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Beur Travel Writing: Tassadit Imache's *Algérie*

by Monika Wadman

TRAVEL WRITING AND THE BEUR predicament do not seem to belong in the same sentence, or essay. The genre has been identified, most notably by Mary Louise Pratt but also by Edward Said, with an European expansionist project and its orientalizing impulse. With reference to texts ranging from eighteenth century European books on southern Africa to sentimental travel writing, and from Victorian explorer accounts of the interior of Africa to postcolonial travelogues of the 1960s and 1990s, Pratt has argued that classic travel narratives are propelled by a self-authorizing figure of the seeing man, who in a series of "monarch-of-all-I-survey" scenes deploys, or occasionally parodies, imperial stylistics. The defining features of this particular stylistics are estheticization of the landscape always beheld from a promontory, its appropriation through symbolic translation into the terms of the explorer's home culture and, ultimately, enactment of the seer's mastery over the seen. Inheriting the Linnean systematizing imperative, the imperial stylistics deculturates and deterritorializes indigenous populations, representing an occasional "native" as an ethnographic specimen by definition denied any coevalness with the narrating traveler.

Classic travel narratives, argues Pratt, worked to legitimate the imperial European project and to imaginatively construct its domestic subject. Their stylistic requisites of estheticization, appropriation and domination have survived the classic empires and persist in travel narratives by contemporary canonical authors such as Paul Theroux or Alberto Moravia. In fact, they are so pervasive that even when contemporary writers explicitly disavow them, precipitating a realization of the dead end of travel writing at the close of the twentieth century (Pratt's example here is a 1983 travel book by Joan Didion, *Salvador*), they are restored as organizing tropes of authority in the critical and popular reception of these renegade travel accounts. In one way or another, contemporary traveler-writers are doomed to inherit the classic tradition's poetics and politics.

The particular cultural positioning described as the beur predicament and often summed up in the phrase "belonging neither here nor there," is clearly a result of French colonial history. As such, it hardly refers to

subjects able or willing to assume the vantage point of the classic European travel narrative or to employ its poetics. Beurs are children of North African immigrants (primarily from Algeria, but also Morocco and Tunisia) who arrived in France after the Second World War to work in the developing auto industries.¹ While entitled to French citizenship (born in pre-independence Algeria, their parents are French subjects), these French-born subjects are routinely referred to as "second generation immigrants," a practice which underscores their problematic status in the French national imagination.² In the early 1980s they burst onto the political scene with a series of marches and demonstrations for equal treatment³ and on the literary scene with a series of debut novels and autobiographical narratives.⁴ While many of their texts are fundamentally structured by a specific itinerary (a journey from France to Algeria and back to France is imagined, postponed, undertaken and often repeated by beur protagonists), as far as I know, writers of the beur generation have not produced travel narratives in the traditional sense of the genre.

Or perhaps, I should say, beurs cannot write travel narratives without radically transforming the genre itself. In their classic version travel narratives assume a clear conception of home and abroad; they rest on stable national or cultural identities, or in rarer cases, on a cosmopolitan consciousness of the narrating subject. For beurs these fundamentals are problematic. Supposedly belonging neither in France nor in Algeria, beurs cannot establish a definite vantage point culturally and nationally, nor can they easily distinguish between home and abroad. Politically committed to claiming their legal right to French citizenship, they are often discouraged by structural discrimination, for example, in the French educational system, which channels them into vocational schools, or in the prevailing conceptions of French identity, which continue to construct the Arab as France's ultimate other.⁵ Seduced by the myth of return and its false promise of unambiguous national identity upon return to their parents' native country, they find themselves invariably cast as the scorned European other in independent Algeria.

Beur writing repeatedly rehearses these two scenarios of othering and exclusion. Tossed between France and North Africa, protagonists of beur fiction become negative cosmopolitans, exiled from everywhere and belonging nowhere, permanently stranded on board airplanes and ferries crisscrossing the Mediterranean. Consequently, their cultural location and the fiction it inspires exemplify a kind of impasse for identity politics in France and in Algeria on one hand, and for the very possibility of travel narrative, paradoxically at a time of increased global mobility, on the other. However, an impasse (a clearly felt sense of a limit) becomes an opportunity to intimate, if not articulate, alternatives. A condition of forced mobility and, at the same time, an experience of limits, the beur predicament, I will argue, allows us to re-imagine travel narrative and its attending models of subjectivity and authority. If (as Caren Kaplan

reminds us in a recent *PMLA* essay) to travel is, by definition, to theorize, bear travel accounts could offer a blueprint for a new poetics and new politics of cross-cultural encounters, which go beyond the return of the gaze by the dominated/resistant historical subject envisioned at the conclusion of *Imperial Eyes*.

