Silvia Nagy-Zekmi

FIGUES DE BARBARIE AND *FRENCH FIGS*: HYBRIDITY IN THE *BEUR* IMAGINARY

Hoy todas las culturas son de frontera.[1]

The title refers to the tell-tale contradiction surrounding the name of the prickly pear (*opuntia ficus-indica*), in French "figue de barbarie," and in the colloquial Arabic (*derja*) of Algeria is *karmouss n'sara* (figs of the Christians, i.e., French fig, as the French were called in colloquial Arabic, n'sara, Nazarenes). I will make use of the irony evident in the terms for the exploration of the hybridity embedded in *Beur*[2] identity and represented by *Beur* authors, Leila Sebbar, Azouz Begag, Leila Houari, Farida Belghoul. I will center my claim of hybridity as an imaginary and narrative construct manifest, for example, in the metaphoric representation of the border.

The borderland in the postcolonial imaginary challenges the binary classification deployed in the construction of the Other. Otherness/alterity has been viewed as "threat, responsibility, alter-ego and enigma to and of the self".[3] However, the notion of otherness has been challenged by the idea that discourses of alterity emulate and rearticulate the priority of the center vis-à-vis the periphery by distinguishing between the self (the center) and the other. Hybridity has proven to be a more useful theoretical tool to scrutinize discourses that emerge from unequal power relations in loci of cultural contact, such as the borderland.

Contesting culture's equation with a location of an identity (see reference to Grossberg ahead) leads to the recognition of the validity and uniqueness of hybrid cultures. The disjuncture between the nation state and the location

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[1] N. García Canclini: *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad,* México: Grijalbo, 1989.

[2] *Beur*: People of North African origin living in Europe, most often it refers to the second generation (S. Mehrez: 'Azouz Begag: *Un di zafas di bidoufile* (un des enfants de bidonville) or The Beur writer: A question of territory', *Yale French Studies* 82, 1993 : 25–42, p. 29).

[3] R. J. C. Young: 'Concepts in postcolonial theory: Hybridity and otherness' (http://tinyurl.com/qhckbd3).

of (its) culture is not simply displayed in the forms of cultural resistance, or in the presence of counter-cultural elements, but it requires a deeper scrutiny of the interaction between culture and nation, that is to say, of the role nation plays in shaping the culture and the role of culture in sustaining the nation-state. This relationship is neither 'natural' nor 'neutral', it does not arise by accident, but it is historically produced and traceable in the cultural practices of the population.

My scrutiny of the multiple meanings of the border as a textual construct in *Beur* writing traces the collective identity of this group defined by migration and cultural hybridity. I will explore the transformation of fixed notions of identity into a set of complex cultural loyalties that unite and also divide local communities. The textual manifestation of these new social configurations are examined in this article.

Border

> *Entre tu pueblo y el mío hay un punto y una raya.*
> *La raya dice no hay paso, el punto, vías cerradas*
> *y así, entre todos los pueblos raya y punto, punto y raya.*
> *Con tantas rayas y puntos el mapa es un telegrama.*
> *Caminando por el mundo se ven ríos y montañas,*
> *se ven selvas y desiertos, pero no puntos ni rayas.*
> *porque estas cosas no existen, sino que fueron trazadas*
> *para que mi hambre y la tuya estén siempre separadas.*[4]

A point and a line drawn, "un punto y una raya" to quote the song above, a border marks the place where adjacent state jurisdictions meet as a consequence of the states attributing to themselves a right to property.[5] But as a consequence of globalization the functions of the nation-state are more and more troubled, its primary functions regarding borders shifted from territorial control (whether it be national or colonial) from an outside enemy in time of war to the self-protection from mass migration of what is perceived as economically inferior crowds. The border, as in borderland studies,[6] has become a locus that symbolizes encounter through migration (legal or illegal) that produces racial, economic and cultural hybridity, due to which

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[4] A. Nazoa & J. C. Núñez: "Punto y raya" quoted in A. Khatibi: *Amour bilingue*, Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1983 : 73–74.

[5] E. Balibar: 'World borders, political borders', *PMLA* 117, 2002 : 71–78, p. 72.

