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AFRICAN HISTORIES  
AND MODERNITIES

# Art, Creativity, and Politics in Africa and the Diaspora

Edited by Abimbola Adelakun · Toyin Falola

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## CHAPTER 2

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# Rewriting Algeria: Transcultural Kinship and Anticolonial Revolution in Kateb Yacine's *L'Homme aux sandales de caoutchouc*

*Amir Aziz*

In Kateb Yacine's 1970 play, *L'Homme aux sandales de caoutchouc* (The Man in Rubber Sandals), Mohamed, a shepherd of North African origin contracted by France to fight in Indochina, is attacked by Viet Cong rebels. Mohamed, in a sudden moment of realization, recognizes that the rebels are not so different from the men of his village and refuses to fire, proclaiming solidarity with their cause. In another scene, a similar pattern of cognizance occurs for Alabama, an African-American soldier serving in the Vietnam War. Alabama draws parallels between the African-American liberation struggle and the Vietnamese reunification

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The original version of this chapter was revised: The author name and email address were updated. The correction to this chapter is available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91310-15>

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movement and transforms into a Viet Cong rebel: “J’ai déserté / Je suis un Viet / À ma façon / Que tous les Noirs américains / Tuent leurs officiers / Et la guerre sera juste.”<sup>1</sup> (“I have deserted / I am a Viet / In my own way / May all Black Americans / Kill their officers / And the war will be just.”) In both moments exemplifying the spontaneous embodiment of transcultural kinship, Mohamed and Alabama see their own struggles mirrored back to them, prompting their conscientious objection to violence exerted onto populations whose struggles they consider to be not unlike their own. The textual transformation of these characters, from poor shepherd to anti-war pacifist for Mohamed in French Indochina and from Black Panther to Viet Cong fighter for Alabama during the Vietnam War, reveals that *L’Homme* is provocative in motif as it is calculatingly purposeful in its selection of historical context and political overtone. It is not mere happenstance that Yacine chose to tap into the rich depository of anticolonial fervor circulating in Vietnam and adapted it into the theatrical form.

In this essay, I argue that *L’Homme* is a critical piece of creative writing in North African Francophone theatrical literature by its deliberate deployment of Vietnam as the narrative setting and its compelling messages of transcultural kinship and anticolonial revolution. First, I describe Yacine’s upbringing and discuss the variegated influences shaping his foray into theater. Second, I embark on a textual analysis of *L’Homme* by discussing the play’s structure, its recurring themes, and the narratives of several major characters. Because the play features a monumental cast of characters, rather than analyzing all of them, I engage in an intersecting mapping out of the diverse origins, historical contexts, and narratives of major characters that I contend serve to unify and epitomize the play’s broader themes of transcultural kinship and anticolonial revolution. Even though *L’Homme* may appear oddly discordant in cast and momentum, I demonstrate how a comparative textual analysis reveals a consistent articulation of the play’s recurring themes. Third, I problematize the play’s message of an anticolonial solidarity transcending space and time by speculating on the implications of narrative co-optation. I ask if Yacine’s attempts at refashioning the struggles of colonized groups result in a streamlined narrative that collapses differences and particularities in culture, history, identity, and language, or if its archive of literary figures may be achieving a different goal. Fourth, I locate *L’Homme*’s overt political themes as exemplifying Yacine’s commitment at developing a creative theatrical form that transmits instructive lessons in post-independence Algerian national unity.

## KATEB YACINE: BACKGROUND AND FORAY INTO THEATER

Born in 1929 to an Algerian family of Kabyle-Amazigh origin in Constantine, Kateb Yacine was from the outset an individual situated between divergent worlds: the French-speaking milieu dominant in colonial-era Algeria and the Arabo-Islamic world maintained at home by his family. Yacine spent his initial school-going years at a Qur'anic school where literary Arabic was the principal language of instruction. At the age of seven, Yacine was sent by his father to a French colonial school, where he first learned French. Yacine's father envisioned that French would serve his son well in the future, as it was, at the time in the 1930s, deemed an essential language of communication and social mobility in colonial Algeria if one desired to succeed.<sup>2</sup>

Later in his life, Yacine gained literary fame throughout Africa and Europe as a novelist writing in French—most prominently for his debut novel *Nedjma*, published in 1956. For Yacine, French served as a vehicular container for developing a versatile Algerian literary voice he believed had yet to flourish: He believed that wielding and mastering French along with knowledge of its culture was not antithetical to Algerian identity, but rather a *butin de guerre* (“spoil of war”) that could be harnessed to cultivate new generations of culturally mobile Algerians who could employ French and the fields of knowledge it provided access to for gaining national liberation. When Algeria gained independence in 1962, however, the political turbulences and censorship that followed pressured Yacine to temporarily leave the country and move to Paris, where he continued writing.

Yacine's rich body of works reflected the talents of a writer of considerable versatility and intellect. Cognizant of his influential public role as a writer and the potentiality for change in his home country, Yacine returned to Algeria from exile in 1970, ceased writing in French, and began producing theatrical plays performed in vernacular Algerian Arabic. He traveled around Algeria throughout the 1970s to stage his plays with his theatrical troupe. Because he was not fully comfortable in Algerian Arabic, Yacine would first write in French or latinized Arabic, and later worked with members of his troupe more well-versed in the vernacular to polish his work.<sup>3</sup>

Vernacular Algerian Arabic is a non-standardized, colloquial dialect derived from standard Arabic, and is considered to transmit a distinctive sense of “Algerian-ness,” articulating the more intimate aspects of

the daily Algerian experience. Its built-in lexical diversity, incorporating words from standard Arabic, French, and Amazigh, adds to its depth and expansiveness, while its grammatical ease adds to its allure. Aside from making his works accessible to the vernacular-speaking Algerian public, Yacine's decision to compose in the vernacular stemmed from a personal impulse: His parents had primarily communicated in the vernacular. Since Yacine had stopped speaking Arabic growing up and switched to using French, he described feeling particularly estranged and distant from his mother, who never learned to speak French:

Jamais je n'ai cessé, même aux jours de succès près de l'institutrice, de ressentir au fond de moi cette seconde rupture du lien ombilical, cet exil intérieur qui ne rapprochait plus l'écolier de sa mère que pour les arracher, chaque fois un peu plus, au murmure du sang, aux frémissements réprobateurs d'une langue bannie... Ainsi avais-je perdu tout à la fois ma mère et son langage, les seuls trésors inaliénables—et pourtant aliénés.<sup>4</sup>

I never stopped, even on successful days at school, from feeling deep down in me this second rupture of the umbilical cord, this interior exile that brings the schoolboy closer to his mother only to tear them apart, each time a little bit more, at the whisper of blood, at the reproving quivers of a forbidden language... And so I had lost all at once my mother and her language, the only inalienable treasures—nonetheless alienated.

Retracing his career back to the vernacular after having mastered French was, for Yacine, the poignant return of an adrift son to his natal roots and a restoration of the severed matrilineal cord. It also symbolized his way of reclaiming the dispossessed pluralism he believed was constitutive of being Algerian, which included the communicative importance of vernacular Arabic in structuring quotidian life and a renewed vigor for Amazigh language and culture.<sup>5</sup> Yacine also insisted upon acknowledging the mosaic of ethno-cultural and linguistic influences essential in the reworking of an Algerian identity, as neither the language of Molière nor the Arabo-Islamic world could, in a singular act of monopoly, claim to authenticate fully what it meant to be Algerian.

The vernacular also meant, for Yacine, a renunciation of hegemonic French and Arabo-Islamic influences as sole determinants of Algerian-ness, as well as an act of defiance against post-independence pro-Arabization laws that promoted literary Arabic. Staging theater in the vernacular would also enable the Algerian population to access his plays and be



made aware of complexities in Algerian history, as Yacine professed that “l’histoire portée au théâtre devient un spectacle et touche ainsi un public qui n’avait pas accès aux sources historiques.”<sup>6</sup> (“History brought into theater becomes a spectacle and influences a public with no access yet to historical sources.”)

