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Hakim Abderrezak, *Ex-Centric Migrations: Europe and the Maghreb in Mediterranean Cinema, Literature, and Music*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. xiii + 266 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, filmography, discography, and index. \$35.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-2530-2075-8.

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In 2016, the world's migration crisis reached unprecedented proportions: over sixty-five million people have been forcibly displaced and 7500 fatalities occurred, including 4000 drownings in the Mediterranean Sea. How do we make sense of this humanitarian tragedy? Media reports shock us with statistics and images (which politicians exploit for their own purposes) while sociological studies probe the causes of migration. The richest, most nuanced and sympathetic representations of the migrant experience, however, as Hakim Abderrezak argues in *Ex-Centric Migrations*, are to be found in the artistic responses of literature, cinema, and song. Abderrezak offers a timely reflection on creative works from the past two decades that focus on migration in the Western Mediterranean, several of which depict crossing the sea itself. Abderrezak's study is pertinent to the current refugee crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East and can serve as a model for examining representations of migration and diaspora around the world.

Ex-Centric Migrations is rich and impassioned yet also playful. Thoroughly researched, it encompasses previous scholarship on migration and post-colonialism as well as on the novels, films, and songs in question. The author extends current research in original and creative ways. Scholars have predominantly examined literature and cinema by and about Tunisian, Algerian, and Moroccan immigrants and their descendants in France. Abderrezak is less preoccupied with how life is experienced in a European host country and turns his lens toward works that explore (e)migration away from, and even toward, the Maghreb. He uses "ex-centric" to refer to destinations other than metropolitan France (i.e., from France to the Maghreb or from the Maghreb to Spain). Ex-centric also refers to extralegal forms of travel, such as crossing the Mediterranean on a fishing boat or a rubber raft rather than by ferry. Abderrezak underscores that such crossings are not a new phenomenon. Centuries of migratory flux in the Mediterranean have formed a "clash of civilizations" mindset that economic globalization has exacerbated. He traces the evolution over the past decades of a political stance in France, Spain, and Italy hardened by Islamophobia and bolstered by a vast apparatus for protecting the borders of "Fortress Europe."

In his introduction, Abderrezak reveals that his family migrated to France from Morocco and acknowledges how his personal experiences have strengthened his empathy for the North African migrants depicted in the works he studies. He recounts how, at the age of seventeen in Melilla, a Spanish enclave in Morocco, he witnessed a police dog sniffing out a young man attempting to stow away on the ferry to Spain. "We saw the frightened teenager being taken away, gasping for air and sweating heavily" (p. 1). This was the first of several encounters for Abderrazek of "this type of chase on both sides of the Strait of Gibraltar" (p. 1). Throughout the book, he guides and encourages readers to see through the eyes of migrants while also offering detailed factual information on the dangers of

clandestine migration. The introduction, for example, features a full-page map indicating the deaths of “irregular” immigrants trying to enter Europe from 2006 to 2009. Abderrezak’s clearly stated point of view is that migration is “a right guaranteed by international law” (p. x) and exercising that right should not imperil thousands of lives. He argues that the tightening of legal migration from North Africa to Europe from the 1980s to the early 1990s “shifted the image of the Maghrebi migrant from guest worker to suspect alien” (p. 15), and currently the dominant political discourse portrays clandestine and illegal immigrants as “criminals, economic opportunists or traitors” (p. 21). In sharp contrast, the writers, filmmakers, and singers he studies “compel us to think [about clandestine immigration] in human terms” (p. 11). Their “counternarratives” serve to “decriminalize and rehumanize the figure of the clandestine” (p. 10). The works examined in *Ex-Centric Migrations* are primarily best-selling books, popular albums, and blockbuster films. Their message of compassion for struggling migrants resonates with a mass public. And yet, political and public discourse belies a fear and hatred for Muslim migrants as Abderrazek shows in his evaluation of the use of terms such as “migrants,” “refugees,” “illegal,” “unauthorized,” and “clandestine.”

Abderrazek’s clever and insightful philological analysis, delving into English and the languages surrounding the Mediterranean, is in fact one of the many strengths he brings to bear on his subject. He begins by comparing the names given to the Mediterranean Sea as well as their literal translations: for the Greeks it is “the sea over by us,” for the Romans it is “our sea,” while the Arabs call it, less possessively, the “white sea of the middle.” Abderrazek cautions against describing migration in terms of “waves, flux, currents, human tide, spilling over” (p. 13) because of their negative connotations. He subtly argues that: “A linguistic lens reveals phonetic and/or transliteration proximity between the Arabic words *hriq* or *harga* (burning), *harragas* (clandestine migrants), *hogra* (humiliation), and *Hijra* (the emigration of the Prophet Muhammad and the original sacred Muslim community or *Ummah*), which in turn feeds into a historical, social, and religious legitimization of human migration in Islam-based cultures” (p. 13).

