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Modernity in question: retrieving imaginaries of the transcontinental Mediterranean

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Modernity in Question: Retrieving Imaginaries of the Transcontinental Mediterranean

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the Requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

by

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2009
The Dissertation of Edwige Tamalet is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2009
In Memory of my Father
Francis Tamalet
(1948-2008)

Диярга
күзімнің жарылыма, жүрекімнің дұрсілімге
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Chapter 2, in part, has appeared as “Between nostalgia and desire: L’Ecole d’Alger’s transnational identifications and the case for a Mediterranean relation.” International

The author of this dissertation was the sole author of this material.


Two of the texts addressed in chapter 3- “Saint Stéphane Mallarmé,” La Tunisie Française Littéraire (21 Mars 1941) and Armand Guibert, Jean Amrouche (1906-1962) par un témoin de sa vie- were procured from the Fonds Roblés- Patrimoine Méditerranéen at the Université Paul Valéry- Montpellier III, France.
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Modernity in Question:
Retrieving Imaginaries of the Transcontinental Mediterranean

by
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Doctor of Philosophy in Literature
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Professor Winifred Woodhull, Chair

This project focuses on submerged utopias of the Mediterranean crucible in the imaginative work of colonial and postcolonial authors from the Maghreb (and related space of Gibraltar) throughout the twentieth century. The authors discussed in this project have employed literary creation as a vector of resistance to fixed representations of subjectivity reliant on coercive national frameworks marked by the colonial experience. Albert Camus, Gabriel Audisio, Jean El Mouhoub Amrouche, Tahar Bekri, Trino Cruz, and painter Ahmed Ben Yessef have conceptualized a transnational, often mythical space of the Mediterranean with its distinctive mythology and historical dynamics, which displaces the Eurocentric hegemony of the former
colonial center from a cultural, political, and aesthetic point of view. Through their articulation of transcultural representations of the region, they have taken to task the usual division of the space of the sea into two distinct and irreconcilable civilizational models. It is on their literary, imaginary strategic responses to the imposition of Western modernity in a Mediterranean context that this project focuses. My purpose is thus two-fold. I reinscribe the space of the Maghreb in a Mediterranean backdrop while stressing the relevance of a transnational approach to the investigation of the region’s plural cultural landscape and of its long-standing history of contact and exchange with a variety of locations on both shores of the sea. As well, I investigate the ways in which these representations take to task the Eurocentric dominant historical framing of the region as foil to (and point of origin of) European modernity and explore the resonances of concepts of vernacular modernities, here predicated on alternative Mediterranean identifications, in relation to the space of the Maghreb.
Introduction

« Sur la place d’El Boramar
Tes Yeux
La nuit aux chants du condor
Scrutent la traversée du silence
Flute de Pan Lune levant l’ancre
C’est la fête des amarres Appel des Andes. »

[On El Boramar Square
Your eyes
The night filled with condor songs
Watch the crossing of silence
Pan flute, the moon weighs anchor
It is a festival of moorings
A call from the Andes.] ¹

Tahar Bekri, *Le chant du Roi Errant*
[The Song of the Wandering King]*
XXVII

Thus begins the 27th section of Tunisian poet Tahar Bekri’s “D’où viens-tu, lumière?.” In this cycle of poems, Bekri reinvents the Mediterranean “continent of the sea” as a space of wandering permeated with the memory of various poetic figures in an original Mediterranean genealogy open onto the world (here, the Andes). The lines are accompanied by a footnote, in which the poet explains his choice of this specific Mediterranean locale: ““El Boramar” (Bord de mer) est une petite place dans la ville Catalane, Collioure, où se trouve une tour ancienne construite par les Arabes” [El Boramar (Seashore [Square]) is a small square in the Catalanian town of Collioure where one can find an ancient tower built by the Arabs] (45). This “ancient tower,”

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the French, the Italian, and the Spanish are mine throughout the dissertation.
renamed “Torre de la Guardia” after its incorporation into a 16th-century defensive fort on the French-Spanish border, was originally built during the Arab occupation of the town in A.D. 740 and embodies through its tumultuous history of belonging the dynamics of interactions and contestations that have underlain the history of the Mediterranean. This small French Catalan fishing community, located a mere 40 kilometers from the village where I grew up, has since gained international fame as the object of chief fauvist paintings by artists such as Matisse and Derain. However, it is an older past that Bekri is recovering here, a repressed past, since the official visitor’s history guide to the village lists conquests by the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Greeks, and the Spanish, but never by the Arabs. This past bears witness to the hybrid Mediterranean character of the region, one of multiple, multi-directional crossings of ideas, styles, religions, and thinkers that mapped out the ancient and medieval Mediterranean as a space of exchange and mutual enrichment. Such a history, however, remains frustratingly peripheral as the resistance of the Office du Tourisme of Collioure to acknowledge the Arab past of the town shows, thereby underscoring the enduring authority of dominant historical framings of the “Mediterranean” in terms of a monolithic, fixed identity marked by diachronic continuity and inescapable genealogy (the Mediterranean as the cradle of civilization; as the birthplace of philosophy and democracy- in a word, as the birthplace of the rationality underlying European modernity and validating its colonial efforts and its ensuing dissemination of hierarchies and inequalities on the global level). This theoretical construction of the Mediterranean contact zone, on which current-day definitions of the southern borders
of Europe rest, has been intimately intertwined with the development of a modernity, in Iain Chambers’ words, “nationalist in its form and imperialist in its reach” (Chambers 15). As colonial power relations over-determined representations of the Mediterranean in the modern period, the region was imagined as divided between two incommensurable spaces and associated civilizational models (the Northern shore, Christian and European, and the Southern one, Muslim and fundamentally non-Western, although, recently, another divide between the former Eastern bloc and its Western counterpart has emerged to complicate this framework), a configuration which obliterated a long history of connections and cooperation between the two. It is these very multifarious connections disrupting the North vs. South, Europe vs. Africa dyads that this project is interested in retrieving.

Maghrebi critics and authors have emphasized the plural, polyphonic quality of the region’s culture as they have revealed alternative, imaginary margin-to-margin circuits of affiliation that have displaced the cultural primacy of the French metropole. Such reading of the region’s history has been fundamental to early conceptions of North African identities and cultures. Major authors such as Assia Djebar, Nabile Farès, and Tahar Ben Jelloun have deconstructed the France/North Africa dyad in their writings, striving to multiply connections between Maghrebi culture as a whole and other Mediterranean traditions.\(^2\) In addition, influential postcolonial Maghrebi

\(^2\) For a discussion of these efforts, see especially Winifred Woodhull, “Postcolonial Thought and Culture in Francophone North Africa;” Réda Bensmaia, “Media-terranean, or between Borders: Nabile Farès’s Un Passager de l’Occident.” Woodhull convincingly argues that “colonial relationships deeply structure French and Francophone Studies to this day… In the age of transnationalism, it seems more fruitful to shift our sights and to look at both minoritarian writing’s relations to an array of
criticism of the past twenty-five years has set out to configure North African culture as distinct from both the French colonial model and later state-sponsored configurations of the Maghreb as exclusively Arab, Arabic-speaking, and Muslim. Works such as Abdelkebir Khatibi’s *Maghreb Pluriel* (1983), for instance, through the consideration of linguistic diversity in North Africa, moved away from both colonial and Arab-Islamic nationalist frameworks to emphasize the residual Mediterranean cultural elements underlying Maghrebi culture, thereby bringing to the fore the distinctive historical intermingling of influences in the area: “a mosaic of *interlangues* between the oral and the written, between the national and the extranational or the transnational” (Khatibi *Figures de l’Etranger* 204; qtd in Woodhull *Transfigurations of the Maghreb* X). Khatibi’s conception fruitfully presented the Maghreb as a variegated amalgam of cultures resulting from various waves of conquests and occupations. Such a paradigm can profitably be extended to the whole Mediterranean, an effort that would underscore the dynamics of exchange and communication mentioned by Khatibi, which tied the Maghreb to a variety of locations throughout the region during successive colonial experiences prior to French colonization- the Roman, Arab, Ottoman conquests, but also the conquest of Spain and parts of Southern Europe by the Arabs and certain Berber groups. The numerous rewritings of

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3 Khatibi’s concept of *bi-langue* [bi-language] partakes of the effort to retrieve the plural heritage of Maghrebi culture. Through *bi-langue*, Khatibi shifts the focus onto the spaces of incommensurability (and therefore hospitality) intrinsic to every language. Univocal definitions of identity are destabilized as subversive, alternative genealogies are excavated and integrated into the cultural map of the region. The rigid opposition between colonial/Western influence and Arab/Islamic tradition takes a back seat to the internal instability of Maghrebi identity, which Khatibi locates in the intersection of several distinct traditions perceptible in the enduring linguistic diversity of the Maghreb.
mythical Al-Andalus (the seven century-long Arab rule over Southern Europe) by authors as diverse as Driss Chraïbi, Rachid Boudjedra, and Assia Djebar testify to the attraction of histories of cooperation in the region for Maghrebi literary imaginaries. Moreover, recent North African immigrants to Italy and Spain have adopted local languages as their literary idiom, thereby calling into question the centrality of French as the only alternative to Arabic for North African authors (e.g., Mohsen Melliti, Amarra Lakhous write in Italian; Larbi El Harti, Ahmed el Gamoun in Spanish; Najat El Hachmi and Laila Karrouch in Catalan).  

Restoring the Maghreb to its historical complexity would profitably complicate dominant interpretive frames in the field of Francophone Postcolonial Studies, which only construe the former North African colonies either from a single national perspective (reading Moroccan, Algerian, or Tunisian texts in isolation) or at best, as part of a France-Maghreb nexus that restricts the global relevance of the region to its indentured relation to its former metropole. The implementation and enforcement of French as the colonial language in the North African colonies ensured that generations of authors, regardless of their original languages and cultures, would be educated in the European tradition of the metropole, causing what Albert Memmi called a “drame linguistique” for native authors.  

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4 See for instance: Larbi el Harti, *Después de Tanger* [After Tangier]; Najat El Hachmi, *Jo també Soc Catalana* [I too am Catalan]; Leila Karrouch, *De Nador a Vic* [From Nador to Vic]; Ahmed El Gamoun, “La Atlántida” [Atlantis]; Ahmed Ararou, “Rickiem” and “Tabanxi;” Mohsen Melliti Pantanella; Amarra Lakhous, *Scontro di Civilta per un Ascensore a Piazza Vittore* [Clash of Civilizations around an Elevator in Piazza Vittore].

5 In *Portrait du Colonisateur, Portrait du Colonisé* [The Colonizer and the Colonized], Memmi argues that “in short, colonial bilingualism is neither a form of diglossia, where a popular idiom and a pure language coexist, which both belong to the same realm of affect, nor simply a polyglottal blessing...; it is a linguistic drama” [in the original French: “En bref, le bilinguisme colonial n'est ni une diglossie, où...”].
liminal position at the point of juncture of two cultures and linguistic traditions has been the focus of most foundational criticism of Maghrebi literature and it seems that Francophone Postcolonial Studies have thus far failed to produce hermeneutic paradigms that would do justice to the complex genealogy of Maghrebi literature and culture. Therefore, in keeping with the history of the region, I contend that it seems more crucial than ever to disengage the space of the Maghreb from this one-to-one relation to France and its colonial hegemony, and to reinscribe it on the map of global modernity as an autonomous, multifarious space whose history would not be restricted to the 130 years of French domination.

The Mediterranean as an asymptotic concept

This dissertation considers the space of the Mediterranean in the light of the infinite imbrications, translations, and overlaps connecting its diverse cultures, which make it a key space for the study of transnational interactions and contestations between various traditions and spaces. Following a decentered logic of multiple, non-coextensive experiences and reinscriptions, I endeavor to reveal the Mediterranean in its ever-changing dynamics. Subverting conceptions of “place” as a stable, distinctly localized reference, the Mediterranean rather appears as what Michel de Certeau termed “space:” “a practice place,” by which he means a place determined by “the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different

coexistent un idiome populaire et une langue de puriste, appartenant tous les deux au même univers affectif, ni une simple richesse polyglotte...; c'est un drame linguistique”) (125).
conventions." In this sense, the “space” of the Mediterranean is therefore performatively reinvented through the history of the human and cultural movements that contextualize it both spatially and chronologically as an “itinerary,” a space of mobility and creativity. The term “Mediterranean” as a concept encompassing multiple historical, social, linguistic, racial, and religious realities must then leave room for the consideration of impermanence, of an inherent imaginative dynamics at work at the core of the notion. If one is to use the denomination “Mediterranean” as a heuristic category, a lens through which to apprehend and, possibly, reinterpret the conflicting relations between its two shores, one is to embrace its double, irreconcilable nature as a space marked by ambivalence and discrepancy. This space-in-movement attracted the interest of many critics, who have taken to task the Southward-looking dominant historical framing of the “Mediterranean.” Several difficulties await any epistemological inquiry into the contradictions of the Mediterranean. The necessity to conceive concurrently of the region’s unity and heterogeneity, of its reality and mythical nature places any investigation under the sign of paradox, even aporia. However, despite its resistance to fixed determination, the very category of “the Mediterranean” construed as a single entity remains remarkably persistent, which the recent resurgence of Braudel-inspired histories of the Mediterranean as a unified space in the past decade can only verify (Purcell and Horden’s *The Corrupting Sea* in 2000, for instance, constitutes a case in point).  

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7 See chapter one of this dissertation.
The region informed antinomic representations with regards to the modern. In point of fact, it was recuperated both as the discursive origin of Western modernity (as the birthplace of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian civilizations, from which Western modernity supposedly derives) and as the other against which Northern European identity could be predicated (against the regions formerly part of the Arab/Ottoman empires, i.e., North Africa, Turkey, and the parts of Spain, Portugal, Italy, and associated islands which once constituted Al-Andalus). Taking as an example Bourdieu’s reluctance in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* to consider the place of Algerian Kabyle society within the Algerian nation-state, Mediterranean anthropologist Michael Herzfeld debunks dominant anthropological approaches which construe Mediterranean idiosyncrasies as expressions of a fundamentally pre-modern ethos: “[In Mediterraneist anthropology,] the nation-state– by its own reckoning, the ultimate symbol and embodiment of modernity- serves as the touchstone against which Mediterranean society and culture acquire their distinctive characteristics, their fundamental otherness, and above all, their removal to a primitive age” (Herzfeld 11). Outside the field of anthropology, similar discourse prevails. In point of fact, Western imaginaries revived long-standing Mediterranean antinomies running along old fault lines between ancient civilizations and world systems. Their vision of the Mediterranean is exoticized as radically different from the North European/North Atlantic center and its values are presented as incommensurable to its modern ideals (to wit the much-favored dyad of Mediterranean honor and shame, the emphasis on its pervasive religiosity and hybrid forms of superstition, its favoring of sensuality and
emotion over reason, its resilience to industrial modernization, etc.). It is important to note that these Eurocentric representations did not always coincide with the strictest historical truth; rather, they routinely did away with local histories should they somehow come to contradict the overall thrust of their (often mythical) narrative. The Greece that is invoked as the cradle of democracy, for instance, is the Greece of the Athenian agora and of its empire; as such, it bypasses an earlier genealogy of Greek culture which evinces a strong Egyptian (i.e., African) influence (Bernal; Senghor).  

While it is crucial to bear in mind the heterodoxies of modernity in a Mediterranean context, it is also important to attempt a differential, contrastive reading of these appropriations of the modern in relation to one common Mediterranean identification. I define “modernity” as the grand narrative of progress based on the triumph of rational thinking, which ultimately brought about a global politics of Westernization. While I aim to replace the development of modernity in its geographical and historical context (as the product of eighteenth-century Northern European thought), I am particularly interested in disentangling the modalities and ramifications of its global spread. Therefore, beyond the discourse that emerged at a specific time in a specific location in Europe, I consider modernity as it has been perceived and undergone the world over, that is as an inescapable dynamics of

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8 In his poem “Méditerranée,” Léopold Sedar Senghor evokes a time of cross-pollination between the African/Egyptian world and Greco-Roman civilization (Hosties Noires). The same concern can be found in his Libertés III- Négritude et Civilisation de l’Universel. In a similar vein, Talal Asad commented: “The populations designated by the label ‘Islam’ are, in part at least, the physical descendants and cultural heirs of the Hellenic world- the very world in which “Europe” claims to have its roots. Yet ‘Islamic civilization’ must somehow be denied a vital link to the very properties that define so much of what is essential to ‘Europe,’ for otherwise a civilizational difference cannot be postulated between them” (qtd. in Hurd 52).
modernization and, generally, Westernization. This dissertation aims to reveal several literary responses to the imposition of Western modernity in a Mediterranean context. What all these alternative visions of modernity have in common is their avowed references to a mythical golden age of the Mediterranean. The cultural confluences of the Al-Andalus period, which has come to embody this moment for many of the authors in our corpus, have been reactivated as an imaginary locus of identity from which forms of resistance to the imposition of colonial modernity have surged. Certainly Mediterranean countries have taken diverging trajectories, but this is not to say that they have therefore eschewed encountering each other altogether. This dissertation proposes to set in relief diverse modes of appropriation of (and resistance to) the common colonial heritage and its associated modernity along the Southern Mediterranean shoreline. The main issue that recurrently pervades analyses of the Mediterranean lies in the elusiveness of the term, its resistance to clear-cut definition and fixed characterization. The concept of the Mediterranean as a stable object of knowledge remains frustratingly unattainable. Resisting geographic or cultural localization, the space of the Mediterranean takes on as many hues as there are subjective, imaginaries configurations of it. Its intricacies can therefore only be grasped through direct subjective experience and cannot be subsumed within rational definition or delineation. Numerous critics have put to the fore the inadequacy of the term “Mediterranean” itself owing to the dynamics of obliteration lying at the core of the very idea of definition, whose aim is to bring out one main feature of a phenomenon at the expense of its intrinsic complexity (Horden and Purcell; Boetsch
and Ferrié; Herzfeld). Resorting to the concept of a “Mediterranean” in any analysis of its referent is therefore laden with problems as it presumes a unified whole that can be precisely demarcated and described- in a word, known epistemologically by the subject thus referring to it. Yet, employing a fixed, univocal term is also an indispensable preliminary to any discussion of the influence of a specific shared geography and cultural history on local experiences of modernity in a distinct context. Although ultimately partial and inadequate, therefore, the term “Mediterranean” is nevertheless necessary to the theorization of local socio-cultural trajectories that attempt to move away from Eurocentric visions of the area only in terms of a space indentured to former histories of colonialism.

I contend that a regional, post-national approach to the area cannot exist without the resort to a unifying term, a process which can be conceived as an instance of Spivak’s notion of “strategic essentialism.” Spivak argues that, although essentialist categories should be avoided in theoretical representations of identity and culture, identification with such over-generalizing concepts can at times provide subaltern groups with political visibility. She therefore advocates a “strategic use of essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest… This would allow them [these subaltern groups] to use the critical force of anti-humanism, in other words, even as they share its constitutive paradox: that the essentializing moment… is irreducible” (Spivak In Other Worlds 205). Identification with a monolithic, diachronically fixed identity can thus be construed as a vector for strategic positioning outside of the dichotomies of the colonial order of power. In this respect, re-imagining 1930s Algiers as a
“Mediterranean” space of regional collaboration and as an alternative to the social segregation implemented by the colonial power, despite its limited utopian relevance, retains tremendous impact on the epistemic construction of colonial culture. The authors of *L’Ecole d’Alger*, for instance, who adopted this essentialism, fruitfully eschewed (or at the very least attempted to eschew) other more deleterious forms of fixed categorization and their associated practices of colonial violence, epistemic and otherwise.⁹ Therefore, I wish to retain the category of the “Mediterranean” as a key concept and strategic form of identification in this study. Through their varied, at times contradictory uses of the term, the authors of my corpus prove that a conscionable, careful use of the concept (i.e., a use that would not attempt to mark the author’s representation of the region with the stigma of universalism) allows for alternative identifications and disruptions of the discursive foundation of colonial structures of power. Correspondingly, I argue that a cognizant use of the category of the “Mediterranean,” if accompanied by the necessary caveat regarding its ultimate intrinsic inadequacy, can provide a powerful tool to help reconfigure the regional space of contact between Europe and Africa in a way devoid of partisanship and exclusiveness. Rather, it allows submerged repressed histories of contact and mutual influences between diverse marginal regions to resurface and therefore shed additional light on the idiosyncratic amalgam of cultures pertinent to each local context. The mindful consideration of local instantiations of this over-generalizing concept therefore brings out real and imaginary vernacular specificities, and enables a more

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⁹ See chapter 2 of this dissertation.
contrasted analysis of each context in its own right. Through my use of the concept’s strategic generality, I thus simultaneously hint at the ever-changing nature of the Mediterranean, at the intrinsic slipperiness of its definition, which informs the fractal reading of Mediterranean culture that I suggest in these pages. No rigid vision of the region can be offered as a convincing alternative to monolithic colonial models of civilizational models. Instead, I join Yvonne Lassalle in her plea for a consideration of the history of the Mediterranean as a “prefigur[ation of] what Appadurai (48) describes as the condition of the late twentieth-century, where “the landscapes of group identity- the ethnoscapes- around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous’’” (Appadurai 48; qtd. in Lassalle 183). In contrast to this interpretation of culture on a planetary frame, she evokes Western modernity’s mapping of the Mediterranean in terms of its pre-modern other (a vision which, as we have seen, constitutes only part of the picture).¹⁰ She articulates her critique under what she calls “the concept of border:”

Borders are defined by the crossing, mixing, circulation of peoples, histories, and economies… Borders are “ethnoscapes” in which people separated by distances created by geography, but mostly geopolitics, “negotiate with one another and manufacture new relations, hybrid cultures, and multiple-voiced aesthetics” (Saldivar 13-14). No longer preoccupied with locating the trans-historical “essence” embodied and enclosed within the Mediterranean, we can move to appreciate how the production and/or reproduction of cultural forms and identifications is shaped by specific socio-historical conjunctures and the politico-economic dynamics emerging within them (183-4).

¹⁰ Chapter 1 tackles this issue further.
Although, in my view, essentialism carries more profound and possibly positive potential in the context of the Mediterranean, I would like to reflect on the promise of Lassalle’s dynamic configuration of border culture. This notion of “border” is significant in at least two different ways: as a point of contact between various cultures, which undergo a process of hybridization, a vision particularly productive in the case of the Mediterranean, but also, and more importantly maybe, as a peripheral space lying on the margins of the former colonial center. (I do not mean to say, however, that this process of hybridization brings together two previously discreet and homogeneous spaces. In the space of the Mediterranean, especially, culture is always formed through contact and interaction between unstable, multifarious elements.) Both understandings of the concept enrich each other as it is only through the consideration of the polyphony of the contact zone that alternative voices can emerge in the margins (Fernand Braudel’s “many voices of the Mediterranean”), which take to task the monolith of dominant Western modernity. In these pages, I would like to take Lassalle’s configuration further and to delineate the modalities of the emergence of these marginal voices from their peripheral location, a positionality that I conceive as an asset in the perspective of modern visibility.

The idiosyncrasies of Mediterranean writing

Several Maghrebi writers of all origins have historically contributed to this imaginary writing of the region as what, in the wake of Deleuze and Guattari, I name
the “smooth” space of the sea,¹¹ a space open to fictional inscriptions and markings and highlighting an alternative history of creation and affect contrapuntal to the histoire événementielle (or history of events) of fixed, constructed realities. These authors have employed literary creation as a vector of resistance to fixed representations of subjectivities reliant on a coercive national framework marked by the colonial experience and prone to encourage identitarian and religious fundamentalisms. They also have conceptualized a transnational, often mythical space of the Mediterranean with its distinctive mythology and historical dynamics, one displacing the Eurocentric hegemony of the former metropolitan center from a cultural, political, and aesthetic point of view. Authors as diverse as Albert Camus, Gabriel Audisio, Jean El Mouhoub Amrouche, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Trino Cruz, or Assia Djebar, through their shift to the space of the Mediterranean, have put to the fore the necessity of a transcultural, vernacular representation of the region in order to adequately reveal its cultural intricacies through multi-directional translations and unceasing rewritings.

This study builds on the premise that, in order to reveal marginal, subaltern agencies and processes of creativity, one needs to rethink global maps of artistic expressivity outside Eurocentric frameworks. In a discussion of the relation between “Narrative and Social Space,” Edward Said develops the concept of “contrapuntal reading” (Said Culture and Imperialism 66). By that term, he designates “[a practice of reading] which must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of

¹¹ I here point to their discussion of embedded "smooth" (free-flowing, undetermined) and “striated” spaces (marked by fixed confines) in A Thousand Plateaus (“The Maritime Model”).
resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded” (66). This suggested method, however, does not advocate undue generalization; the contrapuntal reading should not “efface the identity of a particular text, author, or movement.” On the contrary, its conceptual fruitfulness lies in its consideration of the latent ideological subtext of the piece so as to question the absolute character of any narrative. What Said applies to literary texts can productively be applied to all sorts of cultural discourses, Western forms of the narrative of modernity included. This approach, therefore, permits to relativize the viewpoint implicit in any process of representation and to redistribute agency accordingly. Iain Chambers’ ground-breaking study of the Mediterranean, *Mediterranean Crossings*, puts to the fore the fundamentally discriminatory character of Western configurations of the Mediterranean, which in his view bear the mark of “worlding.” Inspired by Heidegger and subsequently inflected by Gayatri Spivak, the concept of “worlding” refers to “the way in which colonized space is brought into the ‘world,’ that is, made to exist as part of a world essentially constructed by Eurocentrism” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 241). Instead, Chambers recommends a “more open comprehension of the making of a multiple [i.e., integrated vision of the] Mediterranean” relying on “Edward Said’s noted theme of overlapping territories and intertwined histories” (Chambers 3). This embedding also occurs on the level of language as Chambers argues that “repressive and repressed representations are conjoined like night and day, life and death. The other of language- silent, subversive, unspoken- is also… within language” (12). Chambers reminds us that the emergence
of discourse on the margin from the margin “is constantly haunted and interpellated by the invisible, by what fails to enter the arena of representation, by what is veiled or simply falls out of the field of vision of a predictable consensus” (5). The recovery of these obliterated discourses needs to be mediated by “border criticism,” which Chambers defines as “criticism as a border discourse… to analyze, disturb, deviate and deconstruct a language and disposition of powers which unilaterally manage the ‘world picture,’ deciding who gets to be represented and who does not” (8). Through this practice, historically disciplined colonial subjects can thus performatively reappropriate the process of representation and emerge into the world as agents in their own history.

In his article “Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse,” Walter Mignolo emphasizes the necessity for postcolonial studies to take into account the local content of forms of knowledge and aesthetic criteria, which, in his view, cannot be defined from an all-encompassing transcendental subject position but which, instead, must be “universally established by historical subjects in diverse cultural centers.” His pluralizing approach provides new insight into the field of postcolonial studies, which he envisions not so much as “a new field of study,” but rather as “the condition of possibility for constructing new loci of enunciation as well as for reflecting that academic ‘knowledge and understanding’ should be complemented with ‘learning from’ those who are living in and thinking from colonial and postcolonial legacies” (130-131). Texts produced in colonial spaces displace the predominance of the metropolitan center and its sovereignty throught the creation of alternate “sites of
enunciation.” Postcolonial Studies should therefore be practiced so as to become a “liminal and critical locus of enunciation,” from which local histories of knowledge can be articulated. This emergence of peripheral voices as defining alternative expressivities he calls “border thinking or border epistemology,” which he defines as “the recognition and transformation of the hegemonic imaginary from the perspective of people in subaltern positions” (Mignolo “The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis” 736). Although Mignolo’s argument restricts “border thinking” to “subaltern knowledge” and therefore focuses on issues of epistemology, a scope far too limited for the forms of expressions recorded in this dissertation, the concept can still fruitfully illuminate the contrapuntal quality of these alternative experiences of modernity.12 An additional benefit of the methodology that Mignolo records in Local Histories, Global Designs lies in the blending of two typically distinct strands of analysis- that reflecting on the nature of modernity and that investigating the dynamics of colonialism. By theorizing modernity and coloniality as two facets of the same phenomenon (to the extent of creating a new concept for it, “modernity/coloniality”), Mignolo unearths what he calls “local histories [of]…global designs” (51), a perspective which sheds light on repressed, non-hegemonic experiences of modernity marked by the trauma of colonial epistemic (and other forms of) violence. It is the constitution of marginal, syncretic modern subject positions marked by the multifarious culture of the Mediterranean that

12 Although the authors belonging to l’Ecole d’Alger drew inspiration from their underclass background, they should not be assimilated to the subaltern populations of Algeria. Endowed with French citizenship and its associated privileges, their economic status was not enough to liken their predicament to the lot of the Muslim communities of the colony. Similarly, Trino Cruz, despite its identification with the poetic figure of the stowaway cannot be subsumed within the category of the abjected.
this dissertation aims to excavate. These first and foremost emerge as a lived experience of difference from the normative European models of culture and knowledge, an “alternative aesthetic and political hermeneutic” (Mignolo “Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse” 131). It is a kind of “border thinking, critical and dialogic, from the perspective of those local histories that had to deal all along with global designs,” such as colonialism (Mignolo “The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis” 744), or, as Paul Carter couched it in The Lie of the Land, “[a] continuing critique of Western logos that will characterize the emergence of a post-colonial polity and poetry” (302; qtd. in Chambers 10). These reactions to the disciplining language of reason need to be articulated in a mode of creativity, unreason, and excess (Trino Cruz’s locura).