Vietnam was already on Yacine’s mind when he began work in 1949 as a journalist for the Algiers-based newspaper, *Alger Républicain*. By then, Yacine was already politically active, joining the Algerian Communist Party in 1947. An event that profoundly had affected him was the Sétif and Guelma massacre. On May 8, 1945 in the northeastern town of Sétif, Algerians gathered on the streets to celebrate the end of World War II and protest for Algerian independence. The demonstrations escalated into widespread riots as French police and Algerian protestors engaged in retaliatory attacks, with the death toll estimated to be as low as 1400 by the French government to as high as 30,000 by Algerian nationalist groups.<sup>7</sup> The incident was a turning point in French-Algerian relations, as it demonstrated growing organized resistance against colonial rule. As Ahmed Akkache, Yacine’s colleague at *Alger Républicain*, described:

La période 1948–1949 milieu du siècle, était une période de bouillonnement extraordinaire et Kateb s’est retrouvé là, au confluent de deux grands événements qui l’ont profondément marqué : les massacres du 8 mai 1945 et la fin de la seconde guerre mondiale; une guerre terrible contre le fascisme qui avait duré de longues années.<sup>8</sup>

The mid-century period of 1948–1949 was a period of extraordinary activity and Kateb found himself between two major events that profoundly shaped him: the massacres of 8 May 1945 and the end of World War II; a terrible war against fascism lasting many years.

During his brief journalist career from 1949 to 1951, Yacine began writing about Indochina.<sup>9</sup> His turn to Vietnam was not accidental. Spurred by the Sétif and Guelma massacres, Yacine fixated on the international arena to search for answers to explain the Algerian desire for national autonomy. And as Vietnam became increasingly visible on the global stage, through its anticolonial insurrections and the 1945 unilateral establishment of North Vietnam by the Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh, Yacine began making comparisons between Algerians and the Vietnamese, two communities under French colonial rule. Subsequent

events in Vietnam, such as the 1954 Battle of Dien Bien Phu that resulted in France's defeat and withdrawal from Indochina, further solidified the revolutionary connections he had made between Vietnam and Algeria. Vietnam was, for Yacine, a revolutionary site Algerians could critically look towards in responding to questions of Algerian independence. Yacine had begun drafting several scenes in 1947 for a play on Vietnam, but it was not until 1967 after he had traveled to North Vietnam that he began developing the play further.<sup>10</sup>

While visiting Vietnam in the late 1960s, Yacine was impressed by Ho Chi Minh and the apparent success of the Vietnamese revolutionary movement.<sup>11</sup> By then, Algeria had already gained independence from France, but the tumultuous post-independence era compelled Yacine to look to Vietnam for didactic instruction. He was also struck by how Vietnamese theater, Chèo, creatively incorporated folk traditions and history and inculcated a strong sense of communal identity, something he saw as absent in Algerian theater. As he confessed in an interview in 1986:

Lorsque je suis allé au Vietnam, j'ai été frappé par le fait que les Vietnamiens ont porté presque toute leur histoire au théâtre, depuis l'invasion chinoise il y a bien longtemps, plus d'un millénaire. Je voudrais faire un peu la même chose en Algérie, c'est-à-dire porter notre histoire ainsi que notre histoire brûlante actuelle, parce que là je touche à des thèmes qui sont d'actualité.<sup>12</sup>

When I went to Vietnam, I was struck by how the Vietnamese brought most of their history into theater, since the Chinese invasion more than a millennium ago. I wish to do the same thing in Algeria, to transmit our history as well as our current fervent history, because there I deal with themes that are of current relevance.

It was this desire to radically shape the theatrical form in Algeria that led Yacine to finish composing *L'Homme* after a final trip to Vietnam. The theatrical stage was a fertile terrain upon which Yacine planned to cultivate an Algerian national theater that would transmit what he considered to be teachable lessons in national unity, transcultural solidarity, and historical knowledge from revolutionary sites like Vietnam. As Pamela A. Pears points out, "Kateb wishes to emphasize mutual identification and understanding among oppressed peoples. Above all, he sees his play as



a vehicle enabling the creation of ties that bind human beings to one another.”<sup>13</sup>

## TRANSCULTURAL KINSHIP AND ANTICOLONIAL REVOLUTION IN *L'HOMME*

*L'Homme* deals with themes of colonial oppression and military imperialism, with Vietnam as the narrative locus and fecund battleground for the contestation of competing ideas on culture, ideology, and nationhood. Yacine portrays agents competing for control in Vietnam, while dissenting characters, from colonial soldiers and North African *spahis* (light cavalry) to Vietnamese rebels, resist in a myriad of ways. I begin by analyzing the narrative trajectory of three non-Vietnamese characters, showing how they embody moments of transcultural kinship with the Vietnamese. As I have described in this project's opening paragraph, I refer to transcultural kinship as cognitive modes of cross-cultural recognition in which characters are prompted to declare solidarity with another population after having been exposed to instances of shocking violence or trauma. I then move on to analyze the narratives of two Vietnamese characters, showing how Yacine portrays their actions as embodying idealized notions of anti-colonial revolutionism.

*L'Homme* contains eight chapters. The play begins in 40 AD with the rebellion of the Trung Sisters, military leaders, and national heroines celebrated in Vietnam for their fierce rebellion against Chinese military expansionism, and closes in 1970 with the death of Ho Chi Minh, the eponymous man in rubber sandals that the title of the play alludes to. Sometimes hundreds of years are contained in a chapter, while other times a chapter covers several decades, altogether producing a prolonged snapshot of Vietnamese history. North African, African-American, Latin American, and European characters are included in ways that connect them to the play's focus on Vietnam. Protagonists, villains, and one-time characters weave in and out of scenes intermittently, signifying fluidity and irregularity in narrative pace. There is also a blending of historical with fiction and a synthesis of present events with ancient history. Some characters such as the Trung Sisters are real historical figures, while others such as Alabama are fictitious offshoots, as Yacine draws upon both history and creative imagination. Because of the mammoth temporal and geopolitical scope and much overlap between history and fiction,

sketching an exhaustive picture of all the play's chapters, characters, and links to real-world history is beyond the scope of this essay. Rather, *L'Homme* is best understood through a textual analysis of several major characters, whom I argue epitomize the play's principal messages of transcultural kinship and anticolonial revolution.

The first character is Henri Martin, based on the French soldier with the same name who gained fame in the 1950 Henri Martin Affair for refusing to participate in colonial efforts in Indochina. The real Martin joined the French navy to combat Japanese troops invading Southeast Asia, but was sent to Vietnam where he witnessed a litany of horrors perpetuated by colonial soldiers. In the play, the soldier Martin vividly recalls a scene of horrifying colonial violence in Indochina:

Six cents personnes / Sont rassemblées dans une cour / Les hommes sont torturés / Ensuite, on les massacre / Les filles sont violées / Des femmes enceintes sont frappées / Jusqu'à éclatement de l'abdomen / Une seule maison est restée intacte / On y enferme deux jeunes filles / Et on y met le feu.<sup>14</sup>

Six hundred / Are gathered in a courtyard / The men are tortured / Then, they are massacred / The girls are raped / Pregnant women are struck / Until their bellies burst / Only one house remained intact / Two young girls were locked in it / And they set it on fire.