[6] Association of Borderland Studies, absborderlands.org.

border society is "an abstract [yet palpable] concept compounded of ideas about the sovereignty of nation-states, the intensification of commerce, and strategies of cultural representation".[7] Yet border society does not exist merely on and around the borders, it also manifests itself in metropolitan centers, in airports and other spaces of transition, as Stuart Hall puts it, Paris is French with a difference, the otherness is forever inscribed in French identity.[8]

Home

Because borders were conceived of as entities limiting separate cultural (linguistic, national) territories, these may be thought of as a locus representing a home. The territorial expansion of colonialism is now countered by a reversed flow of deterritorialized human masses driven by economic or political necessity (or both). Even though the displacement of humans has reached extremes never seen before, the phenomenon is nothing new. Todorov reconstructs the genealogy of the exile, one of the most common forms of displacement, in *The conquest of America*:

> Today it is the exile who best embodies, turning aside from its original meaning, the ideal of Hugo de San Victor, who formulated it in the following way in the 12th century: "The man who finds that his own homeland is sweet is nothing more than a soft novice; for him who finds that each soil is like his own is already strong; but the perfect man is he who finds that the entire world is like a foreign country" (I, who am Bulgarian and live in France, take this quote from Edward Said, a Palestinian who lives in the United States, who had found it from Erich Auerbach, German, an exile in Turkey).[9]

Among the reasons for migration (exile, diaspora, displacement) Abril Trigo mentions "the unequal socioeconomic development within the interrelated geographical zones between complex regimes of expulsion and attraction".[10]

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[7] O. Cadaval: *United States–Mexico Borderlands/Frontera*, Smithsonian Institute, 2002 (http://educate.si.edu/migrations/bord/intro.html).

[8] S. Hall: 'Cultural identity and diaspora', in: P. Williams & L. Chrisman (eds.): *Colonial discourse & postcolonial theory: A reader*, London: Harvester Whaeatsheaf, 1993 : 392–403.

[9] T. Todorov: *La conquista de América. El problema del Otro*, México: Siglo XXI, 1989 : 259.

[10] A. Trigo: 'Migrancia: memoria: modernidá', in: M. Moraña (ed.): *Nuevas perspectivas desde/sobre América Latina*, Santiago: Cuarto Propio, 2000 : 273–291, p. 273.

It should be added that this unequal development has been a direct consequence of mostly (although not exclusively)[11] European colonial expansion and attempts at neocolonization.

Thus, the question of migrancy may be approached from a postcolonial perspective that identifies colonialism as one the root causes of migration, may it be direct or indirect. Various authors, who think of themselves as migrant beings, propose – in a postcolonial framework – the reevaluation of categories used by the language of modernity that fueled the colonizing ideology and branded colonization as a "civilizing mission." Salman Rushdie, for example, in *Imaginary Homelands* positions himself as a Muslim Indian who emigrated to England and despite the scandal stemmed from the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, he still considers himself a Muslim even though he is not a believer. In many of his works he assumes a so-called Western position that emphasizes individualism and exceptionality "as the greatest and most heroic of values,"[12] but irony should not be excluded as his motivation for doing so. Rushdie states that migratory experience is a fundamental part in the formation of his "frontier identity"[13] that permits him to circulate in cultural terms, although not physical at the time,[14] between the East and West. Gayatri Spivak also claims to have a "frontier identity" which she defines as non-fixed and constructed from various elements in dynamic interaction and constant movement.[15]

Behind all types of migrancy is the idea of home, the origin, from where one parts that is impossible to reencounter as it is apparent in Martin Heidegger's arguments in his essay about Hölderlin's poetry, *Return to the*

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[11] The Indonesian invasion of East Timor and Ache are examples of non-European colonization efforts in the 20th–21st century.

[12] S. Rushdie: *Imaginary homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991*, New York: Penguin, 1992 : 425.

[13] Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf points to hybrid identity as the only solution to the contradictory relationship between East and West in his essay, *Les identités meurtrières*, particularly in the chapter entitled 'Apprivoiser la panthère.'

[14] The *fatwa* (religious decree) pronounced by the Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 against Rushdie accuses him of having purposely committed desecration of the *Qur'an* in his book, *The Satanic Verses*. As a consequence of the *fatwa*, Rusdie's life was in danger until 1998 when – after Khomeini's death – the Iranian government stopped perusing the *fatwa*, although it could not be officially revoked because – according to Iranian governmental sources – it "would be an insult to the memory of Khomeini" (BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/178349.stm).