The focus of the first chapter is Ismaël Ferroukhi’s 2004 film *Le Grand Voyage* about a Muslim father who forcefully enlists his son’s help in making the pilgrimage from France to Mecca by car. Abderrezak aptly notes that the journey takes place “outside the traditional Maghrebi migratory pole,” since it is neither about an immigrant making his way northward to France, nor about his child’s experience in the host country. Indeed, almost no time or space is devoted to France. Rather the film concentrates on how the son emerges from that locus. Abderrazek places the film in the context of the public debate on French national identity that questions the compatibility of Islamic values with secularism and which had the effect of making Muslims feel “out of place” (p. 25). He notes that Ferroukhi is depicting a reverse migration in which the father compels his son to move away from the influence of France and toward his Islamic and Arab roots: “the old man’s project [is] to carry his son away from a French *cit * (inner city) and from *francit * (Frenchness) as well as to establish for R da a symbolic link with Arabness” (p. 32). There is rich wordplay throughout the chapter, starting with its title “Disimmigration,” inspired by the neologistically titled *Immigrances*, a collection of essays on immigration in France.[1] Abderrezak’s explicit aim is to “reorient scholarly vocabulary with neologisms” (p. 19) while “combining Western scholarship with Arab and Muslim social, linguistic, and religious specificities” (p. 19). So, for example, when the father forces his son to abandon cigarettes, alcohol, cell phone, and girlfriend, Abderrezak qualifies it as “detoxifying,” or, in French, *d soxydant*, pointing out that it sounds like *d s-occident*. According to Abderrezak, as the father pushes his son eastward, he is “symbolically de-Westernizing” him (p. 33); he “disorients” his son to “re-Orient” him (p. 52). In the end, the father hopes that his son will emerge from the pilgrimage *d tach * (untied) and *d tach * (unstained) (p. 36). Abderrezak argues that in “*derouting* the typical migratory scheme” the father “deroots” it through his choice of Mecca as a final destination (p. 36). This original reading of the film brings out its richness as a “Beur” counternarrative that redresses “misconceptions of Islam deepened by 9/11” and valorizes the * migr *’s attachment to his roots.

The second chapter, “Burning the Sea: Clandestine Migration across the Mediterranean in Francophone Moroccan Illiterature,” coins a neologism by combining “illegal” and “literature” to describe a body of work that is preoccupied with the portrayal of clandestine migration. The novels include Binebine’s *Cannibales* (1999), Elalamy’s *Les Clandestins* (2001), and Ben Jelloun’s *Partir* (2006). The author associates “illiterature” with “ill-ness,” *île* (island) literature, *il-* (he) literature, mainly written by men about a male-dominated topic, and “illiterate-ture,” reflecting the illiteracy of many migrants (p. 57). This literature is booming, particularly in Spain, as a reaction against and as an alternative to “monolithic narratives in mass media and politics concerning clandestine migration” (p. 58). In Western media, *harragas* (migrants crossing the sea) are depicted as intruders menacing European security, and the dominant discourse focuses on preventing people from coming in. Moroccan media, on the other hand, tends to suppress news of clandestine emigration and to avoid mention of root causes such as “feeling[s] of boredom due to lack of employment and social infrastructure” (p. 75). When referring to migration Abderrezak uses the Arabic term, *hriq* (burning), and coins the term “leavism” to describe “the insatiable desire to cross the sea,” evoking the “multilayered reality” of migration as a key theme tying these novels together. Abderrezak establishes that they effectively reveal how exodus is “shaped and dictated by global inequalities” (p. 75) while they work to “rehumaniz[e] the dehumanized” (p. 81).

Chapter three, “Southward Road Narratives,” analyses two films from the mid-2000s depicting clandestine journeys of French citizens to Algeria: Djamel Bensalah’s comedy *Il était une fois dans l’oued* (2005) and Tony Gatlif’s diasporic road movie *Exils* (2004). Abderrezak proposes to “scrutinize the impacts of the global on the Maghreb through the prism of ‘return’ or rather, ‘reverse’ migration” (p. 90). He once again employs neologisms: “glocal” refers to “local ways of dealing with globalized practices and products” and “Maghrobal” indicates the unique quality of the Maghreb in a global sphere. Bensalah’s film offers a “playful inversion of typical accounts of migration” (p. 91) through its depiction of Johnny LeClerc, a white, blond French convert to Islam who stows away on a ship to Algeria, his imaginary homeland. Abderrezak labels the film a “Couscous Western,” since its title is taken from Sergio Leone’s famous “Spaghetti Western” *Il était une fois dans l’ouest*, switching out “ouest” (west) with the Arabic “oued” (*wadi*). Abderrezak painstakingly analyzes film and its “questioning of notions of authenticity, belief and truth” (p. 99) before concluding that Bensalah’s position as a filmmaker “remains ambiguous,” and the role reversal between Algerian immigrant and French host “remains mere social comedy, mockery without critique” (p. 97). Gatlif’s film follows the journey, on foot, from France to Algeria by Naïma, the daughter of a Harki (Algerian soldier who fought for France) and Zano, of Roma descent and the son of Pieds-Noirs. The protagonists engage in what Abderrezak calls “identarian tourism” (p. 102) bringing back souvenirs “for the psyche” (p. 102)—rather than knickknacks—that help them overcome the trauma their uprootedness has caused them. Highlights among the many original readings in this chapter include the critique of Gatlif’s portrayal of female characters and the intratextual analysis of the film’s music.