Later, a Vietnamese schoolboy carrying an oil lamp addresses the chorus, who are dressed as French blue-collar workers (with Martin among them): "Là-bas, en France / Vous allez à l'école / Ici, nous étudions / Au bord d'une tranchée" ("Over there, in France / You go to school / Here, we study / At the edge of a ditch") to which the chorus replies in rhapsodic agreement, "Arrêtez la sale guerre!"<sup>15</sup> ("Stop the dirty war!") It is unclear whether this scene occurs in Vietnam or France, but its incidence suggests the sequestration of a cosmopolitan, atemporal space where like-minded individuals gather to share their experiences in proletariat continuum. This transcultural space Yacine creates invites a critical juncture of self-reflection for a perceptive character like Martin. The scene suddenly transforms into a courtroom, where a judge accuses Martin of betraying France. To this, Martin replies in emphatic solidarity with the Vietnamese:

Celui qui aime la liberté / Ne l'aime pas seulement pour lui / Mais aussi pour les autres / La défense nationale / Doit se faire sur le sol de France / Et non pas contre un peuple / Qui lutte pour être libre.<sup>16</sup>

He who loves freedom / Not only loves it for himself / But also for others / National defense / Must be done on French soil / And not against a people / Who are fighting to be free.

Yacine's depiction of a Frenchman within this continuum of transcultural solidarity allows him to deploy Martin conspicuously as a voice of lateral dissent from within France. In reneging on his military obligations by wielding the argument of universal liberty as defense, Martin is depicted as not only condemning colonial practices in Indochina, but also elucidating a shared human aspiration for self-autonomy and liberation. In allowing Martin to conscientiously object to colonial practices by articulating a transcultural mode of solidarity with a colonized population, Yacine places colonial Vietnam as a parabolic example upon which comparisons between colonial Vietnam and colonial Algeria could be made and the Algerian independence question could correspondingly acquire amplified meaning, as he clarifies in an interview:

Il y a en commun le phénomène des langues, le thème de la libération et celui de la patrie, le thème d'un peuple qui se libère; un combat pour la libération populaire qui se passe en Palestine ou au Vietnam, cela se situe peut-être à vingt-mille kilomètres, mais c'est le même problème. Tous ces problèmes sont posés dans les pièces et, par là même, concernent l'Algérie.<sup>17</sup>

There are in common the phenomenon of languages, the theme of liberation and the homeland, the theme of a people emancipating themselves; a fight for popular liberation occurring in Palestine or Vietnam may occur 20,000 kilometers away, but it is the same problem. All these problems are expressed through theater and thus concern Algeria.

In another chapter, Mohamed, the North African soldier conscripted into the French army in the early twentieth century, undergoes a similar moment of transcultural kinship. Mohamed's situation corresponds with a historical reality: Natives from French colonies such as Morocco, Algeria, and Senegal were enlisted into the French army as infantrymen to fight in the First Indochina War, but they regularly faced racial prejudice from French military officers. In the play, Mohamed is struck by how the struggles of the Vietnamese remind him of those of his own

people. After experiencing a profound moment of transcultural recognition and pride, he refuses to fire on the attacking Vietnamese rebels and joins their cause. Conversely, Mohamed's compatriot, a character called Face de Ramadhan, undergoes a divergent trajectory. Seduced by promises of glory, fortune, and social standing, Face de Ramadhan eagerly enlists in the French colonial army. Like Mohamed, he quickly becomes disillusioned, subjected to discrimination by his French superiors. Face de Ramadhan futilely attempts to prove he is no different from the French, imitating how they eat, drink, and behave, but fails to gain acceptance. In the end, while Mohamed assumes a principled stance by refusing to exercise violence and joining the Vietnamese cause, Face de Ramadhan is unable to overcome his wounded pride and treats any Vietnamese he encounters with contempt. In a noteworthy scene, Face de Ramadhan abuses and kicks a young Vietnamese rickshaw boy, Troï, to the ground, replicating the same pattern of colonial violence practiced upon him.

The divergent pathways Mohamed and Face de Ramadhan each pursue are a compelling literary depiction of the psychological trauma of colonial paternalism. Mohamed transforms his bitter experiences into a principled posture of pacifism, anti-violence, and solidarity with the Vietnamese. Face de Ramadhan, tortured over his inability to be seen as equal by his French counterparts, is unable to see beyond his own suffering. He reproduces animosity towards the Vietnamese—whose condition as colonized subject is no different from his—and flees from critical moments of confrontation. Face de Ramadhan desires acceptance and mimics the actions of his French superiors, at one point even participating in the torture of a captured Vietnamese rebel, Ngo. Face de Ramadhan's performance of selfhood is rooted in his desire to seek the attention of a capricious colonial paternalism whose approbation he is continually failing to gain.

Jacques Lacan theorizes how “the effect of mimicry is camouflage” where the subject is not “harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled—exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare.”<sup>18</sup> Camouflage, as an art of disappearance, entails effacing distinguishing elements of the self to blend seamlessly into the surroundings without discordance. According to Lacan, camouflaging mimicry does not allow the subject to *become* another; rather, it produces a *stain* in a painting of otherwise harmonious similitude.<sup>19</sup> Homi Bhabha interprets Lacanian mimicry in the

colonial context, seeing colonial mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite [...] Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal.”<sup>20</sup> Face de Ramadhan occupies an indeterminate space of ambivalence, doomed to reproduce an idealized selfhood he cannot properly assume as he is consistently mocked by his French peers. Face de Ramadhan vacillates perpetually between camouflaging mimicry and self-abnegation, possessing neither the distinctiveness of identity nor the prejudgment of difference. What follows this volatility in identity, then, is more trauma and violence.

It is compelling that Yacine selects a cryptic name, Face de Ramadhan (Face of Ramadan), suggesting that the character lacks distinctive selfhood. Pears points out that he “embodies the exterior image of Ramadan as a pious and holy month,” but beneath, he sustains “a complete black hole of subjectivity entirely different from what we expect to see.”<sup>21</sup> Consider how in the same scene where Mohamed refuses to fire on the Vietnamese rebels, Face de Ramadhan flees in terror: “Allah! Allah! / On va crever ici / Comme des chiens de chasse! / Ce sont des communistes! / Ils ne croient pas en Dieu!”<sup>22</sup> (“Allah! Allah! / We will die here / Like hounds! / These are communists / They do not believe in God!”) In another scene, Face de Ramadhan abandons his post in panic after mistaking a coughing toad for a grenade: “Allah! Une grenade / Qui saute et qui me suit!”<sup>23</sup> (“Allah! A grenade / That leaps and follows me!”) Yacine’s selection of wily interjections, with the religious invocations of ‘Allah’ and ‘Dieu’ during Face de Ramadhan’s moments of extreme trepidation, is not coincidental, as it contrasts the dissemblance between Ramadan, a sacred month in the Islamic calendar calling for principled devotion and self-restraint, and Face de Ramadhan, whose inability to adhere honorably to any one institutional code of conduct (whether in organized religion or military culture) belies the lack of distinctive selfhood and loyal group affiliation.

Thus, a discussion of the character Mohamed is incomplete without a corresponding analysis of Face de Ramadhan, whom I argue is not simply a character foil to Mohamed, as Mohamed and Face de Ramadhan are drawn as co-terminus analogies of postcolonial Algeria. Mohamed is a common male name in the Islamic world that Yacine often uses in his works, most notably in his 1971 play on Palestine, *Boucherie de l’espérance* (Butchery of Hope), in which the main antagonist Mohamed stands in for Palestine. In *L’Homme*, Mohamed is likely an analogy for

Algeria: He begins as a poor North African peasant living under colonial rule and, beset by poverty and despair, accepts the offer to enlist in the French colonial army in return for monetary rewards. Face de Ramadhan is also enticed by the same offer, but the diverging choices they make distinguish them from each other. This, then, invites comparison to the North African postcolonial context, in which Yacine appears to suggest that Algerians could internalize decades of colonial dogma and end up like Face de Ramadhan, a formless persona trapped in the cycle of imitation, self-denial, disappointment, and trauma.

Conversely, they could assume a principled position of certitude, like Mohamed does, by drawing upon transcultural kinship with similarly colonized populations and forging a distinctive national culture rooted in cultural pluralism and socialist futurity. While this dualism that Yacine draws upon no doubt risks oversimplifying and polarizing the complexities of colonial trauma and postcolonial futurity, the suggestion that Mohamed *is* Face de Ramadhan, or at the very least *could* be, is a cautionary metaphor. Yacine knowingly employs in sketching Mohamed as origin and presence (a united Algeria with a strong sense of national identity) and Face de Ramadhan as dissension and absence (a divided Algeria damaged by neocolonialism and self-abnegation).