[15] G. Ch. Spivak: 'Postmarked Calcutta, India', in: *The post-colonial critic*, London: Routledge, 1990 : 67–94.

homeland.[16] He claims that there is no primary home, we are all transients, an idea that is perhaps echoed in Rushdie's essay, *Imaginary Homelands*: "It may be argued that the past is a country from which we all have emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity".[17] Thus, the primary home would be a place where one can "return to selfhood" by means of a dialogic encounter with a language that expresses the sense of ego. That is why for Heidegger (temporary) displacement is not possible, rather; continual displacement is the only possible way to conceive existence.

Heidegger's idea of home is described in psychological terms, but for the purpose of my argument here a geographic dimension should be added whereby home can be (re)defined as constituted by hybrid, and even contradictory signs, the physical home on the one hand, and the articulation of the idea of home – origin,[18] on the other. The displacement is more obvious in the borderline where identity – which is intimately related to origin and language – is highly problematic.

Beurs form the cultural entity on which I intend to focus, without creating a direct link between culture and space, because this would manifest the essentialism that I am trying to avoid. "Challenging culture's equation with a location of an identity may enable us to think about the possibilities of politics which recognizes the positivity or singularity of the other".[19] Exploring the cultural hybridity in the European "contact-zone"[20] may yield some important keys in the scrutiny of the border as a postcolonial space due to the fact that hybridity shows not only the genealogy of cultural origins, but it may also subvert the discourses of dominance.

[16] M. Heidegger: *Saggi sulla poesia di Hölderlin*, Milano: Adelphi, 1981 : 10–31.

[17] *Op.cit.* : 12.

[18] The idea of the origin is discussed by Derrida in *Monolingualism of the Other* in terms of the language that reveals the complex interplay of psychological factors that provides the subject with an identity, with the desire to recover a "lost" language of origin (J. Derrida: *Monolingualism of the Other or, The prosthesis of origin,* transl. P. Mensah, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.). Rushdie, on the other hand, sees "out of language experience" as a more intensified form of loss (S. Rushdie: *Imaginary...*, *op.cit.* : 12).

[19] L. Grossberg: 'The space of culture, the power of space', in: I. Chambers & L. Curti (eds.): *The post-colonial question*, London: Routledge, 1996 : 169–188, p. 169.

[20] M. L. Pratt: *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992.

Hybridity and heterogeneity

> *L'identité n'est pas donnée un fois pour toutes,*
> *elle se construit et se transforme tout au long de l'existence.*[21]

Homi Bhabha suggests that hybrid cultural identity is articulated from a specific perspective, the "third space" of enunciation.[22] It materializes from this ambivalent and contradictory space that, according to Bhabha, is instrumental in the elimination of cultural exoticism. Hybridity, where new cultural meanings can be located, emerges in cultural crossroads, such as the borderland, emanating from this "third space" that opens up in the dynamic interaction of cultural contacts based on difference. Many critics utilize the concept of the "third space", or similar ones: "in-between-ness"[23] or "contact zone"[24] in order to deconstruct the prescribed notions of the location of culture. In this heterogeneous space *Beurs* can recuperate their agency that houses the shared memory with the Maghreb, as well as the continuous cultural influence of France and by extension, Europe. Many critics[25] theorize about the hybrid zone as a place of "cultural visibility and cultural invisibility".[26] However, Saldívar adds that in the global borderlands "composed of historically connected postcolonial spaces"[27] it is difficult to theorize about the frontier existence and identity, because theory today is not conceived from a "critical distance" but from an "in-between" space where subjectivity emerges to constitute agency as a form of resistance.

The quest for an idea that expresses this in-between space of enunciation that would be able to circumvent the stalemate of binary oppositions would resurface in the concept of heterogeneity developed by Antonio

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[21] A. Maalouf: *Les identités meurtrières*, Paris: Grasset, 1998.

[22] H. Bhabha: 'The third space', in: J. Rutherford (ed.): *Identity: Community, culture, difference*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990 : 37.

[23] R. Rosaldo: 'Ideology, place, and people without culture', *Cultural Anthropology* 3, 1988 : 77–87.

[24] M. L. Pratt: *Imperial eyes...*, *op.cit.*

[25] J. D. Saldívar: 'Cultural theory in the U.S.–Mexico borderlands', in: *Border matters: Remapping American cultural studies*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997 : 17–36; R. Rosaldo: 'Ideology...', *op.cit.*; G. Gómez-Peña: 'Danger zone: Cultural relations between Chicanos and Mexicans at the end of the century', in: *The new world border*, San Francisco: City Lights, 1996 : 169–178.