For that reason, this project focuses on submerged utopias of the crucible of the Mediterranean in the imaginative work of colonial and postcolonial authors from the Maghreb (and related space of Gibraltar) throughout the twentieth century. I propose to move beyond the modern, colonial-inspired primacy of the metropolitan/European center with regards to which the Third World can only stand as marginal and derivative. Through a focus on the regional space of the Mediterranean, I disclose alternate forms of historical and cultural affiliation in the region and investigate the new theoretical perspectives that such practices call for. Reconfiguring the Mediterranean as a hybrid space of interaction becomes relevant to geopolitical approaches to the region as the Maghreb has recently become the gateway for illegal immigration from Africa to Europe. I analyze how Mediterranean writings of that
period strategically imagine alternative forms of modernity which both challenge Eurocentric colonial practices of economic, political, and cultural domination and question the usual division of the space of the sea into two distinct civilizational models. Although such imaginative memories of the Mediterranean have been occluded, a condition necessary for normative European colonial modernity to prevail, it seems judicious to recover and analyze them in order to draw a complete picture of regional relations throughout the twentieth century and, thereby, to provide a much-needed revision of contemporary reductive, exclusionary notions of European identity and associated global patterns of modernity. I assess the adjustments that such a vision of the Mediterranean imposes on contemporary dominant configurations of Europe/Africa postcolonial relations in the context of global displacement and North-South antinomy. I disclose transnational conceptions of the space of the Maghreb as an integral part of a Mediterranean region of exchange and cooperation produced by North African subjects of all origins throughout the twentieth century. I investigate the ways in which these conceptions take to task the Eurocentric dominant historical framing of the region as a foil to European modernity. While my project considers the Mediterranean region as a whole, I have chosen to focus most of my analysis on the French colonies of North Africa for two reasons- on the one hand, the exceptional diversity of Mediterranean cultures present on their soil (both native cultures and immigrant ones from Southern Europe) and, on the other, the deep investment of the French colonial government in hegemonic ideas of modernity and civilization, which makes these colonies, more than any place in the Mediterranean, an exemplary locus
to study the emergence of ideological revisions of such concepts. As an extension of my paradigm outside the confines of the French empire, I examine the works of Gibraltarian Trino Cruz, whose poetic output delineates Southern European responses to issues of illegal immigration and transnationalism also affecting the Moroccan shore of the Strait. My objective is primarily to investigate the hypothesis of a Mediterranean sensibility that would produce a culture-specific form of modernity (which I call “vernacular,” i.e., regional, culture-specific), and which would respond to the specificities of the authors’ geocultural position with regards to global post/colonial modernity. My aim, beyond the recovery of those discourses, is therefore to take a fresh look at the colonial era and to retrieve different discourses of modernity with two goals: to redefine the boundaries of Europe as well as its genealogy (i.e., to replace the Oriental Mediterranean on the map of modernity as the origin of both Europe and Africa) and to provide a revision of the normative dichotomous understanding of social relations in a colonial context. I therefore intend to historicize the dominant interpretation of modernity and to put it into perspective through the consideration of vernacular revisions of the concept, so as to refigure the historical nature of North-South relations in the area. I analyze how this vernacular concept engages colonial dynamics of segregation and Eurocentrism, as well as related European modernist aesthetics when appropriate. Recent research in anthropology has put to the fore the necessity to conceive of modernization as a process whose standard differs according to the historical and cultural circumstances of the region, thereby questioning the normativity of modernity in a global context (Gaonkar; Knauff;
Eisenstadt). Although researchers have taken several regions into account, little has been written on the distinctive context of the Mediterranean. I thus intend to bring my reading of Mediterranean vernacular revisions of the concept to bear on the issues pursued by these critics. I finally question the limits of the transnational configurations developed by the authors that I analyze. In this respect, my corpus can be divided into two parts: one comprising works by colonial authors Gabriel Audisio, Albert Camus, and Jean El Mouhoub Amrouche, whose configurations of a transnational identity and/or multicultural national model fails on account of their refusal to engage with the identitarian logic of nationalism, to which they preferred an imaginative hybrid identity at the eve of the war of independence, and another one, somewhat more successful, comprising postcolonial contemporary authors Tahar Bekri and Trino Cruz, whose writing-in-exile can only operate in a decentered, post-national regional space.

In my first chapter, I discuss critiques of colonial modernity and world systems of hegemony and their corresponding dominant representation of culture on the global level in terms of Eurocentric diffusionism and derivation. To that aim, I focus specifically on representations of the Mediterranean partaking of the project of colonial modernity in a historical perspective so as to replace them in their wider historical context and therefore bring out their constructed and partial character. I investigate the instrumentalization of the Mediterranean as it is only contemplated through the prism of ancient tropes to the detriment of early twentieth-century Italy or North Africa, which are presented as other to (Northern) European civilization. I study
the extent to which these representations relay colonial principles of exclusion and Eurocentrism. My second chapter unearths obliterated narratives produced within the key space of North Africa by subjects who failed to fall into either of the main two social categories of colonial North Africa (metropolitan colonizers or colonized natives). Due to their liminal position, these voices have been widely ignored by Francophone scholarship. I study the literary production of two members of l'Ecole d'Alger, a group of Southern European authors in Algeria: Albert Camus and Gabriel Audisio. In opposition to dominant metropolitan frameworks in the 1930s, the group of authors countered the instrumentalization of the Mediterranean space as one of discrimination. By redefining the Northern Mediterranean, thus far configured as exclusively Christian and European, the movement indisputably disrupted the rationale of segregation in the colonial space, albeit discursively only. Removing exclusion from their vision of a transcontinental Mediterranean identity, the authors have as well desegregated the concept of modernity, therefore making an argument in favor of culture-specific forms of the modern to be considered in and of themselves. A recent trend in modernist studies, “geomodernism,” has set out to move beyond Eurocentric definitions of the concept to explore the “global horizons of modernism.” (Winkiel and Doyle) This scholarship focuses on the imbrications of various geographies of modernism, most notably in relation to their relation to the dynamics of colonialism (Winkiel and Doyle; Friedman; Gikandi). Through a consideration of Berber Jean El Mouhoub Amrouche’s poetic and critical production, I investigate the relevance of “geomodernist” criticism to my analysis of the relation between the
emergence of a modernist aesthetics from the margins and the construction of a subaltern modernity as the foundation of an anti-colonial nationalist project in Algeria. I argue that Amrouche’s poetry and literary criticism were developed as an attempt to create a transnational “North African” literature of memory, one that would incorporate the immemorial time of Berber tradition as a foundation for identity and an alternative mode of engagement with history in which the colonial subject would be endowed with agency. Drawing from Susan Stanford Friedman’s conception of modernism, I argue that Jean Amrouche’s conflation of symbolist poetic aesthetics and “traditional” Berber oral poetry puts to the fore the ubiquity of certain strands of modernist aesthetic practices independently from geographical, cultural, or historical considerations. Amrouche therefore obliterates the primacy of the center/margin model of global cultural development and disengages “traditional” forms of expression from primitivist recuperations. In my last chapter, I underscore the relevance of the reconfigurations outlined throughout this dissertation to our postcolonial, global context. I examine contemporary Mediterranean Maghrebi poetry (Gibraltarian Trino Cruz/Tetouanese Ahmed Ben Yessif; Tunisian Tahar Bekri) in its engagement with global circulation through the consideration of the figure of the sea wanderer as the epitome of the global subject. I thus investigate Cruz and Ben Yessif’s aesthetics of mirroring. Though the mediation of the symbol of the dove, these two artists delineate an alternative epistemology of illusion, on which they rest their conception of a revised (albeit failed) form of cosmopolitanism, in Walter Mignolo’s terms “critical” of the dominant dynamics of exclusion pertinent to the
global stage of capitalism. In contrast, I study Tahar Bekri’s poetics of wandering in terms of its elaboration of an alternative identification, one which reflects the liminal, hybrid position of the Mediterranean subject. Through his configuration of trans-historical genealogies of exile, Bekri reinvents wandering as a productive mode of creativity lying at the source of a renewed dynamics of encounter within the Mediterranean contact zone.
Chapter I

Critical Mediterranean Modernities

It is almost inevitable, when historicizing cultural phenomena, to think of them in spatial terms, to resort to a fundamentally geographic terminology that articulates their development in terms if a dialectic between centre and periphery… In this context, the Mediterranean appears as one of the –literally- backwaters of the empire, one of its many margins which can adopt or at the very last adapt to the new cultural and economic paradigm but cannot itself be the point of departure of other rival discourses.


A space of interaction and contact between civilizations, the Mediterranean has played a crucial role in history as the epicenter of several world systems and civilizations. Connecting the three great monotheistic religions and lying at the intersection of three continents, the Mediterranean has brought the European West in contact with the non-Western world and has served as a mirror surface on which Europe has constructed and projected its self-image in opposition to its orientalized “other” located right across the expanse of the sea. As a space of hybridity and friction par excellence, the Mediterranean has gained heightened relevance in the context of Europe/Africa interactions on the level of culture, politics, and religion. The history of the Mediterranean is one of mutual, successive conquests criss-crossing the space of the sea, which has been construed as both marking off differences (the sea as limit of a
world) and as joining together various peoples, languages, religions, and cultures (the sea as contact zone). It is a history of emerging and disappearing empires, communities, and commercial routes, which have all conferred onto the region an ever-changing quality, a structural instability which makes it a key space for the study of cultural juxtapositions and of various forms of resistance to colonial-inspired dichotomies. Mixing long-standing tradition and irrationality with forms of colonial modernity claiming reason and secularism as their foundation, the region brims with disjunctive histories of modernity, which are characterized both by a heightened local content and by a marked discrepancy with global dynamics of modernization. As such, it constitutes a prime locus for investigations of alternative forms of modernity and for the elaboration of novel genealogies and incarnations of the concept both inside and outside the Western world.

This chapter aims to retrieve repressed potentialities of the Mediterranean region. Monolithically incorporated into dominant, hegemonic discourses of universal modernity as its point of origin, this space has been historically imagined by the West as a locus of conflict within the confines of which Europe has been able to construct itself in opposition to an orientalized other. In contrast with these dynamics, I intend to unearth alternate configurations of the region in their unique engagement with concepts of modernity and culture. To that aim, I historicize the great narratives of European modernity born of the shift of economic power to the Northern regions of Atlantic Europe in the seventeenth century. Many such theories conceived of modernity as an exclusively European phenomenon, whose self-fulfilling, self-
aggrandizing dynamics aspired to universal applicability. Correspondingly, they obfuscated the underlying duality of the concept, whose inherently dialectical self-definition (the modern as antithesis and annihilation of the non-modern) necessitated the theorization of an absolute form of alterity against which it could be defined. It is this antithetic genealogy of European modernity that interests me here. I extend the chronology of the concept through a consideration of anterior world systems as I return the Mediterranean to its rightful position of dominance in early commercial and political connections (Braudel *Afterthoughts*; Arrighi). By resituating Northern European modernity’s vision of the Mediterranean in its comprehensive, unexpurgated chronology, I aim to highlight the constructed character of the partial historical claims on which its ideology has rested (history as a product of the human and social development evinced by North Atlantic modernity) and to displace the genealogical amnesia that obscures our understanding of the North Atlantic “projective geography of modern imagination and domination” (Knauft 8). In parallel, I assess complementary vernacular representations in the region, which attempt to de-center the necessary category of Europe in revised histories of modernity. Thus, I aim to encourage a new approach to the study of non-Western forms of modernity, which would construe these forms with regards to their own specificities rather than in comparison with a universalized standard, which denies the human sensibilities, cultural choices, and ideological persuasions specific to their localized history.

To that aim, I adopt a “geohistorical” approach to the phenomenon of modernity (Taylor). In his astute study, *Modernities: a Geohistorical Interpretation,*
Taylor pitches his suggested approach to modernity against usual studies of the concept which emphasize its nature independently from any consideration of place or time. The diachronic conception of modernity much favored in the late nineteenth century associated notions from the ancient world (Rome and Greece especially) to current-day features of Northern European society. Thinkers such as Matthew Arnold and Baudelaire revealed what they thought was the lasting nature of modernity, one actualized in various contexts, but whose nature remained untouched by the passing of time (3). In contrast, Taylor advocates a return of the concept to the practice of everyday life, to the specificities of the subject’s inscription into the world: “Quite simply,” he argues, “embedding occurs in real time and space locations which are constitutive of the modernity under study. Hence a geohistorical interpretation of modernity is concerned to understand the specific periods and places where ideas and practices of being modern are created, challenged, and changed”(4). His method favors a fractal framework where instantiations of the modern are examined in their local distinctiveness. Taylor’s geohistorical approach thus allows him to move away from ideological master narratives of modernity, which assess the value of local instances of the concept only in terms of their ability to substantiate the narrative’s overarching, universalizing claims. Instead, Taylor proposes an empirically-based methodology grounded on the “time-space structure” of modernity: “In a geohistorical approach periods and places are not simply ‘used,’ they are interpreted as being the concrete face of modernity as a single interconnected story and map” (4). Such is the goal of these pages as I examine the space of the Mediterranean in terms of the local,
diverging trajectories of modernity which have emerged in its territory. Adopting the premise that all spaces involved in the modern world economic system have contributed to the emergence and expansion of economic interconnections on the global level, and therefore partake of the same “story-and-map” of capitalist modernity, Taylor asserts the inscription of all subjects in the realm of the modern. Modernity therefore becomes a world-wide phenomenon, but its materialization in distinct, local contexts precludes any universalizing, prescriptive pretenses of the concept. It is therefore in terms of a local engagement with the global dynamics of modernity that I envision Mediterranean culture in these pages as I investigate the cultural cross-currents and regional confluences evinced in my Mediterranean corpus. The geo-historical approach to modernity developed here logically leads to a reflection on recent evolutions in the scholarship of cultural anthropology and history towards new concepts of “alternative” (Gaonkar), “multiple” (Eisendstadt), or “vernacular” (Piot; Knauft) modernities. My goal is thus to investigate the strategic application of theories of vernacular modernities in the context of the Mediterranean region as I consider local forms of the modern in the light of dominant theories of world hegemony.

**What is modernity?**

The exact definition and fields of applicability of what Michel-Rolph Trouillot termed “the North Atlantic universals” remains by and large a major point of
contention for critics (Trouillot 221). Every civilizational model presenting itself as such in the history of the world has put forward its own brand of universalism duplicating its local values and particularism on the global level. Moreover, each of their histories has developed from mythicized, partial accounts of the past, which aim to provide purportedly sound (or, at the very least, alluring) historical foundations meant to validate the legitimacy of the new order that they have inaugurated. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s definition of “concept” in *What is Philosophy?* (“the inseparability of a finite number of heterogeneous components traversed by a point of survey at infinite speed” 21), I am cognizant of the multifarious elements that the concept “modernity” holds together. However, my focal point doesn’t rest on the exact stratification of the concept. Rather, what concerns me here is the use to which the concept has been put historically by the North Atlantic West to deploy itself as a prescriptive, attractive world model, both relevant and universally applicable. Overlooking the legitimate debates regarding the exact definition of this term, I will therefore appropriate Bruce Knauft’s formula in his introduction to *Critically Modern* and define the modernity that this dissertation will use as a point of reference as “the images and institutions associated with Western-style progress and development [,which emanated from the North Atlantic world]” 18). By revealing Western modernity’s obliteration of its localized origin and relevance, I aim to debunk the very tenets of the process through which what was originally a historically and

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13 In his chapter “The Otherwise Modern: Caribbean Lessons from the Savage Slot,” Trouillot asserts that “North Atlantic universal are murky references: they evoke rather than define” (221).
geographically restricted experience of the modern has successfully imposed itself on the planetary level as a normative model of development and civilization.

A short survey of the genealogy of the concept of modernity will allow to grasp and evaluate its intrinsic evolution in relation to the dynamics of global hegemony in the age of European colonialism. In his dictionary entry on the subject, David Macey reminds us that for centuries the concept was used in reference to the Western world, to express “a break with Classical Antiquity, or a consciousness of a complex and differential relationship with that epoch” (Macey 259). The concept was originally associated with the history of Europe, this time not in relation to a colonized other, but rather in relation to a classical Golden Age, from which it was purportedly derived and from which it needed to distinguish itself (to wit, the illustrious “querelle des Ancients et des Modernes” [Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns] in late seventeenth-century France about the role that ancient classical aesthetic models should play in literary creation). Likewise, Fredric Jameson’s discussion of the term “modernus,” which he traces back to the fifth century A.D., emphasizes the differential nature of the term, which aimed to mark out past from present: “It signifies a fundamental dividing line between a henceforth classical culture and a present whose historic task lies in reinventing that culture” (Singular Modernity 17). Among dominant Western representations of the history of the concept, the most prominent feature of modernity was therefore its departure from past or conventional norms. The concept’s centrality to the construction of a Western model of scientific and philosophical rationality peaked during the Enlightenment, which ascribed
emancipatory powers to the episteme of modernity construed as a teleological process in which a rational subject freed from superstition would embrace unbounded progress and perfectibility and repel the monopoly of tyranny and superstition (Kant; Foucault; Habermas; Berman). In such a context, a narrative of history was formed as a measure of the progress made by Western civilization towards a higher level of social advancement. Foucault, however, emphasizes the concurrent disciplining of the modern subject’s life for the sake of progress and civilization (The Order of Things; The Birth of the Clinic; Discipline and Punish). The multifold reverberations of the project of modernity in relation to the industrial revolution and the world of capitalist exploitation have been thoroughly investigated by many social scientists, who have put to the fore the dehumanizing value of the commodity and the exchange system born of rational modes of modern production (Marx; Durkheim; Weber). These developments were not restricted to the Western world: capitalism and colonialism developed hand in hand as the production of industrial commodities was facilitated by the rise of colonial expansion on the global level. Parallel to the changes experienced in the metropole, colonial spaces underwent deep permutations of their traditional social structure: displacement, growth of Creole populations (a reality which also affected the metropole), adaptation of Western forms of polity, hybridization of culture (Knauft 8). Correspondingly, the colonial world left its imprint on metropolitan imaginaries in such a way as to produce a discourse of radical alterity against which the modern European subject constructed itself. Trouillot cogently argues that

modernity was by definition plural since its inception as its development rested on a relation to a position of alterity, to what Michel de Certeau calls “heterology.”

“Modernity as a structure requires an other, an alter, a native—indeed an alter-native. Modernity as a historical process also created this alter ego, as modern as the west, yet otherwise modern” (Trouillot 224-225). Walter Mignolo echoes this position when he contends that “coloniality, in other words, is the hidden face of modernity and its very condition of possibility. The colonization of the Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and of Africa and Asia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, consolidated an idea of the West: a geopolitical image that exhibits chronological movement” (“Many Faces of Cosmopolis” 722). It is in this history of modernity in a global context, in its dark, colonial face, in its self-duplication on the planetary scale through measures of coercion as it developed dialectically in opposition to a notion of alterity that I am interested here. In order to reveal its characteristics, a close examination of the global geographies of power and culture that colonial conquests left in their wake seems to be indispensable.

Important analyses from the mid-nineties have brought the global spread of modernity into focus. In this respect, Anthony Giddens’ work has been particularly significant (The consequences of Modernity, in particular). Giddens ascribes the emergence of modernity to four interrelated factors: capitalism, industrialism, state surveillance, and military power. These four characteristics have in his sense inflected all facets of the development of the world capitalist system, both at home and abroad.

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15 See Michel de Certeau, Heterologies: Discourses on the Other.
The consequence on the level of social formations is most perceptible in the switch from a stable, rooted feeling of identification with a place to a fluctuating identity-in-movement formed through various spatial disjunctions. The global scope of his analysis as well as the intertwined consideration of disembedded social relations in both the metropolitan and international contexts is promising. However, his analysis seems little concerned with the discrepancies of the modern on the global level. His reliance on a unified, homogeneous model of world modernity eschews adequate investigations of the specificities of non-Western forms of the modern. Europe still appears as the point of origin of the global process, which is supposedly flawlessly duplicated in local contexts world-wide. His model therefore falls short and is in this sense quite symptomatic of the shortcomings and intrinsic flaws of analyses of modernity which insist on keeping their Western-inspired, teleological framework intact.

Another such consideration of the intricate intersections of metropolitan and colonial contexts can be found in Fredric Jameson’s essay “Modernism and Imperialism.” Jameson offers a historical consideration of the structure of aesthetic modernism in relation to the emergence of a “new imperialist world system” (44). Distancing the movement from its alleged “apolitical character, its turn inward and away from the social materials associated with realism,” he rather highlights the correlation between the stylistic fragmentation it evinces and the subject’s experience of its incommensurability to modern life (45). The argument’s impact lies in its rigorous consideration of the key terms in their historical context. The concept
standing at the source of the relationship, imperialism, is envisioned in the framework of high colonialism - the period directly following the Berlin Conference of 1884 that pieced out Africa between the main European imperial powers. Yet, the concept is disengaged from a narrow focus on military conquest and administrative occupation. Pursuing his previous argument in favor of the relevance of socio-political imperatives to the study of literature, Jameson seeks to delve beyond the surface of cultural phenomena to uncover their underlying rationale: here the economy of imperial global capitalism as the origin of modernist cultural and social “mutations” (Jameson’s term, 44).^{16} Modernism is defined as an aesthetic of representation that emerged as a reaction to the modern colonial structure of feeling: “[Modernism] is in general the relationship of formal and cultural change to what we have called its social ‘determinants’, which present a radically altered situation (new raw materials of a social, psychological, or physical type) to which a fresh and unprecedented aesthetic response is demanded, generally by way of formal, structural, and linguistic invention” (50). Jameson’s definition seems to conflate the realm of aesthetics as the hallmark of modernism. Yet, the argument goes on to differentiate between the two interrelated contexts of metropolitan modernization and commodification, and “the new situation of imperialism” (50). The artificiality of such a distinction ultimately underlies the very structure of Jameson’s articulation of imperial capitalism. However, his argument does distinguish between both geographical contexts on account of the distinct social identifications that each permits. For the loss of continuity and

^{16} In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson presents literature as an institution aiming to “deconceal social institutions otherwise imperceptible to the naked eye” and reveal the “determinant relationship between ideology and the production of form” (265).
wholeness characteristic of the metropolitan modern structure of feeling mostly on the psychological level is a direct correlate of the feeling of “spatial disjunction” which renders the imperial system utterly non-intelligible for metropolitan subjects. Within domestic capitalist societies, the subject can situate itself within the social body. Indeed, in the home country, the subject’s existential definition is achieved in a double movement of opposition (to different social classes) and integration and solidarity (through the subject’s responsibility with regards to society as a whole, Jameson’s concept of “social guilt”). Therefore, the loss of meaning experienced by the metropolitan subject on the psychological level is mitigated by a feeling of social belonging. On the other hand, the geographic disjunction apprehended by the subject in the colonial context, either overseas or even at home due to the global nature of domestic capitalism, modifies the relation of integration between the subject and its world. The very distance separating him from a major component of the chain of production hampers his grasp of the system’s global structure: “a significant structural segment of the economic system as a whole is now located elsewhere… outside of the daily life and existential experience of the home country” (50-1). Capitalism is conflated beyond the realm of experience and acts as a distorting lens in the subject’s apprehension of possible structural connections between the domestic and colonial contexts. Solidarity and understanding between both ends of the imperial system therefore becomes impossible as the colonial other is conceived in terms of absolute difference, a configuration typical of modern representations of global structures of power and belonging. Jameson takes the argument further as he associates the
subject’s inability to grasp the intricacies of the new imperialist world order to the ideological annihilation of the colonial other in modern European thought and culture, a dynamic which, according to him, persisted through the first half of the twentieth-century. Jameson argues that the interrelation between metropolitan life and overseas, colonial spaces was not historically theorized until the middle of the twentieth century and the advent of decolonization movements, which are concomitant with the rise of global capitalism: “In the age of neocolonialism, of decolonization accompanied by the emergence of multinational capitalism and the great transnational corporations… contemporary theorists… have been concerned with the internal dynamics of the relationship between First and Third World countries, and in particular the way in which this relationship … is one of necessary subordination or dependency” (48). In his view, modernity (as opposed to post-modernity) was marked by the obliteration of the colonial world from the national public sphere while the colonial other was the repressed object of the modernist imagination. The subject’s failure to immanently grasp the complexity of global imperial capitalist networks is conflated with its absolute inability to imagine and represent its colonial other, albeit from a position of superiority. Such a claim certainly ignores ubiquitous representations of colonial alterity in modern literature and downplays its crucial role in the formation of European identity, which postcolonial studies have put to the fore. In contrast to such Eurocentric visions, I am interested here in retrieving earlier theorizations of Europe’s dealings with its other in a colonial context, conceptions which re-center the genealogy of modernity on its dark, obliterated side.
Of the Enlightenment as the origin of modernity

A first step towards questioning the normative understandings of modernity in a global context consists in shedding critical light on European narratives of world history and, more importantly for our purpose, of the supposed role played by the Mediterranean in the formation and development of the world’s greatest civilizations. For centuries, the geographic and symbolic space of the Mediterranean has been ensconced in concepts of European identity and of its supposed cultural universality. From Ancient Times, the region has figured prominently in all major narratives of the origin Western civilization. The cultural and religious heritage on which the construct of European identity was based finds its source in the ancient Mediterranean world, be it in its Greco-Roman past (for its philosophy, political science, and aesthetics) or in its Judeo-Christian tradition (for its religion). It is little surprising, therefore, that the Mediterranean basin should have been dubbed the “cradle of civilization.” It is important to note, however, that the phrase was only coined in reference to Western civilization and Europe. In the Arab world, for instance, much less attention was paid to the space of the Mediterranean as a space of origin. In the introduction to her book *L’invention Scientifique de la Méditerranée*, Marie-Noëlle Bourget argues that the Mediterranean was less symbolically relevant in the Arab world than it was in European culture. Considered exclusively in terms of a geographic and symbolic demarcation between Arab culture and the Roman and Byzantine empires, the Mediterranean holds a marginal position in the Arab imaginary: “As concerns Egypt,
what we have is the absence of the Mediterranean: for Muslim thought, turned towards Mecca, the Mediterranean remain a frontier; it is the ‘sea of the Rum’…and does not in itself constitute an object of research, or even a scale of relevant observation” (26-27; qtd in Peressini and Hadj-Moussa 1). Mauro Peressini and Ratiba Hadj-Moussa add to her observations the example of Ibn Khaldun’s *Al-Muqaddima* (Prolegomena), where “the Mediterranean [is referred to] simply as a physical feature… [it] does not seem to raise any questions or carry any historical resonance, as if the Mediterranean did not constitute a reference for [Ibn Khaldun]” (Peressini and Hadj-Moussa 1). In his Second Prefatory Discussion on world geography inspired from Ptolemy and the *Book of Roger* (Chapter I: Human civilization in general”), Ibn Khaldun describes the Mediterranean exclusively in geographical terms: only its location, the countries that border it, its islands, and the seas that branch off from it are mentioned in the text. It is depicted as a point of reference to express boundaries and distances in order to better delineate the confines of the region that is being described: the Arab world and the Middle Eastern Fertile Crescent where Ancient civilizations developed, civilizations that seem to hold more power over Ibn Khadun’s imaginary than the Mediterranean does. In point of fact, the only symbolic reference associated with the sea summons two histories of conquest (“the Roman Sea” and “the Syrian Sea”),

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17 Abd Ar Rahman Ibn Muhammed Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) was a historian and philosopher born in current-day Tunisia. His 1377 *Muqaddima* (or introduction) was originally conceived as the first part of his *Kitab al-Ibar* (literally book of advice), which was intended as a history of the world. The *Muqaddima* broaches a variety of topics (the philosophy of history, sociology, economics, natural history, geography, Islamic theology etc…) and the theories and methods which it presents have often been considered to be prescient of subsequent developments in the social sciences.

18 All references are to Franz Rosenthal’s translation (http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ik/ Muqaddimah).
which mark it off as an external, foreign space of potential danger. This concept of an intrinsic rivalry between ancient empires is found again in the Third Prefatory Discussion, where Ibn Khaldun distinguishes between the Arabs and other “nations” of the Mediterranean who have turned to Christianity (the Turks, the European Christians). The basis for his distinction lies in the belief that civilization has historically developed in the zones closest to the temperate centers (Europe, the Mediterranean [although the word is never used in this context], and the Arabian Peninsula). Thus, Slavic and African nations lie on the edge of civilization due to the inclemency of their climate: “The reason for this is that their remoteness from being temperate produces in them a disposition and character similar to those of the dumb animals, and they become correspondingly remote from humanity” (chapter 1.3). Ibn Khaldun’s intervention into the genealogy of the world’s nations and races needs to be construed in relation to contemporaneous theories, which ascribed racial differences to the Biblical myth of Ham, Shem, and Japheth. Indeed, it is against prevailing Islamic readings of Genesis 9 that Ibn Khaldun reacts. The chapter recounts the story of Noah’s three sons, who set out to repopulate the earth. Each of them is said to have begotten a distinct lineage corresponding to one of the main three races: Japheth would have fathered the European race, Shem the Semitic race, and Ham, whose son, Canaan, had been cursed by Noah after Ham saw his father’s nakedness, the African race. Many Islamic thinkers held this myth to account for the notable differences

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19 The curse of Ham has been historically utilized to justify the practice of slavery perpetrated against the people of Africa, whom the Biblical myth presented as a cursed race. The practice aimed to assert the inferiority of African people and to obliterate any moral responsibility on the part of the parties involved in the slave-trade.
between races. Ibn Khaldun, in contrast, shifted the explanation to the grounds of geographic determinism. This geographic determinism, however, is eventually outdone in his argument by the prevalence of what is presented as the issue of “descent.” While some “nations” are characterized by geographic location, the Arabs together with the Israelis and the Persians belong to another “descent” altogether, a difference which is compounded by unique “custom and distinguishing characteristics”, i.e., culture. There is no doubt, therefore, that miscegenation between the two shores isn’t for Ibn Khaldun a characteristic of the Mediterranean region. In his at times contradictory representations of the world’s main ethnic groups, one constant remains: the difference separating Arabs from Christian populations from the Northern shore of the Sea and the marginal significance of the Mediterranean as a factor of identity. In Ibn Khaldun’s would-be scientific account of human civilization and racial difference, the people of both shores of the Mediterranean are never placed within the same category. The sea functions as a barrier between different “descents,” which eventually seems to follow the fault lines of religious groups rather than bespeak common cultural ancestry.