Yacine also sketches the narrative of another fictitious character, Alabama, and places him within the historical context of the African-American civil rights movement. Naming the character Alabama carries two connotations: It pays homage to Alabama as a hotbed of civil rights activism, from the fearless defiance of Rosa Parks to the tenacity of Selma Voting Rights marchers, while also recognizing the state's complicity in allowing Jim Crow laws and racial segregationism to flourish. In the play, Alabama's journey begins on the streets of Harlem, where he encounters the President of the United States heading to church. Yacine portrays the President as a pompous character who views African-Americans with distrustful, paternalistic condescension. When Alabama follows him to church, the President is astonished: "Mon Dieu, une panthère! / Une panthère noire / Qui lit la Bible!"<sup>24</sup> ("My God, a panther! / A black panther! / Who reads the Bible!"). In a rapid succession of fiery come-backs, Alabama castigates the President for what he deems as hypocrisy in segregationist policies characteristic of the U.S. Jim-Crow era:

Garde ta Bible dans ta poche / Elle est bien où elle est / Avec ton porte-feuille et tes préservatifs / Il me faut cette église / J'en ai besoin pour te



combattre / Pour faire entendre notre voix / Pour te lancer tes psaumes /  
 En pleine figure / Comme tu as besoin / De nègres à l'église / Pour  
 blanchir ta conscience / Les mêmes nègres / Que tu fais trimer / Les  
 mêmes négresses / Que tu prends dans ton lit / Pour interdire ensuite / À  
 ces négrillons qui sont tes bâtards / Tes belles écoles toutes blanche.<sup>25</sup>

Keep your Bible in your pocket / It is befitting where it is / With your  
 wallet and condoms / I need this church / I need it to fight you / To  
 let our voice be heard / To throw you your psalms / In your face / Just  
 as you need / Negroes in church / To whitewash your conscience / The  
 same Negroes / That you enslave / The same Negresses / That you take to  
 bed / And then preventing / These black children who are your bastards /  
 From going to your lovely all-white schools.

Here, Yacine encapsulates what he perceives as centuries of social injustice against African-Americans, caricaturizing what he perceives as a complicit U.S. national apparatus that permits racial segregationism to prosper. Alabama is later sent to fight in the Vietnam War. He is astonished when he discovers what he considers to be a paradoxical mission, "Protéger le Viet-nam / Contre ses propres habitants!" ("Protect Vietnam / From its own inhabitants!") to which his superior, Capitaine Supermac, replies sardonically, "Tu dois casser du Viet / Pour mériter tes droits civiques."<sup>26</sup> ("You must crush the Viets / To earn your civil rights.") Alabama's experiences in Vietnam radically change him, as war violence compels him to experience a spontaneous moment of transcultural solidarity with the Vietnamese. He kills his commander, deserts the army, and joins the Viet Cong. Yacine thus portrays Alabama as eventually becoming aware of parallels between African-Americans and the Vietnamese, and realizing he is fighting for a national apparatus that has similarly denied civil liberties to his own people. Alabama marks his own social location of marginalized subject as comparable to that of the Vietnamese and declares solidarity with them, which Yacine illustrates by making Alabama literally *transform* into a Viet Cong rebel.

Alabama, Mohamed, and Henri Martin are characters made to participate in various instances in Vietnamese history, and they all undergo similar moments of transcendent recognition. These moments operate under a convergence of transcultural solidarity that necessarily collapses differences in culture, language, and national origin. On a textual level, Yacine appears to be articulating that transcultural kinship is the precursory essence for a revolutionary politics that would engender radical

social change in an era marked by repeated patterns of colonial violence and anticolonial insurrectionism. Alabama, Mohamed, and Martin are all dramatically portrayed as transcending the shackles that once constricted them to their respective social locations, and by doing so, they are able to embody new subjectivities in the pursuit of radical political change.

The other recurring motif, anticolonial revolution, is traced through two Vietnamese characters whom Yacine depicts as embodying exceptional revolutionary passion. Yacine first traces the journey of a character called Nguyen Ai Quoc, who appears in the first chapter as a cook's assistant on a French vessel headed for Marseille. Ai Quoc's journey is transformative. He first seeks out proletariat support from laborers and denounces colonialism: "Franchement, camarades / Si vous ne soutenez pas / La lutte des peuples opprimés / Quelle est donc la révolution / Que vous voulez faire?"<sup>27</sup> ("Frankly, comrades / If you do not support / The struggle of oppressed peoples / What then is the revolution / That you intend to make?") In another scene, Ai Quoc, as a formidable socialist leader, launches a call to arms that provokes a peasant revolution, alluding to Vietnam's actual unilateral secession from France in 1945. In a following scene, the choir triumphantly declares the landslide election victory of a mysterious character l'oncle Ho (Uncle Ho), and opens a door to reveal a dignified Ai Quoc. It becomes clear, for those familiar with Vietnamese history, that Nguyen Ai Quoc is, in fact, Ho Chi Minh, first president of an independent Vietnam. Through anticolonial revolution sustained by proletariat support, the poor peasant Ai Quoc *transforms* into the charismatic politician affectionately called Uncle Ho, fatherly ancestor of modern Vietnam.

If Ai Quoc's journey is transformative and affirming, then Yacine furnishes a counter-narrative that leads to tragic death: that of Troï. We first see Troï in chapter three as the young rickshaw boy subjected to Face de Ramadhan's abusive violence. Troï reappears in chapter five as an active North Vietnamese communist seeking Vietnamese reunification amid the Vietnam War. He and his wife, Quyen, are imprisoned for communist activities by the American-backed South Vietnamese. Yacine also briefly alludes to revolutionary Latin America: The FALN, a Venezuelan guerilla group, kidnaps an American colonel and demands the release of Troï, with whom they declare solidarity. Lancedalle, an American officer, promises to release Troï in an agreed exchange of prisoners, but orders Troï's execution after the Venezuelans release the captured colonel. When the execution squad fires at him, Troï cries out in defiance,

“Vive le Viet-nam! Vive Ho Chi Minh!”<sup>28</sup> (“Long live Vietnam! Long live Ho Chi Minh!”) before falling to the ground. Troi’s fate mirrors the real-life execution of Nguyen Van Troi, a young Viet Minh communist who attempted to assassinate the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in 1963.<sup>29</sup> Yacine adapts Nguyen Van Troi’s story to not only illustrate the potential costs of revolutionary activity but also its galvanizing effects, as the character Troi’s death inspires others to take up his cause.

Anticolonial and anti-neocolonial revolutionism are thus featured in two distinct panels of Vietnamese history that Ho Chi Minh (colonial Vietnam) and Troi (U.S.-occupied Vietnam) represent. Nguyen Ai Quoc guides Vietnam to independence, transforming into Ho Chi Minh and paving the way for further gains to Vietnamese political sovereignty. The subsequent 1954 Battle of Dien Bien Phu between French forces and Viet Minh nationalists splits Vietnam into the communist, Ho Chi Minh-led North and the U.S.-occupied South. Troi fights in U.S.-occupied Vietnam and his tragic fate serves as a cautionary tale of the risks involved in revolutionary endeavors as well as a demonstration of the revolutionary’s readiness for self-sacrifice. And because Yacine’s use of Vietnam in *L’Homme* is also shaped by his commitment at developing a creative theatrical form with instructional goals, Yacine is thus implying that Vietnam *is*, in fact, an exemplary ideal for Algeria to bear in mind, where a socialist Vietnam under the unyielding leadership of a charismatic leader represents a blueprint for an Algeria of the future: “Mon pays tel que je voulais qu’il soit, je le voyais naître sur la terre vietnamienne. L’Algérie comme projetée dans l’avenir [...] l’Algérie ayant franchi l’étape du nationalisme, le Vietnam ayant commencé l’instauration d’une vraie république socialiste.”<sup>30</sup> (“My country as I wanted it to be, I saw its birth on Vietnamese soil. Algeria as projected in the future [...] Algeria having passed through the nationalism stage, Vietnam having begun the establishment of a real socialist republic.”)