[26] G. Gómez-Peña: 'Danger zone', *op.cit.* : 176.

[27] J. D. Saldívar: 'Cultural Theory...', *op.cit.* : 153.

Cornejo Polar.²⁸ Heterogeneity is embodied in the resistance to the homog-
enizing forces of colonialism, and to the equally Eurocentric ideologies of
the nation-state.

Deterritorialization in Europe: The Beur

*Parle mon fils, parle à ta mère!*²⁹

Cultural hybridity manifest in *Beur* narrative evolves around the exploration
of the incertitude originating from the cultural transplant, according to the
critics (Hargreaves, Bonn). The fundamental question *Beur* authors (Azouz
Begag, Farida Belghoul, Leila Houari and Leila Sebbar) face is the subaltern
re-writing of history, in other words, the narrative treatment of the particular
strategies of resistance.

   The Deleuzian concept of deterritorialization (*Thousand Plateaus*) was de-
veloped to challenge the Modernist thinking of identity as a fixed entity
based on categories of difference and to move away from the hierarchical,
arborescent thinking toward a rhizomatic notion embracing diversity. It pro-
vides alternatives to the concepts of borders as inflexible and unmovable,
political and legal entities by conceiving of borders as constantly changing
groups of "assemblages" whose movements are determined by historically
defined patterns of power. Deterritorialization and *a posteriori* reterritorial-
ization occurs in such dynamically configured "assemblages" through "lines
of flight" (*lignes de fuite*). One example of the "lines of flight" is provided
by Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson, and Vassilis Tsianos in their
study of migration processes, *Escape routes*, whereby the reconfiguration of
the Deleuzian term is applied specifically to the reformulation of the border
as a locus of social transformation.³⁰

   Beurs represent a particular case of deterritorialization, which may be un-
derstood quite literally, or along the lines of the Deleuzian concept. After
the French left the Maghreb, North Africans migrated to France (even be-
fore the end of the French colonial empire) looking for opportunities they
did not have in their countries destroyed by colonialism and later by a long

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²⁸ A. Cornejo Polar: Antonio: 'Mestizaje, transculturación, heterogeneidad', *Revista de
Crítica Literaria* 20, 1994: 368–371.

   ²⁹ L. Sebbar: *Le chinois vert de l'Afrique*, Paris: Stock, 1984.

   ³⁰ D. Papadopoulos, N. Stephenson & V. Tsianos: *Escape routes. Control and subversion in the
21st century*, London: Pluto Press, 2008.

and bloody liberation war (eight years, in the case of Algeria, 1954–1962). In France they were regarded as colonial subjects, openly treated as second class citizens. Partly as a consequence of such treatment, partly due to living in a hybrid cultural environment that contains contradictory, even mutually hostile elements between the culture of their origin, and that of their residence, North African immigrants experience "dépaysement" a type of defamiliarization, alienation of their *milieu*. Moroccan writer, Tahar Ben Jelloun documents this condition in his dissertation of psychiatry, *La Plus Haute des Solitudes* (1997).[31]

Julia Kristeva also treats this aspect of the immigrants' psyche in her book, *Étrangers a nous-même*, but she, in a manner very *sui generis*, depoliticizes the issue by introducing the notion of "citoyen-individu" and the idea of 'civilized' cohabitation:

> Perhaps by subverting this modern individualism, or from the moment when the "citoyen-individu" no longer considers himself as united and glorious, but discovers his incoherencies and his failures, in sum, his strangeness, is that the question may again be asked: it is not about the welcoming of the foreigner into a system that does not recognize him, but about the cohabitation of those strangers that we all recognize ourselves to be.[32]

Julia Kristeva, more than confident in the "citoyen-individu" ethic, tries to include all foreigners, exiles or not, under the same idea of "cohabitation" by introducing "civility" as a human condition that cures all ills of colonialism and racism. This type of elitist exoticism is refuted by Samia Mehrez, for the reason that "it eclipses the real struggle against exile and nomadism, which even as it deterritorializes the dominant, seeks to acquire and legitimate territory for itself",[33] and also by Abdelmalek Sayad, who suggests that the situation of the North African immigrant in France is a reproduction of the colonial condition, especially in view of the relation between the immi-

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[31] T. Ben Jelloun: *La Plus Haute des Solitudes. Misère affective et sexuelle d'émigrés nord-africains*, Paris: Seuil, 1997.