In contrast, the history of the West has thrived on theorizations of the Mediterranean. Historically, this discourse developed in the wake of a transfer of the center of economic and commercial power from the Atlantic South (Spain and Portugal) to the Northern European region (Mignolo “The Many Faces of Cosmopolis;” Arrighi; Wallerstein). Such development rested on the elaboration of a discourse on world history which could simultaneously locate its center in the Western
part of Europe and marginalize the geographic spaces lying on its borders as characteristic of a former, incomplete form of cultural, ontological, and historical development. This antinomy of similitude and difference has been intricately embedded into spatialized representations of hegemony through the related categories of the center and the periphery. The colonial expansion of Europe, starting in the 15th century with the discovery of the Americas, drew geographic maps of dominance, where Europe was promoted to the center of the form of teleological history which it inaugurated. In turn, Enlightenment philosophy conceived of modernity as a global phenomenon that would develop in successive phases in different regions of the world. The past became the object of a reinterpretation which construed it only in terms of a rational process which had made eighteenth-century European culture both the center and the end of universal history. Eastern civilizations became representative of humanity’s infancy (Montesquieu’s discussions of Oriental Despotism in *De l’Esprit des Lois* [Of the Spirit of Laws] constitute a striking example of this discourse) while the course of history took a Westward direction towards Europe. Walter Mignolo identifies three types of master narratives, each favoring a different historical period, respectively attempting to locate the origin of Western history in Ancient Greece, in Spain’s supremacy over the expansion of Atlantic capitalism in the fifteenth century, and in eighteenth century Northern European Enlightenment (“The Many Faces of Cosmopolis 722). This section seeks to read such elaborations of genealogies of the West in the light of the phenomenon of modernity, which, to Walter Mignolo, holds “coloniality as [its] constitutive side” (722).
In his *The Philosophy of History*, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel develops his well-known thesis of history as a sequence of successive historical stages. The development of History manifests itself as the necessary self-actualization of the Spirit in a Westwards movement from Asia (the land of childhood and immaturity) to Europe (and America as its extension and future): “The Principle of Development involves also the existence of a latent germ of being- a capacity or potentiality striving to realize itself. This formal conception finds actual existence in Spirit; which has the History of the World for its Theatre, its possession, and the sphere of its realization.” (54). History is thus construed as a process, a development associated with the subject’s emancipation from its circumstances and unrealized potentialities. It can be traced in time and space as a universal process of exclusion, its linear progress being predicated along its geographic course from east to West. Europe therefore becomes the “centre and end of history.” This necessary trajectory by-passes Africa as Hegel goes so far as to recommend renouncing the constitutive heuristic category of universalism when dealing with the study of the Black continent: “In Negro life,” he writes, “the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence- as for example God or Law” (93). Egypt, which he absolutely dissociates from its African heritage (Bermal) constitutes the “point of passage” from the Eastern to the Western phases of history. The end of history lies in the “German world,” i.e. Northern Europe, where reformed Christianity is credited with completing the realization of the Spirit: “The antithesis of Church and State vanishes. The spiritual becomes reconnected with the Secular… Freedom has
found the means of realizing its Ideal—its true existence (109-110). In his configuration of the Old World, the Mediterranean sea plays the role of a connector between the three continents. It allows for continuity between spaces: “For the three-quarters of the globe the Mediterranean Sea is similarly the uniting element, and the center of World-History…The Mediterranean is thus the heart of the Old World for it is that which conditioned and vitalized it” (87). By “Mediterranean,” however, Hegel really means Ancient Rome and Greece. Although his enumeration lists the relevance of the region for all religions and civilizations (Jerusalem for the Jewish and Christian faiths, Mecca and Medina for Islam), his analogy draws on the example of the Ancient civilizations that Enlightenment Europe recognized as its origin: “Without it, the History of the world could not be conceived: it would be like Ancient Rome or Greece without the forum,” the “forum” being a direct reference of the genealogy of democracy in modern Europe. Interestingly, the argument limits historical agency in the Ancient world to the Mediterranean region, the confines of which lie in Northern Europe and Eastern Asia. The center of Enlightenment modernity would therefore seem, at first glance, to be excluded from this illustrious historiography. However, the aggrandizement of the Mediterranean only serves the oblique purpose of further paying tribute to Europe as the teleological approach adopted by Hegel ascribes to European civilization the prominent position of end stage of the history. Mediterranean conquests and imperial expansion led to the later development of European culture. Europe therefore constitutes a more developed stage of the same radiant civilization that animated the Mediterranean in the ancient world. Hegel
presents the sea as a galvanizing element, spurring on imperial powers in their insatiable thirst for invasions and expansion. The integrated nature of capitalist economy and world imperialism pervades the argument as Hegel points out quite astutely that “the sea invited man to conquest and to piratical plunder, but also to honest gain and commerce” (90). Hegel’s Eurocentric views, however, do not acknowledge that both sorts of interaction were in fact quite intertwined. As the engine of the incarnation of the Spirit through History, colonial exploitation and its associated commercial activities need to remain in the realm of rational, progress-generating enterprises: “Courage is necessarily introduced into trade, daring is joined with wisdom” (90). As such, they constitute the tenet of European superiority, economically, but also in every other aspect of “progress.” Quite unexpectedly, colonial North Africa, the location of many glorious city-states in Ancient Times, is incorporated into Europe. The ancient Mediterranean basin, therefore, although marked by a selective genealogy of space (the Northern Mediterranean shore and related Southern spaces that played a part in the development of Rome and Greece), is considered in its entirety as a unifying (and unified) region. As well, Hegel’s focus on the sea serves to defuse the significance of the space of Africa which is reduced to the European appropriation of the Ancient history of North Africa. However, it is ultimately to Northern Europe that centrality in modernity is ascribed, Southern Europe (Greece and Rome) only constituting the second and third stage of World-History. The Mediterranean is thus reduced to its identity as the mythical cradle of European civilization, its non-Roman, non-classical Greek heritage being occluded
and marginalized. Southern Europe, in turn, is refigured as historically Germanic as Hegel highlights the various waves of Germanic conquests which swept through Europe in the wake of the Roman Empire. Although culturally distinct, the South is still included in an imaginary medieval geography of common Germanic ancestry. However, the subsequent mixing with local population brought about ever-increasing distance from the original Germanic culture, which Hegel associates with distinct linguistic specificities (Romance languages). The modern South of Europe is therefore marginalized as racially and culturally impure, a claim which we also find in Kant. Although the importance of the discovery of the Americas is mentioned as a prime factor in the emergence of a new, post-medieval order (“blush of dawn,” or Renaissance), it is only with the Reformation that modernity truly begin.

Kant’s slightly earlier *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* delineates a classification of European national characters much more critical of Southern European idiosyncrasies. While Kant depicts France and England as the most advances stage of civilization in Europe, Spain is regarded in a more ambiguous light. Its prestigious imperial past in the Atlantic secures it a third place in the classification. However, it is as a hybrid, mixed people that Spaniards are represented, as “[having] evolved from the mixture of European blood with Arabian (Moorish) blood” (Kant 231). This contravention to the *limpieza de sangre* principles enacted in Spain after the Reconquista testifies to the inescapable racial heritage of the country, which its new-
found loyalty to Christianity cannot effectively counterbalance.\textsuperscript{20} The taxonomy of national characters therefore yields to an oblique discussion of racial purity as prime criterion for European belonging and national supremacy. The miscegenated past of Spain excludes it from the construct of “Europe,” and creates a fault line across the continent that reverberates on the historical dividing line separating the Greco-Roman world from its Arab counterpart: “The Spaniard’s bad side is that he does not learn from foreigners; that he does not travel in order to get acquainted with other nations; that he is centuries behind in the sciences. He resists any reform; he is proud of not having to work; he is of a romantic quality of spirit, as the bullfight shows; he is cruel, as the former auto-da-fe shows; and he displays in his taste an origin that is partly non- European” (Kant 231-2; my emphasis). Being removed from European Enlightenment, Spain fails to accomplish its “exodus … by its own effort from the state of guilty immaturity.” This dyadic vision of Europe split between a Northern culture of rationality and a contemporaneous Dionysian Mediterranean underlies dominant discourses of European identity from the Enlightenment on. This paradigm would soon overlap with nineteenth-century investigations into the origin of oriental languages, an effort which would drift into considerations of hierarchies between cultures and generate associated racial considerations.\textsuperscript{21} Enlightenment philosophy

\textsuperscript{20} The Reconquista’s propagation of the “purity of blood” principle (limpieza de sangre) testifies to this desire to purge Spain of its historic cultural and biological hybridity and to downplay its position as the historical crossroads of the three great monotheistic religions in the Mediterranean at the time of Al-Andalus.

\textsuperscript{21} The development in European scholarship of new taxonomies of Oriental languages led to the elaboration of the dyad Aryan/Semite (Jewish and Arab both) and to the emergence of racialized discourses of difference (see for instance William Jones, “On the Arabs” and “On the Literature of the
thus restricted the origin of modernity to its own moment, its relation to previous world systems being either one of appropriation (for the Greco-Roman past), obliteration (in the case of imperial Spain’s role in the formation of “the West”), or discrediting (for Al-Andalus).22

Such inscriptions of modernity in the exclusive context of Northern European Enlightenment only provide a partial view of the history of the West. Previous world systems existed, centered on the Mediterranean as well (although in a different configuration), which developed their own forms of modernity. Considering their role in the formation of Western history opens the door for re-assessments of the intrinsic value of later narratives of the formation of the West and shifts the spotlight back to spaces once of global prominence, whose historical role in the creation of tenets of modernity (Western or otherwise, as some of the elements claimed by the West as characteristic of European rationality are in fact ubiquitous in various cultures) has been eluded. Walter Mignolo’s work on colonial Latin America has provided social sciences with such an alternative genealogy of the project of modernity and of the role of the Mediterranean in its elaboration prior to the seventeenth century. Running against the grain of postcolonial theory and post-structuralism, which in his view located the origin of colonial modernity in the period of the Enlightenment, Mignolo


22 This Eurocentric approach to the development of history has informed subsequent accounts of the formation of Western modernity. Max Weber, Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Jurgen Habermas amongst others all elaborated paradigms that reinforced the centrality of Europe in the global project of modernity.
aims to retrieve an earlier moment in the history of European hegemony: that of the accession of Spain to the status of European leader concurrent with its discovery of the new World in the fifteenth century. He argues that Northern European eighteenth-century modernity constitutes but a second phase of the development of European history, one only made possible by the colonial history which developed in the Atlantic. His argument relies on the historical study of world-system models from their confines (Latin America in the case of Spain), an approach which allows him to historicize absolute conceptions of European modernity in a way that emphasizes their constructed nature over the centuries: “to look at it not only from the interiority of its formation and expansion but also from its exteriority and its margins” (*Local Histories* 49). Through a focus on the periphery of world-systems, Mignolo gains keen insight into the evolution of these systems and is able to include them all the more adequately in a long history of shifting global connections and networks. For thinkers such as Immanuel Wallerstein and Enrique Dussel, the emergence of colonial modernity in the sixteenth century coincides with that of a new capitalist world system centered on the Atlantic triangle. Mignolo posits the Reconquista and the concurrent “discovery” (invasion) of the Americas as the point of origin of a European form of modernity based on coloniality, which would connect the former Mediterranean center to the

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23 See also Dussel “World-System and Trans-Modernity;” Trouillot “Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The poetics and Politics of Otherness” and *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History.*

Taking as its focal point the Black diasporas of the Atlantic world, Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* partakes of a similar effort as it investigates the crucial part played by the Black Atlantic in the elaboration of European concepts of modernity. Echoing Jameson’s argument in “Modernism and Imperialism,” Gilroy puts to the fore the global nature of European modernity, indicting the theory that it should have been the product of purely national forces of material production. See in particular “The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity” (1-40).
Atlantic circuits of commerce in a new world system. This new system brought with it a specific global imaginary, which he calls “Occidentalism,” and which could exist only in relation to an Oriental other (Local Histories 51). However, Mignolo does not locate the West in Europe alone; it is to be found in the new system formed by Spain and its American colonies, which he opposes to the earlier dominant conception of the Occident as European Christendom (51). As it became the center of European Atlantic power, Spain was therefore disengaged from its Mediterranean heritage: “Spain was the beginning of modernity in Europe and of the beginning of coloniality outside Europe” (51). The rise of Spain, and beyond it, Europe on the global stage was facilitated by a combination of several factors: the scientific and technological progress which allowed better mobility and stronger military power; the trading of new commodities, such as metals and much-in-demand food items from the New World; slavery and colonial exploitation in the New World (Dussel “World System and Trans-modernity” 223). This newly-accumulated capital allowed Europe to intensify trade with Asia and to progressively usurp its position as the economic center of the world. With the new turn towards the Americas, conceived as the extension of Europe, and the demise of Seville as the center of world commercial circuits (Wallerstein), the old Mediterranean world became the teleological past of European modernity, a heritage which Spain was keen to leave behind. The ascent of Spain to this position of power within Europe and in the New World therefore constituted the first step towards the development in the eighteenth century of what Mignolo construed as the second stage of modernity: one based on the supremacy of Northern
European powers (France, Britain, Germany). The shift away from the Mediterranean basin (Spain, Portugal, Italy) of the previous age is also characterized by a decline of Catholicism as a main engine of colonial mercantile expansion in the new world order. In the seventeenth century, Holland emerged as the center of a new commercial world order (Arrighi), an evolution which constituted the first step in the relative de-secularization of Europe that would culminate in Enlightenment philosophy (58). It is therefore little surprising that Kant should have conceptualized Spain as lying on the border between two historical world systems.

The construal of (economic) history in successive “world systems” based on a pattern of core zones exploiting peripheries to form a global order of economic interdependence, which has been known as world system theory or analysis, is a relatively recent evolution of scholarship. Drawing inspiration from the Annales School of history and its reliance on histoire de longue durée, these theories developed around the examination of synchronic global maps of economic discrepancy at different points in time in their diachronic relation to former systems. Correspondingly, the emergence of new economic centers become the engine of world history and the “system” paradigm the heuristic category par excellence to interpret the development of Western capitalist modernity. By focusing on the logic of sequentiality in the development of successive integrative world-systems, the approach calls into question the purported self-sufficiency of Europe in gaining its eventual position of hegemony. Instead, it replaces it in a genealogy of power that far exceeds its mythical appropriation of the Mediterranean past. Enrique Dussel rightly
argues that “‘modernity’ is … the management of the world-systems’s ‘centrality’” (Dussel “World System and Trans-modernity” 722), i.e., in other words, the hegemonic process of coercion and violence through which the center erects itself as center and its margins as periphery. Dussel therefore emphasizes how crucial to the rise of Europe integrated networks of production have been, networks born of coloniality and of the exploitation of non-Western areas. For global unevenness is the sine qua non of the core’s hegemony, which leads Immanuel Wallerstein to conceive this heterogeneity as intrinsic to the logic of the modern capitalist system and, therefore, as inescapable. In point of fact, the most salient characteristic of these world systems is their development around three embedded spatial concepts: the center (possessing capital), the periphery (possessing labor), and the semi-periphery (undergoing a process of modernization).

Such is the paradigm developed by Immanuel Wallerstein in his analysis of the origins of the modern world system of capitalism in “the long sixteenth century” (1450-1620): “In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, there came into existence what we may call a European world-economy” (Wallerstein The Modern World System 15). In his view, Western European economy expanded due to the rise of exchange with non-European countries and colonies (the Americas and Asia, in particular), all regions being ultimately unevenly integrated into one, all-encompassing world economic system, which belies the relevance of the category of the nation. Because of his choice of the sixteenth century as the starting point of this global development of Western capitalism, Wallerstein also situates the center of the world in
the Atlantic interface (Spain, Portugal, France, England), the core of imperial and economic power. Parallel to the exploited spaces of the colonies outside of Europe, a semi-periphery emerged within the continent along the Northern parts of the region, which would only develop in subsequent centuries (Holland in the 1600s; England and France in the 1800s). Although Wallerstein’s neo-Marxist approach is focused exclusively on retrieving the history of the current Eurocentric world system, one of the argument’s most significant thrusts lies in its revealing of an earlier phase of modernity centered on Southwestern Europe, whose accumulation of wealth from its colonies ensured Europe’s economic growth. However, by anchoring his analysis in the aftermath of the feudal system in Europe and not in relation to other previous world-systems hinging on Asia, Wallerstein duplicates the very Eurocentrism that undergirds global inequality, be it economic, cultural, or political. His comparative paradigm thus reinforces the centrality of the West as unique engine of progress and development, as the center of “management” of the laboring peripheral colonies. By favoring the consideration of capitalist production to the detriment of trading networks, Wallerstein by-passes earlier world-systems, which have successfully presented alternative mappings of economic hegemony.

Such is the contention of Janet Abu-Lughod’s Before European Hegemony. Centering her argument on the 1250-1350 period, Abu-Lughod provides an groundbreaking alternative longue durée genealogy of world economic development.

24 Other accounts of pre-modern world-systems can be found in Andre Gunter Frank’s ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age and The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand, which traces the beginning of the World System formation to the fourth millennium BC; A. Korotayev et al.’s Introduction to Social Macrodynamics: Compact Macromodels of the World System Growth (10th millemium BC); Enrique Dussel, “World-System and Trans-modernity.”
She insists that the thirteenth century constitutes as important a step in the formation of the modern world system as the long sixteenth century favored by Wallerstein, and ascribes the rise of European hegemony to the demise of a medieval, polycentric capitalist system, where Europe was playing second fiddle to Asia. She convincingly argues that, after 1000 A.D., an uneven world system came to life, which culminated in the thirteenth century and that tied Asia and the Middle East (North Africa included) to Europe in a web of political and economic interaction (352-373). The touchstone of this system was trans-continental trade, which became essential to the development of European wealth (353-354). Each region of the paradigm was formed by a core and a periphery, all cores being inter-dependent. Europe, which would be promoted to world center in the 1500s, was then a less organized, less powerful core than Asia’s centers. No one space dominated the system which included only agrarian empires, which had not yet become full-blown capitalist politico-economic systems. Abu-Lughod thus presents the centered, hierarchical nature of the modern world system posterior to the 1500s as a non-predictable evolution of world economic patterns: "there was no inherent historical necessity that shifted the system to favor the West rather than the East, nor was there any inherent historical necessity that would have prevented cultures in the eastern region from becoming the progenitors of a modern world system" (12). In fact, by isolating a China-Rome nexus of trade as the first stage in world economy, she belies the purported self-sufficient character of Roman civilization, whose expansion she reconfigures as dependent on its trade with China. Writing against the grain of Weber’s theses on the industrial development in
the West and the East, she correspondingly downplays the significance of local cultural values and institutional factors to account for the regions’ different levels of development. In the case of Europe, this shift to dominance was caused by the decline of the previous world system due to Mongol invasions, endemic wars, and the plague epidemic. Europe’s rise therefore took place in the context of the overall decline of the trans-continental system. It was merely conjectural. In this paradigm, the discrepancy between modern centers and peripheries isn’t a product of Europe’s superior qualities and virtues; rather, it has emerged from the new center’s ability to master the dynamics of world system development, or in Dussel’s words, to “manage … the world system’s centrality.”

It ensues that the world-system approach, as Abu-Lughod theorized it, can constitute a viable attempt to deflect the pervasive Eurocentrism of usual theories of modernity by replacing the rise of Europe in its historical context and revealing how crucial global networks (and therefore Asia) were to its development. The trans-continental focus of the analysis lessens the relevance of the intrinsic characteristics of individual societies and deflates the pretensions of cultural superiority put forth by the

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25 Max Weber’s work aimed to provide an account of the historical reasons why the capitalist Industrial Revolution occurred in Europe and not in China or India (see The Religion of China, The Religion of India, and his influential The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism). He grounds his analysis in socio-political organization and the sociology of religion to prove that Europe’s position of prominence was caused by exceptional intrinsic characteristics (Calvinist Protestant ethics and scientific rationality).

26 Donald E. Nielsen questions Abu-Lughod’s absolute subsumption of all European cities in the world system. European towns evinced an increased autonomy and “autocephaly” (Abu-Lughod) due to the existence of city charters, which granted them multi-fold privileges. This led to the demise of feudal power and to a marked move towards more modern forms of polity. In their view, Abu-Lughod unduly assimilates all urban contexts to a few examples and fails to respect the idiosyncratic specificities of the objects of her study.
centers. In this sense, it provides a fruitful counterpoint to world histories, such as Hegel’s, which theorize European hegemony as the necessary end-product of history. However, in the context of this dissertation’s attempt to retrieve submerged vernacular representations of the marginalized space of the Mediterranean, world system theory still seems theoretically lacking on account of its reluctance to incorporate human histories of resistance. Donald E. Nielsen’s critique of Abu-Lughod’s method is illuminating. Nielsen deplores the argument’s exclusive focus on economic development as only factor of difference between regions. He offers the antithetical view that cultural changes generated by centuries of interpenetration also played a crucial part in the emergence of the European center in the 1500s (e.g., new legal systems; elaboration of theology; scientific discoveries). In his view, Abu-Lughod’s analysis obliterates these dynamics. Instead, he pleads for a consideration of “the relationships between cultural changes across centuries,” in order to “avoid the pitfalls of views, such as variants of the ‘world systems theory,’ which dissociate cultural eras from one another in the very process of linking the rise and decline of world systems phases to each other” (489), a claim whose validity obviously extends beyond the analysis of Abu-Lughod’s work. Nielsen suggests replacing economic and political networks “within wider civilizational contexts and more complex systems of institutional and cultural mediation.” This failure to integrate all aspects of social life, is, in his view, typical of world system analysis:

It seems to me that ‘world systems theory,’ in any of its current forms, is itself a not entirely innocent child of European thought, one which removes the experiencing and acting of history from the hands of all the various peoples who make up the world system. In the end, it
leaves them with their fates determined by larger forces and with few options. In my view, one way out of this scientific and moral dilemma is to give due emphasis to the historical, comparative responses and experiences of civilizational actors—*as they themselves* evidently wish to do— including their differences in religions, cultural logics and values, symbolisms, motives, and structures of consciousness (496; my emphasis).

It ensues that world system theory remains inexorably Eurocentric in that its paradigm, whose purpose is to depict the reality of a certain synchronic map of global hegemony and interaction with utmost accuracy, ultimately end up reflecting the very iniquitous dynamics it analyzes. By construing inequality not as a residue that will get resorbed as the system evolves, but as one of the inherent side-effects of the system as a whole, world system theory does not leave much room for an examination of the particular, local experiences, aspirations, and resistance of subaltern subjects, whose inscription into the world system is mediated in terms of exploitation and marginalization. Agency is shifted to general patterns of capitalist exploitation governed by impersonal forces of market competition. I therefore reiterate Nielsen’s call for a re-centering of all-encompassing mappings of development on the category of the subject, especially the subject located in the margins of the system, so as to disclose the responses to and experiences of capitalist modernity in their specificities. To the study of world systems needs to be adjoined a study of the effects of the system in distinct, discrepant contexts world-wide. This renewed interest in the human bestows agency onto the subjects excluded from the great generalizing narrative and moves beyond the victimization of marginalized subject-positions.
Enrique Dussel’s concept of “trans-modernity” proposes to accomplish that move. Dussel defines “trans-modernity” as a process in which “both modernity and its negated alterity (the victims) co-realize themselves in a process of creative fertilization” (“Eurocentrism and Modernity” 76). Writing against critiques of “rational epistemology,” such as the ones elaborated by Tzvetan Todorov and Richard Rorty, Dussel advocates a “reason of the other” (75), which would take into account the constitutive asymmetry of interrelations between subjects from the center and subjects from the peripheries. Rather than dismiss “reason” as a category, Dussel proposes to consider the concept in its fundamental irrationality, “the irrational moment of sacrificial myth” (75). The depiction of the violence of modernity as an irrational process does in itself raise a number of questions. We will disregard them for now to concentrate rather on Dussel’ proposed incorporation of the two sides of the equation of modernity: the positive one (which constitutes the end of history and has adopted a positive epistemology) and the negative one (negated colonial alterity). Trans-modernity, in the early version of the concept developed in “Eurocentrism and Modernity,” therefore aims to deculpabilize the victimized colonial others of modernity, who, following Kant’s principle have suffered from the guilt of immaturity. The assimilation of a coercive colonial definition of the colonial subaltern to his or her state of consciousness (the subaltern native both perceived as guilty and experiencing guilt) is in and of itself a curious notion and the promise of Dussel’s liberatory project of trans-modernity is somewhat defused by his insistence on turning it into an ontological process of deculpabilization (the colonial subject must “discover
itself as the innocent victim of a ritual sacrifice,” 76). His representation of subalterns as mystified subjects who need to uncover the intrinsic coerciveness of the modern order imposed by the colonial power is quite problematic. The very verb used by Dussel, “discover itself,” seems to bear the connotation of a chance encounter with truth, as if the violence theorized here had not been experienced first hand by the subject, incorporated as part and parcel of colonial subject formation, and integrated into strategic forms of resistance (both cultural and ontological) to the destructive nature of colonial coercion. The whole idea thus seems to further alienate subalterns in a dynamic discrepant with dominant reflections in postcolonial theory, which have revealed the omnipresence of forms of reaction, accommodation, and resistance to the colonial order throughout the colonized world. The narrative of trans-modernity therefore seems to fall to the trap of the “modern,” colonial vision of native subalterns, which Dussel was eager to dismantle. Natives appear as victims, whose experience of coloniality is reduced to a feeling (guilt) and not mediated through various strategies of containment. By eluding the reality of interaction between the colonized and the colonial order, Dussel ultimately conflates Enlightenment-inspired visions of modernity as a self-sufficient monolith. The very multifariousness of his project of “trans-modernity” (an *incorporative* solidarity… between center/periphery, man/woman, different races, different ethnic groups, civilization/nature, Western culture/Third World cultures etc…,” 76) is therefore undercut by his alienation of subaltern potential for resistance. Interestingly, his 2002 revision of the argument in “World-System and Trans-modernity” seems to have distanced itself from the issue of
victimization and ritual sacrifice. Rather, Dussel disengages European modernity’s “technical and economic globality” from “a cultural globalization of everyday life,” thereby redeploying the concept on a planetary scope while leaving room for the consideration of non-Western forms of the modern: “From this omitted potentiality and alterity ‘exteriority’ emerges a project of ‘trans’-modernity, a ‘beyond’ that transcends Western modernity (since the West has never adopted it but, rather, has scorned it and valued it as ‘nothing’) and that will have a creative function of great significance in the twenty-first century” (221). It is the focus on this “beyond” that underlies his whole project. “Trans-modernity,” he defines as “the reality of [the] fertile multicultural moment” when “a varied ‘reply’ by all [non-Western culture] to the modern ‘challenge’” emerges to form a new cultural moment (221). However, he glosses over the modalities of this emergence as he defines this “exteriority” (in Lévinas’ sense) as the “cultural ‘positivity’ not included by modernity,” which surges from an “other” place repelled by European hegemony (234). These “repl[ies]” are depicted as “present-day cultures that pre-date European modernity, that have developed with it, and that have survived until the present with enough human potential to give birth to a cultural plurality that will emerge after modernity and capitalism” (234). The concept is seductive; yet its theorization leaves much to be desired: how does this local response to modernity differ from the “traditional” cultures imagined by modernity as the other to its state of progress? What are the modalities of this parallel development? What will be the nature of the “cultural plurality” bound to surface after modernity has passed? Little is provided by way of an
answer and, although Dussel insists on considering the “positivity” of these cultures, he fails to address their relation to dominant forms of scientific epistemology developed by Western modernity as the paragon of knowledge and rational heuristics. Although his intention of moving beyond the universalizing homogenization of culture and values through globalization can only be commended, the exact meaning of the prefix “trans-“ in “trans-modernity” remains unclear and Dussel’s promising project of retrieving historically marginalized cultures amounts to little more than a vaguely defined utopia. How then to approach the global trajectories of modernity in a way that does not occlude “the enormous cultural and human richness that that the transnational capitalist market now attempts to suppress under the empire of ‘universal’ commodities?” How to formulate modernities that would be “multicultural, versatile, hybrid, postcolonial, pluralist, tolerant, and democratic” at the same time? How, in other words, to bring Dussel’s project of “trans-modernity” to completion?