## NARRATIVE CO-OPTATION AND LITERARY ARCHIVES IN POSTCOLONIAL TEXT

Yacine’s brand of a globalizing socialist-Marxist politics is undoubtedly evident in the play. Yet, *L’Homme* should not be simply interpreted as engaging in a rigid anticolonial politics or romanticized ideations of

socialist solidarity. While shaping a text according to a unitary political aesthetic involves the favoring of certain ideological impulses, it is also crucial to note that Yacine's writings were impacted by a confluence of socio-political developments and prevailing sentiments representative of his time that contributed to the overall ideological thrust of *L'Homme*.

In this section, I ask whether Yacine's articulation of a transcultural kinship collapses differences between the marginalized groups he depicts. Does the staging of these groups as universal "victims" of colonial powers furnish greater insight into or radically oversimplify the complexities of colonial exploitation and trauma? I answer by investigating the epistemic possibilities of the text—how it offers ways of re-thinking marginality and colonial subjecthood. Texts such as *L'Homme* that communicate provocative ideological messages may be better seen as reflective of interpellations circulating at the time when they were written, rather than as elaborate manifestos prescribing an unchanging transhistoricity. Yet, this also does not mark *L'Homme* as fundamentally anachronistic or unable to withstand the vicissitudes of changing social times. *L'Homme* is a product of its era, and while it collapses important differences between groups, it is also a vibrant literary archive whose purpose is to evidence and preserve the collective presence and voices of marginalized populations. Consider how the text itself is structured, with the large cast of characters encompassing multiple temporal, geopolitical, and cultural configurations, the intersecting of narratives, the overlap between history and fiction, and the breakneck narrative pace. The text's ingenuity lies not in the monumental and chaotic nature of its plot structure, but in its manner of giving voice to narratives that have been left at the periphery amidst the grand world-making project of European colonial expansionism and its epistemic violence.

There are, however, limits to the textual representation of marginality, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes that "the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic."<sup>31</sup> This is a reminder of the costs incurred when the marginalized is rendered recognizable using dominant rules of recognition, which Spivak cautions will "objectify the subaltern and be caught in the game of knowledge as power."<sup>32</sup> This is similar to how Louis Althusser describes interpellation as the process through which ideologies unilaterally shape subjects through hegemonic logics, as "ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects [...] even before he is born."<sup>33</sup> Despite these limits, *L'Homme* succeeds in convening seemingly

disparate narratives to produce polycentric subject-positions, assembling a subaltern counter-literature that communicates *beyond*, but not completely unburdened from, the signs, terms, and language of dominant literary production. What is striking is thus not how Yacine charts resistance to colonial and neocolonial hegemony in disparate localities such as Vietnam, Algeria, black America, and France as being *separately* generated, but how they are emerging *together* in purported solidarity, subverting the trappings of the dominant-or-subordinate binary that inscribes marginalized groups as, in Althusser's words, "always-already" immobilized in patterns of passivity and subservience. The complex ways these narratives are made to intersect, then, challenge their collective invisibility in dominant modes of literary representation.

Yet, disrupting hegemonic knowledge production requires more than just a mere textual re-inscription of the marginalized. When Yacine depicts Mohamed as refusing to fire because he recognizes similarities in the struggles of the Vietnamese, or when Alabama transforms into a Viet Cong rebel, the *political* nature of these individual shifts and fissures in subjecthood suggest *contextually-specific* costs and stakes at hand. The cross-cultural solidarities being fashioned are reflective of similar political changes in the discourse, movements, organizations, and social structures of colonized populations engaging in concerted decolonization efforts which, as Édouard Glissant describes, involves "the creativity of marginalized peoples who today confront the ideal of transparent universality, imposed by the West, with secretive and multiple manifestations of Diversity."<sup>34</sup> Consider again how the narratives of the five characters discussed are no less than ideologically and politically, if not polemically, transformative: from soldier to communist (Henri Martin), from shepherd to anti-war pacifist (Mohamed), from Black Panther to Viet Cong fighter (Alabama), from rickshaw coolie to revolutionary martyr (Troï), and from peasant to politician (Ho Chi Minh). Taken together, the intersecting nature of these narratives demonstrates how the North African, Vietnamese, African-American, and French contexts are not disparate social locations separated irreconcilably by gulfs in culture, language, space, and time. Rather, the solidarities Yacine constructs (Algerian/Vietnamese, African-American/Vietnamese, Venezuelan/Vietnamese, among others) are shown to emerge from specific socio-political conditions endured by marginalized groups, demonstrating their capacity to engage in complex, consequential, and contextually-specific political mobilizations across cultural lines.

The genealogies of characters such as Henri Martin, Mohamed, Alabama, Ho Chi Minh, and Troï traced in *L'Homme* are also expressive of what Edward Said calls “individual consciousness,” which is “a worldly self-situating, a sensitive response to the dominant culture” that “is not naturally and easily a mere child of culture, but a historical and social actor in it.”<sup>35</sup> In the postcolonial North African context, such a dynamic archive of transculturalism and resistive marginality that *L'Homme* represents is an epistemic corrective written for purposes of historical posterity, preserving the individual consciousness of those that dominant history has neglected to confer visibility to. Together, they challenge the universalizing narrative of colonial historicism and Euro-centric diffusionism—the “colonizer’s model of the world”<sup>36</sup>—in which Third World populations are situated as anachronistic, provincial, and auxiliary to a rapidly progressing, intellectually-elevated, and geographically-centered Europe. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that because European colonial historicism enforces a radical temporal and geopolitical re-structuring of history, which relegates Third World populations to a distant historical past, anticolonial narratives contest the centrality of Europe as singular subject of the historical present:

Twentieth-century anticolonial democratic demands for self-rule, on the contrary, harped insistently on a “now” as the temporal horizon of action. From about the time of First World War to the decolonization movements of the fifties and sixties, anticolonial nationalisms were predicated on this urgency of the “now.” Historicism has not disappeared from the world, but its “not yet” exists today in tension with this global insistence on the “now” that marks all popular movements toward democracy.<sup>37</sup>

The stories in *L'Homme* thus serve to produce an enduring literary, political, and historical archive blended from both history and fiction, where textual fiction is able to stake a claim to authenticity in the same way that testimony’s claim to objective historical truth has always done.<sup>38</sup> Yacine’s *L'Homme* is one of many creative writings of the postcolonial generation that offers new literary representations of the colonized, imagining counter-memories and alternative political possibilities, social communities, and individual consciousness. *L'Homme*’s archive would be what Chakrabarty describes as the “peasants, tribals, semi- or unskilled industrial workers in non-Western cities, men and women from the subordinate social groups—in short, the subaltern classes of the



third world.”<sup>39</sup> *L’Homme* merges history and fiction to produce a kind of mythic literary, political, and historical archive of alternative possibilities that demands entry into the *here and now*. If we consider Saidiya Hartman’s reflection that “myth is the threshold of history,”<sup>40</sup> and if we also return to Spivak’s averment that the subaltern is “the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic,”<sup>41</sup> we may consider how *L’Homme* participates in the genesis of a mythical, circuited, and vibrant historical *present* and the *here and now*, comprised of subaltern Third World subjects who refuse to be consigned to the European civilizational past and whose presence destabilizes the colonial world order and its offers of gift-giving civilizationism.