[32] "Mais c'est peut-être à partir de la subversion de cet individualisme moderne, à partir de moment où le citoyen-individu cesse de se considérer comme uni et glorieux, mais découvre ses incohérences et ses abîmes, ses étrangetés en somme, que la question se pose à nouveau : non plus l'accueil de l'étranger à l'intérieur d'un système qui l'annule, mais de la cohabitation de ces étrangers que nous reconnaissons tous être" (J. Kristeva: *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, Paris: Fayard, 1988 : 11).

[33] S. Mehrez: 'Azouz Begag', *op.cit.* : 27.

grants and the French society, where the communities "coexist" but do not "cohabitate".[34] This is particularly discernible in today's racist political discourses (cf. father and daughter Le Pen).

North African immigration in France started at the end of the Second World War, caused by the economic boom at the time. The second generation, the *Beurs*, as they are frequently referred to by the dominant society, as well as by themselves,[35] often do not relate intimately to any other country but France. The country of origin of their parents is a mythical country, constructed in the minds of the *Beurs* based on the stories of their parents and relatives.[36] Consequently, one of the distinct characteristics of this group is alienation caused by living in an ambiguous space that contains conflicting cultural signs. Even though many *Beurs* travel to their parents' country of origin, the stigma of not being "authentic" is placed on them everywhere. In France they may be called *les sales Arabes* 'dirty Arabs' and in the Maghreb they are called *les Arabes de la France* 'the Arabs from France'.[37] Their hybrid identity nourished by different cultural heritages is neither North African nor French, and neither one of these cultural components should be considered as culturally or even racially homogeneous. However, it is safe to say that North African social codes determined mostly by the Muslim religion differ greatly from those of France, whose cultural medium (the school, the mass media, particularly the television) provides the codes with which *Beurs* grow up, thus living in a continuous cultural split. This explains their rejection towards both cultures and their desperate search for something "authentic" that can define them.[38]

[34] A. Sayad: *La Double Absence: des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré*, Paris: Seuil, 1999 : 209.

[35] In this way, the expression *beur* is a term that was used by the dominant society, as derogatory, to refer to the second generation of North African immigrants, who eventually appropriated the term thus empowering themselves.

[36] Cf. Sebbar, *Parle mon fils. . .*, *op.cit.*

[37] S. Mehrez: 'Azouz Begag', *op.cit.* : 29

[38] In this sense, the *Beurs'* search for cultural authenticity is very similar to that of the Chicanos in the U.S. that also live in continuous cultural crossroads. In spite of the undoubted achievements of the civil rights movement, they are still subject to diverse forms of marginalization in the U.S., and also rejected, called *Pochos* in Mexico. In this junction multiculturalism is not a possibility, because it is rejected by both the intransigence of the culture of origin and by the cultural and racial intolerance of the place of residence. Moreover, multiculturalism is based on parallel cultural functions characterized by occasional syncretism, but not by an emerging new cultural entity, like hybridity does. One of the most powerful manifestations of the search for resolving this conflict is the creation of an active subject position of agency embodied in the *Pachuco* who (with his clothing, language, etc.) personifies difference from

Reterritorialization by means of literature

Deleuze and Guattari's brilliant but ambiguous study of Kafka as an example of "minor literatures"[39] have been harshly criticized by a number of critics, rightly or wrongly. In the study "minor" is used in a positive sense referring to literature produced by minorities in spite of odds within a dominant culture, therefore, representing an example of resistance writing. However, Samia Mehrez in her article about *Beur* literature disapproves of this concept and argues for the necessity of the reterritorialization of post-colonial "minor literature" which she sees as different from minority literature. "Our critical investigation should never stop at deterritorialization, because postcolonial "minor" literature, rather than glorifying exile, seeks to acquire and legitimate territory" at the same time deterritorializing the dominant.[40] Anne Donnadey goes beyond this idea by suggesting that writers must create their own space of difference by means of their language and culture. However, she adds, "the difference in power position between the French (authors) and exiles or immigrants, especially the Beurs in France, is too easily erased by Deleuze and Guattari and Kristeva".[41]

According to Alec G. Hargreaves, the *Beur* represent a generation characterized by insecurity and by a continuous identity crisis, and the desire to resolve these problems is what motivates *Beur* literary production: "the exploration of that uncertainty is the central dynamic which informs most *Beur* writing".[42] I must add that, in Hargreaves' article, despite being undoubtedly informative, the paternalistic perspective from which he approaches the subject casts a shadow on the validity of his arguments. His comment on the *Beurs*' "material deprivation [that] slow[s] their progress through the French

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both cultural entities, while belonging to neither. This identity is articulated from the "third space" where the "others" are able to engage in a dialogue with the "us," in order to affirm "their" presence as members of a community. The *Pachuco* manifests the cultural hybridity of the borderland by its mere existence (S. Nagy-Zekmi: 'Postcolonial representations of the new world (b)order', in: E. Dussel, M. Moraña & C. Jáuregui (eds.): *Coloniality at large: Latin America and the postcolonial debate*, Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 2005 : 7–8).