The stakes of Mediterranean vernacularisms

Recent scholarship in the social sciences has dissociated modernity from the acquisition and propagation of a normative discourse, whose conception of civilization rests on the adoption of European models of advancement duplicating the same racist, hierarchical conception of progress. Rather, it has set out to expunge prescriptivity from modernity, as the writers of l’Ecole d’Alger did through their attempted promotion of a transnational Mediterranean brotherhood. This multidisciplinary effort
has made a case for the pluralization of the seemingly linear and coherent singular narrative of modernity, which supposedly spread smoothly from the West through the mediation of modernization on the one hand and the continuing discourses of Eurocentric hegemony on the other. Furthermore, it has lain to rest the notion of a “convergence” (Eisenstadt) of world cultures towards a unique Western-inspired model symbolic of capitalist collective progress. The fascination with the “global village” paradigm in recent years begs the question of how much more advantageous this indiscriminate assimilation of cultural difference to one singular model of worldwide development can be in comparison with antiquated models in social sciences that insisted on the category of difference as a vector of discrimination between cultures (S.R.G. VI). This revision of the concept lies in the recognition of new culture-specific modernities, which can have as many avatars as there are cultures, an approach opening the door to theories resting on the consideration of each cultural region in its own right. The Mediterranean becomes an example that could potentially be the source of a worldwide application of the principle- the duplication of the model of regional paradigms on the global level. In this reconfiguration, the global comes from the ubiquity of regional paradigms internally contrasted and different from each other. These spaces become sites of contestation of homogenous global paradigms as they displace dichotomies inherited from coloniality, which construe cultural formations either as validations of a normative universal or as forms of absolute resistance to it (in the guise of nationalism, for instance). Rather, these previously
marginalized spaces can be reconfigured as some of the many loci in which various versions of vernacular modernity emerge.\textsuperscript{27}

Such a polycentric conception of modernity emerged in reaction to modernization narratives from the 1950s. These narratives unambigously presented the economic and industrial development of first world countries (of the Western bloc) as a model to be emulated world-wide. The promised social change was in nature a duplication of Western standards and practices. In his \textit{Theory in an Uneven World}, R. Radhakrishnan ascribes the dynamics of endowing one dominant particularism with universal authority to the very nature of comparativity: “The point is,” he argues, “that in a world structured in dominance, comparisons are initiated in the name of these values, standards, and criteria that are dominant. Once the comparison is articulated and validated, the values that underwrote the comparison receive instant axiomatization as universal values” (74). As a corrective, Radhakrishnan suggests a politics of comparativity which would renounce its prescriptive nature and embrace what he calls a strategy of “reciprocal \textit{defamiliarization},” where no pre-existing inherent value would be ascribed, thereby allowing each locality to be considered in its own right through a process of comparison devoid of a priori reference.\textsuperscript{28} This

\textsuperscript{27} Examples of these efforts include Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, “On Alternative Modernities;” Timothy Mitchell’s \textit{Questions of Modernity}; S.N. Eisenstadt, “Multiples Modernities;” Bruce M. Knauf, ed. \textit{Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropology}.

\textsuperscript{28} This mutual defamiliarization is reminiscent of the “exotic” approach to Western/non-Western cultural encounters recommended by Victor Segalen to avoid the pitfalls of an Orientalist, essentializing gaze: “L’exotisme n’est donc pas […] la comprehension parfaite d’un hors-soi qu’on etreindrait en soi, mais la perception aigue et immediate d’une incomprehensibilite eternelle” [Exotism is therefore distinct from a perfect understanding of an exterior alterity which one would assimilate to the self; rather, it is the acute, immediate perception of an eternal incomprehensibility]” (“Essai sur l’Exotisme” 25).
approach advantageously dispels what Radhakrishnan called “the curse of derivativeness” (“Derivative Discourses” 790). While derivativeness has been a dominant heuristic framework in the analysis of (post)colonial engagements with modernity (Chatterjee; Bhabha), Radhakrishnan rejects the stigma associated with the concept. He reconfigures derivativeness as the basis of every culture on account of its participation in the history of global interactions and intercultural encounters. The West, itself, is derivative and owes its existence as a world power to the millennia of world system history preceding it.29 The recent discourses on multiple modernities partake of such a non-hierarchical concept and further the attempt to deconstruct Western modernity as the yardstick against which the rest of the world should be judged. It is important to impress that the local framework of many of these theories does not in any way obfuscate the reality of globalization and of its intrinsically uneven dynamic of power and capital. On the contrary, to paraphrase Walter Mignolo’s title, it is precisely the repercussions of these global designs that these discourses aim to investigate in local histories: “the divergent responses of the world’s peoples arguably maintain or increase their cultural diversity at the same time that they become more deeply entwined with capitalist influences, institutions, and impositions” (Knauft 2). In this respect, they should not be construed as antithetic to world system theories. Both approaches rely on a thorough consideration of world-wide dynamics and constants. World system theory, however, lies on a bedrock of historical

29 Groundbreaking scholarship in modernist studies has put to the fore the centrality of non-Western models in the formation of Western forms of modernism. See, for instance, Cuddy-Keane; Friedman “Cultural Parataxis and Transnational Landscapes of Reading: Toward a Locational Modernist Studies;” Gikandi; Doyle and Winkiel.
materialism and, as such, privileges the categories of capital and economic development as ultimate criteria. Theories of vernacular modernities, on the other hand, are deeply anchored in the discipline of social sciences and take into account different facets of social life. The planetary imposition of modernity has brought about a disruption or transformation of social formations in the light of new institutional models and related aspirations. In response, scholarship in vernacular modernities seeks to examine the new forms of subjectivity that are created in the wake of modernization as well as the processes of subordination and resistance through which they are mediated. Their approach belies the supposed global triumph of Western modernity as it sheds new light onto the “articulations of culture and power” (Knauft 4) on the local level.

It is such articulations that this dissertation intends to reveal in their local context. By “local,” I do not mean to say “micromodernities,” i.e., “[modernities] that are so locally and culturally situated that they become practically a synonym for current custom or personal performance” (Knauft 4). I aim to write from beyond the pale of the traditional to foster a critical reading of the mutually constitutive interactions between the modern (indigenous and trans-culturated) and the bedrock of customary practices. While a thorough discussion of neo-cultural relativism and issues of universalism extend far beyond the purview of this project, I nonetheless aim to investigate the formation of vernacular modernities in their double relation to the nation and the region in both a colonial, nationalist age and in a postcolonial global moment. I contend that the appropriate theoretical response to dominant representation
of marginal cultures in terms of belatedness and derivation lies in the consideration of the mutually constitutive nature of cultural formations on the global level. James Clifford’s concept of “traveling culture” and Arjun Appadurai’s “modernity at large” both emphasize the transnational mobility of social and cultural formations in our global era, a conception which allows to reconfigure culture and literariness as two concepts-in-movement, whose circulation develops dynamic of hybridity and transculturation with/in local forms.\(^{30}\) The consideration of cultural contact reveals margin-to-margin interconnections and influences which complicate the stratification of local contexts beyond the mere modern-colonial/traditional-subaltern dichotomy. The adoption of regional paradigms when examining vernacular responses to modernity therefore provides a more precise picture of cultural formations in terms of their hybridity and adaptation of variegated, disparate elements of the modern hailing from a variety of contexts. Nevertheless, I do not intend to obscure the asymmetry of power pertinent to colonial contexts or the resonance of a modernity imposed from the top onto local, decimated cultures. Vernacular modernities are not all about happy hybridizations; the utopian Mediterranean reconfigurations presented in the following chapters all paid a dear price for their obliviousness to the harsh realities of colonial rule. Yet, modernity is always already ruptured. Coloniality conditioned the imposition of the Western model in a context of multi-layered dislocations reinforced by epistemic violence. Modernity thrived on the abjection of the colonized, but it also

\(^{30}\) See James Clifford, “Traveling Cultures” in *Routes Travel and Translation in the Twentieth Century* and Arjun Appadurai, “Modernity at Large”. Transculturation theory was first conceptualized by Francisco Ortiz in the context of Cuba’s plantation society and subsequently developed by Mary-Louise Pratt and Edouard Glissant among others.
benefited from the creativity springing from the interstices of an imperfect process of assimilation. It is on these forms of partial adoption and dynamic adaptation of forms of the modern that this section focuses, on the modalities of the disjunctions and stratifications of incommensurable cultural traditions in vernacular spaces. These local experiences of the modern generate a local consciousness accompanied by epistemic modes of “subaltern knowledge” (Foucault). I study the cultural production of such sites of inscription in their linguistic, cultural, and epistemological diversity. I am particularly attuned to “trans-local” (moving to different locations within the region, i.e., margin-to-margin, in the context of European modernity, albeit imaginatively only) interactions between local cultures, all trajectories by-passing the European center and fostering hybrid forms of creativity. Such an approach calls for vigilance against the usual pitfalls associated with comparative methods. The very notion of “alternative modernity” intrinsically requires positing a default position from which these discrepant forms diverge. I therefore prefer the term “vernacular” for its intrinsic resistance to embedded contexts of comparativity. I propose a configuration of vernacular modernities that eschews derivativeness, disrupts dichotomous understanding of culture in a colonial/postcolonial context, and honors the complex anthropological legacy of the space of the Mediterranean. In that aim, I investigate the ways in which modernity refracts through each of the cultures of the Mediterranean but also how these refractions reverberate on each other “trans-locally.” Yet, my consideration of each form of Mediterranean modernity is anchored in its rich local specificities; transnational movements only take shape in the fertile soil of local
contexts of negotiation. Each locality is illuminated through its dialectical relation to the region, which develops between the two poles of similitude (the Mediterranean as a unified cultural paradigm) and differentiation (as a space of incommensurable, dissonant cultures). In this sense, my analysis contrasts with what Jahan Ramazani construed as a “‘postnational’ or ‘postethnic’ history, in which writers are viewed. . . as floating free in an ambient universe of denationalized, deracialized forms and discourses” (Ramazani 350). But, at the same time, this regional framework needs to be cognizant of the forms of transnationalism that circulation and socio-cultural criss-crossings elicit. In this respect, Francisco Ortiz’s concept of “transculturation” illuminates the mutually formative interactions lying at the heart of cultural formations in a “trans-local” context. Shedding light on the cultural fluidity of the Mediterranean successfully downplays diffusionist models centered on the construct of Europe.

Dealing with the space of the Mediterranean involves positing a few fundamental difficulties and paradoxes. The first one lies in interrogating the very notion of “the Mediterranean.” What exactly does the concept refer to? Is there even a unified object to which the term could aspire to refer? The very notion of a Mediterranean culture is far from being self-evident. The literature of cultural anthropology taking the region as its object was built on the discussion of the paradoxes of a possible collective identity. Excavating a common heritage specific to the region and distinct from neighboring forms of culture became the main concern of Mediterranean anthropology (Boetsch and Ferrié). Adopting a diachronic comparative method, these endeavors constructed Mediterranean identity as a series of survivals
from an original ancient civilization. Transhistorical, essentialist apprehensions of the region prevailed in that literature and overlooked the significance of interaction in identity formation. Their stories focused on settled populations, discounting the importance of “trans-local” migrations and circulations of human and cultural capital. The populations examined were therefore taken in the context of their territorialization and the diachronic consideration of their cultural traits drifted easily towards concepts of geographic and biological determinism. Fernand Braudel’s masterpiece, The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II (1955), partakes of this dynamic of territorialization and regional unification, albeit from a historical perspective. His work has marked the culmination of a long geographic tradition centered on the space of the Mediterranean. Although Romantic perceptions of the region emphasized the division between the two shores of the sea (as Gibbon put it, “the distinction of North and South is real and intelligible;” qtd. in Horden and Purcell 18), Braudel brought analyses of the Mediterranean in terms of continuity to their pinnacle. The influence of the Annales School of history on his work ensured that several levels of history would be taken into consideration: histoire totale, which would encompass the three layers of historical time- longue durée history based on the consideration of environmental determinism (“a history of constant repetition, ever-repeating cycles” 20), conjunctures (fifty-year cycles of wars, systems, regimes), and histoire évenementielle (of dates, historical trivia and heroes), each layer the bedrock of the following one. All three layers of history are superimposed to form an image of the Mediterranean both as a space of unity and as one of dissonances: “…the essential
task before us is to measure the… coherence of [this] history, the extent to which the movements of boats, pack animals, vehicles and people themselves makes the Mediterranean a unit and gives it a certain uniformity in spite of local resistance” (227). Braudel’s focus on ahistorical geographical “constants” made the longue durée narrative of imperceptible change look exceptionally close to a form of stasis. Individual will is subsumed within wider impersonal dynamics and Braudel’s analysis is quick to downplay the human factor in his multidirectional vision of history.

It is this aspect of Braudel’s work that spurred Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell’s would-be complementary project, The Corrupting Sea. In the first tome of their analysis (the only one published to date), the authors set out to present an integrated revised history of the region that would accommodate the fundamental dichotomy at work in the space of the sea: both its diversity and the commensurability of its cultures. Horden and Purcells’ project proposes to stay away from major misrepresentations of the area, which put to the fore the superficial similarities between its spaces or employ stereotypical representations of the region (a site of rejuvenation for Westerners; a primitive, irrational land of religiosity etc.). Their approach blends in mythical and historical representations, literary and academic theorizations in its awareness of “the peculiar burden of cultural history” in the Mediterranean (26). One of the major thrusts of their argument lies in the emphasis on dynamics of reciprocal exchange and interconnections rather than diachronic particularities of distinct spaces: their goal is to reach an “understanding of the whole environment” as “the product of a complex interaction of human and physical factors,
not simply a material backdrop or a set of immuable constraints” (10). The book takes as its focal point the “human geography” of the sea (2) in its dynamic aspect, a history marked by countless crossings and invasions to the detriment of stable, fixed geography (a penchant itself reminiscent of Braudel’s paradigm): “It bears re-emphasis that the region’s unity and distinctiveness must be conceived in relative, not absolute, terms: neat frontiers, enclosing blatant uniformities, are hardly to be expected” (487). Thus, the authors base their analysis on the notion of perpetual movement and instability rather than on great historical breaks and dramatic evolutions. In this sense, their approach could be described as “relational” (Algazi): "it must not be forgotten that such tiny units [the microregions] are not crisply bounded cellular entities with their own destinies. They are not definite in the sense that they have fixed boundaries. Rather, their definition is always changing as their relations with wider wholes mutate" (74). Their interest lies in the minute details of everyday life, in the lived experience of Mediterranean history on the local level (what they call, in reference to Braudel, mentalités) so much so that the relations to the greater, non-local structures of power, political or economic, are at times left aside. Such an approach requires rapt vigilance as several pitfalls await any study of Mediterranean specificities.

These difficulties are evoked in the section of the book dedicated to Mediterranean anthropology. The authors isolate three main perils plaguing “Mediterraneanist” approaches: the exoticization of the sea, which becomes synonymous with Islamic culture; the homogenizing of inherent diversities; and the
“restricted comparatism” of disciplinary investigations, which favor certain transnational networks and trajectories over others (486-7). As a remedy against such mystification and as an echo of Radhakrishnan’s plea, the authors advocate a “defamiliarization” of the locale, which they claim to have accomplished through the use of the category of “microecological model.” Through this concept, the argument distances itself from both an “interactionist approach” and an “ecologizing” one. The “interactionist” approach focuses on the space of sea as a space of interaction in its earlier forms (ancient thought) and, subsequently, on the tracing of major commercial routes in the space of the sea, which sees the Mediterranean only in terms of its incorporation into “high commerce” and ignores more restricted local movements, more humble in scope and disseminated geographically, but nevertheless fundamental to the development of the region’s history (144). In turn, the “ecologizing” one considers land-oriented social formations and focuses on the land surrounding the sea as an ensemble sharing physical characteristics, such as climate and vegetation (11-12). The authors propose to study the interactions between the two approaches in the region, notably through the use of two embedded concepts: “microecologies” and “connectivity.” These two notions open the door to a consideration of the Mediterranean “in terms of the unpredictable, the variable, and, above all, the local” (13). They construe these two concepts as correctives to the short-coming of Braudel’s

31 By “microecology,” Purcell and Horden designate the local environments in which the “interplay of ecological factors that gives each its apparent identity or definition” is studied. Similarly, “microecological investigations” (2) partake of the rendering of the history of the Mediterranean, which differs from a political, religious, social, and economic point of view, as opposed to histories in the Mediterranean. “Connectivity” refers to “the various ways in which microregions cohere, both internally and also with one another, in aggregates that may range in size from small clusters to something approaching the entire Mediterranean” (123).
methodology. Through his favoring of *histoire totale*, Braudel neglected to account for the forces of subjective consciousness and their influence over the course of history. Horden and Purcell, in turn, aim to create a pendant to human geography in the field of history: “…such history cannot be ‘mindless,’ for all its attention to subconscious patters of behaviour. *Mentalités* must clearly find their place” (45). The ecological model that they propose aims to leave room for such considerations of the subject in its ever-changing relation to its environment (45-49). Their approach has spurred quite intense debates over the major shortcomings of the project, especially with regards to its fragmentary, inconclusive structure (Algazi; Peressini and Hadj). However, regardless of the problems inherent in the structure of the analysis, the most problematic point may well be the authors’ curious choice to chronologically end their corpus with the early modern world. The authors make the questionable claim that Mediterranean history, as defined in their paradigm, “can be deemed to have reached a close” (4). They even go as far as to entitle one of their sections, the one directly following their examination of Braudel, “The end of the Mediterranean.” This interpelling title is meant to reflect the demise of regional accounts of the Mediterranean in the wake of Braudel’s *Méditerranée* (43). However, the observation on the state of scholarship after Braudel is soon extended to encompass the very possibility of historical thinking about the Mediterranean region. The distinction between a history *of* the region and a history *in* the region is enacted on the chronological level as well as the geographic one as only historiographical evidence up to the early modern period can be considered to partake of Purcell and Horden’s
project: “But the Mediterranean region as a distinct whole is not, we think, the indispensable framework within which to conceptualize the very recent history and likely future of its peoples” (2). Subsequent forms of interaction are considered to be manifestations of a hegemonic history of the superpowers at work in the region, its local history being obliterated or reduced to an insignificant position: “the very ‘modern’ periods and topics not fully represented here belong not to a history of the Mediterranean but in some other analysis” (4). This claim assimilates the modern Mediterranean to the discourses of modernity predicated on it. In this respect, it is oblivious to the submerged human histories of resistance and rewriting of Eurocentric forms of dominance which this dissertation aims to unearth in the space of the Mediterranean. Instead of relegating the history of “connectivity” in the region to earlier periods, it seems fruitful to investigate the repressed potentialities of alternative discourses of the region in the modern period, precisely because they constitute a much-needed counterpoint to the dominant narratives imposed by the West. Limiting the impact of Mediterranean interactions to the prehistory of modernity comes down to reinforcing hegemonic discourses on the region. This indubitably constitutes one of the main limits of the project. This contribution to theorizations of the Mediterranean is nevertheless important- because it displaced the concept of a united space of the Mediterranean, but also because it debunked the great narratives of the region. The focus on idiosyncrasies brings forth the fractal nature of the Mediterranean and reconfigures it as a key space of divergences, oppositions, and diffractions. The attention paid to local contexts in their embedded microregional specificities fosters a
different mode of representation based on local socio-cultural elements, whose heterogeneity and incommensurability become productive tenets of the approach.

Similar concerns with localism and disjunctions animate Franco Cassano’s ground-breaking essay *Il Pensiero Meridiano*. The 1996 piece portrays the effects of the double pull of globalization (towards world-wide connectivity on the one hand and the emergence of local idiosyncrasies on the other) in the region. His argument takes as a starting point the correspondence between the limits of the sea and the particular ethos that developed in its space. His analysis stems from the refutation of German philosopher Carl Schmitt’s Mediterranean geography, *Land and Sea*, in which sea and land are collapsed into a single land-oriented entity, the sea being perceived as a space of “diabolical temptation” [“tentazione diabolica” Cassano 33]. The sea is by nature a space of excess [“dismisura”], the moment of coastal interaction constituting but an intermediary step. The sea, for Schmitt, is conflated with the space of the Ocean, on which Northern Atlantic modernity is predicated (he mentions England), a form of dominance which considers itself to lie beyond the realm of rules and ethics. The sea becomes a space to conquer in an endless race for power and domination. In contrast, the land emerges as a firmly established, stable space of measure and humanity. This “phobia of the sea” (34), Cassano ascribes to the temptation of rootedness and narrow, exclusive identifications (“la passione per il radicamento… la tentazione di ricomporre in uno i frantumi disperse in tutte le direzione” [the passion for rootedness… the temptation to reassemble in one element the fragments dispersed in all directions] 34). In turn, Cassano emphasizes the mutual complementariness of sea and land for the
study of the Mediterranean. Both a sea encircled by land and a land delimitating a sea, the Mediterranean stands in sharp contrast to the two forms of fundamentalism against which Cassano writes— that of the land and that of the sea: “Nel Pensiero Meridiano viene proposto un criterio largo, ma preciso, di confrontabilità, una nozione di ‘misura’ come punto di equilibrio tra due fondamentalismi di segno opposto, quello della terra e quello del mare [Meridian thought suggests a wide but precise criterion for comparability, a notion of ‘measure’ as a point of balance between two opposed fundamentalisms, that of the land and that of the sea]” (XXX). He continues, “Se la terra illustra il terreno dell’identità, delle appartenanze comuni e del legame sociale, il mare illustra invece l’idea di partenza…di un individualismo senza misura... [È] il nomadismo di un ‘io’ prigioniero del suo etnocentrismo istantaneo ...una patologia esattamente simmetrica al totalitarismo [If the land epitomizes a grounded identity, a sense of common belonging and social connections, the sea epitomizes in turn the idea of departure, of unbounded individualism… It is the nomadism of the self prisoner of its sudden ethnocentrism… a pathology exactly symmetrical to totalitarianism]” (XXX-XXXI). Cassano therefore detracts from Schmitt’s representation as he is endowing the Mediterranean with an ethos of “measure” inspired from Camus’ pensée de midi and its opposition to Northern European thought.32 The sea, immune from Oceanic excess plays its connecting role. It thus becomes the geographic incarnation of the golden mean advocated by la pensée de midi. Never losing sight of the surrounding land, the sea allows for the possibility of a journey, either physical or

32 See chapter 2 of this dissertation.
cultural. Cassano presents this key middle position in purely geographical terms, thereby downplaying historical frameworks of modernity: “La differenza tra le terre non è uno scarto temporale or una gerarchia di valore, ma uno scarto spaziale, che non va superato con la transizione lineare (il ‘prossimo’) dalla stadio ‘arretrato’ a quello ‘avanzato.’ Non si tratta di una transizione temporale ma di una traslazione...” [The difference between lands isn’t predicated on the temporal level or a hierarchy of values, but on a geographic level, which linear transition (‘progress’) from a ‘backward’ stage to an ‘advanced’ one does not upstage. It isn’t a temporal transition but a translation...] (XXVII). The Mediterranean is a space of transition, of bridges (a pontós, as Massimo Cacciari intimates), where heterogenous, kaleidoscopic spaces “held in an inconclusive suspension” (Chambers) are linked together in an Archipelago (Cacciari’s term; qtd. in Chambers 24). Cassano’s effort therefore delineates an alternative, more fluid cartography of the Mediterranean not just in term of its physical features, but rather from the point of view of its human history of migration and re-routing. This mutable vision of an ecumenical Mediterranean branches out to more open geographies of belonging in the contiguous spaces of Asia, Europe, and Africa. Cassano therefore re-imagines the space of the sea as a prolongation of all the historically discriminated spaces of the South, from Gramsci’s Southern Italy to the former colonial spaces of Asia and the Caribbean. The thrusts of the pensiero meridiano (meridional or Southern thinking) rests in this border-to-border connection in the face of ambivalent Western modernity and its ontological appropriation of an oriental (or Southern, in Cassano’s paradigm) other: “Insomma,
l’idea-forza era quella di un riscatto del sud, di un suo uscire di minorità… un’ idea che incontrava il bisogno diffuso dei meridionali di cambiare l’immagine negativa de si stessi e della propria terra..” [In sum, the main idea was to redeem the South, to rescue it from its minority status, an idea that met the Southerners’ crucial need to change the negative image of themselves and of their land] (X).

It ensues that the consideration of performative processes of identity formation in the Mediterranean can only be adequately construed when the notion of cultural permanence is evacuated from the foreground. Likewise, modern models of analysis which construct Mediterranean identity retrospectively as the supposed origin of modern Europe have proved insufficient. The map of the Mediterranean must thus be re-centered. Boetsch and Ferrié have convincingly argued that conceptions of Mediterranean cartographies have always been developed in relation to the imperial expansion of ancient civilizations. The precisely delineated, historically constructed category of the nation has lain at the heart of representations of Mediterranean cultures inspired from physical anthropology. In turn, I assert the importance of a regional framework retaining its regional character and irreducible to static territorializations of culture for the theorization of transnational cultural counter-currents in the area. The notion of a Mediterranean identity is a necessary one, if only to provide a wider structure in relation to which to examine each specific rendering of this common culture. However, stipulating that the similarities evinced in the region constitute evidence of an originally shared culture obfuscates the transnational dynamic of contact and acculturation characteristic of contemporary relations. All authors
examined in this project have experienced dislocation and trans-culturation first-hand. In my view, a rigidly rooted perspective on local culture cannot fruitfully elucidate the dissonance that they experienced. Rather, the following chapters propose to emphasize performative, disjunctive processes of identity formation with regards to a mythicized Mediterranean ideal in the moment of their emergence. Because beliefs and identifications acquire meaning through usage (Boetsch and Ferrié), these pages focus on the personal articulations of Mediterranean identities by each author to the detriment of preconceived notions of what Mediterranean shared features are and of where they should be located. As I pointed out earlier on, Mediterranean identifications present a variegated process dependent on localities. For Southern Mediterranean subjects, for instance, identification to an Arab culture takes precedence over any consideration of the sea. Particular attention must thus be paid to the socially constructed character of concepts of identity and regionalism while essentialist discourses on origins and genealogy need to be deprioritized (19). Mediterranean vernacular modernities (in the plural) must therefore be evaluated on such grounds and eschew the same brand of essentialism that European discourses of modernity put to the fore, thereby avoiding flattening out cultural discrepancies and dissonances both within communities and between them. The following chapters present various reverberations on these issues.
Si les Grecs ont formé l’idée du désespoir et de la tragédie, c’est toujours à travers la beauté et ce qu’elle a d’oppressant. C’est une tragédie qui culmine. Au lieu que l’esprit moderne a fait son désespoir à partir de la laideur et du médiocre … Pour les Grecs, la beauté est au départ. Pour un Européen, elle est un but, rarement atteint. Je ne suis pas moderne.

[When the Greeks formed the idea of despair and tragedy, they did so from the oppressing concept of beauty. It is a culminating tragedy. In turn, the modern mind created its notion of despair from ugliness and mediocrity… For the Greeks, beauty lies at the source. For a European, it is an end rarely met. I am not modern.]

Albert Camus, *Carnets* II.

In adapting postcolonial studies to the context of a globalized world, critics have been increasingly calling into question the adequacy of theoretical approaches considering ex-colonial spaces individually and only through a necessary one-to-one relation to the former metropole. While postcolonial studies were in many ways founded on the elaboration of a critique of colonial binaries and a reconfiguration of the hierarchy established between the metropole and its ex-colonies, recent scholarship has paid particular attention to transnational comparative frameworks where entire regions have been configured as unified objects of study, be they centered on language
groups (the Francophone world, for instance) or on a common history (the Black Atlantic). Such a regional approach was also fundamental in early conceptions of North African identities and cultures. In keeping with that regional framework and in the aim of moving beyond North-South antagonism between Europe and North Africa in our global era, this chapter aims to reconfigure the Mediterranean as a strategic space of exchange and collaboration between its northern and southern shores. Decades of French, British, Spanish, and Italian colonization of the Mediterranean’s Southern shore in the name of progress and civilization stand at the origin of the opposition and exploitation that have historically characterized many significant aspects of dealings between Europe and its orientalized other. Discriminatory political measures demarcated with precision the space that each community (Muslim, Christian, and Jewish) was to occupy within colonial society, thus making segregation and confinement the logic of colonial policy-making. The polarization of the colonizer and the colonized, a configuration on which all subsequent relations were to be based, ensured the perpetuation of such a dichotomy into our postcolonial period. Finding alternative historical patterns of identification within the Mediterranean beyond the two poles of colonizer and colonized therefore carries with it potential in a global context where new relational configurations of regional spaces (especially those straddling the North/South divide) may offer fruitful alternatives to the colonial inspired primacy of the metropole/European center with regards to which the Third World can only stand as marginal and derivative. The option of multiple, regional

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33 See introduction to this dissertation.
identifications and margin-to-margin abstract affiliations thus open up new cultural spaces that offer a corrective to the failures of postcolonial global relations between centers and peripheries. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Algérianiste movement, which will be analyzed in greater detail later, already conceived of France and Algeria as organically tied in a regional Mediterranean context. Yet, their emphasis on native Berbers as the only legitimate North African group downplayed the importance of successive waves of Muslim conquests, be they Arab or Turkish. Berbers, who were believed to descend from Indo-Europeans, were thus construed as the historical heirs to North Africa’s “original” culture— the Roman Christian one, a conception which ignored centuries of Islamic influence and condoned French colonization as legitimate repossessing of Christian land. Less prone to revert to simplifying polarization were the writers of l’Ecole d’Alger [the School of Algiers], whose conception of fluid, syncretic Mediterranean identities this chapter will investigate.