I also wish to suggest that the narrative co-optation in *L’Homme* works not to reify categories of colonizer-colonized, present-past, and global-local, but to complicate these strict binaries. Yacine furnishes narratives of marginalized groups not only to disrupt their literary invisibility in historical archives, but also to show how this invisibility has obscured complexities in colonial subjecthood. Yacine illustrates textually that the marginalized subject is epistemologically mobile in navigating fields of social relations and power. For example, while characters like Mohamed and Face de Ramadhan are “always-already interpellated” as colonized, ethnic bodies, a designation that Face de Ramadhan futilely seeks to shed their agentic mobilities suggest a more complex picture. As part of the French colonial army, they are brought to Indochina to participate in colonial efforts on the international arena. The local, colonized subject crosses cultural and territorial boundaries to enter upon the global stage—the geopolitical domain of the colonizer. The local (inscribed as colonized, native, ethnic, Third World) is thus *subtended* to the global (inscribed as colonizer, cosmopolitan, European, Western) by its participation in colonialism’s world-making project.

This spatial trespass is also a trespass that reshapes the meanings and roles of colonial subjecthood. While still subordinate to colonialism’s hegemony and its joust for power (to return to Spivak’s caveat), the now-global colonized subject is spatially and geopolitically untethered from its native land and acquires new subject-positions upon being invited to participate on the global frontier. Face de Ramadhan’s ambitions compel him to engage in victimizing acts, from being complicit in the torture of a Vietnamese rebel to assaulting a young Troï, which complicates assumptions of the colonized subject as positionally powerless. Conversely, acting on the global stage may produce dynamic meanings in

colonial subjecthood: Face de Ramadhan's actions spark a chain of events that later leads Troï, as a young communist, to take up the communist cause.

Mohamed's narrative follows a similar local-global trespassing but with different ramifications: Where Face de Ramadhan sees abhorrent difference, Mohamed recognizes as kinship, solidarity, and pride, suggesting that lateral interactions between globally positioned colonized subjects further trouble the local-global divide and encourage the genesis of new positionalities. Even though Mohamed remains a colonized subject, albeit mobilized onto the global stage, he refuses to abide by these disciplinary ordinances, sees only similarity amidst difference upon realizing the Vietnamese are not so different from his own people, and crosses a forbidden threshold to challenge and refashion his colonized status of his own volition. For Alabama, Yacine materializes the inconstancy in the local-global divide in a scene where he assumes the dual role of soldier and errand boy in Vietnam. Alabama's superiors employ infantilizing language to order him around: "Hé, boy! Apporte-nous / Des crabes sautés au citron / Et de la bière fraîche / Hé, boy! / Apporte aussi du caviar."<sup>42</sup> ("Hey, boy! Bring us / Sautéed crabs with lemon / And fresh beer / Hey, boy! / Bring us also some caviar.") Alabama's social location is marked by the global, as a soldier serving in U.S.-occupied Vietnam, and the local, as being treated condescendingly as an errand boy invokes the U.S. Jim Crow-era. Alabama's eventual transformation into a Viet Cong rebel further evidences textually how lateral interactions between marginalized subjects on the global stage may result in agentic resistance against hegemonic structures of power.

From the perspective of postcolonial literary criticism, European humanistic discourse often presents itself as the true "subject" of historical and intellectual knowledge production, while ethnic, colonized, and Third World populations are marked as never capable of transcending the crippling unremarkability and provincial origins of their 'object' status. Postcolonial feminist Chandra Talpade Mohanty describes this as "a colonialist discourse that exercises a very specific power in defining, coding, and maintaining existing First/Third World connections" and as "the underlying anthropomorphism and ethnocentrism that constitute a hegemonic humanistic problematic that repeatedly confirms and legitimates (Western) man's centrality."<sup>43</sup> In *L'Homme*, Mohamed transgresses cultural and geopolitical gulfs and asserts a new individual consciousness rooted in an anticolonial, transcultural politics. This is also

seen in the transformations of characters like Ho Chi Minh and Troï—a narrative strategy Yacine employs to conduct a new counter-literature that centers Third World subjects as arbitrators of their own destinies.

Yacine also draws upon characters like Mohamed and Alabama to make an interesting, if not provocative, connection. By complicating the local-global divide and by linking the local and colonial with the global and modern, Yacine shows how the invisible labor of colonized populations has enabled and fueled European colonial expansionism and Western modernism. Consider again how in *L'Homme*, Mohamed and Face de Ramadhan are recruited to fight in Indochina, mirroring the similar local-to-global mobility undertaken by natives from French colonies in Africa conscripted to fight for France in global colonial ventures. Consider also how Alabama's service in Vietnam is conditioned by promises of civil liberties. When his superior Capitaine Supermac reminds him of this, Alabama responds unflinchingly with, "Le Noir contre le Jaune / Pour un Blanc qui voit Rouge"<sup>44</sup> ("Black against Yellow" / For a White who sees Red"), implying that the violences of marginalization and laboring of minorities in the U.S. have always secured the political and economic interests of the dominant group. *L'Homme* narrativizes the industry of characters like Mohamed and Alabama, whose stories are often written out of dominant literary production but whose invisible laboring is vital in ushering in the global and the modern. *L'Homme* charts a new subaltern historiography, in which its phenomenological moments of transcultural kinship and anticolonial revolution are less noteworthy than its work to visibilize social actors whose narratives have historically been absent or silenced, expanding epistemic possibilities for the marginalized subject to be creatively re-imagined and re-written into literary discourse.

## POLITICS, LANGUAGE, AND POSTCOLONIAL NATIONHOOD IN ALGERIA

*L'Homme*'s themes of transcultural kinship and anti-colonial revolution highlight a common quest for national liberation and political sovereignty. Yet, solely lauding the text for its literary quality of elucidating a subversive, liberatory poetics risks characterizing oppressed groups as an undifferentiated mass mired in perpetual subordination and resistance, divorced from particular and changing historical contexts. I thus

argue that *L'Homme* also engages in a political critique of contemporaneous social conditions and issues impacting Algerian society in the years after national liberation, given how Yacine only completed the first draft of *L'Homme* in 1969, several years *after* Algeria had achieved independence. Winifred Woodhull notes that “it seems especially inappropriate to read Algerian writing in terms of the supposed autonomy of aesthetic practices, particularly since that writing explicitly engages political debates in Algeria, challenging the reduction of national identity to a unity defined by religion or culture.”<sup>45</sup> Following Woodhull, instead of simply framing the text as a response to colonialism or as exceptional in its literary subversiveness, I read *L'Homme* as a contextually-specific political critique of how national liberation and the dismantling of French colonialism have not yet led to a reconciliation of the contradictions and pluralities still present in Algerian society, in particular how women’s issues, sexuality, language, culture, and religion configure into a new national politics. A reading of *L'Homme* is incomplete without locating its motifs of colonial and political imperialism as reflective of Yacine’s broader resolve to inculcate instructive lessons in Algerian national unity.