[39] G. Deleuze & F. Guattari: *Kafka, Towards a minor literature*, transl. D. Polan, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

[40] S. Mehrez: 'Azouz Begag', *op.cit.* : 27–28.

[41] A. Donnadey: 'Cultural *Métissage* and the play of identity in Leila Sebbar's *Sherazade* trilogy', in: E. Barkan & M.-D. Shelton (eds.): *Borders, exiles, diasporas*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998 : 257–273, p. 269.

[42] A. G. Hargreaves: 'Beur fiction: Voices from the immigrant community in France', *The French Review* 62, 1989 : 661–68, p. 661.

educational system, and has sometimes provokes serious behavioral prob-
lems" is problematic, because Hargreaves does not seem to include in his
discussion of the *Beurs* the fundamental role of racism that affects this gen-
eration. This critic characterizes Leïla Houari, the daughter of Moroccan im-
migrants in Belgium, as a hysterical woman who suffers from "full-brown
identity crisis, nervous breakdowns and suicide attempts" and besides report-
ing this fact does not comment on any of her novels, *Zeïda de nulle part* (1985),
Quand tu verras la mar (1988). The collected stories in *Quand tu verras la mer*
represent conflicts caused by the ambiguity of values *Beurs'* lives. The stories
represent the "double rupture fondatrice"[43] on one side, with the identity of
the culture of "origin" (of the parents, in reality) and on the other, with the
culture of the place of residence. As Kathryn Lay-Chenchabi suggests,[44] an
interesting contrast, symptomatic of the *Beur* condition, is to be perceived
between Azouz Begag (*Le Gone du Chaâba*, [1986], *Béni ou le paradis privé*,
[1989], *Quand on est mort, c'est pour toute la vie*, [1994] *Zenzela*, [1997]), and
Leila Houari's works, namely that Begag's characters reflect the author's po-
sition (who considers himself a Frenchman of Maghrebi origin) and wish
to be accepted in French society in spite of their experiences of racial and
economic marginalization. However, Zeida and other characters in Houari's
works in their quest for authenticity and to contest the fragmented identity
resulting of their *Beur* condition, construct a mythical homeland of Morocco
to gain acceptance and fail at every attempt.

Various novels written by *Beur* authors deal with childhood and repre-
sent the tensions between home and school, the two decisive and culturally
conflicting spaces, vital to the formation of a young girl is exemplified in
Georgette! by Farida Belghoul.[45] The narrator is a girl of Berber origin[46] who
lives with her parents and siblings in Paris. With profound sensibility, the

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[43] Ch. Bonn: 'Romans féminins de l'immigration d'origine maghrébine', *Nouvelles écritures féminines* 118, 1994 : 98–107, p. 101.

[44] K. Lay-Chenchabi: 'Writing for their lives: Three Beur writers discover themselves', *Mots Pluriels* 5, April 2001 (motspluriels.arts.uwa.edu.au/MP1701index.html).

[45] Until the publication of *Georgette!*, her first novel, Belghoul was known in France as an activist as well as film critic and director of the movie *Le depart du père* (M. Rosello: '*Georgette!* de Farida Belghoul: Télévision et départenance', *L'esprit créateur* 33, 1993 : 35–46, p. 35).