While Pratt's entire study is a critique of Western discourse, with occasional analyses of autoethnographic⁶ texts produced by the hybridized colonial subject, the book's conclusion intimates the rise and promise of a different kind of account of the "contact-zone" encounter. Testimonio, a text of witnessing narrated by the oppressed, confronts the masterful ethnographic gaze of the classic travel narrative's seeing man. The looked at now looks back, and speaks as the resisting historical subject rather than the deculturated and deterritorialized ethnographic specimen. And yet, as politically exciting as this new possibility is, in effect, it reverses the binary between the Westerner and the third world subject which structured imperial stylistics, while leaving it in place as an organizing category. That might be a strategy necessary for effective political mobilization of subaltern subjects. At the same time, however, this reliance on the categorical thinking which distributes ethnic/racial/national/cultural characteristics on the opposite ends of the same axis has also been at the root of the bear predicament. Bear travel accounts could present an opportunity to loosen up, if not displace, that binary and the stylistics it engendered. Resistant historical subjects and Westerners negotiating the seeing-man positionality at the same time, bears as traveling narrators open up the possibility of a different gaze, and a different kind of recognition, across the colonial/postcolonial gap. My aim is not to imply that testimonio, and related genres, have outlived their political and cultural usefulness. Narratives of witnessing by historically oppressed subjects need to be told again and again. My intention, in this essay, is to consider a possibility of writing authoritatively about cross-cultural encounters from a position that is not available within the Westerner-Other binary which authorizes different subjects at different historical junctures, but denies that authority of voice to cross-over subjects such as bears.

In what follows I attempt to bear out this claim in an analysis of the only generically unambiguous travel narrative by a bear generation writer that I am aware of, Tassadit Imache's *Algérie, filles et garçons*, published in 1991 by Albin Michel Jeunesse. Third of her published texts, following a 1988 novella for children, *Le Rouge à lèvres*, and a novelistic debut in 1989, *Une Fille sans histoire*, Imache's travel narrative again targets young readers, as if she intended to bypass altogether the entire classic tradition that the adult Western audience has inherited.⁷ *Algérie* merits critical attention not only because it is a travel narrative at all,⁸ and in that sense unique in bear literature, but because it creatively capitalizes on the impasse I have described above. It attempts to move beyond the representation of the bear

predicament as a traumatic, even pathological, condition of displacement popularized by both French sociological discourse and *beur* writing itself. It refigures the dominant conceptions of French national identity by situating the origins of contemporary France in Algeria. As it critically engages the imperial stylistics of classic travel writing, it articulates new possibilities for the postcolonial politics of subjectivity and representation.

In her early work, Imache diagnosed her generation's cultural positioning as a traumatic predicament by creating fictional protagonists that are tormented by a sense of loss and fragmentation as well as by a keenly felt lack of origin, coherence, or direction. This difficulty in inhabiting a viable subject position experienced by *beurs* results arguably from the mainstream politics of representation in France. Robert Henry thus describes this politics:

[T]he Algerian dimension had been an important element in the self-representation of modern France from the beginning of the colonial period. Algeria was one of the most familiar and prominent forms of alterity in relation to which modern France defined itself. During this period, Algeria helped to sustain in the French imagination the distinction between modernity and tradition, between civilization and the desert. Today Algeria means the South, the Orient, and Islam, and the typical Algerian brings alterity into our everyday lives. His alterity is at one and the same time radically distant and deeply penetrating; he is that "étranger à nous-même" of which Julia Kristeva speaks, and we can see his presence constantly erupting, for example in the debate over the French nationality code. For its part, Algeria was constructed against modern France and yet at the same time in its image, in both its national project and its formation as a state. (Hargreaves and Heffernan 3–4)

In this context the *beur* predicament marks a subject position that is by definition impossible. The term itself, as Sylvie Durmelat has suggested, while to so many a "*mot juste*," is more properly understood as a facile cover-up of a fundamental crisis in naming tied to the oppositional conceptual framework structuring French discourse on national identity. A symptom of "being at a loss for words" rather than a viable identity category, the term and the predicament of location it presupposes to name jam the established modes of identification, and thus expose the limits of the French republican model of citizenship.