**Imaginative disruptions of the colonial discursive**

During the late 1930s, at the apex of the implementation of colonial modernity, a group of writers descended from various Mediterranean cultures emerged in the Algerian capital in a movement that was to be known as l’Ecole d’Alger. It should be noted that l’Ecole d’Alger (also called Ecole Nord-Africaine des Lettres [The North African School of Letters]) in no way constitutes a unified literary movement. It was
so identified years after most of its members had been scattered throughout France, and this very designation was refuted by Albert Camus and Emmanuel Roblès, two of its most eminent members (Grenaud, Herrin). For the purpose of this chapter, however, we will disregard legitimate critiques as to the somewhat incorrect appellation and use it here to refer to the set of writings by Camus and Audisio that elaborated the theoretical and political stances of the movement. While the analysis will focus on these two founding figures, I will attempt to assess the significance of the movement as a whole since works by other contributors, such as Emmanuel Roblès, Jules Roy, or Jean Amrouche, whose literary production is the object of chapter 3, were no less crucial to the development of the school.  

The main figures of the movement coalesced around the figure of Edmond Charlot, the founder of the Editions Charlot, whose collection “Méditerranéennes” [Mediterranean] through its focus on the celebration of pan-Mediterranean culture served as a locus of dialogue for a nexus of authors with otherwise quite diverse interests. It is in the small bookshop/library “Les vraies richesses” [True Riches] owned by Charlot that Albert Camus met in 1937 with Gabriel Audisio, in those days the most celebrated writer of French Algeria and the only one published in the metropole. Since the onset of French colonization, successive waves of immigrants from the northern Mediterranean had settled in French North Africa. Maltese,

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34 For a recent survey of all contributions to the movement, see Guy Dugas, La Méditerranée de Audisio à Roy. Previous volumes include: Rencontres Méditerranéennes Albert Camus, Audisio, Camus, Roblès, frères de soleil- leurs combats; Michel Puche, Edmond Charlot, éditeur: bibliographie commentée et illustrée; Guy Dugas, dir., Une Famille de Rebelles. Hommage à Armand Guibert and Des Chemins où l’on se perd. Hommage à Emmanuel Roblès.
Corsicans, Catalans (primarily Mahonese/Balearic), Provençal French, Spaniards and Italians constituted a non-negligible part of the early colonizers of French Algeria. It was not until 1896 that Algerian-born Europeans outnumbered foreign-born immigrants, which made Algeria a land of immigration par excellence (Abun-Nasr 32). Authors such as Audisio and Camus shared similar transnational Mediterranean origins. Gabriel Audisio was born to a Piedmontese father and a Niçoise mother in Marseille although the family moved to North Africa soon after his birth. Early in his career, he evinced a strong interest in historical figures that united the Mediterranean: his research on Mediterranean conquerors from the whole Latin and non-Latin Mediterranean resulted in the publication of two books on Hannibal and Haroun-al-Raschid, the leader of many expeditions launched against the Roman Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean.35 In a similar vein, his anthology of the tales of Cagayous followed by a glossary of pataouète reflected a fascination with the Mediterranean hybridity that such a popular dialect evinced.36 The son of a Frenchman who met an early demise, Albert Camus was raised by his mother’s Balearic family. Although he never seemed to master any other language than French, his lack of linguistic skills was largely compensated by his passion for Spanish (in particular, Andalusian) culture. In his book written in homage to their friendship, Roblès fondly reports their

35 In 1930, Audisio’s La vie de Haroun-al-Raschid was published by Gallimard. Berger-Levrault published his Hannibal in 1961. Al-Raschid was the late 8th century fifth Abbasid caliph in Baghdad.

36 Cagayous was a working-class picaresque hero of Algiers folklore known for his colorful vocabulary and his impudence. Originally from Bab-el-Oued, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Algiers, he is the epitome of pied-noir (French colonist) vitality and boldness. Pataouète was the hybrid dialect spoken by the communities in Bab-el-Oued and is a blend of “French, Arabic, Italian, Spanish, Maltese, and more” [Audisio Algérie, Méditerranée, Feux Vivants 29]. See also Musette, Cagayous(textes recueillis par Gabriel Audisio).
evenings in Andalusian cafés where both drew inspiration from the hybrid vocal genre of *canto jondo* (Roblès 29). Through his veneration of Iberian culture, Camus acknowledged and cultivated another layer of identity, one that proved irreducible to *pied-noir* identity or metropolitan Frenchness, regardless of his status with regards to French citizenship and its prerogatives.

It is from this very irreducibility to monolithic categories that the authors’ identity springs, culturally but also in terms of class. Endowed with the privilege of citizenship, unlike the Muslim subalterns, they nevertheless belonged to underclass backgrounds. Southern European ethnicity and a working-class background oftentimes seemed to go hand in hand, both denying them equality with the ruling land-owning French elite or *grands colons*. In point of fact, in his dialogue with Jean-Louis Depierris, Roblès discussed the cross-pollination of concepts of ethnicity and class in the making of hierarchies within colonial society (De Pierris 19). Thus, the Spanish

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37 The phrase *canto jondo* designates a specific form of *cante [sic] flamenco* or *cante Gitano*, a vocal form typical of Andalusia. Flamenco music partakes of Andalusian folklore. It constitutes a hybrid musical genre that originated in Arab and gypsy music.

38 Laws were passed in the late 1800s that conferred French citizenship on European immigrants provided they did not concurrently claim another national identity (Stora 32).

39 Gabriel Audisio’s case was somewhat different as his father was the director of the Opera of Algiers. It can thus be assumed that his perception of class reality may have somewhat differed from that of Camus, who came from a working-class background. It is also interesting to note that his literary production was notably less openly Marxist-inspired than that of other authors of the movement (Camus and Roblès especially).

40 For an even more striking discussion of communities lying in-between the two poles of the Europeans and the natives, see Andrea Smith, “The Colonial in Postcolonial Europe: The Social Memory of Maltese-Origin Pieds-Noirs,” where she depicts the Maltese as being linguistically and culturally closer to the Arabic-speaking Muslims than to Europeans, a similarity which spurred French colonial authorities in the *Constantinois* region to quickly impose restrictions on their immigration to Eastern Algeria.
community in Algeria was considered to be what he called “fifty percent” (19). That exclusive denomination functions on two levels: the ethnic one, as Spaniards were considered to be neither exactly European,” nor really indigenous, as well as the socioeconomic one, as most of them belonged to the working-class.\footnote{Camus’ incomplete novel, \textit{Le Premier Homme}, depicts the poverty endured as a child after his father’s death left the family in a difficult financial situation. The French \textit{pied-noir} community of \textit{petits colons} did not necessarily fare much better; at the eve of the war of independence, their standard of living was on average 20% below that of the metropolitans (Todd 598).} However, although the most impoverished of them would easily cross the thin line into peripheral communities (Camus’ mother, for instance, spent the decade of the war of independence in the neighborhood of Belcourt located near the \textit{cité} Mahieddine, a poor Muslim-populated area), it should be noted that working-class Southern Europeans such as Camus still enjoyed civil and social privileges of which the indigenous population was deprived.\footnote{The \textit{cité} Mahieddine was characterized as a \textit{“bidonville”} (Roblès 19). Like most colonial cities, Algiers was marked by urban segregation. European and Muslim populations would thus only encounter one another in hierarchized work situations were the Muslims would be employed and therefore in a position of inferiority with regards to the \textit{colons}. In his essay \textit{Feux Vivants}, Audisio makes this spatial segregation one of the main causes of the cultural indifference between communities. For a discussion of the 1881 \textit{code de l’indigénat}, which codified the domination of \textit{colons} over the natives, see Naylor and Heggoy 154-5.} From their intermediary position in between the main two communities, the authors elaborated a vision of the colonial situation (and, beyond that, of the hegemonic discourses associated with it) which went beyond the dominant discursive framing of French colonial society in binary terms. Their unique situation allowed for the elaboration of an alternative identification- a mythical pan-Mediterranean transnational identity, both cosmopolitan in nature and generative of regional awareness and which would downplay racial and religious differences
between communities. The decision to include in their circle Muslim writers, such as Mouloud Feraoun and Mohammed Dib, who would later play a crucial role in the development of a national postcolonial literature, enabled them to further mark out a distinctive position vis-à-vis colonizer/colonized polarities. In point of fact, prominent members of l’Ecole d’Alger proved to be strong supporters of Muslim Algerian authors; for instance, it was Charlot who published Mouloud Feraoun’s first novel, *Le fils du Pauvre* [The Poor Man’s Son] (Editions Rivages). Moreover, the influence of the movement on the following generation of Algerian writers was not negligible. Publisher Edmond Charlot thus claimed in an interview with Frédéric-Jacques Temple, a lesser-known member of l’Ecole d’Alger, that Mouloud Feraoun decided to start writing after reading Roblès’ novels, whose treatment of the colonized figure fascinated him (Temple 140). Furthermore, Roblès initiated the publication of important works of early postcolonial Algerian literature. The head of Le Seuil’s “Méditerranée” collection, he published authors such as Nabile Farès, Tahar Djaout, and Mohammed Dib, all of whom were to become some of the most prominent writers of independent Algeria.

*L’Ecole d’Alger* must thus be understood as an utopian humanistic response to the colonial racialized discourses of modernity that had been mobilized in the colonies to facilitate the institutionalization of the French colonial presence and its associated patterns of segregation. However, in considering the movement’s fruitful imaginative conception of social relations in the colonial context, an alternative articulated at the apex of modernity in the key decade of the 1930s, it is imperative to keep in mind that
their proposed reconfiguration of the colonial order was mostly utopian and was eventually outrun by the course of events. Their lack of anti-colonial activism as well as their entrenched resistance to any mode of anti-colonial thinking, which has been understandably condemned by critics, undoubtedly constitutes the main limit of their argument.43 This inability to successfully adapt itself to the reality of colonialism, however, does not in any way minimize the potential of l’Ecole d’Alger’s project for our purpose. Reconfiguring the Mediterranean as a cultural center in its own right, l’Ecole d’Alger opened up the colonial space of Algeria, which had hitherto only been construed as peripheral with regards to the metropole, and integrated it into a pan-Mediterranean backdrop. By redefining the northern Mediterranean, which had been discursively configured as Christian and exclusively European by restrictive colonial ideologies, the movement’s endeavors resulted in a genuine disruption of the rationale of hierarchical segregation in the colonial space, albeit on the discursive level only. I focus on the transnational alternative forms of historical and cultural affiliation in which L’Ecole d’Alger engaged and highlight new theoretical perspectives appropriate to these practices. I argue that their reconsideration of polarized understandings of the colonial Mediterranean appears to be particularly productive in the context of our postcolonial era, if only to help us find productive alternatives to most socio-political approaches to multiculturalism in the French national context, approaches still predominantly conditioned by a logic of resentment directly inherited from the rigid,

43 For an extreme example, see Haddour “Unravelling the Mummifying myths of colonialism.” Haddour’s argument, however, indiscriminately conflates l’Ecole d’Alger and the Algérianistes and thus fails to recognize the specificities of the former school of writing, as well as its productive influence on conceptions of multiculturalism in the Maghreb that were later fruitfully developed by postcolonial nationalist writers.
binary dynamics of the colonial period that culminated in the Algerian war. By articulating their concept of a transcontinental Mediterranean identity around their critique of hierarchy, the authors associated with l’Ecole d’Alger also helped to desegregate the concept of modernity, at the same time making an argument in favor of culturally-specific forms of the modern to be considered in and of themselves rather than in relation to an exterior cultural standard. The argument elaborated in the 1930s is still of great relevance in our globalized age owing to its advocacy of a transnational regional paradigm that could be duplicated on the global level. It thus parallels relational theories, such as Edouard Glissant’s théories de la Relation, which provide a compelling theoretical substitute for North vs. South hierarchized conceptions of our global world.

**Audisio’s hybrid “Eternal Mediterranean”**

Let us now turn to the forms that this reconfiguration of colonial relations took in the authors’ writings. Gabriel Audisio was chronologically the first of the group to develop an interest in the cultural interaction brought about by the colonial encounter. Because cultural mixing had been a constant in the history of the region, Audisio offered a vision of the Mediterranean which construed Algeria not as a nationalized space but rather as a local space that would only gain significance as part of a greater region. The main feature of the Mediterranean land and its people was, he suggested, its hybridity. A sound analysis of this hybridity can be found in the opening pages of
Jeunesse de la Méditerranée [Youth of the Mediterranean], in a section entitled “Les Deux Portes de la Mer” [The Two Doors of the Sea].\textsuperscript{44} Significantly, the narrative starts with a poetic description of sailors sleeping on a ship deck. The intertwined bodies trigger musings about the possibility of human brotherhood as the idealized egalitarian, cosmopolitan group of sailors is perceived as the model for a type of intersubjective relations freed from the secular antinomies caused by national rivalries (10).\textsuperscript{45} Soon afterwards in the text, the evocation of cultural differences separating the sailors, once they emerge from their pacifying sleep, acts as a foil to the evocation of Mediterranean society. Audisio presents the Mediterranean as a liquid continent, a fatherland (“patrie”) that unites nationally diverse groups seen as pertaining to the same people, which he calls the Mediterranean “race” (10). Mediterranean unity proceeds from a common condition, that of cultural syncretism of which North Africa is the epitome: “l’Afrique du nord fournit les preuves (…) de notre unité méditerranéenne par sa soumission aux diverses civilisations qui ont régné sur elle, des phéniciens aux français” [North Africa epitomizes our Mediterranean unity through its subjection to the various civilizations which ruled over it, from the

\textsuperscript{44} In Audisio, Jeunesse de la Méditerranée.

\textsuperscript{45} One should keep in mind that the narrative was written during the 1930s, at a time of increased national aspirations among European nations. At that time, Hitler had already got to power in Germany, the civil war was about to break out in Spain, and Mussolini had turned Italy into the first fascist nation in Europe. L’Ecole d’Alger was sorely aware of these developments and due to the Spanish or Italian origins of most of its members, the movement felt compelled to take a stance against the rise of totalitarianism in the continent and, in the case of Italy, its related colonial expansion (the colonization of East Africa as part of a national Risorgimento). A general mistrust for nationalism ensued, which permeated most of the school’s works, as we shall see.
Phoenicians to the French]. This syncretism is presented as the product of successive waves of colonization, in the wake of which elements from various traditions have been incorporated into a mosaic of cultures (“amalgame”): “‘Mon peuple,’ a de multiples visages comme tout ce qui vit, et son authenticité repose, comme toutes les vérités, sur un amalgame d’antécédents suspects” [“My people” is multifaceted as does all that exists and, as it is the case for all that is true, its authenticity rests on an combination of suspicious antecedents] (13).

However, Audisio takes this thinking one step further as his apprehension of a common state of hybridity all over the Mediterranean region leads him in essentialist directions. In his use of the term “race” as opposed to “nation” (10), Audisio not only emphasizes the transnational character of his concept, thereby annihilating nationalistic thinking as inadequate to his literary vision; he also reveals a belief in the biological assimilation of what were originally cultural parameters. The argument goes as far as to establish the existence of a discriminate race, one whose existence is ascertained by references to archeological work (17). Indeed, the recurrence of cultural experiences and symbols throughout the Mediterranean is used to demonstrate the existence of a distinctive, syncretic state of mind, the Mediterranean psyche, which is thought to be the most perceptible emanation of a specific biological constitution. The

There would be much to say about Audisio’s choice to characterize North Africa exclusively in terms of its submission to waves of colonization, which he here envisions as the historic standard for the region. Suffice is to say that his depiction has the perverse effect of legitimizing colonialism as a positive dynamic, one at the origin of productive cultural interactions lying at the root of his imaginative vision of a Mediterranean identity supposed to be moving beyond racial and social considerations. These unwitting mentions of the “naturalness” of the colonial rule in North Africa can be found in many passages and exposes the fundamental ambiguity of Audisio’s argument and therefore its most notable limit.
argument is further developed in Audisio’s essay “Homère à Alger,” [Homer in Algiers] where the author argues that the ubiquity of the poetic trope of nostalgia in Berber and Greek literatures stands witness to the common character of Mediterranean culture.47 Yet nostalgia does not merely underlie poetry formally; it is seen as the expression of a most intrinsic Mediterranean feature. Homer’s epic The Odyssey unravels along the lines of a homecoming (the Greek nostos literally means “homeland”) and his hero’s meandering journey becomes a metaphor for the condition of the Mediterranean man who, for Audisio, lives and suffers as an exile in his own land. Similarly, in the same essay, Kabyl Berber poetry is depicted as inspired by the feeling of homesickness in a time of exile, thus supporting the hypothesis of transnational characteristics specific to the Mediterranean “race;”

... Je ne veux m’attarder à cette communauté de nostalgie qu’on voit entre le chantre homérique et ces poèmes berbères de Kabylie où le mal du pays, le thème de l’exil mettent un accent profond, aussi pathétique que celui d’Ulysse, sur la grève de Calypso, pleurant du désir de revoir son Ithaque. Ce sont là sans doute des constantes de l’homme méditerranéen...

[…I do not want to linger on this common nostalgia found in both the Homeric bard and these poems from Kabylia, which homesickness and the theme of exile deeply accentuate, as pathetically as Ulysses, on Calypso’s shore, weeping for Ithaca. These are undoubtedly constants of the Mediterranean man] (358).

In this context, the recurrent figure of Odysseus the wanderer in Audisio’s theoretical production epitomizes such a transborder, hybrid Mediterranean identity. The hero links together vitality, nostalgia inspired mobility, and the paganism inherent in oriental (non-Christian) cultural traditions— all characteristics that lie at the root of

47 Gabriel Audisio, “Homère à Alger.”
Audisio’s conception of the Mediterranean people. This focus on essential Mediterranean features is part and parcel of the disruptive potential of Audisio’s discourse, as the very notion of hybridity underlying it (cultural and racial) directly undermines dominant racialized discourses in the colony, such as earlier Algérianiste theories, which provided a rationalization of colonial practices in the making and with which Audisio directly engaged.

It is indeed in the light of Algérianisme that Audisio’s writings are most appositely understood. Based on the writings of Louis Bertrand and Robert Randau in the early 1900s, the Algérianiste movement was the first attempt in the literature produced in the French colony to envision Algeria as a space of coexistence and cultural communication between the Orient and the Occident. While rejecting the previous orientalist littérature d’escale on account of its exoticized foreign perspective, the Algérianistes meant to provide a realistic account of the dynamics of Algerian colonial society through the depiction of the birth of a new race- les Algériens. By emphasizing for the first time the mixed Mediterranean character of the land, the Algérianistes reconfigured Algeria as the crossroad of disparate Western (Latin) and oriental cultural influences. Such interest in cultural hybridity could have potentially moved away from monolithic understandings of culture. Yet, the promise of their writings was short-lived as the transnational character of the Mediterranean influence present in the colony was neutralized; Algeria was mapped out as an enclosed, self-sufficient regional space which obeyed exclusive dynamics. That elaboration of Algeria as a regional paradigm owes much to the contemporary
conceptions of regionalism as an incarnation of “True France” (Lebovics). In a dystopian national context where the rapid pace of modernization was perceived as a threat to the “true” national character, conservative regionalisms were regarded as the only legitimate form of resistance to national decline. In traditional regionalist fashion, the Algérienistes thus envisioned Algeria as a locus of regeneration for the corrupted, weakened French Republic, which had just then lost the war against the Germans. Algeria appeared to be a new land full of promises, one that could compensate for the loss of Alsace-Lorraine in 1870 (Bertrand’s homeland, which was handed over to the Germans as reparations) and, through the colonial domination and “civilizing” of the natives in the name of North African Latinité (the Roman, Christian history of the land considered as its true tradition), restore France to its former grandeur.

Such a restoration was to be completed on the racial level (it was in terms of racial degeneracy that the failure of France was construed) through the creation of a new bloodline- a bold, hybrid people formed in the image of Cagayous. To that effect, the Algérienistes configured a mythical “Grande Berbérie” as the model for the necessary “re-barbarization” of the French-Algerian race promoted by Bertrand, which is yet another instance of the modern fascination for the primitive (Dunwoodie 204). (The recourse to Berbers is incidentally a significant choice as it seems to imply that it is only through a race considered to be Indo-European that regeneration can be achieved. In this respect, the Algérienistes’ vision of primitivism is thus radically distinct from the fascination with African tribal culture that was soon to develop in Parisian artistic circles.) The connection to Berbers as representative of a pristine state
of nature for the Indo-European race also functions on the cultural level. In point of fact, through their focus on “native” Maghrebi populations, the movement downplayed the importance of successive waves of Muslim conquests, be they Arab or Turkish. Thus, the Berbers are here depicted as having remained faithful to their “original” culture— the Roman Christian one, a proposition which obscures centuries of Arab influence. Bertrand’s engagement with regionalism is thus highly selective as it only acknowledges part of the historical and cultural heritage of the region. Therefore, if this vision of Algeria as a space of cultural (but never biological) “miscegenation” between the Orient and the Occident is significant, the Algérianistes’ contribution remained incapable to displace the dominant logic of colonialism; rather, its hypothesis of selective Mediterranean hybridity strove to downplay Islamic culture to the benefit of Latin/Christian civilization in a way that provided historical justifications for the exclusion of the Muslim majority from its own history. It thus seems clear that the Algérianistes’ agenda was to provide a theoretical framework that would facilitate contemporaneous reforms aiming to establish segregation at the heart of colonial society and to secure the historical supremacy of Europeans in North Africa. In this regard, their appropriation of the trope of the Mediterranean was very partial and exclusive.

Gabriel Audisio was no stranger to Algérianiste interpretations of Algerian heritage as purely Latin. Early in his career, he had contributed to the group’s periodical Afrique and was therefore familiar with its theories. His writings’ emphasis on the fluidity evinced in Odysseus’s meandering journey back to Ithaca can thus be
read as a rejection of the instrumentalization of concepts of hybridity evinced in *Algérianiste* writings. It is important at this point to map out the stakes of Audisio’s understanding of the concept. His writings delineate a geographical representation of absolute hybridity promoted as political ideal, both nationally and transnationally. In no way can this hybridity be collapsed into the colonial appropriation of the concept within a logic of cultural hierarchy.\(^4\) Here, the potential of Audisio’s vision rests on its geographical scope, as the choice of a local, transnational, even transcolonial paradigm (straddling French, Spanish, and Italian colonial borders) immunizes it from nationalistic recuperation and ensures its propagation as a vector of desegregation. Audisio links the Orient and the Occident in a Mediterranean unified “space,” whose hybridity is shaped by this ever-shifting Mediterranean dynamic of exchange and redefinition.\(^4\) I do not mean to say that, in Audisio’s thought, this fluid hybridity is by nature incommensurable with any national framework; his later texts do consider the context of the Algerian nation in relation to these failed transnational inventions of Mediterranean identity (*Audisio Feux Vivants* [Live Fires], for instance). Audisio interestingly theorized transnational Mediterranean identity as a suitable foundation for nation formation; to him, the two notions are complementary, one being a local instantiation of the other.\(^5\) In the context of the nation, this transnational character of

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\(^4\) For an astute discussion of how theories of métissage were instrumentalized to inscribe hierarchies at the heart of colonial societies’ self-representation, see Miller.

\(^4\) I use “space” in the sense developed by Michel de Certeau in his *Practice of Everyday Life*. See introduction of this dissertation.

\(^5\) “Il me semble que l’esprit méditerranéen ne devrait pas trahir le destin de l’Algérie, le destin de l’Afrique du Nord toute entière, parce que l’Afrique du Nord, et spécialement l’Algérie, se présente à
Mediterranean identity is most evidently perceptible in the intrinsic multiculturalism of Maghrebi national bodies (composed of Arab, Berbers, Jews, and various European nationalities). Audisio’s very qualification of the Mediterranean sea as the real “patrie” (Audisio *Jeunesse de la Méditerranée* 10) testifies to the theoretical overlap between regional/transnational and local/“national” contexts in his thought. However, by theorizing the fluidity of Mediterranean hybridity (one which includes elements from French colonial culture) as a suitable substitute for nationalist identitarian politics, Audisio fails to understand the very dynamic of anti-colonial struggle. Defining the national community as a one of reconciliation (“l’ensemble des groupes humains qui cohabitent en Algérie, qu’ils soient d’origine européenne ou indigène, de religion chrétienne, hébraïque ou musulmane” [All of the communities living together in Algeria, be they of European or indigenous origin and of Christian, Jewish, or Muslim faith] Audisio *Feux Vivants* 26), he further alienates his project from the realities of the colonial situation and his engagement with the category of the nation can only lead to aporia as he finally concedes that his national vision is doomed to failure: “l’amalgame de ces divers éléments est resté superficiel, plus apparent que réel… la communauté algérienne n’existe pas” [The blending of these various elements has remained superficial, more apparent than real… the Algerian community does not exist] (Audisio *Feux Vivants* 25-26).

*nous comme une image réduite, un véritable microcosme de tout le monde méditerranéen*” [It seems to me that a Mediterranean ethos should not betray the fate of Algeria, the fate of North Africa as a whole, because North Africa, and especially Algeria, are small-scale images, true microcosms of the whole Mediterranean world.] (Audisio *Feux Vivants* 22).
The choice of the term “race” applied to all Mediterranean subjects, regardless of religion or geography, must thus be understood as a rewriting of modern exclusive implications usually associated with the concept. If the Mediterranean people (Muslims and non-Muslims alike) constitutes a different race, it is one that presents itself as rejuvenating for “old” northern Europe. Its historical eternal youth, here, is not connoted as immaturity or cultural primitivism. A new semantics ties youth to regeneration and vitality, thereby displacing historicist discourses of the “not yet.”

To the concept of stages in cultural development, Audisio opposes a vision of the Mediterranean that would render all historicist judgment obsolete. In this regard, his argument extends the filiations of Mediterranean culture and its European self-proclaimed offshoots beyond a Greco-Roman heritage. Audisio’s writings present two sides of Greek culture that are put to the fore according to the historiography in which they are mentioned: paganism and the culture of epics (what Audisio sees as the fruitful side of Greek culture), and Greek rationality, embodied either in its philosophy or in its political achievements. It is the latter characteristic that is here conveyed in the term “Greco-Latin” (52), which adequately puts to the fore the recuperation and limitation of Greek culture to what has been adopted by its Latin offshoot. Audisio’s use of (irrational) Greek culture as epitome of an inclusive Mediterranean character stands closer to the evocation of irrational Semitism discussed below than it does to the Greco-Latin tradition. Audisio thus attempts to defuse discourses that would make that culture the only valuable one in the ancient Mediterranean for being the avowed

51 I here use Chakrabarty’s terminology designating the theories en vogue in colonial times that justified colonialism by the purported immaturity of colonial peoples to dispose of themselves.
precursor of northern European modernity, its contemporaneous colonial tradition included. In “Le Sel de Carthage,” [The Salt of Carthage], Carthage in its cultural hybridity becomes the epitome of an extensive Mediterranean unified beyond religious and geographical divides. Audisio here again adopts a transnational perspective as his analysis endeavors to replace Carthaginian culture in its historical context of migrations and displacement of populations instead of judging the ancient history of which it partook through the lens of Roman culture. In revealing the reasons for the city’s historical condemnation, his argument attempts to contextualize it as he reveals that it was anti-Semitic sentiments rooted in the fear of cultural/racial contamination that led to the city’s repudiation. Audisio thus offers an alternative reading of the history of Carthage, not in terms of a threat to the Roman empire then dominating the Mediterranean, but rather as its complement, a locus of fruitful collaboration between Orient and Occident. His claim thus displaces Greco-Roman culture as the central one in the Mediterranean, thereby challenging the historical superiority attributed to the Western civilizations claiming that heritage. Through his consideration of Carthage, Audisio adds a new component to his Greek-inspired Mediterranean hybridity: Semitic culture, taken here mostly as Jewish rather than Arab (although both branches are inseparable for Audisio), yet taken not so much in religious terms as in its ethnographic character. It is here the Semitic orient of Jewish mysticism (“l’orient sémitique … de la mystique juive”; my emphasis) that is taken into account as a foil to “Greco-Latin” rationality (52). Semitism is thus considered more as a principle of

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52 In Gabriel Audisio, *Le Sel de la Mer* 47-75.
irrationality than as a purely Jewish element. Carthage rather embodies non-Christian/Oriental culture detached from its later offshoot: Roman Christian culture, Christianity being taken here as the rigid hierarchical organization of the Roman Church rather than its mystical beliefs. Audisio’s Mediterranean is thus described as originating from this perpetual conflicting encounter between East and West through “horizontal” waves of Eastern migrations to the West. Carthaginian “Semitism” thus historically provided a counterpoint to a Roman/Christian domination necessary to “faire des étincelles” [for sparks to fly], that is for cultural hybridity to eventually occur (all Audisio’s terms; 51). Audisio’s Mediterranean is therefore one of reconciliation, one of fusion between Orient and Occident, whose heartland lies in the central land of Tunisia. Eternal in its shared hybridity, its culture stands the test of time and defies appropriation by any one wave of colonization: “Sous la domination romaine, la latinité n’y change presque rien” [Under Roman domination, Latinity changes almost nothing] (55), a concept that could possibly include the French colonial presence.