[46] The Berbers (who include a series of non-Arab minority groups) are found in all North African countries and are considered descendents of inhabitants that lived there prior to the Arab invasion. It is significant, just like in some of Assia Djebar's work, that the main character is a non-Arab representing the ethnic heterogeneity of the Maghreb, in spite of the homog-enizing categorization Maghrebi immigrants, "les Arabs," are subjected in France and other parts of Europe.

author represents the growing crisis in the life of this seven-year old girl who is learning to write in school. As Mireille Rosello points out, "l'enfant se trouve confrontée à toutes sortes de discours qui tiennent a lui imposer une identité complexe et problématique".[47] But the most important of these discourses are those of the father and the teacher, situated in two diametrically opposed ideological poles. More important than the linguistic diversity and the ethnic complexity of the Maghreb (as the main character is a Berber girl and not an Arab), the contradiction is presented between the parents' oral culture, and the written culture of France that opens doors, but also closes them, because the oral cultural coordinates that govern the world of her parents will be out of the girl's reach forever, for the "subaltern cannot speak",[48] if she does, she is no longer subaltern. This explains, in part, the great difficulty *Beurs* face in gaining acceptance in the country of their parents.[49]

The cultural "in-betweenness" seems to be the principal motive in the novels of Leila Sebbar as well. The protagonists (youths, in their majority) respond to this crisis, fleeing, running, escaping, looking obsessively for a model that includes and corresponds to the cultural and linguistic hybridity that shape their experiences. In *Le Chinois vert de L'Afrique* each one of the seven units (there aren't any indicated chapters) are initiated by a small epigraphic passage that starts with the same word: "Il court" (he runs). In this way Sebbar creates for her protagonists a "third space" that is anchored nowhere, and where the "other" of North Africa is able to engage in a dialogue with the "us" of France in order to affirm a presence as citizens in the country of their ex-colonizers.[50] This "third space" is an exile of all cultures and places, it is found outside of the family (that imposes the Muslim morals and North African language) and outside of French society (that causes anguish by its racism and a colonialist mentality) it is the only one that offers the possibility of articulating identities far from the intrusion of either cultural *milieu*, that (in spite of what Kristeva says) cannot be reconciled or harmoniously coexist in a person. Sebbar's protagonists cannot be integrated in French society today, nor can they (re)encounter the signs of their lost

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[47] M. Rosello: '*Georgette!…*', *op.cit.* : 35.

[48] G. Ch. Spivak: 'Postmarked Calcutta, India', *op.cit.*

[49] L. Houari: *Zeida de nulle part*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985.

[50] V. Orlando: 'A la recherche "du devenir femme" dans le Troisième Espace de Culture: *Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* de Leila Sebbar', *Women in French Studies* 2, 1994: 19–31, p. 19.

origin.[51] For Sebbar writing is, in effect, a form of reterritorialization, her pur-
pose is to give the children of immigrants (her protagonists) "a territory in lit-
erature".[52] Through hybrid textuality Sebbar attempts reterritorialization, but
not at the national level (as many others propose it), but by creating "imagi-
nary communities"[53] that, unlike the immigrant communities, are not based
on a common mythical past. In an interview with Monique Hugon, Sebbar
states that what she seeks is to write about the French reality that is not all
French and, at the same time, to give a legitimate space of representations to
the people of Maghrebi origin within the confines of French Literature.[54]

The territories in one side of the frontier in the postcolonial imaginary
offer the security of a culturally homogeneous area, but as Said comments:
"can also become prisons and are often defended beyond reason or neces-
sity".[55] To experience an identity constantly challenged in the intersection of
histories and memories (individual and collective), to live simultaneously in
the interior and the exterior requires from those who live in a frontier real-
ity the revision and reexamination of that fluid identity articulated on the
basis of sporadic historical inheritances and a heterogeneous present.[56] The
hybrid cultures, as García Canclini points out, are consequences of economic
de/re/structuration, the new global patrons of production, distribution, con-
sumption and communication,[57] as well as migration processes that produce
new social configurations as it is evidenced in Beur writing.

[51] E. L. Vergano: *Poétique, politique et culture dans les romans de Leila Sebbar*, dissertación,
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1991 : 224.

[52] M. Laronde: 'Leila Sebbar et le roman "croisé": Histoire, mémoire, identité', *CELFAN
Review* 7, 1988 : 6–13, p. 88.

[53] This is a reference to the *imagined communities* by B. Anderson: *Imagined communities:
Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983.

[54] M. Hugon: 'Leila Sebbar ou l'exile productif', *Notre librairie* 84, 1986 : 32–37.

[55] E. Said: 'Reflection on exile', in: R. Ferguson, M. Grever, T. Minh-ha & C. West (eds.): *Out
there: Marginalization and contemporary cultures*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990 : 357–363,
p. 365.

[56] I. Chambers: *Migrancy, culture, identity*, London: Routledge, 1994 : 6.

[57] N. García Canclini: *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*, Méx-
ico: Grijalbo, 1989 : 13–14.