Imache's early writing fully participates in, as it also explores, the game of identity negotiation that is the *beur* predicament. This game conforms closely to the rules of the subject's positionality outlined by Chantal Mouffe, who suggested that "we have to conceive the history of the subject as the history of his/her identifications, and [that] there is no concealed identity to be rescued beyond the latter" ("Democratic Politics" 34). Thus rather than attempting to articulate an essential hybrid self hidden behind or repressed by the totalizing discourses that constitute identity, a self that awaits definition and recognition, through its frequent games of

doubleness and the retrospective narrative arrangements Imache's early work draws attention instead to the historical context in which these discourses unfolded.

For example, her debut novel, *Une Fille sans histoire*, explicitly links this particular sense of being split characteristic of the beur protagonists to the erasure of France's colonial legacy in the French cultural consciousness. In her essay "Une Certaine Idée de la France': The Algeria Syndrome and Struggles over 'French' Identity," Anne Donadey argued that the debates over national identity and immigration in France during the 1980s and the accompanying increase in anti-immigrant, and specifically anti-beur violence, are a direct result of the "Algeria Syndrome," a concept she derives from Henry Rousso's much discussed *Le Syndrome de Vichy (1944–198...)*. Algeria Syndrome manifests itself in the repression of the French colonial past in Algeria and the French defeat in the Franco-Algerian war of 1954–62 in particular. This repression constitutes an foundational gesture that, in Ernest Renan's 1882 theory of nation building, is always necessary to effect the construction of a nation.⁹

Resorting to the Freudian model of the repressed, Donadey argues that the French defeat during the 1954–62 war returns in the form of the acts of violence against Algerian immigrants and their children, acts that function as the reenactments of the emotions activated during the war itself. Pointing out the disparity between the abundance of literary and other texts on the Franco-Algerian war by Algerian intellectuals and a virtual absence of the subject in the French cultural arena, Donadey suggests that literature by beur authors functions as a "*lieu de mémoire*," a literary space which counteracts the repression of the violent past by preserving its memory. This complicity between the interests of nation building and dissemination of historical knowledge to the French subjects is a fact of life in the France of the Fifth Republic¹⁰ and a leitmotiv of much of beur fiction. Imache is preoccupied with setting the record straight. Her books are intended to substitute for the missing or edited for nation-building history books that the protagonist of *Une Fille sans histoire*, as well as other beurs, fictional and real, (do not) encounter in their French education. In this context Imache's work embodies the repressed past and chronicles the interplay of cultural difference as constitutive of French identity. Returning as an act of a narrative reclamation of presence, it brings on the credibility crisis with respect to national histories by reeducating the children about the missing history.

Algérie, filles et garçons participates in the same project, and as a result transforms the very parameters of classic travel writing by undermining the unity and authority of the traveler-narrator and insisting on the historical dimension of travel and all representations it engenders. Co-authored with illustrator Anne Tonnac, *Algérie* is conceived as a narrative of a double return: Tass, a young beur, born in France in the midst of the Franco-Algerian war, travels to her father's country to visit remaining family

members; her companion, Anne, a Frenchwoman born in Algiers in 1953, returns to the country she left in the wake of the Franco-Algerian war.¹¹ Yet rather than simply an account of an ethnic metropolitan subject's experiential debunking of the "myth of the return" so characteristic of beur narratives, *Algérie* is conceived as a travelogue/travel guide with all the ethnographic, historical, and simply informational material such a genre necessitates. Yet, from the opening sentences the text seems to evoke the classic features of travel writing, only to subvert them:

Vers les banlieues d'Alger

25 juin 1990. Marseille.

Les contours de l'Europe s'effacent. Est-ce le soleil ou l'eau, la ville s'attarde encore. Si l'Afrique s'annonce déjà à Marseille, c'est à la Méditerranée que nous le devons, elle, qui, aujourd'hui comme hier, entêtée, savante, fait et refait les liens entre ses rives. Notre bateau, Le Tipasa, nous conduit de l'autre côté. Bientôt, nous passerons de midi à midi sans jamais quitter ces mailles bleues et chaudes. Passagère soucieuse, je m'interroge: "Avons-nous l'air de simple voyageuses?"