Music takes center stage in the following chapter exploring Manu Chao’s album “Clandestino” (1998), Chambao’s song “Papeles mojados” (2008), and several albums of Raï’n’b music from France (2004–09). Abderrezak maintains that these works nostalgically fashion the Maghreb as a “New Eldorado,” often with “clichéd imagery” that feeds into common stereotypes such as the warmth of the Maghreb versus the chill of France (p. 127). He underscores how these works tend to discourage migration northward, such as this plea in a song about clandestine migrants in the Strait of Gibraltar: “Dear brothers...let us stay in Algeria / Overseas one loses oneself / There one suffers / And one is discriminated against” (p. 125). Abderrezak analyzes how listeners are encouraged to identify with the migrants, to “put [themselves] in their shoes” (p. 140) for “we could all be haragas” (p. 144). This groundbreaking chapter fills a gap in musical criticism that has been largely neglected by scholars of Maghrebi migration.

Ex-Centric Migrations returns to film in the fifth chapter, “Europe Bound Shooting ‘Illegals’ at Sea.” Abderrezak summarizes the causes of Maghrebi migration, referencing the Arab spring, the Jasmine

Revolution in Tunisia, and how citizens feel about global injustice and the frustrating situation at home. He draws a stark contrast between the reaction of Italian politicians—"let's put them back on the boats" (p. 146)—with Pope Francis's condemnation of the wealthy for their insensitivity to the pain of people seeking a better life during his visit to Lampedusa. In the mid-to-late 2000s, filmmakers stopped depicting northward migration by ferry and began to represent the tragedy of clandestine crossings on a fragile *patera*, for example *Harragas* (2009) by Merzak Allouache, *Bled Number One* (2006) by Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche, *Harraga Blues* (2012) by Moussa Haddad, *L'enfant endormi* (2004) by Yasmine Kassari, and *Visa* (2004) by Ibrahim Letaïef. Abderrezak fruitfully explores key questions raised by these films: what is gained or lost by leaving and how individuals and communities cope when left behind. He evaluates how effectively the films portray the nefarious effects of the global system with its rigid borders and structural inequalities and whether they succeed in eliciting the compassion of viewers for victims of the system.

Abderrezak puts an original twist on the theme of return migration in his final chapter "Heading Home: Post-mortem Road Narratives" by exploring the burials of Maghrebi immigrants: Houda Rouane's novel *Pieds-blancs* (2006) and Hassan Legzouli's film *Ten'ja* (2004). There are only two exclusively Muslim cemeteries in France, established in 1937 in Bobigny and in 2012 in Strasbourg, causing many Maghrebis to consider repatriating the bodies of dead relatives to the *bled* (homeland), even if they themselves have few attachments to people or property there. Abderrezak labels this final return (or reverse migration) "methical" (p. 197), that is to say both mythical and ethical, noting that "the return home...is finally undertaken because it is lived as the only ethical option even if, and well after, it has become a myth for an entire migrant community abroad" (p. 196).

The conclusion circles back to the introduction, revisiting the signification of the Mediterranean Sea itself: "White Sea of the Middle" or "Wide Sea to Meddle In"? This geographical space, Abderrezak argues, is not only a site of restriction, but also one of creativity (p. 223). While governments are preoccupied with "control, identity and security" (p. 216), writers, filmmakers and singers are countering with nuanced representations of the needs and desires of migrants. Through fiction we can "imagine the (im)possible" (p. 215, citing Mehta), "imagine new social configurations" (p. 215, citing Thomas) and "influence and preempt reality" (p. 215). As *Ex-Centric Migrations* illustrates, for people of Maghrebi origin living in Europe, the feelings of exile, nostalgia, "cultural disbelonging," and the "resulting identitarian quest" (p. 214) can lead them to idealize the *bled* or push them to reappropriate identity and heritage in positive ways. As Abderrezak writes, "The White Middle Sea can be a space where old cultural ties can be rekindled, different pathways can be attempted, and a new conception of the region can be explored" (p. 223). He also proposes extending research to include creative works by Maghrebi immigrants in places outside Mediterranean Europe (e.g., Holland, Belgium, Germany, Canada, or the U.S.), by sub-Saharan clandestine migrants in the Maghreb, or by French and Spanish nationals who migrate to Morocco, fleeing unemployment back home or retiring to a less expensive, warmer place.

Ex-Centric Migrations is crucial reading for scholars and students of contemporary Maghrebi, French, and Spanish literatures and cultures. It breaks new ground by encompassing the literature, film, and music of "return migration" and examining the trajectories of Maghrebi migration outside France. Abderrezak also supports future research by providing a rich bibliography, filmography, and discography (although it would have been preferable to separate primary and secondary sources). Through his own creative approach to criticism and his subtle analysis of a wide variety of cultural production, Abderrezak argues convincingly that, if artists can imagine protection for migrants and free movement beyond borders and protection, these are worthwhile goals, not utopian fantasies.

NOTE

[1] Benjamin Stora and Émile Temime, *Immigrances: L'immigration en France au XX^e siècle* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2007).

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