The two shifts from self-enclosed Algeria to the transnational, hybrid Mediterranean and from Latin ancestry to Greek-Semitic ancestry thus work hand in hand to form a reconfiguration of a utopian North African community included in a Mediterranean region that stretches beyond racial and religious divides with the limits mentioned. The recuperation of Semitism as part and parcel of Audisio’s redefinition of a Mediterranean of reconciliation is thus integral to his disruptive potential. His emphasis on the pre-Roman past relativizes the watershed of the Roman conquest,
which had important political consequences in the heyday of the Italian fascist conquest of East Africa in the name of a renewed *pax romana*. In emphasizing the Mediterranean as a space of reconciliation between Latinness and Judaism, Audisio’s argument undermines the very workings of *Algérianisme*, which tended to associate anti-Semitism with faithfulness to an original common Latin culture:

N’a-t-on pas vu, en temps de campagnes électorales, un parti anti-sémite d’Algérie se donner pour parti latin? N’a-t-on pas vu tel journal... se déclarer “organe anti-juif et d’action latine” et ses rédacteurs se flatter d’être “les fils de la latinité et non de la Judée”? N’a-t-on pas vu, dans la guerre éthiopienne, des Français ... prendre parti pour la latinité italienne contre les Abyssins dont on se plaisait en même temps à insinuer qu’ils ne sont que des juifs (bien que Chrétiens pour la plupart)?

[Have we not seen, in electoral times, an anti-Semitic party passing for a pro-Latin party? Have we not seen some journal...declare that it was “an anti-Jewish vessel in favor of pro-Latin activism” and its writers pride themselves on being “the sons of Latinity, not of Judea?” Have we not seen, during the Ethiopian war, French nationals ... siding with Italian Latinity against the Abyssinians who, *it was insinuated with much pleasure, were supposedly Jewish (although most of them are Christians)*?] (Audisio *Le Sel de la Mer* 59; my emphasis).

His words therefore resonate as antifascist, be it Italian fascism in the guise of Latinness or European fascism, with the rise of Hitler in Germany and the growth of an anti-Semitic sentiment in France. Audisio’s focus on a hybrid North Africa therefore transgresses its local boundaries and the context of colonialism as *l’Ecole d’Alger* made it a key locus in the struggle against fascism and, beyond it, a certain idea of modernity (Dunwoodie 209-211). 53

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53 Those issues were as well developed in Camus’ writings, as we shall see later.
The inclusion of Islam in his vision, however, is much less conclusive. Audisio’s biography of Haroun-al-Raschid provides insight into his perception of Islamic culture. A romanced depiction of the life and achievements of the Baghdad caliph, whom Audisio interestingly presents as the head of the Arab empire that stretched from Spain to India, the book enthusiastically portrays an idealized Islamic civilization of power and enlightenment on its way to conquering the whole Mediterranean. Although the focus lies on Haroun-al-Raschid’s empire in Asia, his reference to al-Andalus, the Muslim rule over parts of the Iberian Peninsula, emphasizes the transnational character of this golden age of Islamic civilization. Haroun-al-Raschid’s court therefore becomes the epitome of Islamic enlightenment, which is to be found throughout the Arab empire all the way to al-Andalus, the Muslim rule over parts of the Iberian Peninsula. Yet, the defeat against Charles Martel spelled the end of Arab ambitions in the Mediterranean and it is on a somewhat nostalgic note that Audisio deplores the incompleteness of the Arab conquest of both Mediterranean shores. The image of Islam in the Mediterranean is thus, to Audisio, that of a failure, of an absence, one which holds sway over his treatment of Islam and Muslim natives in his theoretical configurations. In narrating the history of the Arab empire in the East, Audisio chooses to present unadulterated Muslim civilization free of any intermingling with the native populations of North Africa.  

54 In point of fact, a major blind spot in Audisio’s conception lies in his perception of Berber cultures. Rarely discussed per se, they are often only used as mere ethnographic counterpoint to the evocation of northern Mediterranean cultures and do not significantly contribute to Audisio’s mythical conception of Mediterranean hybridity. Audisio generally downplays Berber specificities and subsumes them within what he calls “le génie nord-africain,” a syncretic cultural construct reminiscent of Mediterranean hybridity, which reduces Berber cultures to a disparity of cultural elements assimilated from successive
dissociates Islam from the Mediterranean region. The inclusions of Greco-Mediterranean and Semitic cultures partake of the same objective: redefining the Mediterranean as a transnational space of contact immune from polarized recuperations. By choosing to focus on Islam outside the Mediterranean region, Audisio fails to incorporate Islamic elements into this syncretic vision of the region. Islam is therefore relegated to a superficial, marginal position; it does not even warrant any thorough consideration of its rich history in the North African region (in mythical Al-Andalus, for instance, the setting of many accounts of Islamic-inspired Mediterranean hybridity). It is thus not surprising that, in his theoretical production, the treatment of Muslim figures, be they Arabs or Berbers, should remain frustratingly peripheral; nor is it surprising that his vision of a common Mediterranean identity should predominantly be influenced by Greco-Mediterranean cultures. It is in this deficient representation of Muslims that Audisio’s theoretical configurations are most waves of colonization. Audisio’s reluctance to acknowledge the existence of specific, autonomous Berber cultures may constitute a rejection of Algérianiste theories.

55 Rachid Boudjedra’s La Prise de Gibraltar (1987); Driss Chraïbi’s La Mère du Printemps (1982) and Naissance à l’Aube (1986), for instance provide inroads into the history of Al-Andalus in relation to postcolonial Maghrebi (Berber) identities.

56 I believe that a word about the emphasis on Northern Mediterranean cultures in most of the movement’s writings is necessary here. Despite the evident problems lying in the choice of a European model rather than a native one, there is nevertheless a strategic point in focusing the theoretical project of defining the Mediterranean on Southern European cultures (primarily Greece and Italy). In point of fact, it is this same Greco-Latin tradition that the discriminatory arguments that l’Ecole sought to refute (those of the Algérianistes, for instance) claimed as their foundation. The bone of contention thus lay on the Northern shores of the Mediterranean, which urgently needed to be reconfigured in order to open up European thinking to considerations of other Mediterranean subjects, be they Christian Europeans from North Africa, Jews, or Muslims, even if the extent to which this integration of all communities was in fact performed by these authors remains questionable.
limited, his dealings with the segregated natives possibly constituting a case of the return of the colonial repressed.

Audisio’s main contribution, thus, lies in his attempt to promote an alternative value system, albeit limited and utopian, which remaps the Mediterranean locus as a transnational and, possibly, anti-segregationist one in its questioning of the rationale of the racializing discourses on which the colonial enterprise rests. His focus on a hybrid North Africa therefore transgresses its local boundaries as l’Ecole d’Alger made it a capital site in the global struggle against fascism and its associated segregation. That move was to be developed by Camus who took Audisio’s insights to a higher philosophical level.

**Camus’ “Mediterranean Humanism:” a transnational revision of the Marxist ideology of revolt**

Camus’ approach to the Mediterranean is in many ways comparable to that of Audisio: his texts evince the same distrust of reinforcements of racial and ethnic dichotomies in Algérianiste writings, as well as a similar interest in a transnational paradigm. His denunciatory approach nevertheless does not stop at the consideration of segregation as an incidental phenomenon. If Camus shares Audisio’s belief in the “eternal Mediterranean,” his analysis strives to reconcile the belief in the non-hierarchical nature of Mediterranean culture with the realities of colonial rule in Algeria. His dilemma is further compounded by his simultaneous adherence to
Marxist doctrines and associated ideals of progress and historicism that Audisio’s non-historicist, cyclical conception of history (waves of transient conquests) was so quick to dismiss.

In order to understand Camus’ alternative vision of modernity, one needs to bridge the gap between his mythical reconstruction of an ideal Mediterranean in the 1930s and the later development of his political philosophy predicated on liberatory solidarity. The main text by Camus dealing with these issues in a Mediterranean context is the speech that he delivered at the inauguration of the *Maison de la Culture* [Cultural Center] in February 1937, an address generally considered to be the founding manifesto of *l’Ecole d’Alger* (*Essais* 1321-7). The text was composed at a crucial moment in Camus’ relation to the French communist party (PCF) as he came to oppose the party’s Eurocentric doctrines on account of its incapacity to adapt its ideological principles to the complexity and uniqueness of the Algerian situation. The connection between the PCF and Algerian nationalists had been a turbulent one, in which Camus directly participated when in charge of the recruitment of Muslims. Indeed, the party’s original reluctance to accommodate devout Muslim groups in a political movement that had always rested on the denunciation of religion was eventually mitigated by its crucial need for their support against the fascist threat in Europe. The party’s instrumentalization of the Muslim people, combined with the official downplaying of their demands for justice and equality within the colony, was to cause an irremediable rift between Camus and the elites of the party, from which he
eventually resigned. The inaugural speech must thus be considered, in this tense context, in terms of Camus’ opposition to monolithic doctrines defended by the PCF, which he accused of sacrificing the well-being of the people in the name of deadlocked ideology. While his argument does not reject the emancipatory claims underlying grand narratives, such as Marxism, it nevertheless reveals how Orthodox Marxist doctrines from the late 1930s perpetuated a hierarchy between an essentialized Europe, where the threat of fascism had to be defused as a main priority, and the rest of the world, where demands on the part of the oppressed did not resonate with such urgency. In its assessment of political priorities, Marxist ideology partook of the same logic of abstraction that informs historicist conceptions of civilization based on the dangerous notion of progress. Despite its avowed focus on universalism and post-nationalism, it paradoxically resulted in the reinforcement of national/racist hierarchies. Camus therefore suggests a reformulation of Marxism that would be more amenable to the distinctive context of colonial segregation in the Mediterranean. Reconstructing a Greek-inspired hybrid Mediterranean is thus here a matter of political relevance as it is only through the assertion of a Mediterranean aversion to militaristic ultra-nationalism that such revision can be effectively enacted.

Camus’ concept goes back to the evocation a mythicized earlier form of (Mediterranean) culture, one of collaboration and harmony between all communities that would displace the primacy of the dangerous concept of progress. In this respect,

57 See introductory essay to the speech in Camus Essais 1314-5.

58 Camus associates this ultra-nationalism to the Italian colonial expansion in East Africa in the name of Latinity.
he appropriates the modern concept of nostalgia for a state that pre-existed unruly modernization. Here, however, it is the culture of pre-modern societies, not their apparent primitivism or state of nature, which is considered. The goal here is to reappropriate a past deemed to have been less inimical to oppressed subjects in order to promote social advancement. The argument truly engages the modern theoretical apparatus at its best as Camus offers an alternative humanism working its revision from within the limits of the modern, and only in relation to that framework. This backward movement should not be confused with the regionalist conservatism that appeared in France around the same time. The text starts with a defense of regionalism, disengaging it from backward traditionalist doctrines such as those of the Algérianistes. Camus explicitly mobilizes a liberal subtext in order to better frame the relevance of his proposition: “Il y a peut être quelque chose d’étonnant dans le fait que des intellectuels de gauche puissent se mettre au service d’une culture qui n’intéresse en rien la cause qui est la leur, et même, en certains cas, a pu être accaparée (comme c’est le cas pour Maurras) par des doctrinaires de droite” [It may be surprising to see left-wing intellectuals serve a culture which is in no way related to their cause and which, in some cases, has even been recuperated by right-wing reactionaries (such as Maurras)]” (1321). This argument is first and foremost a diatribe against conservative nationalism, which it equates with decadence, a desperate attempt to preserve the once fluid superiority of its spirit through the extreme codification of its relation to others. In opposition to such notions, Camus puts forth the idea that human nature and civilization are intrinsically good. Corruption stems from the
adulterated relation of the subject to the world, which is generated by unnecessary mediation through abstractions. History (here taken as the historicist narrative of progress), like all abstractions, can only continue past injustices instead of escaping the logic of subjugation, which has led to the current situation of oppression and segregation. Abstracting “life” (the “essence” of Mediterranean culture for Camus), it also petrifies it in “pensée morte” (dead thought); categories which eventually shape realities that man, the subject of Camus’ humanistic reading of Marxism, should shape. Man is thus enslaved by this rationalization of his experience. Camus’ text emphasizes the importance of the discursive in the erection of unnatural oppressive dynamics and advocates a turn back to ancestral Mediterranean “culture vivante” (living culture) in lieu of Germanic/northern European “civilisation morte” (dead civilization, also understood as the nationalistic phase of culture). Modernity must thus be reconfigured not a disembodied concept anymore, but as an experience predicated on a refutation of the primacy of reason, one that does not obstruct the subject’s relation to the world, to his or her culture.

The specificity of Mediterranean modernity rests in its immediacy, its intuitive perception through identification with the land in an irrational original experience. In the critique of the Algérieniste movement inherent in his “Noces à Tipasa,” Camus ridicules the worship of the Roman ruins standing on the Algerian soil, which are construed as a symbol of its Latin past (Camus Noces). Camus’ rendering of his

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59 This concept of culture vivante works as a prefiguration of his pensée de midi later expounded in Camus’ most comprehensive political work, L’homme révolté. Franco Cassano provides a compelling discussion of “la pensée de midi” in relation to the global issues reverberating in the contemporary Mediterranean in his Pensiero Meridiano (79-106).
contemplation of the ruins is lyrical in tone and it has sometimes been assessed in terms of a purely aesthetic discussion of the beauty of ancient art and its affect on its viewer. Nevertheless, careful observation reveals that the piece is actually more concerned with the viewer himself as it is his immediate sensations triggered by the Algerian locale that are brought into focus. In Camus’ perception, the Roman occupation symbolized by the presence of the Roman ruins on the Algerian shores is less powerful than man’s irrational emotional response to them:

Ici, je laisse à d’autres l’ordre et la mesure. C’est le grand libertinage de la nature et de la mer qui m’accapare tout entier. Dans ce mariage des ruines et du printemps, les ruines sont redevenues pierres, et perdant le poli imposé par l’homme, sont rentrées dans la nature... Aujourd’hui enfin leur passé les quitte, et rien ne les distrait de cette force profonde qui les ramène au centre des choses qui tombent.

[Here, I leave order and measure to others. It is the great freedom of nature and sea that fills my whole mind. In this blend of ruins and spring time, the ruins have turned back to stone and, losing the polished quality imposed by man, they are reunited with nature... Today, finally, their past deserts them and nothing separates them from this deep force that brings them back to the crumbling center of things] (15).

Here, “l’ordre et la mesure” is an obvious reference to the notorious discipline of the Roman armies whose conquests the ruins come to symbolize; to Latin reason, Camus opposes a sensuality, an instinctive connection to one’s environment in which the subject finds its own brand of measure away from distorting ideologies and abstractions. An anti-intellectual dynamic resting on the primacy of sensations is at work, which recalls the Algérianiste concept of felicitous barbarity. Indeed, the parallel may even be extended to the healthy bestiality characteristic of Audisio’s
early heroes. Yet, the episode takes Audisio’s celebration one step further, for the exaltation of the subject’s communion with nature also constitutes a reflection on the modern issue of man’s place in the universe. The very extolling of a perfect harmony between man and nature lays claim to an alternative type of modern condition, one that would abolish the restraints and anxieties of fragmentation on the subjective and the political levels and that would promote solidarity and brotherhood: “Non, ce n’était pas moi qui comptais, ni le monde, mais seulement l’accord et le silence qui de lui à moi faisait naître l’amour. Amour que je n’avais pas la faiblesse de revendiquer pour moi seul, conscient et orgueilleux de le partager avec toute une race, née du soleil et de la mer” [No, I didn’t matter, or the world, only the harmony and silence that created the love between us. A love that I was not weak enough to claim for myself only. I was aware and proud of the fact that I was sharing it with a whole race, born of the sun and the sea] (22).

For Camus, it is through the direct contemplation of the Algerian land/seascape that the subject gets a sense of his or her Mediterranean character. This dynamic can be found in one of the key fictional texts by Camus, “La Femme Adultère” [The Adulterous Wife] a text which general criticism has widely misconstrued in the wake of Edward Said’s partial reading in *Culture and Imperialism* and that I propose to re-interpolate here in the light of Camus’ Mediterranean thought (Camus *L’Exil et le Royaume*). Present space does not allow to develop the specifics of Said’s analysis of Camus’ story in much detail. I will thus only examine his main contention, to wit that

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60 This refutation of reason as *sine qua non* of the modern condition is already present in the novel *Héliotrope* in the elaboration of an anti-intellectual ideal: “No anxiety, no feverish depths, no overdone anguish, but healthy, frank truths” (Audisio *Héliotrope* 142).
Camus’ text partakes of the effort to provide a “methodically constructed political geography of Algeria” (176), one that would by nature be external to its object and idealistic: “It is accurate to say, therefore, that Camus’ narratives lay severe and ontologically prior claims to Algeria’s geography... They are not Camus’ alone... He inherits and uncritically accepts them as conventions shaped in the long tradition of colonial writing on Algeria” (180; my emphasis). The choice of “geography” as a hermeneutic category is not inconsequential. The discipline of geography has had a longstanding connection to colonial expansion, as explorers were the first to establish contact with the new territories. 61 As well, through its development as a science, the discipline fed into the discourse of colonialism as the process of “pacification” and “civilization” of newly-conquered territories connected it to the French “Vocation Supérieure.”62 Thus, at the core of geographical discourse lay the discrimination and racism underlying imperial strategies of conquest and assimilation, to the detriment of an equal partnership in development between colonial power and colonies. Said’s construal of Camus’ text as an instance of geographic discourse places tremendous restrictions onto his reconfiguration of the relation between the subject (here Janine)

61 Countless accounts officially geared towards geographic knowledge played a key part in the construction of a scientific discourse directly preparing or enhancing the establishment of colonial structures of power. In North Africa, commissioned reports, such as Charles de Foucault’s Reconnaissance au Maroc (1883-1884), or geography books, such as the collection directed by Vidal de la Blache [Bernard Augustin’s pages on “Berbérie” in Afrique Septentrionale et Occidentale (1937-1939) are particularly illuminating], constitute prime examples of the important role played by all Sciences Humaines in the French colonial project.

62 “This supreme command is one of the imperious duties inscribed on our intelligences and on our activities. Geography, that science which inspires such beautiful devotedness and in whose name so many victims have been sacrificed, has become the philosophy of the earth” (Admiral La Roucière-Le Noury’s inaugural address, 1875 Second International Congress of geographical Sciences, qtd. in Said 169-170). The phrase “vocation supérieure” comes from Robert Delavignette and Charles-André Julien’s Les constructeurs de la France d’Outre-Mer (qtd. in Said 169).
and her homeland, a relation that Camus conceives as an ontological one. This myopic perception finds its sources in Said’s characterization of Camus in terms of a “French youth” (178; Said’s emphasis), a claim evidently oblivious to the complexities of Camus’ social and ethnic status. Said’s inaccurate interpretation partly derives from his conception of French colonists as a homogeneous group sharing the same economic interests in the perpetuation of French colonial rule. In this regard, his biased analysis does not do justice to the complexity of Camus’ insights. I am interested in bringing to life an alternative reading of the text in relation to Camus’ philosophical stances as they first emerged in the context of his engagement with Mediterranean culture.

“La Femme Adultère” narrates the story of Janine, an Algerian-born French woman, who sets out on a business trip in the Algerian desert with her husband of many years. A reluctant housewife for reasons of convenience, her whole life prior to the journey seems to be a sequence of small renunciations leading her into ever deeper social “exile” (one of the two key concepts evoked in the collection’s title (L’Exil et le Royaume [Exile and the Kingdom], two concepts around which the volume’s six stories are constructed). Despite her undeniable belonging to the pied-noir community, Janine seems to experience continual malaise both among other colonists and among natives. Her experience is that of an outcast seemingly unable to find her place in a

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63 See Roblès as well as major biographies: O’Brien, Lottman, and Todd.

64 “In widening the historical perspective from Camus as an attractively solitary writer of the 1940s and 1950s to include the century-old French presence in Algeria, we can perhaps better understand not just the form and ideological meaning of his narratives, but also the degree to which his work inflects, refers to, consolidates, and renders more precise the nature of the French enterprise there.” (Said 175).
strictly compartmentalized French colonial society. Her failed interaction with the natives during her journey only exacerbates her frustration as her encounter with them is by nature overdetermined and codified by the history of segregation at work in colonial Algeria. Interestingly, it is in the wake of an initial visual encounter with a French officer that Janine can finally direct her gaze to her surroundings and “see” for the first time the Arabs near her. It is in reaction to this cold, distant gaze which alienates her from the only member of her original community (her husband is portrayed as inconsequential), once the socially prescribed logic of ethnic affiliation is invalidated, that Janine can move beyond the confines of her social position and seek intersubjective interaction with the natives, an endeavor which will frame the remainder of the story until the final climactic scene: “[le soldat français] l’examinait de ses yeux clairs avec une sorte de maussaderie, fixement. …Elle revint vers son mari…C’est à ce moment qu’elle vit les mains maigres et le visage brûlé des Arabes qui étaient devant elle” [He examined her with his clear eyes, staring silently...She turned back to her husband … It was at this moment that she saw the thin hand and sunburned faces of the Arabs in front of her] (12 of the French text; my emphasis).65 From that moment on, Janine is defined through her obsessive scrutiny of the natives, which attempts to palliate the impossibility of actual communication. Along her journey away from her routine life, her attentive observation is always presented as a counterpoint to her own uneasiness among them, a feeling exponentially compounded by her progressive awareness of the discrepancy between their economic conditions:

65 All translations of the story’s original French are from Carol Cosman, “The Adulterous Wife” (Camus Exile and The Kingdom).
les mains maigres des arabes…[qui] semblaient au large… sur les banquettes où son mari et elle tenaient à peine. Elle ramena contre elle les pans de son manteau. Pourtant elle n’était pas si grosse… non, rien ne se passait comme elle l’avait cru” [the thin hands of the Arabs [who] seemed to have plenty of room on the benches where she and her husband were barely perched…She pulled the lapels of her coat closer. Yet, she was not so heavy… No, noting was the way she had imagined] (12), or again, “Elle avait mis un vêtement de laine sous son gros manteau, elle aurait voulu tenir moins de place [She had put on a wool dress under her heavy coat; she would have like to take up less space” (20). The story ends with a climactic scene of liberation and self-discovery. In a revealing fashion, it is not through direct contact with the natives that her final deliverance is performed; all contact across racial lines can only take place on the imaginative level, even in the fictional world of the story. Rather, it is through her eventual communion with the Algerian land, with the desert contemplated from the top of the terrace, that Janine can reconcile herself with her profound identity and experience liberation from her life of constriction: “…le même cheminement immobile la réunissait peu à peu à son être le plus profond…En même temps, il lui semblait retrouver ses racines, la sève montait à nouveau en son corps qui ne tremblait plus” [The same stationary progression reunited her little by little with her deepest being… At the same time she seemed to be recovering her roots, and the sap rose anew in her body, which was no longer trembling] (34). Said reads the final scene of Janine’s orgasmic communion with the surrounding desert in terms of detachment from her immediate context, an aloofness necessary to self-discovery: “Her specific
history as a Frenchwoman does not matter, for she has achieved a superveningly immediate and direct access to that particular earth and sky” (Said 176; my emphasis). In point of fact, Said presents the moment of fulfillment through spiritual union with her environment as a surrogate for the now-dead relationship between the woman and her husband and reduces it to an episode of sexual compensation: “What her real identity is or may be is judged later in the passage when she achieves what is an unmistakably sexual climax: Camus speaks here of the ‘centre obscur de son être,’ which suggests both her own sense of obscurity and ignorance, and Camus’s as well” (177). He emphasizes the self-absorbed character of the episode and neglects to consider the implications of Janine’s position as an Algerian–born “Frenchwoman” in the context of a colonial society in which she cannot find her place; to him, the text constitutes a classic episode of female self-discovery which only makes sense within the narrow context of her female identity. In contrast and in the light of Camus’ theorization of a Mediterranean identity, I contend that Janine’s episode illustrates in the imaginative mode Camus’ hypothesis of a Mediterranean identity that would unite all North African subjects in a renewed brotherhood. His explanatory notes regarding l’Exil et le Royaume (“[Le] royaume qui coïncide avec une certaine vie libre et nue que nous avons à retrouver pour renaitre enfin,” [[The] Kingdom which eventually coincides with a certain kind of life, free and bare, and which we must recover in order to be finally reborn] Camus 2039; qtd. in Said 177) suggests that the “kingdom” in question is that which is offered to her gaze, that of nomadic life whose fluidity becomes an ideal representation of Janine’s social aspirations. The “free and bare” life
mentioned by Camus could fruitfully be understood as a desire for social interaction ridden of its overdetermined character. Said’s interpretation therefore seems to discount the very nature of Janine’s quest. That her self-realization is achieved in the desert, characterized here by its endlessness ("étendue sans limites" [limitless expanse] 25), is highly significant. Therefore, it is a liberation from her confined status, as a housewife and as a colon woman, that she achieves:

“In [her] heart… a knot tightened by years, habit, and boredom was slowly loosening. She looked at the nomad encampment. She had not even seen the men who were living there…and yet she could think only of them, of their existence, which she had hardly known of until today] (26-27).

In this episode, she gains awareness of her identity as a woman born in the diverse Algerian land. Her communion with the land is also directly an attempt to achieve communion with the inhabitants of this other “kingdom” that she longs to inhabit:

“[Ils étaient les] seigneurs misérables et libres d’un étrange royaume […] Elle savait seulement que ce royaume, de tout temps, lui avait été promis et que jamais, pourtant, il ne serait le sien, plus jamais, sinon à ce fugitif instant, peut-être…” [They were the destitute and free lords of a strange kingdom … She only knew that this kingdom had been promised to her from time immemorial, and that it would never be hers, never again, except perhaps in that fleeting moment…] (27). Therefore, her desire for going native is one that brings about the much awaited deliverance from her narrow position,
the achievement of a much longed-for fluid identity stretching beyond racial or social boundaries. Janine’s experience thus constitutes an illustration of Camus’ theoretical paradigm as it is on the contemplation of the land that Janine’s Mediterranean identity is predicated. The depiction of the locale cannot without much loss be assimilated to a colonial Orientalist one. Here, it is the immanence and life-giving character of the land that matters, not its geographic discursive representation. The actualization of this identity on the political level, however, seems compromised as Camus emphasizes the transient nature of this moment of communion, one with the landscape rather than the natives themselves who remain irreversibly enigmatic (“on apercevait des tentes noires. Tout autour, un troupeau de dromadaires… formaient sur le sol les signes sombres d’une étrange écriture dont il fallait déchiffrer le sens” [Large black tents could be distinguished. All around a herd of motionless dromadaries… formed the dark signs of a strange writing whose meaning had yet to be deciphered] (26). As in Audisio’s writings, Mediterranean identity is best imagined in the absence of natives.

The concept of a Mediterranean identity predicated on subjective experience is therefore presented as the most adequate safeguard against possibly harmful abstractions, for the hybrid quality of the culture with which it is connected is felt without mediation by every Mediterranean subject in a renewed (although utopian) solidarity. Camus’ analysis thus endows it with both historical and geographical relevance as he substitutes it for nationalistic paradigms, which have historically led to iniquitous colonial situations:

La Méditerranée est de tous les pays le seul peut-être qui rejoigne les grandes pensées orientales. Car elle n’est pas classique et ordonnée,
elle est diffuse et turbulente...Et à ce confluent, il n’y a pas de différence entre la façon dont vit un Espagnol ou un Italien des quais d’Alger, et les Arabes qui les entourent. Ce qu’il y a de plus essentiel dans le génie méditerranéen jaillit peut-être de cette rencontre unique dans l’histoire et la géographie née entre l’Orient et l’Occident.

[The Mediterranean may be of all countries the only one that truly connects with great oriental thoughts. For it is not classical or orderly, but rather diffused and turbulent [...] And, in this space of confluence, there is no difference between the lifestyle of a Spaniard or an Italian from Algiers’ docks and that of the Arabs that surround them. The essence of this Mediterranean ethos may spring from this unique encounter in history and geography between Orient and Occident.] (Essais 1325; my emphasis)

As in Audisio’s text, its undeniable connection to a hybridity generated over the course of history marks its very multifaceted nature. But, beyond that, the appeal to a glorious past functions as a cultural mémoire of which one can avail oneself in order to come to a genuine understanding of the world and to protect oneself from the harmful effects of chauvinistic, divisive abstraction. We can see how the mythical notion of a unified Mediterranean identity pervading Audisio’s writings is here reworked in the political/philosophical mode as the basis for an immediate intersubjective relation, a rediscovered human solidarity, one that is meant to compensate for the precarious absurdity of the human condition. The local focus thus becomes essential as it is through local cultures alone that men better grasp their humanity and feel the need of community, of revolt for a common good that is really experienced as such. It is

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66 I read the phrase “la façon [de vivre]” here as a synonym for the culture and traditions of these ethnic groups rather than their living conditions.

67 It is interesting to see how this idea prefigures Fanon’s argument in Peaux Noires Masques Blancs where the Martiniquan develops the notion of a locus of proud Blackness as a reservoir from which to draw the strength to resist colonial racist discourses depriving the individual of his humanity [see Frantz Fanon, Peaux Noires, Masques Blancs. Both alternative cultural affiliations can productively be explored as instances of a colonial revision of a harmful normative form of humanism.
nonetheless important to remark that, although the hypothesis of immediate solidarity between subjects from all communities holds great potential for Camus’ theoretical revision of Marxism, it is doomed to have limited practical effects due to the existence of unbridgeable material differences between communities in a colonial context. Interestingly, these material differences constitute the latent text of Camus’ argument, thereby reverberating on his treatment of native figures who bear the brunt of segregation. Camus’ enumeration in the preceding quotation constitutes a case in point. While the Spanish and Italian subjects are endowed with the privilege of individuality (and associated agency), the natives are presented as an indistinct group (“les arabes”). Moreover, the focus here lies on the central two characters, the European subjects, while the natives who surround them hold their habitual peripheral, marginal position. Camus’ argument therefore appears to be at odds with colonial reality and his theoretical efforts to promote equality between all subjects, despite their critique of the ideological rigidity that causes exclusion, seem to eventually fall prey to the power of the colonial dynamics of segregation.