Dans son sac chargé de boîtes de couleurs et de feuilles blanches, Anne la Strasbourgeoise range son billet. Au fond de mes poches, mes doigts, nerveux, retrouvent un ticket de métro parisien.

"Cela fait longtemps que je n'y suis pas allée", déclare Anne qui y a grandi.

En fille d'immigré, j'ajoute: "Moi qui n'y suis même pas née, à chaque fois que j'y vais, j'y retourne."

Assise à l'ombre, Anne inspecte une fois de plus son matériel de travail. "Mais l'aquarelle, Tass, est-ce que tu crois que c'est bien pour Elle?"; comme elle dirait: Est-ce que cela lui va au teint? Anne a des souvenirs et j'ai des rêves. Mais l'Algérie, plus que tout autre pays, choisira seule ses lumières.

Salon du Tipasa. A la television, un match de la Coupe du monde de football

Les hommes parlent des élections qui viennent d'avoir lieu en Algérie. C'est un parti religieux intégriste, le Front islamique du salut (FIS) qui l'a emporté dans plus de la moitié des communes. L'Algérie est sous le choc: le parti fondateur de l'Etat algérien, le Front de libération nationale (FLN), a perdu. D'autres jeunes partis ont réalisé de faibles scores. Mais beaucoup d'Algériens ne sont pas allés voter. L'atmosphère est fiévreuse, faite de remous et de ressacs. (*Algérie*, opening sections)

As it locates the narrating subject at a reverse-promontory in the manner reminiscent of the "master-of-all-I-survey" scenes from Pratt's account, the text invokes the oppositional binary between Europe and Africa undergirding so much of classic travel writing, ultimately to put it in question. The Mediterranean sea is not deployed as a borderline marking off two radically opposed territories but figured as a permeable space in

and through which linkages are made and remade. Africa, in fact, announces its presence in France, at its border, or, to borrow Etienne Balibar's term, at its defining periphery. The narrative emphatically refuses the paradigmatic figure of the masterful and self-authorizing seeing man as well. No promontory vantages are available to Tass and Anne who travel among other passengers aboard the ferry, are driven in friends' cars speeding by blurred landscapes, and walk in the streets of Algerian cities or follow unpaved paths in the countryside. Just as was the case with earlier European travels in Africa, in a literal sense, Tass and Anne's very ability to travel, see, and write is enabled by scores of "native informants." Unlike the classic narrative, however, *Algérie* explicitly represents that dependence.

The account's collective narratorial stance embodies the French subject as multiple and split by lines carved by the history of colonialism. The beur/pied-noir pairing reverses the familiar/foreign duality traditionally governing any attempt at an account of the French-Algerian relationship and hints at the very impossibility of untangling the historically developed knot of interdependencies. The French subject, rather than being constituted against Algeria, as Henry suggested, is constituted here through Algeria, in one way or another. In this logic Anne's origins in colonial Algeria legitimate Tass's Frenchness.

No authoritative stance seems likely as the narrator and the illustrator voice anxiety over their location and authority, the very possibility of representation, and the limitations of both visual and verbal media. In an uncharacteristically essentializing gesture, as the narrator acknowledges her companion's and her own interested cultural stance (Anne comes in search of her memories; Tass, her dreams), she engages, for a moment, a fantasy of Algeria choosing its own medium of representation, speaking for itself, since any mediated account by definition would be compromised. This fantasy works to underscore the strongly felt suspicion with regard to the genre that the authors are inheriting.

