After the bad reception in Paris in the 1960s, things improved in the 1970s. He was involved in the events of 1968, but he wasn't left-wing. Many *pieds-noirs* Jews were there during the Mitterand administration. He regrets that he and his brother didn't ask his parents more questions about their experiences. His parents didn't talk much about the past. His paternal grandparents stayed in the Creuse during this time while his parents were in Algiers. He also had family on his father's side who stayed in Molineaux. They could have left but they weren't worried. Schapira doesn't know much about their situation. They are still alive at the time of the interview. He reminisces, commenting on the difficulty of recreating the past. He admires how his parents never complained, in spite of difficulties. In Paris, they had an apartment with no furniture, but eventually acclimated. Occasionally his grandmother regretted not being in Boufarik, where she had lived. She died when his mother was 20 years old. Pierre's mother worked in her father's factory. Her maiden name was Beton. Her ancestors came from Morocco and he discusses changes in her family's name on her ID card due to differences in pronunciation. His maternal

grandmother's family became French citizens under Napoleon III before the Crémieux Decree because the grandfather was a judicial interpreter and created an Algerian company that is still there. (**Note:** The Crémieux Decree gave French citizenship to the Jews of Algeria, but was revoked under Pétain between 1940-1943).

People bought apartments in Paris as a way to invest money before leaving Algiers. Hundreds were bought starting in 1959. His father met a former director of an Algerian bank who was now director of a bank in France. He offered his father a job. He thus became head of a subsidiary of the bank until he retired. Although successful, his father was an intellectual and this wasn't what he wanted to do. He was constantly reading and going to libraries. He wrote a biography of Colonel Mayer, DeGaulle's military mentor. Considered a wise man in his village, his father encouraged others. He was blond and blue-eyed and didn't look Jewish. He organized cultural lectures, which he tried to continue later in Paris, but couldn't. His sympathies were with the left. During the Algerian War he steered a path between the FLN and OAS and managed to avoid conflict with either. (**Note:** *OAS: Organisation armée secrète* = Secret Armed Organization that carried out attacks to stop Algerian independence from France; *FLN: Front de Libération National* was the National Liberation Front directing the Algerian War against France). He tells how a group of Resistants stole a truck, and 20 years later the driver wrote his parents a letter of apology. His father was a humanist and respected everyone. He also knew Jacques Lazarus (publisher of the periodical *Information juive*) and had contacts with him.

Reiterating that the situation in Algeria was very complicated, Pierre created distance between himself and events that occurred there. He wasn't nostalgic, and is not sure if the many stories he heard are true or false. In dental school, he met a number of Algerian students.

Regarding his family's religious practice: They are not observant, but his mother's family is more observant than his father's side. They went to synagogue on Yom Kippur. His father and paternal grandfather were atheists but on his mother's side, the family was more religious, especially during holidays. His uncle was president of the Jewish community in Boufarik, so they went to synagogue on certain occasions. Thus, they identified as Jewish but were not religious. Pierre's wife is Catholic and his children don't identify with any religion. His daughter, a journalist, kept her name Schapira. He talks about religion, which is sometimes a sensitive topic. He wants to organize his family archives now that he has more time.

An interesting story concerns his mother's first cousin, Jean-Claude Beton, who developed the drink Orangina in Boufarik, Algeria. Beton's father derived the formula from a Spanish pharmacist who had the original formula but didn't develop it. After WWII, Beton developed it and sold the drink in his village. It soon became popular in Europe and the rest is history! He talks about other personalities in Boufarik who became known.

Pierre Schapira went back to Algeria several times. In 1992, at the beginning of the Algerian Civil War, he hiked to the Hodna region in Algeria. He took a plane and was in the airport in

Algiers for five hours. He called someone he knew and met him in front of the Town Hall. Nothing had changed—businesses he remembered were still there. He also went back in 2003 and 2006 as deputy mayor of Paris. He describes a reception in 2003 with his delegation and the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs in Algeria, who said he was from Boufarik as well. Mayor of Paris Delanoë was there also. The people from Boufarik recognized each other, and shared many memories.

In 2006: The affair of the cemeteries: Delanoë and Schapira went to visit his grandfather's grave. Delanoë was Tunisian and very affected by cemeteries. Schapira told his mother about this, and also located his father's gravesite. He had been president of the Jewish community in Boufarik. This was a memorable experience, with pictures, publicity, a delegation, etc.

On one of his trips, he went back to his high school in Boufarik. He saw the principal, who found the school register for 1956-61. Records had been kept all these years, and he was able to see names and faces he recognized.

In 2009, he also went to Algiers. There was a lot of cooperation between Paris and Algiers. Paris helped renovate the Jardin D'Essai (a beautiful botanical garden) which had been closed for a long time. They helped renovate it with the help of experts and he participated in the ribbon cutting ceremony. They had lunch and talked about soccer, meeting people from Boufarik everywhere he went.

Once, on a trip to Ottawa he took a taxi to the airport and the taxi driver had been a math teacher in Boufarik! In 1962, Pierre's son, a lawyer, took a taxi to Orly. The driver told him he knew his grandparents and said they were very nice people.

Educational and Political background: Pierre Schapira finished his studies in 1971. His father knew Mitterand when he was Minister of the Interior through a mutual friend. Pierre became very active politically, especially in the socialist party, and has held a number of offices. He was elected Vice-President of the French Economic and Social Council for Paris. He was a member of the European Parliament from 2004-2009 and deputy Mayor of Paris under Delanoë from 2001-2014. He then became president of the Convention and Tourist Bureau in Paris, (a position he still holds as of 2019) and where he heads the administrative council. He works hard to welcome tourists!

**Translated by:** Felicia Berger Sturzer  
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