Yet, this address is significant in that it constitutes a strategic move towards a small scale, culturally-specific geography of revolt within an internationalist framework, as the establishment of the new Mediterranean paradigm is only the first step towards a globalized reconfiguration of Marxist understandings of the relation between the subject and ideology. Even though other spaces are not specifically referred to, the allusion is quite forthright: “Dans le cadre de l’internationalisme, la chose est réalisable. Si chacun dans sa sphère, son pays, sa province consent à un
modeste travail, le succès n’est pas loin” [Within the framework of internationalism, it can be done. If each of us in his circle, his country, his region consents to a small effort, success is within reach] (1327). In this respect, the **Maison de la culture** was to become a crucial organ of local collectivism, thereby advocating the relevance of regional frameworks to internationalist, global projects. It is nevertheless imperative here to disengage the idea of revolt from any advocacy of anti-colonial praxis. Revolt is to be enacted on the social level only as a personal commitment potentially duplicated on the group level. This notion does not in any way promote the end of colonialism or Algerian independence. Nationalistic thinking, even the anti-colonial kind, is dismissed, therefore further limiting the practical impact of Camus’ proposition since the natives’ position within colonial society excludes them from any configuration of non-nationalist revolt.

Indeed, while the authors of *l’Ecole d’Alger* systematically denounced the segregation at work in colonial society, they paradoxically never advocated the end of colonization, a system that *needed* segregation to survive. Moreover, their de facto acceptance of colonialism, which they envisioned as the historical standard for the area, undermined their utopian call for absolute equality between North Africa and Europe. Their attempts to change the order of things therefore remained inadequate and at odds with the realities of colonial rule. Their reluctance to oppose colonization made their position untenable, especially in the context of exacerbated polarization ushered in by the Algerian war of independence. It can therefore be said that it was
their inability to adequately engage with the nationalist question that sealed the failure of their mythical reformatory scheme.\textsuperscript{68}

\textbf{A language “close to laughter or poetry”: assessing the impact of l’Ecole d’Alger’s reconfigurations}

Camus’ early philosophy of revolt aims to show how thinking/praxis predicated on partisanship and loyalty to rigid ideology necessarily leads to aporia. In his view, the remedy to dangerous abstraction lies in the rehabilitation of personal agency in relation to overdetermined social circumstances. It appears then that the existentialist issue of individual responsibility and freedom underlying Camus’ later work was already present in the 1937 inaugural address discussed earlier, albeit as failed utopia. Yet, his insights, although inadequate to the context of colonialism, prove to hold tremendous theoretical potential in our postcolonial context. Just as Mediterranean local collectivism implies distance from a monolithic, pre-determined ideology, his understanding of human responsibility rests on one’s liberation from identities pre-

\textsuperscript{68} For the sake of historical accuracy, it is nevertheless important to note that, in the late 1930s, Algerian nationalists had only recently started envisioning independence from the metropole as the only adequate solution to the colonial situation. Up to the failure of the 1936 Blum-Violette bill, which aimed to endow certain categories of Muslims with French citizenship and its privileges, Algerian intellectuals, such as Ferhat Abbas, had been calling for greater equality between the two communities in an Algeria that they hoped would be ‘départementalisée’, i.e., administratively integrated into the French public space on a par with its other regions. Their hope for success had been fueled by their unremitting faith in the French government in Paris, which they dissociated from the colonial French administration ruled by settlers’ interests. The rejection of the Blum-Violette bill by the French parliament therefore marked the end of their confidence in a possible egalitarian collaboration between the two communities and pushed them towards more radical nationalist ideals, thus paving the way for independence. The school’s reluctance to envision the possibility of Algerian independence is therefore quite typical of their time.
determined by birth circumstances. In her book *France and the Maghreb: Performative Encounters*, Mireille Rosello insists on the overdetermined character of most postcolonial Franco-Maghrebi encounters. At the beginning of her introduction, she presents the idea that

the violence of some historical contexts makes any initial encounter with another subject almost impossible. No first encounter can ever take place when history, language, religion, and culture exert such pressures upon the protagonists of the encounter that their desire to speak or be silent is trapped by preexisting, rewritten dialogues and scenarios. (1)

Rosello’s argument places history and its share of conflict, physical or ontological, as the main impediments to free-flowing encounters going beyond stereotypes and fossilized identities. Rosello’s analysis can shed light on the disruptive potential of utopian discourse, such as *l’Ecole d’Alger’s*, in our postcolonial times. Their language, in keeping with her analysis, is one “close to laughter or poetry” (6). Through what Rosello calls an “imaginative protocol of encounters” (my emphasis), a protocol that would strip the parties involved of a pre-established relationship, utopian writings can displace the primacy of discourses of absolute antagonism that have shown their political and theoretical limits in our postcolonial period: “When we assume that we can identify the *Mediterranean* subjects who will be the ordinary heroes of this book, if we already know what to call them (…), the encounters that we imagine are already overdetermined by our narratives” (1; my emphasis). The erasure of alternative patterns of relations can only encourage the perpetuation of a dialectics of resentment between the communities involved in the colonial situation, which has often proved to lead into political dead-ends. The 2005 riots in major French cities provide of vivid
example of the failure of current postcolonial relations in the context of multicultural France. The polarization of the French and Algerian communities (now extended to all previously colonized ethnic groups), which increased exponentially during the war of independence, brought about enduring narratives of violence that are still perceptible in the tension at work in the relations between Français de souche and Français issus de l’immigration. The far-reaching consequences of durable resentment between colonizers and colonized, those events seem to be directly connected to monolithic, frozen conceptions of essentialized, polarized identities in a postcolonial context, which pre-empt any effective integration of ex-colonized populations into the nation, be it following the Republican model or otherwise. Therefore, the movement’s attempted reconfiguration of the normative dyadic understanding of colonizer-colonized relations can provide much-needed theoretical alternatives to dynamics inherited from colonial times, especially in the context of the (French) multicultural nation. In that context, the concept of transnational (regional) identities that would not be co-opted by modern exclusive discourses has tremendous theoretical potential. Undeniably, the moment of a shared identity for Maghrebi and European communities has passed (as it already had in the days of French colonialism in Algeria). Yet, the fascination exerted by colonial Algeria as a unique colonial space of encounter between diverse civilizations in the Mediterranean testifies to the (utopian) theoretical attractiveness of a locus rid of communitarian tensions.

* L’Ecole d’Alger thus emphasized the necessarily impromptu character of encounters between subjects from different communities, a stance that adequately
matches the non-binary nature of Algerian society that the movement strove to put to the fore. That spontaneity informs the dynamic of the very concept of hybridity developed by Gabriel Audisio: a hybridity construed not as a middle ground position between two fixed subject positions but an ever-changing hybridity based on relational dynamics predicated on individual experience (with the limitations mentioned earlier). The true impact of such a stance thus does not lie in direct praxis (it was never taken that far by any of the authors), but rather in the attempted (and sometimes successful) dislocation of stereotypical discourses that tend to polarize subject positions with the tragic consequences already mentioned. Therefore, albeit an imaginative, incomplete one, the reform brought about by L’École d’Alger is significant as its conception of the Mediterranean provides a new context for possible reconfigurations of intercultural relations in a (post)colonial context. Through their resistance to the duplication of exclusive categories still at work in a postmodern context, the insights of l’École d’Alger pave the way for a reconfiguration of worldwide models of cultural relations that may be seen to fit with the global dynamics of our age. These writers’ cultural affiliations, political stances, and literary practices spell out a transnational position, which calls for the elaboration of new areas of study - here, the Mediterranean - to be considered in their own right, regardless of hierarchies inspired from colonial times. Attention to regional spaces would constructively displace models of representation in which the theoretical existence of the marginal space is but a by-product of its necessary relation to the metropole. Alternative regional representations, therefore, can in and of themselves be appropriated by postcolonial theory as a response to the
growing logic of globalization, one that would emphasize a genuine decentering that could not be recuperated into contemporary modern processes of hierarchization. The argument elaborated in the 1930s is still of extreme relevance to our globalized age: it advocates the duplication of the Mediterranean paradigm on the global level, and thus heralds relational theories, such as Edouard Glissant’s théories de la Relation, which provide a compelling theoretical substitute for North vs. South hierarchized conceptions of our global world.

In his Poétique de la Relation [Poetics of Relation], Edouard Glissant engages with the issue of cultural relations through the lens of hybridity. Positing the “rapport à l’autre” [relation to the other] as the basis of all identity, Glissant emphasizes the importance of the issue of relating. Starting from a precise consideration of ancient colonial traditions (nomadisme envahisseur [invading nomadism]), which is but a subcategory of a general principle of mobility (l’errance [wandering]), Glissant tackles the issue of the representation of the other in a context of unequal cultural encounters. His argument pitches two dynamics of the ancient world against each other: the attempt to impose Roman culture as universal versus the regional forms of resistance based on the extolling of particularism (26). To Glissant, this tension between cultures in contact with one another lies at the root of civilization and constitutes the primum mobile at the origin of cultural identity. It is indeed in that relating process (Relation) beyond absolute diversity that cultures come into being; an intrinsic paradigm of totality underlies all thinking about cultures that takes into account the existence of difference:
La pensée de l’Autre ne cessera d’être duelle qu’à ce moment où les différences auront été reconnues. La pensé de l’Autre “comprend”... la multiplicité, mais d’une manière mécanique et qui ménage encore les subtilités de l’universel généralisant.

[The thought of the Other will only cease to be dual when we acknowledge differences. The thought of the Other “comprehends” multiplicity but in a mechanical way which still spares the subtle nature of the generalizing universal] (30).

One more step will be necessary to gain the awareness that cultures partake of the same totality but Glissant implies that this underlying principle is present all along. The totality implied here is not one of totalitarianism (totalitarisme). It is in essence a decentered one, one where the logic of rootedness in one space has failed. All thinking about totality therefore implies the consideration of absolute “Relation”:

… Dans la mesure où notre conscience de la relation est totale, c’est-à-dire immédiate et porte immédiatement sur la totalité réalisable du monde, nous n’avons plus besoin, quand nous évoquons une poétique de la Relation, d’ajouter: relation entre quoi et quoi ? C’est pourquoi le mot français “Relation” qui fonctionne un peu à la manière d’un verbe intransitif, ne saurait répondre par exemple au terme anglais “relationship.”

[… Provided that our awareness of relation is complete, i.e., immediate, and that it deals immediately with the realizable totality of the world, we no longer need to add, whenever we evoke a poetics of relation, “relation between this and that.” That is why the French word “Relation”, which functions somewhat similarly to an intransitive verb, could not correspond to the English term “relationship”] (39–40).

The very concept of Relation annihilates the notion of center, be it geographic (metropole) or cultural (language of the colonizer in a colony). Relation is thus multilingual, de-hierarchized and thereby reminiscent of the utopia that l’École d’Alger developed in the context of the Mediterranean. Here again, we are faced with
the power of the imaginative as it dismantles entrenched dynamics of hierarchization and exclusion. That abolition proceeds from an explosion (**éclat**), which creates a world described as Chaos, each element of which retains its intricacy and irreducibility to a norm. Yet, that explosion should not be understood as pure scattering: all elements partake of one decentered whole to which they freely relate. In point of fact, the epitome of Relation is the Caribbean archipelago, a space of diffraction where all cultures violently clash before being momentarily reconciled via variable processes of creolization. The Caribbean therefore is a small-scale model of cultural relating applicable to the global level. Here, Glissant’s focus is on the Caribbean Sea. Yet a comparison with the Mediterranean follows where the latter is described as being more inclusive than the Caribbean. Nevertheless, no advantage is given to either with regard to its exemplarity on the global level. For one of the main features of this “world-Chaos” is its simultaneous movement that denies both logic and hierarchy.

Therefore, Glissant’s theory of Relation can, in and of itself, be appropriated as a strategic response of postcolonial theory to the growing logic of globalization, one that would emphasize a genuine decentering that could not be recuperated into contemporary modern processes of hierarchization. In point of fact, in their “Francophone studies/Postcolonial studies: ‘Postcolonializing’ through *Relation*,” Prabhu and Quayson associate Glissant’s approach with the concept of “postcolonizing,” i.e., with the “critical process by which to relate modern-day phenomena to their explicit, implicit, or even potential relation to th[e] fraught heritage [of the colonial aftermath].” Although the paradigm can be duplicated on the
global level, I would like to emphasize its particular relevance in the context of the Mediterranean as contact zone between First and Third worlds. Even though l’École d’Alger’s imaginative views have fallen into oblivion, their analysis restores a fuller picture of Mediterranean relations in the modern era, thereby providing a much-needed revision of reductive, exclusionary notions of European identity. Through their recuperation of Semitism as part and parcel of Mediterranean identity, these authors displaced the primacy of the interwoven history of the Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity, which European modernity has claimed as its heritage. Their revision of Mediterranean history presented both sides of the Mediterranean (the Western/Christian one and the Eastern/Semitic one) as inseparable, thereby annihilating any distinction between a civilized Mediterranean and its barbarian other. This redrawing of the boundaries of European genealogy resonates with current day issues of what should constitute the borders of Europe. While discursively, the rift between Europe and North Africa has been perpetuated through decades of anti-immigration policies that have worked to make the two sides of the Mediterranean irretrievably opposed, the reality of trans-Mediterranean migrations begs to differ. The growing influx of migrants from western and northern Africa through the Mediterranean gateways of Ceuta and Melilla (two Spanish enclaves within mainland Morocco), as well as the Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean have proven how porous and blurry the borders between Europe/the global North and Africa/the global South truly are.
Such a massive arrival of immigrants has given rise to nationalistic defensive reactions with regards to the influence of immigrant culture on a European identity that globalization has increasingly hybridized. Redefining the Mediterranean as a space of contact and cooperation in our era of globalization is therefore particularly relevant, as North Africa has become a major stake in European dealings with Africa as a whole. Reconfiguring Mediterranean cultures as historically linked and mutually dependent seems to be crucial in the days when the rise of Muslim fundamentalisms, which sparked the civil war in Algeria, has also contributed to the ostracism of Muslim countries (and Muslim minorities in Europe) in the context of the US-led war on terror. Moreover, acknowledging the intrinsic cultural diversity of Mediterranean Algeria would be a first step towards questioning the alleged cultural purity of the Algerian nation, thereby undermining the essentialist discourses on which fundamentalisms rely and historically reconfiguring Algeria as a space of tolerance on a par with Europe. The need to underscore the historical nature of North-South relations in the Mediterranean area, which continually shift as economic, political, and social dynamics change, therefore seems to resonate with increased urgency as theoretical constructions inherited from the colonial hierarchies between colonies and metropole seem more than ever unable to rise to the theoretical challenge posed by our global dynamics.

Chapter 2, in part, has appeared as “Between nostalgia and desire: L’Ecole d’Alger’s transnational identifications and the case for a Mediterranean relation.” International
The author of this dissertation was the sole author of this material.
Chapter III

“Traduit du Silence”: Jean El Mouhoub Amrouche’s National Poetics of Memory


[We must know within ourselves the poet captive within the man and, after setting him free, we must restore unity by creating the man after the poet […] “I” must become the Other]

Jean El Mouhoub Amrouche, “Notes sur la grâce de ravissement en poésie.”

What we call memory today is therefore not memory but already history. What we take to be flare-ups of memory are in fact its final consumption in the flames of history. The quest for memory is the search for one’s history.

Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les lieux de Mémoire.”

In his Meditaciones del Quijote [Meditations on Quijote](1914), Spanish author and philosopher José Ortega y Gasset outlines a distinction between Germanic culture, characterized by transcendental inspiration and clarity of expression, and Mediterranean (Spanish) culture, one predominantly marked by realism. This dichotomy between a Germanic Northern Europe of rationality and a Mediterranean of
sensuality and chaos informed most of European cultural theory in the 1920s and 1930s. Ortega’s unusual perspective presents Germanic tribes as the true historical Barbarians, whose conquest of Europe (inundación) is thought to have obliterated the transnational Mediterranean culture which pre-existed polarized theoretical constructs of Europe and Africa. Unlike Ortega’s liberal vision, most of the theoretical production which originated in Europe in the same period construed the cultural rift through the lens of Eurocentric modernity—Northern Europe (Germanic rationality, in Ortega’s paradigm) presented an insuperable stage of cultural development, which colonial power structures aimed to disseminate in a humanistic spirit, while Arab-influenced Mediterranean Europe (the parts, such as Spain and several Mediterranean islands, which, during the years of the Arab conquest, had distanced themselves from their Roman heritage) was thought to pose a threat to the future of culture in Europe. Symptomatically, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, who was soon to become the fascist-inspired dictator that we know, warned against the triumph of leftist democratic forces in Spain in the civil war, which he associated with a new Berber victory over what he envisioned as the forces of civilization in the country, here the order inherited from the Habsburg rule: “The ‘Germanic’ Habsburg dynasty imposed a certain order onto society, an order which today, in the days of the civil war, is threatened by the plebeian Berber faction of Spain, here incarnated by the left and the Republicans. If this indolent Mediterranean faction is victorious, writes José Antonio [Rivera], there will be another Berber invasion” (Ferracuti).

69 In Ferracuti’s Italian translation of the original Spanish: “[…] Hanno imposto un ordine alla società
Parallel to these European arguments were cultural theories emerging in the colonies, such as those developed by the Algérianistes writers in Algeria, which attempted to adapt such hierarchical constructions to the context of indigenous North Africa, with a notable emphasis on race as a factor for inequality. In the North African colonial context, if the cultural and political supremacy of the French colons was always presented as unquestionable, more surprising was the effort to elevate native Berbers to the racial status of Indo-Europeans. In point of fact, although their material condition remained by and large as severe as that of their Arab counterpart, colonial discursive formations identified Berbers as superior. Believed to be descended from the mythical Scythians, they were thought to constitute the racial elite of North Africa, the direct product of years of Roman colonization prior to the Arab conquest, which racist theories despised for having allegedly tainted the supposed cultural and racial “purity” of Christian North Africa. The Berbers, therefore, were idealized as the true noble savages in the Maghrebi landscape, whose culture the recently expatriated French colons purported to emulate in an attempt to return to a simpler, more primitive way of life (rebarbarisation, or rejuvenation achieved through

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70 The Algérianistes were the first writers to portray the Algerian colony as an autonomous regional space, whose literary production would form a local counterpoint to the Orientalist travel literature on Algeria, or littérature d’escale, produced in the French metropole around the same time. For a more detailed discussion of Algérianisme, see Dunwoodie 83-174.

71 Before the racialization of the issue in the 19th century through the Indo-European myth of Scythian origins, this distinction between formerly Christianized natives and Arab conquerors was already present in 16th century European writings on North Africa (Zhiri).
the mimicry of primitive cultures in the wake of the 1870 French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war).

Jean El Mouhoub Amrouche’s poetry cannot be considered independently from the specific context of the segregationist doctrines and racist conceptions informing colonial cultural politics in French Algeria in the 1930s. The son of Kabyle Berbers converted to Christianity in their youth, Amrouche carries the mark of profound cultural duality. Identifying both as Jean, claiming a Catholic faith which he embraced as a constant source of inspiration, and El Mouhoub, in homage to the ancestral Berber culture which he was to regard as essential to his identity and poetic transfiguration, Amrouche occupied a very unusual subject position within colonial society, which very much influenced his politics. Twice estranged from his immediate socio-cultural environment (he was alienated from the colonized Muslim majority due to his Christianity and French intellectual formation, yet distanced from French national culture by the colonial formation of his racial difference), Amrouche’s identification was therefore to be expressed in differential terms (neither Arab/Muslim, nor French), a situation that was to inspire an exile’s sensitivity in his poetic persona.

Born in Algeria, Amrouche was soon to leave for Tunis, where his parents’ Berber language and Christian traditions would not be shared by the local Muslim, Arabic-speaking population. Linguistically and culturally isolated, Amrouche grew up in a poor European neighborhood under the auspices of the Pères Blancs de Carthage, a catholic congregation dedicated to the care of poor non-European Christian children.
Educated in the French tradition, both in Tunisia and in Paris, the Algerian-born young man epitomizes the ambiguous position of indigenous intellectuals within world systems of cultural production and dissemination which rest on the primacy of the metropolitan centers. In 1913, his family was awarded French citizenship and, after a year in Algerian Kabylia, Amrouche began his education in French colonial schools. Throughout his student years, which would take him to the prestigious *Ecole Normale Supérieure de Saint-Cloud* in France, Amrouche was familiarized with the canon of European literature and it is as a perceptive critic of French *Belles Lettres* that he set out on a literary career in the Tunisian protectorate - both as a teacher in Tunisian schools and an active contributor to several North African literary journals (*Le Baut Mythes* 9-17). From his extensive engagement with the humanistic ideals professed in French schools will emerge his awareness of a discrepancy: that between the ideal image of a humanist France, with which he had been presented at school, and the harsh realities of French colonial rule in North Africa.72

On a more personal level, his intermediary position between a colonized people from which he had increasingly become estranged and a French intellectual elite with whom he could not completely identify is perceptible in the schism reverberating throughout his early poetry. In point of fact, critics have illuminated the pessimism and gloominess of Amrouche’s first collection of poems, *Cendres* [Ashes],

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72 This theme will be developed extensively in his political writings. See, for instance, “Une certaine image de la France” [A Certain image of France], “Quelques raisons de la révolte algérienne” [A Few Causes of the Algerian Revolt], “La France comme mythe mythe et réalité” [France as Myth and Reality], all in Jean Amrouche: *L’Eternel Jugurtha* (1906-1962), Archives de la Ville de Marseille (Marseille: Palais de Beaux-Arts, 1985), hereafter abbreviated as AM.
published in 1934.\footnote{The text was first published in the colonial margin, in Tunis with Editions Mirages (1934).} Emphasizing his ontological exile from a community in which he does not belong anymore as well as the betrayal experienced in the midst of his European colleagues, Amrouche conflates his disappointment with a feeling of guilt, that of having forsaken God and his ancestral culture for the alluring modernity performed by the colonial power. Only a symbolic return to the land of childhood could reconcile Amrouche with his abdicated origins. However, it is on the evocation of inescapable estrangement that the volume ends and only with the next collection of poems, \\textit{Etoile Secrète} [Secret Star] does the poet recover some spiritual unity. In an effort prefiguring the work of Albert Memmi, his student in Lycée Carnot in Tunis, in \textit{The Colonizer and the Colonized} and, later, that of Martiniquan psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, Amrouche was one of the first to explore the effects of colonial domination on the colonized psyche, an investigation which he undertook as a personal, even ontological, enterprise and which would eventuate in his positioning against the colonial power in the early days of the Algerian war.\footnote{Frantz Fanon was no stranger to the psychological effects of the colonial situation in Algeria. Assigned to a hospital in the colony, he had first-hand experience of the mental disorders suffered as a result of colonialism. While his first book, \textit{Black Skins, White Masks}, was anchored in the reality of the racial question in the Antilles, the rest of his production was to be shaped by this Algerian experience. \textit{A Dying Colonialism} and \textit{The Wretched of the Earth} were written in the wake of his growing sympathies for the fate of the colonized in Algeria and his support of the nationalist movement. Of special interest is the chapter exclusively dedicated to the report of Fanon’s observations on several case studies encountered between 1954 and 1959 in Algeria, all related to the afflictions caused by the atrocities of the independence war- torture in particular [in the English translation, “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” in \textit{The Wretched of the Earth} 249-310].} Starting with his second collection of poems, \textit{Etoile Secrète} (1937), Jean Amrouche’s quest for his lost identity reconfigures poetic creation as a palliative to the feeling of exile haunting the poet’s
persona in the wake of French colonialism. This is the lens through which the later works of Jean Amrouche much be considered as performing through poetic creation a reconciliation of the poet’s French-inspired modern mindset with the idealized “traditional” (i.e., in modern oppositional terms, “pre-modern”) intuition inherent in his ancestral culture. Undoubtedly, poetry acts as a remedy against the psychological rift brought about by a colonial education and, by permitting the poet to achieve internal reconciliation, facilitates his engagement with the issue on a broader level. For as Albert Memmi and, later, Frantz Fanon would emphasize, the colonial psychological trauma did not exclusively affect the subject; it also shaped cultural dynamics at the social level. Amrouche’s shift from the consideration of his personal conflict to that of the predicament of Algeria has indeed led many critics to construe his poetic writing as the first step in a quest for subjective identity and authorial recognition that would eventuate in his ultimate engagement in favor of Algerian nationalism and independence.

Global literary paradigms and the spatio-temporal mapping of modernity

In consonance with the spatial turn that has inflected critical approaches in the social sciences and the humanities, recent trends in Modernist Studies have

increasingly taken into consideration the planetary dynamics of interaction, coercion, and mutually constitutive influences intricately connecting the European center and the many territories lying on its peripheries.\textsuperscript{76} As well, they have highlighted the imbrications of modernist aesthetic and global dynamics of power (political, economic, and literary) in the colonial and postcolonial worlds.\textsuperscript{77} While global interaction between various areas of the world has historically played an active part in the development of civilizations for millennia, the recent predominance of globalization as a critical framework has triggered a transnational turn in literary and cultural studies, accompanied by an increased interest in dynamics of circulation, cultural translation, and diaspora on the global level. This evolution has led to the growing integration of various disciplines (postcolonial studies, anthropology, diaspora studies) into new fields of studies that have moved beyond the frame of the nation to consider the geo-cultural dynamics of modernity on the regional or planetary level, thereby reinstating issues of comparison and commensurability at the heart of their investigations. By testing the boundaries of a modernist global literary system resting on the center-periphery model, these new paradigms have proposed an alternative mapping of literary conjunctions that enables the exhuming of plural, disjunctive genealogies. Such an approach undermines diffusionist conceptions of culture and literary creation centered on two seemingly opposed principles:

\textsuperscript{76} Important efforts in this direction include Doyle and Winkiel; Friedman “Paranoia, Pollution, and Sexuality: Affiliations between E.M. Forster’s \textit{A Passage to India} and Arundhati Roy’s \textit{The God of Small Things}” and “Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies; Geist and Monléon; Kronfeld; Pollard; Cuddy-Keane.

\textsuperscript{77} See most notably Booth and Rigby; Jameson “Modernism and Imperialism;” Gikandi.
cosmopolitanism and the reaffirmation of geo-political imperatives. As well, it restores visibility to silenced, rival non-Western forms of literacies, whose margin-to-margin itineraries have historically resisted the dominant literary circuits which made cultural recognition by the European center the prerequisite to consecration on the global level. Correspondingly, in their displacement of global literary models in which Europe and the US would be configured as the exclusive site of creativity and artistic agency, these approaches propose a rewriting of European linear narratives of history and modernity.

In *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*, Fredric Jameson excavates the intricate relationship between modernity (in broad terms, the product of economic and technical capitalist development) and modernism (an aesthetic response to it). The modalities of this interaction, he argues, are to be defined through an analysis of the quintessential notion of time, which serves as a “mode in which the th[e] transitional economic structure of incomplete capitalism can be registered and identified as such” through the vector of modernist literary creation (142). This neo-Marxist vision of history construes capitalism as the engine of modernization and the vector of global socio-economic development- in sum, as the normative standard of modernity. In a European context, Jameson hypothesizes two distinct, yet complementary spheres of temporal experience (“temporalities”), each a direct reflection of the degree of modernization achieved in the space in which the subject situates itself: “[…] those writers who are unabashedly urban […] feel beyond their urban experience the presence of something radically other that completes it”
That “something,” he theorizes as “a decidedly unmodern landscape” in which technology emerges. However, in his argument, both the urban-industrial and rural-peasant world coexist. For the “aesthetic shock” registered by modernist creation can only take place in the context of a defamiliarization achieved through the tension between novel technological development (“the machine as the source of social misery and artistic ignominy” 143) and a persistent non-urban, non-modern cultural background. In this sense, the acknowledgment of discrepant experiences of temporality in a European setting holds its share of promise as Jameson’s vision of “uneven development” as a lasting phenomenon seems to run against the grain of dominant historicist narratives of tradition ("what will inevitably give way to the new that is destined to overcome and replace it" 144). His analysis construes modernity as an intrinsically plural phenomenon which could not without much loss be subsumed within a univocal, universal standard. However, this promise is short-lived as Jameson’s association of the rural world (“the pre-modern”) with the concept of “underdevelopment” falls back into the fold of historicism (modernity as a teleological process of modernization), a perception which his use of the term “pre-modern” corroborates (44). Furthermore, the exclusively metropolitan context within which the analysis is developed eschews the consideration of Europe’s empires, thereby further alienating non-Western modern trajectories. By emphasizing rural Europe as the epitome of tradition, Jameson’s analysis ultimately duplicates the same Eurocentric theoretical paradigms that have configured modernity as a Western-led endeavor.
In contrast to such approaches, Mary-Louise Pratt advocates the elaboration of a “global and relational account of modernity.”\textsuperscript{78} In that sense, she parallels Susan Stanford Friedman’s call for “a ‘relational’ mode of definition [of modernity that…] opens up the possibility for polycentric modernities and modernisms at different points of times and in different locations” (Friedman “Periodizing Modernism” 426). Homi Bhabha posits modernity as “the historical construction of a specific position of historical enunciation and address” (Bhabha 360). It is through the enunciative construction of this position that Europe has established itself as a center and elevated its vernacular particularities to the status of universals (Pratt “Modernity and Periphery” 27). Quoting Paul Gilroy, Pratt proceed to call for an “ethnohistorical reading of [the aspirations of Western] modernity [as a whole]” that would deconstruct the seemingly universal value of homogeneous, totalizing narratives of European modernity (Gilroy 8; qtd. [partly] in Pratt “Modernity and Periphery” 28). To that end, Pratt marks out a sharp distinction between modernization and modernity, which in the Latin American context of her analysis are incommensurable. Drawing inspiration from Norbert Lechner’s postulate, she envisions modernization as “the unfolding of instrumental rationality” (through history) and modernity as “the unfolding of normative rationality leading toward autonomy and self-determination” (35). Similarly, Michel-Rolph Trouillot distinguishes between what he terms a “geography of imagination” (modernity) and “a geography of management” (modernization), two concepts that are interrelated but nevertheless incommensurable (Trouillot “The

\textsuperscript{78} Mary-Louise Pratt, “Modernity and Periphery: Towards a Global and Relational Analysis” 22; author’s emphasis.
Otherwise Modern” 221-2). It is in the discrepancy between these two geographies that divergent processes of production of local modernity and their relation to global dynamics of exchange and coercion can be delineated.