This self-doubting narratorial voice remains doubled throughout as illustrations complete, recast, and even compete with the written narrative. For example, the only promontory scene in the entire travel account becomes an occasion to trace the narrators' divergent genealogies and their conscious and unconscious cultural allegiances. As the ferry approaches Algiers, Tass records her and Anne's reactions to the famed city:

"Alger!" dit Anne qui la reconnaît puis se tait. El-Djezaïr, je pense, et j'a-grandis les yeux. De tout temps, on l'a célébrée en blanc à cause de cette montée crayeuse de la Casbah, labyrinthe insensé de passages, de ruelles, d'escaliers suspendus au-dessus de la mer. Mais au-delà des immeubles modernes et des minarets, à l'opposé d'*El-Aurassi*, luxueux hôtel sur les hauteurs, je trouve Bab-el-Oued. C'est dans ce quartier populaire qu'ont éclaté les premières émeutes d'Octobre 88. (10)

As she invokes the classic depictions of Algiers that reduce it to its oldest part, the Casbah, and in an orientaling vein represent it as a mysterious, unchartable, and vaguely threatening labyrinth, Tass takes care to register its multiplicity: from its double name, its varied architecture, to sharply marked class distinctions. Against the popular accounts of Algiers as the essence of oriental mystery, Tass depicts El-Djezaïr as an Arab city and as a scene of political struggle, anchored firmly in time and history that is local and global. Anne's illustration, however, represents it as a French city swathed in its emblematic whiteness, and except for the white sheets swaying in the wind, completely devoid of human presence or its traces. Tass's popular revolutionaries have disappeared from Anne's now empty streets. Tass's effort to historicize rather than assess and possess coexists with, and is legible only in the context of, Anne's entrapment in the inherited imperial stylistics.

Algérie's double narratorial stance is further complicated by the presence of other accounts: drawings of Algeria by Algerian children, quoted opinions volunteered by Algerian men and women included in the main text or reproduced separately in a side-bar running parallel to Tass's account and interspersed with endnotes explaining presumably unfamiliar terms or events, as well as historical information integrated in the text (as in both examples above), and collated separately in the appendix.

As the text works to contextualize the French subject(s) accounts, the collective voice of Algeria has a problematic status as well. These "authentic" accounts are necessarily mediated because they are accessible only when the subjects speak French or through translation into French. They dramatize the fact that to be heard, the Algerian voices have to be expressed in the language of the former colonizer. And yet, opting for communication in Arabic, were it a real option for Tass and Anne,¹² would not completely clear the linguistic landscape in Algeria either. If speaking French perpetuates colonialism, the prevalence of Arabic in contemporary Algeria is a result of a vigorous post-independence Arabisation campaign, which resulted in a marginalization of other languages and, consequently, of the many ethnic cultures inhabiting the country.¹³ Today, Algeria, like many western democracies, witnesses the growing impetus of minority movements for reclamation of marginalized languages and cultures.

Furthermore these accounts do not have the unconditional authority granted to the resistant historical subject by Pratt. To start with, they are multiple and often contradictory. Some, for example a defiant "On sait qui on est, non?" spoken by an Algerian youth, for Tass are laced with ironies nourished by the *beur* predicament, which could be defined as an inability to provide answers to precisely such questions. Others offer a variety of often mutually exclusive viewpoints on topics ranging from the religious basis for civil law, paths to modernization, relationship to Europe, minority rights, and emigration. Collectively, they embody Algeria as a contested

idea, a country in transition between state-sponsored socialism and newly-emerging political and social arrangements modeled on Western democracies and embodied in free democratic elections, which in turn precipitate yet another transition from the secular orientation represented by Front de libération nationale (FLN), Algeria's founding party, to a religious one embodied in the Front islamique du salut (FIS) orthodox program.

This multiple and fragmented collection of French/Algerian voices is deeply informed by historical developments and the interaction between local and global perspectives. With a similar effect in mind, the fantasy of unmediated representation (Algeria speaking for itself) of the opening paragraphs is immediately counteracted by a scene in the ferry's main cabin: in the din of the World Cup soccer game projected on television screens above, Algerian men discuss the recent municipal elections carried by an orthodox Islamist party. The choice of programming on the Ferry Tipasa is not accidental. National sports, particularly when they result in participation in international competitions such as the Soccer World Cup, are prime nationalist occasions for third world countries, opportunities to display a unified and modernized national front on the par with the first world countries. They are rituals for maintaining fantasies of internal national unity and international equality. And this is precisely why Imache contrasts that ritual of national cohesion with its opposite: a discussion of the aftermath of an electoral upset, which ultimately leads to a bloody civil war in the 1990s. Unlike the classic travel narratives of Pratt's account, which estheticize and translate the encountered other into the discourses familiar to the traveler, Imache's travel account always precipitates itself into history and politics as refracted through the experiences narrated by the other.