The relation between culture and nationhood is central in many of Yacine’s plays. Language, in particular, becomes a contested battleground in efforts to shape Algerian national unity. Boumediène Berrabah notes that because language in Algeria is “intimately linked to identity, political power and social mobility, [it] has become a controversial question and a bitter battlefield for competing ideologies and vested interests.”<sup>46</sup> And as Olivia C. Harrison notes, Yacine’s disjointed language use and legacy are reflective of broader language identity issues in Algeria:

It is an acute irony that the legacy of this iconic anticolonial writer should be part of the larger story of the fragmentation, by French colonial politics, of Algerian society into “*évolués*” (literally “evolved,” that is civilized, natives) and traditionalists, *françaisants*, *arabisants*, Berbers and Arabs. Even after Kateb’s posthumous canonization by the Algerian authorities, his work remains caught within categories created through colonial divide-and-rule policies.<sup>47</sup>

Multiple languages are used in Algeria, such as Algerian Arabic, literary Arabic, Tamazight, and French. There was often variance in the languages Yacine’s plays were composed in, translated into, performed in,

and later circulated as publication. For example, while *L'Homme* was first composed and performed in French and later translated into Arabic, it is currently available only in French in publication, as the Algerian Arabic version is lost to public access.<sup>48</sup> Yacine had also expressed reservation if he could ever produce a work entirely in literary or vernacular Arabic, as he would often write in French first before obtaining help translating into Arabic. While some of his plays were performed in literary Arabic, Yacine viewed it as “un arabe qui n'est compris que par une minorité de gens, de lettrés, comme le latin”<sup>49</sup> (“an Arabic understood only by a minority of people, by literates, much like Latin”) as it existed primarily in written form. He focused on producing theater in Algerian Arabic as it was the spoken language of quotidian life in Algeria. The Tamazight language was a more complex issue for him: “[Tamazight] a été étouffé depuis des millénaires [...] Mais elle existe, elle vit et elle s'appauvrit, alors qu'elle est la base de notre existence historique.”<sup>50</sup> (“[Tamazight] has been stifled for millennia. But it exists, it lives and it is impoverished, whilst it is the basis of our historical existence.”) While Yacine was a strong proponent of Tamazight and Amazigh culture, vigorous censorship from the pro-Arabization government meant that there were difficult restrictions in developing plays in Tamazight.

Yacine's own language fragmentation thus represents similar tensions and contradictions in the use of French, Arabic, and Tamazight that comprise the complex lingual fabric of Algerian postcolonial life. Reactions to his work remain varied in present-day Algeria: While Yacine is well-known for his debut novel *Nedjma*, he may be, as Harrison notes, “most commonly associated among young Arabic-speaking Algerians today with his controversial views on language and his affiliation with the Berberist movements.”<sup>51</sup> Due to the complexities of linguistic and ethno-cultural nationalisms impacting postcolonial Algeria, it is unclear if the legacy that Yacine had meant to sustain in his later career, that of an Algerian writer who produced cultural works for the vernacular-speaking public, had been successfully established upon his death in 1989.

Given Yacine's preoccupation with the politics of language, culture, and Algerian nationhood, he was thus staunchly opposed to pro-Arabization laws passed by the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), the ruling party post-independence. In 1962, the FLN instituted literary Arabic as the national language and primary language of instruction in public schools. Similar policies extended into the domains of bureaucratic governance, media, literary production, and higher education.

As the Algerian president Houari Boumediène proclaimed in 1965, “Sans la récupération de cet élément essentiel qu’est la langue nationale, nos efforts resteront vains, notre personnalité incomplète et notre entité un corps sans âme.”<sup>52</sup> (“Without the recovery of this essential element that is the national language, our efforts will remain in vain, our personality incomplete and our entity a body without a soul.”) The FLN linked literary Arabic, with its cultural and religious ties to the supranational Arabo-Islamic world, to a congenital Algerian national essence. Yacine’s turn to Vietnam thus coincided with his desire to seek new ways of consolidating Algerian national unity against the backdrop of what he perceived as the perilous tide of Arabo-Islamic nationalism espoused by the FLN instituting a monolithic model of nationhood.

In *L’Homme*, while Yacine suggests that the groundwork for an ideal Algeria already resides in Ho Chi Minh’s socialist Vietnam, he also indicates Vietnam as both triumphant exemplar *and* cautionary tale for Algeria by depicting what could happen to a nation torn apart by antagonistic political interests. For example, Yacine presents a character called Général Napalm, an irascible French colonial general whose name alludes to the French army’s practice of using U.S.-supplied napalm over Indochina, and whose death in the text amidst the colonial wars foreshadows the 1954 French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Yacine satirizes Napalm through humorous dialogue:

Allo! Colonel Ducolon? / Qu’est-ce que tu fous / En Algérie? / Si tu veux tes étoiles / Viens vite me rejoindre / Allo! Commandant de La Force? / Laisse tomber Madagascar / Viens vite, je t’attends / Ta femme t’embrasse / La mienne aussi.<sup>53</sup>

Hello! Colonel Ducolon? / What the heck are you doing / In Algeria? / If you want your stars / Come quickly and join me / Hello! Force Commander? / Leave Madagascar / Come quick, I am waiting for you / Your wife sends you a kiss / Mine too.

Général Napalm uses divide-and-rule strategies to gain control over Vietnam and curries favor with other generals through sweet talk and offering them flowers, suggesting that the conquest of Vietnam intersects with variable economic interests. In another scene memorable for its visuality in illustrating cultural imperialism, the characters of Buddha and Jesus Christ are taken hostage and pitted against one another in a boxing match. Christ is force-fed and surrounded by cheering



supporters, while the Buddha is emaciated, having been starved and mistreated. While Christ is mute and unresponsive, the Buddha speaks out against the injustice of the situation and sets himself ablaze. The Buddha's suicide mirrors that of the real-life Vietnamese monk Thích Quảng Đức, who set himself on fire on June 11, 1963 at a busy Saigon intersection in protest over colonial policies that repressed Buddhist religious practices in favor of Catholicism. The self-immolation of the Buddha in a consenting act of self-sacrifice before a silent Jesus Christ is undeniably a polemic image with strong political overtones, mirroring Troi's willingness for martyrdom and signaling the fracturing of Vietnam by interventionist practices.

Yacine also draws upon the American and Soviet obsession of the race to the moon. The characters Lancedalle and Jaunesonne (a parody of Lyndon B. Johnson) are astronauts in space. Two red planets are in the background, one occupied by the Mars (Marx) and Engels, and the other by Lunine (Lenin) and Staline (Stalin). They observe from afar as Lancedalle and Jaunesonne plant an American flag on the moon, symbolizing its conquest. Niquessonne (a parody of Richard Nixon and a linguistic play on a French expletive), whom Yacine depicts as a duplicitous architect of the Vietnam War, is then captured by the choir, who drops him in a casket, buries him alive under the White House, and reads him a list of American soldiers who died during the Vietnam War.

These narratives are conjoined to depict how Vietnamese national unity is threatened by divide-and-rule strategies by the extrinsic practices of colonial and cultural imperialism. Yacine invites comparison with the postcolonial Algerian context, by implying that Algerian national unity is threatened by *intrinsic* socio-cultural nationalisms that may ultimately fracture Algeria, a nation stubbornly resistant to homogeneous interpellations of nationhood. As he asserts, "l'arabisation, c'est imposer à un peuple une langue qui n'est pas la sienne, et donc combattre la sienne [...] L'Algérie arabo-islamique, c'est une Algérie contre elle-même."<sup>54</sup> ("Arabization is to force upon a people a language that is not theirs [...] An Arabo-Islamic Algeria is an Algeria against itself.")

*L'Homme's* textual function, in terms of attending to national issues specific to the Algerian context, is neither to propose a return to some primordial national origin nor to assume that a national politics solely based upon anti-colonialism and cultural conformity alone would sustain nation-building efforts. *L'Homme's* synchronal focus on Vietnam and other sites of resistance establishes the exact *opposite*: that a unified

national body is only possible by confronting and working through, instead of subsuming, the irreducible contradictions and tensions *within* a social polity as heterogeneous as Algeria. The play shows how divisions are created not only through extrinsic forces—French colonialism and U.S. military imperialism, for example—but also through interior elements, as seen by the fracturing of Vietnam into the communist North and U.S.-occupied South. *L'Homme* suggests, then, that Algeria's internal divisions are as much a continuity of the colonial legacy as they are reflective of the political and social costs incurred when a formerly colonized nation remains divided by antagonistic interests after national liberation, and that the momentum gained from an anti-colonial movement may not guarantee unity post-independence, especially if internal divisions are suppressed by monolithic models of nationhood.