Most immediately motivated by the somewhat hysterical coverage of the 12 June 1990 victory of a fundamentalist Islamist party over the founding party of independent Algeria (the FLN) in the municipal elections in Algeria in the French media, Imache's travel narrative becomes a lesson in recognition and an exercise in constructing an alternative image. Clearly a function of proximity, Algeria is familiar and other at the same time. From Tass's narrative it emerges as a modern country dealing with problems surprisingly like those of some urban centers in France: unemployment, shortage of low-income housing, women and ethnic minority rights and ideological struggles over the shape and meaning of the national culture. But Tass also takes care to linger over differences: the traditional call to prayer punctuating days and nights, other religious and cultural observances, alternative familial dynamics, unique characteristics of landscape and architecture, and the ever-visible legacy of colonial exploitation. Imache provides an image that is deliberately at times foreign, at others familiar, but always multiple, in order to navigate clear of stereotypical representation. In fact, her narrative concludes wistfully with a desire to avoid representation altogether, a wish for immediacy resulting from an unmediated experience of proximity.

Ce voyage nous a changées.
 De loin, nous fabriquons de l'Algérie une image étrange. Des près,
 elle nous trouble en se révélant si familière.
 Un pays a plus d'un visage.
 Tous sont légitimes...
 Assise dans l'avion, je ferme quelques instants les yeux.
 J'ose: si la France et l'Algérie ne se regardaient plus au travers
 d'un écran.
 L'avion peut bien tirer un trait dans le bleu du ciel; tout à l'heure,
 l'Algérie sera autre. (*Algérie*, concluding paragraph)

However, just as the opening fantasy of "Algeria choosing her own colors" is immediately interrupted, and denied, by a scene in the ferry's cabin, where in the din of the World Cup soccer game Algerian men discuss the recent electoral upset, this concluding wish for a post-representational world has the permanence of the water vapor trailing the plane.

Algérie, a multiple and fragmented collection of French/Algerian voices, emerges as an account deeply informed by concrete historical developments and the interaction between global and local perspectives. It is a text which, unlike classic travel narrative, insistently precipitates itself into history at every opportunity, which counteracts every fantasy of essence and unmediated representation with the irrepressible reality of historical and political legacies. At the same time, its redeeming grace is its very provisionality. Imache produces a narrative that is incomplete, ephemeral, and always explicitly mediated through personal experience—which in turn is contradictory as Tass with her dreams and Anne with her memories (fail to) understand and represent Algeria in their different ways. Refusal of mastery appears to be the only viable form of authority when the object of the traveler's gaze is always slipping (again) into otherness.

I have argued that Imache's travel narrative is best understood in the context of her effort to link the *beur* predicament to the erasure of France's colonial legacy in North Africa and the country's defeat in the Franco-Algerian war from the national consciousness. In this context all of Imache's work addresses itself not to the question of "Who am I?" typically structuring minority writing, but rather to the question of "What happened?" It functions as a retrospective recovery of the historical past undertaken against the prevailing national mythologies in France. Without an account of the other which was erased to construct the vision of the Fifth Republic, France remains blind to its own historical and cultural truth. As a narrative reclamation of presence, Imache's early work embodies the repressed past, undermines the credibility and legitimacy of French national histories and, ultimately, restores the interplay of cultural difference that properly constitutes French identity. Her travel narrative in particular embodies a writing project which works to turn otherness not into familiarity—getting to know the other as other does nothing to the underlying same/other dynamic—but into commonness,

here understood as a play of differences AND shared experiences and concerns. The aim is not to rediscover Algeria in an orientaling gesture as the radically other, or, in a universalist gesture as the same, but to see it as participating in the commonly shared space and time of modernity in an effort to move beyond the centuries-long logic of the necessarily hostile binary as well as the "refusal of coevalness" characterizing Western travel accounts. However idealistically haunted by a desire for unmediated experience of proximity that would disavow representation altogether, pragmatically, Imache's writing aspires to produce an alternative (even if provisional) representation of Algeria, France's traditional other, as similar. To borrow Mouffe's terms, again, via her travel writing Imache attempts to reinsert Algeria into French history and cultural consciousness as a recognizable and acknowledged counterpart rather than the enemy. In the process, she also articulates new options for contemporary travel writing and the possibility of a different gaze across cultural difference.

The goal seems to be not to displace the France-Algeria, or West-Other, binary, a move which could expose the project to the dangers of universalism, but to put it to different uses by denying its oppositional nature. The text intimates a possibility of moving beyond Mouffe's agonistic configurations to Jean-Luc Nancy's formulations of "being in common" and his inoperative community. The opening image of *Algérie* is helpful here again: the Mediterranean figured not as a border but, a shared space of political, economic, and cultural engagement, where the boundaries of nations and identities are discernible but always overlapping, often in complex and unequal ways. It is in the space so envisioned that postcolonial Western metropolitan subjects, such as beurs, can write from their hybrid positions about our histories and our present.

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Notes

¹When the families of North African workers followed them to France later on, the country was experiencing an economic downturn. These populations found themselves at the center of increasingly visible housing, education, and unemployment problems. The French government responded to these new conditions with a complete halt to inward migration in 1974. By 1982, 43% of the total foreign population of almost four million in France was comprised of immigrants from the Maghreb and their children born in France.

²Since ethnic origins are not recognized legally in France as a basis for political or other organizing or entitlements, the French census divides its population into two categories: nationals (those holding French citizenship) and foreigners (those that do not hold French citizenship but reside in France). By this logic French-born children of immigrants are not considered nationals, unless they assume French citizenship at age 18.

³Beurs first caught public attention as a "social problem" in the summer of 1981 after the series of "rodeos," sprees of nighttime vandalism, in the sections of Lyons inhabited by ethnic and working-class populations. The political organizing among the beurs was made

possible to a large extent by the new law extending to foreigners (see note 3) full freedom of association passed in October of 1981 by the Socialist government under newly-elected President Francois Mitterrand, who pledged to facilitate the immigrant populations' adaptation into French society through their political and organizational participation. The beur and Franco-Maghrebi associations, including several radio stations made possible by newly-lifted regulations on broadcasting, were the first results of this new legislation and spear-headed the "right to be different" campaign in France. These first associations were followed by larger anti-racism organizations such as SOS Racisme headed by Harlem Desir in 1984 and France-Plus in 1985. The best known demonstration organized by these early associations was the "Marche de Beurs" in the Fall of 1983. It marked the beginning of the newly-emerging movement's national prominence, and the peak of what has been called the brief popularity of the "soft" multiculturalist model of nation and society in France.

⁴*Le Thé au harem d' Archi Ahmed* by Mehdi Charef, considered by many to be the first beur novel, appears in 1983. It is followed by such now-classic beur texts as Akli Tadjer's *Les ANI du "Tassili"* in 1984, and Nacer Kettane's *Le Sourire de Brahmin* in 1985. 1986 is the watershed year for beur literature with the publication of Azouz Begag's *Le Gone du Chaâba*, Ahmed Kalouaz's *Point kilométrique 190*, Mehdi Lallaoui's *Les Beurs de Seine*, Farida Belghoul's *Georgette!*, and Mustapha Raïth's *Palpitations intra-muros*.

⁵This dynamic persists even in such well-intentioned efforts at reconceptualizing French identity as Julia Kristeva's *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*.

⁶In Pratt's formulation auto-ethnography represents an effort by the colonized to represent themselves in response to the ways in which they have been represented by the colonizing culture.

⁷Imache went on to write several novels in the 1990s, becoming the most prolific writer of the beur generation.

⁸Unlike the many fictional narratives of beurs' returns to the supposed ancestral home, *Algérie* is unquestionably a travel narrative with its fundamental generic impulse to account for the "foreign" country rather than the narrating subject's culturally mediated psyche.

⁹Donadey points out that the Fifth Republic, with its stable regime of which the French are very proud, originates in the Franco-Algerian conflict, a genealogy that, in a classic gesture diagnosed by Ernest Renan in 1882, "the French prefer not to remember" (223).

¹⁰Donadey notes that not until 1986 were students taking the Baccalauréat asked, for the first time, questions about the Franco-Algerian war, and then only in a few regions of France.

¹¹She represents that class of French colonials dubbed "pied-noir."

¹²Most beurs do not speak the languages of their parents, Arabic or Berber.

¹³Berber linguistic and ethnic groups (Kabyles, Chaouiâ, Mozabites, and Targui), who constitute 25% of the population in Algeria, are one example here.

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