I also wish to complicate and attend briefly to Yacine's idealist proposal in *L'Homme* of transcultural socialism as the basis for nation-building. Given how the Algerian government's brand of state socialism in present-day Algeria, more than 50 years after independence, has led to economic stagnation, a lack of export diversification by an over-reliance on the hydrocarbons industry, relative diplomatic isolation, and the establishment of a political autocracy, the Algeria of today may not completely cohere with Yacine's visions of a progressing Algeria. Further, the devastating Algerian Civil War of the 1990s, waged between the FLN and the fundamentalist Front Islamique du Salut (FIS), portends latent political and domestic uncertainties, indicating that *L'Homme's* message of socialist-transcultural solidarity characteristic of the decolonization era has yet to guarantee sustained economic, political, and social stability in present-day Algeria.

## CONCLUSION

Yacine ends *L'Homme* with a rousing scene. The choir mourns the death of their leader: "Ho Chi Minh, l'homme qui éclaire / L'homme que tout un peuple appelle / L'homme qui ne dort pas beaucoup / Il marche dans nos rêves / L'homme aux sandales de caoutchouc."<sup>55</sup> ("Ho Chi Minh, the man who enlightens / The man whom an entire people calls for / The man who does not sleep much / He walks in our dreams / The man in rubber sandals.") By closing the play with this scene, Yacine portrays Ho Chi Minh as a figure whose legacy strengthens beyond death. The play's title, *L'Homme aux sandales de caoutchouc*

(The Man in Rubber Sandals), contrasts the material simplicity and symbolic modesty of the eponymous figure in rubber sandals, Ho Chi Minh, with the momentous impact and legacy he left as founder of modern Vietnam, whose revolutionary politics against colonialism created new possibilities for postcolonial Vietnamese nationhood.

Throughout *L'Homme*, Yacine locates Vietnam as an important geopolitical terrain to transmit lessons in transcultural kinship and anticolonial revolution. By also mapping out an interconnected bridge of shared experiences, from Harlem and Paris to Hanoi and Saigon, the revolutionary experience accrues greater relevance in relation to similar sites brimming with anticolonial fervor. While I have argued that this narrative co-optation collapses particularities and differences, it also creates a subaltern archive preserving the agency of historically-marginalized groups, while also complicating homogeneous typologies of colonial subjecthood that depict Third World subjects as positionally powerless. I have also argued that Yacine presents Vietnam as both political exemplar to emulate and cautionary metaphor to bear in mind for Algeria towards forging a pluralistic national culture necessary for the formative survival of the North African republic. Far from framing the Vietnamese and other groups as acquiescent victims ensnared in repetitive patterns of colonial domination and civil strife, Yacine illustrates where differing narratives of resistance may instead be conjoined as teachable lessons in Algerian national unity. The narratives in *L'Homme* thus depict defiant colonized populations as social actors emerging from, to borrow Chakrabarty's words, the "imaginary waiting room of history"<sup>56</sup> to forge their own historical and political present.

## NOTES

1. Yacine, *L'Homme*, 253.
2. Gérard Faure, "Un écrivain entre deux cultures: biographie de Kateb Yacine," *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, no. 18 (1974): 68.
3. Arlette Casas, "Entretien avec Kateb Yacine," *Mots: Algérie en crise entre violence et identité*, no. 57 (1998): 103.
4. Faure, "Un écrivain," 68.
5. I am using the more culturally-appropriate and respectful terms 'Amazigh' and 'Imazighen' instead of 'Berber' to refer to the heterogeneous collection of ethno-cultural groups indigenous to the region of North-western

Africa whose primary identification is with Amazigh culture and the Tamazight language, although Amazigh communities often do speak some form of Arabic and may concomitantly or secondarily identify with Arabo-Islamic culture. The plural of ‘Amazigh’ is ‘Imazighen’ which is also the Tamazight word that the Imazighen use to refer collectively to themselves. While the term ‘Berber’ is widespread in scholarly work, literary publications, and popular imagination outside of North Africa, its use has been consistently rejected among the Imazighen themselves as it is considered a derogatory word of foreign origins (derived from the Greek word *barbaria*, meaning “land of the barbarians”).

6. Kateb Yacine, *Parce que c'est une femme, suivi de: La Kabina ou Dibya, Saout Ennissa, La voix des femmes, Louise Michel et la Nouvelle-Calédonie* (Paris: Éditions Des Femmes, 2004), 36.
7. Martin Thomas, “Intelligence and the Transition to the Algerian Police State: Reassessing French Colonial Security After the Sétif Uprising, 1945,” *Intelligence and National Security* 28, no. 3 (2013): 382.
8. Omar Mokhtar Chââlal, *Kateb Yacine l'homme libre* (Algiers: Casbah, 2003), 55–56.
9. See a collection of Yacine’s journalistic writings compiled in: *Minuit Passé de Douze Heures: Écrits journalistiques 1947–1989* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999), 50, 56–58.
10. Jean-Marc Martin du Theil, “Kateb Yacine: Ce que j’ai vu au Vietnam a été pour moi l’aube d’une renaissance,” *Les Lettres Françaises*, Avant-première, November 17, 1971.
11. Jacqueline Arnaud, *Recherches sur la littérature maghrébine de langue française: Le cas de Kateb Yacine, Volume 2* (Paris: Atelier National de Reproduction des Thèses, Université Lille III, 1982), 714.
12. Casas, “Entretien,” 99.
13. Pamela A. Pears, *Remnants of Empire in Algeria and Vietnam: Women, Words and War* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 37.
14. Yacine, *L’Homme*, 71.
15. *Ibid.*, 77.
16. *Ibid.*, 78.
17. Kateb Yacine, *Le Poète comme un boxeur: Entretiens 1958–1989* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994), 89–90.
18. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis Book XI* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 99.
19. Lacan, “The Seminar,” 99–100.
20. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 122.
21. Pears, “Remnants of Empire,” 43.
22. Yacine, *L’Homme*, 121.
23. *Ibid.*, 105.

24. Ibid., 188.
25. Ibid., 190.
26. Ibid., 198.
27. Ibid., 36.
28. Ibid., 214.
29. "Saigon Executes Youth for Plot on McNamara," *New York Times*, October 15, 1964, late edition. [http://www.nytimes.com/1964/10/15/saigon-executes-youth-for-plot-on-mcnamara.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/1964/10/15/saigon-executes-youth-for-plot-on-mcnamara.html?_r=0), accessed February 15, 2016.
30. Du Theil, "Kateb Yacine," 16.
31. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (New York: Routledge, 1996), 217.
32. Spivak, "Subaltern Studies," 217.
33. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review, 1971), 175–176.
34. Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 2.
35. Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 15.
36. J.M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1993), 10.
37. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 8.
38. Another Franco-Algerian literary text similar to Yacine's *L'Homme* that blends both history and fiction to produce an enduring historical/literary archive of subaltern consciousness is Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, La Fantasia* (*Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* in English) in which Djebar re-writes the nineteenth century French conquest of Algeria from the viewpoint of Algerian women revolutionaries, interspersed with actual historical and personal accounts.
39. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 8.
40. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 59–60.
41. Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," 217.
42. Yacine, *L'Homme*, 199–200.
43. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 41.
44. Yacine, *L'Homme*, 199.

45. Winifred Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb: Feminism, Decolonization, and Literatures* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 52.
46. Boumediène Berrabah, "Post-independence Algerian Linguistic Policy," *Research Journal in Organizational Psychology & Educational Studies* 2, no. 5 (2013): 271.
47. Olivia C. Harrison, *Transcolonial Maghreb: Imagining Palestine in the Era of Decolonization* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2015), 42.
48. Kateb Yacine, *L'œuvre en fragments*, ed. Jacqueline Arnaud (Paris: Sindbad, 1986), 29.
49. Yacine, *Le Poète*, 29.
50. *Ibid.*, 33.
51. Harrison, *Transcolonial Maghreb*, 42.
52. Arthur Doucy and Francis Monheim, *Les révolutions algériennes* (Paris: Fayard, 1971), 214.
53. Yacine, *L'Homme*, 87–88.
54. Yacine, *Le Poète*, 107.
55. Yacine, *L'Homme*, 284.
56. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 8.

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