It is important to note that a similar distinction underlies Amrouche’s poetic creation. The author writes and thinks from within French colonial modernity and his production aims to promote an imaginative revision of this intrinsically iniquitous dynamic. In this respect, Amrouche’s literary and critical production is to be considered in the light of its dismissal of teleological history as the colonized subject’s sole entryway into (Western) modernity. Through the strategic recuperation of the figure of Berber king Jugurtha as the sole epitome of the North African character, Amrouche’s poetry and literary criticism were developed as an attempt to create a transnational “North African” literature of memory, one purportedly exempt from any corrupting relation to the French colonial cultures of North Africa and which would incorporate the immemorial time of Berber tradition as a foundation for identity and an alternative mode of engagement with history in which the colonial subject (or at least, here, the poet) would be endowed with agency.

**Reconstructing Berber memory: the stakes of concomitant temporalities**

In his groundbreaking “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” French historian Pierre Nora proposes to illuminate the dialectics of memory and
history in contemporary French culture. Nora centers his argument on *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory, “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself …, certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists” (7). Nora’s analysis interestingly emphasizes the liminal and complex nature of *lieux de mémoire*, which he envisions as symptoms of the displacement of the unmediated, intimate subjective experience of tradition and its memory by the advent of a “fundamentally historical sensibility” (8). As a matter of fact, before the advent of modern historical frameworks based on teleology, tradition was enacted on a daily basis and, through the perpetuation of memory, gained novelty and adjustment; the immediacy of the identification with a lived past made each subject an embodiment of tradition and, as such, endowed him or her with the power to adapt it to current circumstances (16). The “acceleration of history” (7) breaches the continuum represented by the collective heritage of tradition. The critical reconstruction of the past, history is described as superficially apprehending unrelated events and facts, which are perceived as being incompatible with the subject’s experience. With the process of nation-formation emerged a new kind of historiography, one conceived as a perfected version of memory which would keep the reconstruction of the past free of subjective deformation and forgetting. History was henceforth reconfigured as scientific in its purpose; the distance presiding over the subject’s consideration of his or her heritage

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Although his argument mostly considers the context of metropolitan France, his analysis can be extended to a variety of locales, where communities that had established themselves around a continuous, eternal present of tradition were violently propelled into a modern historical time where they only could find themselves marginalized as primitive and backward, i.e., “not yet” at a stage deemed sufficient to take history into their own hands.
became the mark of objectivity, a condition for the emergence of a “true” (i.e., definitive) version of collective memory: “Each historian was convinced that his task consisted in establishing a more positive, all-encompassing, and explicative memory” (8). The “all-encompassing” nature of this hegemonic memory replicates the inclusive process of modernity, one with which the narration of the nation intersects. The emergence of historiography, “the history of history” (9), has put forward the need to produce an official rendering of the past, an exhaustive, supposedly authentic reading of collective memory. In the context of nation formation, the construction of historical discourse legitimizes one normative vision of the past, making alternate perceptions particular and incomplete. The memory of tradition therefore needs to be evacuated from the foreground, fixed and enshrined in hollow memorials, in lieux de mémoire, whose existence marks the end of the subject’s immediate relation to his or her culture and history: “There are lieux de mémoire, sites of memory, because there are no longer milieux de mémoire, real environments of memory,” explains Nora (7). Lieux de mémoire are configured as loci of continuity in the face of radical estrangement from one’s environment. However, the preservation of individual and group memory needs to be carried out in a form amenable to history’s claim to universality. In lieux de mémoire, thus, memory is manipulated; tradition is preserved as static, removed from the present to which it has become incommensurate. This instrumentalization of memory is oftentimes linked to the emergence of the nation-state as an imaginary construct, which necessarily entails the foundation of a new

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80 I have adopted K.L. Klein’s definition of collective memory: “a set of recollections attributable to some overarching group mind that could recall past events in the (admittedly poorly understood) ways in which we believe that individuals recall the past” (135).
national tradition. Through the resurgence of select traces in the past, a teleological narrative can be retrospectively imagined, thereby legitimizing the national construct as authentic and potentially linked to sacred, mythical time.

The constant revision of the discourse of history is to be understood in a historicist perspective of progress and development over time: “History binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things” (9). Despite the fluctuating definitions that the term has elicited, several characteristics of historicism can be pointed out. In an epilogue to the introduction to Provincializing Europe, “A Note on the term ‘historicism,’” Dipesh Chakrabarty emphasizes two main features— the object of historicist analysis needs to be “internally unified” and its “develop[ment takes place] over time” (23). While the development need not be sequential, historicism postulates an evolution from an early incomplete form to a unified whole, which has reached maturity and the full development of its potential. This process of development “seeks to find the general in the particular,” i.e., in a context of hegemony, to endow one particular memory with universal authority and normativity (23).

For Benedict Anderson, the emergence of the nation-state, born of immemorial tradition and developing along time, and of the related communal awareness of a sense of kinship based not only on a direct experience of belonging but extended to the imaginary community of the nation coincides with the shift to Walter Benjamin’s “homogenous, empty time of History,” which came to replace the dynastic time of
medieval simultaneity (Anderson 24-26).81 In this process, the subjective apprehension of time undergoes “homogenization” (Koselleck Futures Past 253) as time is construed as a supposedly objective, synchronized phenomenon throughout the nation: “Acts are performed at the same clocked, calendrical time, but by actors who may be largely unaware of one another” (Anderson 25). Furthermore, this temporalization of history is concomitant with the advent of historicist thinking, both occurring between 1770 and 1830.82 This concept of a uniform, linear time, however, seems to fail in its purported totalizing logic. Reinhart Koselleck has underlined the fascination with the new temporal paradigm (neue Zeit “new time” or Neuzeit “modernity”), which lay at the origin of numerous neologisms constructed around the word “Zeit” in German.83 All modern concepts associated with this new temporal framework partook of the effort to narrate past historical events objectively; as such, they paradoxically point to the limits of a historicist perspective as their “structural potential” as categories exceeds the “pure temporal succession of history” and downplays the uniqueness of each event in the sequence of history (Koselleck Futures Past 112). Chandler reports that Anderson introduces further limitations to the totalizing pretension of linear time,

81 “The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation” (26).

82 See particularly Chandler, chapter 2. Other sources include: Ricoeur; Osborne; Blumenberg. For a discussion of the relation between this new historical order and the emergence of nation-states, see especially Hobsbawn.

83 For a discussion of the implications of Neue Zeit, see Koselleck Practice.
which to him is only justified within the confines of the nation-state. Yet, Anderson’s position itself needs to be modulated, for even in the distinctive, limited context of the nation, the idea of a unique temporality in which all phenomena would take place seems inadequate to account for the discrepancies pertinent to colonial spaces. Bhabha suggests that the enunciative performance of the sign of modernity is marked by the specificities of the geographical and social contexts of its repetition: “… what seems the ‘same’ within cultures is negotiated in the [(post)colonial] time-lag of the ‘sign’ …. Because that lag is indeed the very structure of difference and splitting within the discourse of modernity… then each repetition of the sign of modernity is different, specific to its historical and cultural conditions of enunciation” (364). Taken on a broader level, the existence of diverse concomitant nationalisms on the global stage therefore begs the consideration of the relation between different national spaces with regards to their respective temporalities, thereby further complicating the homogenizing quality of historicist time.

In “Some thoughts on Comparability and the Space-Time Problem,” Harry Harootunian explores the modalities of the postmodern shift from the temporal to the spatial in comparative social science. The objective here is avowedly to re-center the discourse of social science on the category of capital. Yet, beyond the disciplinary intervention into the hermeneutics of social phenomena, Harootunian provides a compelling analysis of the various dynamics regulating the discursive inscription of cultural difference in the related dimensions of space and time. Addressing the bulk of

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84 “[Anderson] suggests that homogeneity of experience is a feature closely associated with what he calls ‘pure temporal succession’ but seems to enclose this kind of homogenous or pure temporality within the respective communal imaginaries of particular nation-states” (Chandler 104).
his critique to area studies and their comparative hermeneutic frameworks, Harootunian calls for the reintroduction of a historical dimension in the discourse on geography and space. Drawing as well from Koselleck’s analysis of the post-Enlightenment temporal order, the argument lays bare the existence of an “internal time” of phenomena which would follow diverse simultaneous temporalities within the same space, thus exposing the deceitful attempts of the nation-state to present time as a unique, universally shared continuum. This insight, for Harootunian, lies at the root of social sciences’ approach to events (and cultures) in history as the existence of an “internal time” of phenomena sanctions the predominance of the comparative method. However, once extended to a global colonial world, this structure of time allows for the conception of simultaneous histories developing at different paces in different regions of the world and facilitates the historical ordering of those stages in different degrees of completion and, therefore, adequacy. As Nora points out, “history can only conceive the relative” (9), which implies, outside the context of relational theories such as Glissant’s, the existence of a unique standard used as a universal norm against which other histories are weighed, stripped of their absolute character, and reconfigured within a hierarchy of cultures.

Although the concept of comparison rests on a dialectic of similitude and difference, classification within a comparative perspective inevitably leads to an amplification of difference in the form of a hierarchization of societies and cultures based on the degree of their embracing of the historical modernity and progress.

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85 Nora’s discussion of Western societies’ positionality between a reflexive, constantly revised history cut off from the everyday experience of memory and a frustrated longing for a past that is no more partakes of this double anchoring of modern life into distinct temporalities.
embodied by the West.\textsuperscript{86} Interestingly, and this is by far the main thrust of Harootunian’s argument, hierarchical configurations oftentimes drifted away from Enlightenment-inspired concepts (history as a universal process which guarantees the modernization of non-Western marginal spaces over time) and ascribed socio-cultural differences between cultures at a given moment in time more to the intrinsic quality of each society than to an incomplete diachronic process of modernization that was still underway. One need only think of the widespread essentialist character of orientalist travel narratives and geographical accounts, which would at times go as far as to resort to geographic determinism to inscribe difference at the core of cultural relations.\textsuperscript{87} The concept of “historical determination” thus gave way to a valorization of spatial location as unique origin of difference and meaning, a process which Harootunian describes as “apparent[ly] exempt from an encounter with time” (29). As often in the article, Harootunian’s construal of space as the one dominant concept in social science seems to be a bit excessive as, in this specific case, the orientalist desire for the authentic, immemorial culture of the exoticized space cannot be conceived outside a temporal perspective, albeit one bearing the mark of circularity and exclusion from teleological time. Essentialist Eurocentrism underlies colonial perceptions of culture based on the post-Enlightenment perspective of natural history and appropriate

\textsuperscript{86} In point of fact, in his study of Anderson’s paradigm of the nation state, Pheng Cheah posits comparison as the “haunting” subtext of the author’s argument (\textit{Grounds of Comparison}).

\textsuperscript{87} See for instance Vidal de la Blache’s \textit{Géographie Universelle} [Universal Geography] or, more surprisingly, Kant’s “On the Different Human Races”, which was interestingly first written as an introduction to his \textit{Physical Geography} lectures (see Bernasconi 14). Until the emergence of state-commissioned reports on soon-to-be-colonized territories in the nineteenth century, travel narratives remained the main primary sources available to natural and social scientists. Essentialism suffused the bulk of travel narratives of the period—be it in a primitivist move, to exalt the purported pristine character of native cultures or, on the contrary, to accentuate their supposed backwardness.
correlates in the field of social sciences. By upholding chronological difference predicated on a linear axis as the absolute standard, the development of comparative methodologies relegated non-Western cultures to a position of belatedness, on both the temporal and cultural levels.

Meaghan Morris defined modernity as “a known history, something which has already happened elsewhere and which is to be reproduced, mechanically or otherwise, with a local content” (16; emphasis mine). In point of fact, interpretations of the modern have invariably put to the fore the derivative nature of non-Western development. Either through the concept of mimicry or that of economic development, Eurocentrism has been configured as a necessary category- if only as the dominant theoretical model to obliterate. The relation to the exotic locale is thus conceived exclusively in terms of mimicry of a European-born model, which alone can guarantee inclusion into linear time. Postcolonial theory has shed light on the shortcomings of the mimetic process between two cultures. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that “the mode of self-representation that the ‘Indian’ can adopt … is what Homi Bhabha has justly called ‘mimetic’. Indian history, even in the most dedicated socialist or nationalist hands, remains a mimicry of a certain ‘modern’ subject of ‘European’ history and is bound to represent a sad figure of lack and failure” (40). Whether one understands mimicry in the sense developed here or rather in terms of a subversive imitation (as Bhabha himself suggests, complementing Chakrabarty’s interpretation), the process of

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88 Postcolonial criticism went so far in its effort to eradicate Eurocentrism in all forms that critics, such as Graham Huggan, have been calling for a “reintroduc[tion] of Europe into the domain of postcolonial literary and cultural studies… at least in postcolonial circles- Chakrabarty’s passionate call for the “provincializing of Europe” has been heeded only too well” (“Perspectives on Postcolonial Europe”).
flawless imitation is in any case doomed to failure. Its result is always incomplete and eventuates in a condition of hybridity, whose very existence belies the essentialist turn of historicist theories of difference. The effects of this hybridity are perceptible in Amrouche’s subject position.

By emphasizing the intrinsic “modernity” of his (supposedly pure) native culture, regardless of any norm or standard imposed by the West, Amrouche strives to enforce coextensivity and coevalness between cultures and emphasizes a multiple, shared present of synchronicity as the only acceptable form of temporal reference within which to situate oneself. Modernity has construed itself as part of the Enlightenment process, which, in its pedagogic project, aimed to obliterate the subject’s “bondage of being-in-nature” (Cheah “Given Culture” 298). Such was the rationale behind the inducement to colonial mimicry—through geographic expansion would come world-wide historical (and technical) progress. Yet, modernization paradoxically happened at the cost of freedom and autonomy— at home, that of the laboring classes at the origin of the wealth supporting modernization, in the colonies that of all natives as the universal narrative of modernity involved the inclusion of all third world national contexts in the same Eurocentric framework, a configuration in which the colonized had been refused agency. The fragmentation of the condition of modernity into various components of the modern, without consideration of geography or linearity, thus dislodges privileged European practices of history and social theory.

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89 Harootunian presents a similar vision of synchronicity in a comparative context, although it is one based on the primacy of capital: “[…] received comparative approaches have consistently denied a relationship of coevality to precisely those societies targeted for study, misrecognizing a coexistent present we all inhabit by demanding a perspective located in a different temporal register from those societies and cultures we are seeking to understand, making them outside to our inside” (33).
to the benefit of alternative conceptions springing from areas traditionally construed as marginal. Such is the impact of Amrouche’s reconfiguration of colonial history, not as a universal, linear historical process but rather as a “politics of time capable of locating practice immanently within a modernity that housed the temporalization of new cultural forms developing everywhere” (Harootunian 32).

In *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty argues from within a Marxist perspective against historicist theories which have entailed unjust practices in the course of history. The Europe which is provincialized is not so much the continent as its theoretical legacy in contemporary social science. The book aims to pluralize historical narratives and disengage them from evolutionary perspectives, which makes it particularly relevant to the study of Amrouche. Discussing the inadequacy of the European divide between the public and the private as a standard for measuring modernity in the context of India, Chakrabarty explains that Indian “narratives of self and community…often bespeak an antihistorical consciousness, that is they entail subject positions and configurations of memory that challenge and undermine the subject that speaks in the name of history” (my emphasis). He continues, “‘History is precisely the site where the struggle goes on to appropriate on behalf of the modern…these other collocations of memory’ (37). Amrouche’s project consists precisely in disengaging the *chants* of Berber collective memory from their appropriation by the logic of colonial history. His edition of the *Chants Berbères de Kabylie* (Berber *Chants* [sung poetry] from Kabylia) in 1939 partakes of the effort to preserve imperiled forms of cultural creation at odds with the internal logic of cultural
modernity. By re-situating his poetic persona in the culture of his ancestors, Amrouche turned the *chants* into a self-referential *lieu de mémoire*, in which he could reconstruct a unified identity from which he could gain vocality. For the sense of dismay permeating the collection of poems *Cendres*, which he wrote from a position of historical and cultural exclusion, he substitutes the hope of a renewed subject-position inscribed in the course of history, albeit in a non-Eurocentric form. To the authority of linear time, Amrouche opposes the disruptive power of a Berber alternative timeline, an internal temporality which, through the mediation of the poetic voice, blends into the cosmic time of tradition: “Those poets sang in unison with the world; they sang their present and they did not know that they were singing at the same time a past and a future that did not belong to them” (Amrouche *Chants* 63).

The correspondence between the instant of the present and correlated moments in both the past and the future is certainly reminiscent of Anderson’s simultaneous time and it is undeniable that Amrouche here resorts to a non-modern mythical temporality, which, through its claim to irrationality, quite blatantly defines itself in opposition to Eurocentric modernity. In this respect, it may therefore seem from a historicist perspective to duplicate the very dichotomies which it seeks to displace. However, I

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90 For the text of the introduction to the volume, I used “Introduction aux Chants Berbères de Kabylie,” *AM* 62-68, hereafter “Amrouche *Chants*.” The text consists in a transcription of the oral Berber original poem accompanied by a translation into French on the following page.

91 “Ces poètes … ont chanté à l’unisson du monde; ils ont chanté leur présent et ils ne savaient pas qu’ils chantaient en même temps un passé et un avenir étrangers.”

92 I have here adopted Chakrabarty’s concept of the non-modern rather than the more conventional “pre-modern,” which, as we recall, was used by historicist critiques such as Jameson’s. See Chakrabarty, introduction. The following paragraphs will elaborate further on how this non-modern present differs from the pre-modern other of historicist thinking.
contend that this eternal present of tradition is not to be mistaken for the objectifying present of the orientalist gaze, the “présent sans mémoire et sans avenir” [memory-less and future-less present] of colonial temporality (“Le Combat Algérien,” [The Algerian Struggle] AM 121). This present allows for the concurrent conception of various concomitant temporalities in the same space and eschews the historicist characterization of any component of this differential moment in terms of “anachronis[m]” (Chakrabarty 12). This present, indeed, subsumes the Messianic time of myth and, through its deep rooting into the past, opens a path to the future. It is a present of inclusion in a wider historical context. It supplies the poet with agency within his ancestral culture and therefore breaks the dynamics of exclusion and objectification imposed by the colonial order. As well, it fosters an immediate sense of brotherhood as the first step towards political praxis: “The brother of men, but in a brotherhood distinct from the diffuse sentiment stirred in him by an abstract concept” (65). In this context, the poetic persona is thus given a voice as part of a community with which he will be able to participate, some fifteen years later, in the political debates saturating the public sphere on the eve of the war of independence.

Another name is given to the Berbers reciting the chants- “homme-enfant” [child-man], in reference to their innocence and purportedly unmediated inscription in a state of nature. Detached from any influence that would come from outside the voice of tradition, they embody Koselleck’s concept of an internal time of phenomena,

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93 “Le frère des hommes, mais d’une fraternité qui n’est pas le sentiment diffus que répercute en lui une formule abstraite.”
which Amrouche pitches against the calendar abstract time necessary for national community to imagine itself:

The child-man does not tick off days and hours as a clock would, but rather feels that he follows his own interior time … and this interior flux is tightly connected to all other times…what we may call the time-span of the universe is … the sum of all these particular times. The singing of the world… is made up of the associated voices of these innumerable times (64).  

In these lines, a fervent sense of community, supposedly missing from subjective experiences of modern life, is associated with a strong cosmic, even religious sentiment. The “singing of the world” designates the voice of tradition manifesting itself to the younger generations and, as the lines surrounding this passage in the text show, the collective memory which Amrouche employs as an alternative rests on the central notion if his spiritual conception of life.  

This spirituality is expressed through the submission to a superior will which guides its progression towards the “orient” of his fate (Amrouche’s term, here to be taken in the sense of “orientation,” purpose). Therefore, Amrouche draws a distinction between modern abstract categories and personal experience. The subject lies at the root of this configuration as time becomes an experience, not just of one individual but of his whole community through him: “Through him all times unfold. Time does not exist independently from him; on the

94 “[L’homme-enfant] ne compte pas les jours et les heures comme une horloge, mais il se sent le facteur d’une durée intérieure… et ce flux intérieur est étroitement associé à toutes les autres durées. Ce que l’on peut appeler la durée de l’univers ne serait autre chose que la composante de toutes les durées particulières. Le chant du monde… c’est le choeur de ces innombrables durées associées.”

95 The influence of religion on Amrouche’s writing has been the object of much criticism, be it as Catholicism or a native religious sensibility. See, for instance, Jean Déjeux, “La Quête inapaisée [The Unrequited Quest]: Jean Amrouche et Patrice de la Tour du Pin ;” Réjane Le Baut Biographie.
contrary, it is through him that it is created. Once time comes to an end, he will come out of it and move into the Contemplation of the Face of God. Then, living divine life, he will know true liberty” (66). I will gloss over the implications of the obvious mystical resonance of this passage for now to concentrate instead on this notion of mediation. For, if the subject is central to the unfolding of universal time, the absorption into this alternative, circular temporality of tradition does not go smoothly. The issue of agency is at the very least problematic and would deserve to be examined in more detail than I am permitted to do here. Suffice is to say for our purposes that the freedom hinted at in the text can only be achieved in death, a pessimism that Amrouche has also expressed elsewhere, and that makes one wonder whether he himself did not grow aware of the ineffectualness of his conception of a nostalgic, idealized Berber culture eventually exclusive of individual subjective agency as the touchstone of anticolonial praxis.

Interestingly, absolute secession from France was not originally the solution advocated by Amrouche who was rather partial to the historically dominant argument in favor of federalization. Amrouche at first conceived of his mission as that of a

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96 “En lui les temps s’accomplissent. La durée n’existe pas indépendamment de lui, tout au contraire, c’est en lui qu’elle se crée. Une fois révolue, il sortira du temps, pour entrer dans la Contemplation du Visage de Dieu. Alors, participant à la vie divine, il connaîtra la vraie liberté.” Obviously, Amrouche’s vision of the subject is in no way coextensive with the category underlying Western post-Enlightenment philosophy; the subject is rather envisioned as a channel through which tradition is enacted in the material world and his subjectivity is conceived only in terms of his expression of a communal identity. We can see how the issue of free will is excluded from this paradigm.

97 While nationalists adopted a more drastic perspective following the Blum-Violette bill in 1936, Amrouche and other moderate nationalists ascribe their change of heart to the decree voted by the provisional government on 7 March 1944. The law voted in France aimed to abrogate the racist laws which discriminated against native populations in colonial Algeria. Although a positive move, the law
representative of the Algerian people with the French government and was hoping to serve as a mediator between his two cultures. Amrouche’s work bears the mark of his hybrid, elite status (he has French citizenship), and fails to embrace the dynamics of subaltern insurgency. The identification with irrational, non-secular cultural forms in no way assimilates him to what Guha has described as “subaltern peasants,” whose inscription in time obeys non-European, non-linear dynamics. His idealized vision of Berber culture _recreates_ his past in a self-oriented process of mimicry; since Berber culture does not constitute an immediate site of inscription, it must be imitated in an imaginative vision which, as it is the case for all mimicry, can only reproduce its original incompletely. Therefore, Amrouche remains as indelibly alienated from his ancestral past as he feels that he is from the future: “I am a cultural hybrid. Cultural hybrids are monsters, very interesting monsters but monsters with no future. I therefore consider that I have been condemned by History” (“Notre Algérie,” [Our Algeria] _AM_ 143). His “monstrosity” in the face of a tradition to which he does not belong anymore bears similitude to what Radhakrishnan has termed, dubbing Derrida, a “prosthesis of origin” (Radhakrishnan “Derivative Discourses” 793). His position is first and foremost a liminal one, that of an intellectual much indebted to the categories

98 The “Archives de Marseille” volume contains a few letters exchanged with General De Gaulle, the French president during the Algerian war (see p.138 in particular). For an enunciation of his role as a representative of the subalterns, see “Aux Algériens” [To Algerians] and “Quelques raisons de la révolte algérienne” [A Few Causes of the Algerian Revolt] in the same volume.

of European political thought. Thus, beneath the nativist facade of his depiction of Berber culture, the repressed residue of a primitivist approach to his own culture surfaces, as his essay “L’Éternel Jugurtha: Propositions sur le Génie Africain” [The Eternal Jugurtha: Propositions on African Genius] (1946) evinces.

In his milestone essay “L’Éternel Jugurtha: Propositions sur le Génie Africain” (1946), Amrouche embarks on a Berber-inspired, imaginative depiction of North African character. The account purports to present a rationalization of the features pertaining to the poet’s culture and own subjectivity and, as such, promises relative identification with the object of study on the part of Amrouche. Yet, surreptitiously, the analysis shifts towards a more critical perspective. The discussion first evokes Jugurtha fiery passion, which surfaces in his commitment to revolt as a mode of inscription into the world. Jugurtha is first and foremost resilient to the waves of conquest that marked the history of the Maghreb. His ability to deceive, his exaltation of freedom, his instrumentalization of foreign cultures for the benefit of his rebellion are the object of much praise and Jugurtha truly appears to be a worthy inspiration for current-day nationalism. In antinomy with this vision, Amrouche then emphasizes Jugurtha’s incapacity to incarnate a European-inspired political subject able to move beyond desire and instinct: he deplores “[son incapacité à] s’intéresser[r] à ce monde autrement que comme un objet de contemplation esthétique ou… une source inépuisable de voluptés et de douleurs éphémères [[his inability] to be interested in this world as more than an object of aesthetic contemplation or… an infinite source of

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100 This mythical configuration of Jugurtha was later on adopted by Kateb Yacine.
ephemeral pleasure and pain” (112). The immediacy of Berber culture’s relation to the world, which Amrouche greatly commended in the introduction to the Chants, is here reconfigured in terms of a lack. Jugurtha is enjoined to adopt a more rational, scientific disposition and to move away from an overly religious and mythical worldview- in a word, to become modern by developing a spirit of initiative and promoting intensive modernization as a prerequisite to political modernity and emancipation. Amrouche goes even as far as to ascribe the belatedness of Berber culture to its lack of technological and scientific initiative, which impedes the progress of modernization. Jugurtha’s vernacular praxis of insurgency constitutes the logical extension on the political level of the cultural argument elaborated in the introduction to the Chants. However, Amrouche here seems to discount it as a fruitful alternative to the embracing of Eurocentric modernity, which he now conceives as an indispensable preliminary in the context of nationalist revolt. His primitivist perception of Berber cultures as being steeped in a previous stage of development stands in blatant contradiction with his purported plea for a return to tradition. It is therefore important here to somewhat qualify Amrouche’s radical questioning of Eurocentric essentialist perceptions as well as his positionality with regards to modernity. It is quite interesting to note that the construal of Berber culture as “traditional” throughout his whole production is enacted only in contrast to the traumatic imposition of colonial modernity, as is the case in many other colonial contexts. Construed on its own, as we will see, Berber culture reveals coincidentally both elements of Eurocentric modernity and “traditional” characteristics, which gives further relevance to Peter Taylor’s
argument that “it is now impossible to write from outside the modern and therefore all critiques [of modernity] are themselves inherently modern” (Taylor 2). The very anxiety expressed at the idea of the future demise of Berber folklore in the wake of modernization is in itself eminently modern and, as much as Amrouche attempts to displace the modern/traditional binary, his essentialist fetishization of Berber poetry imaginatively configured as free of any contact with modern civilization exposes him as being more complicit with modern conceptions of culture than he claims to be. The very positing of modernization as the necessary preamble to political modernity in “L’Eternel Jugurtha” (i.e., the failure to separate both concepts as Mary-Louise Pratt had advocated) evinces Amrouche’s inherent complicity with colonial discursive formations and, therefore, his fundamental duplicity. Tradition is only desirable in the guise of an imaginative construct, one superimposed on a solidified bedrock of modern identity. It thus appears that his aspiration to an inscription into tradition was no more than the expression of a desire of belonging, which the exclusive dynamics of European modernity had frustrated. Amrouche’s construction of a timeless Kabyle identity, which was meant to endow him with agency and vocality, therefore shows its obvious limits and it is as a divided subject caught in-between the two poles of his identity that he appears, the ambiguity of his subjectivity resonating with the failure of his political commitment.101

101 In Radhakrishnan’s words, Amrouche’s failure can be construed as the inability to simultaneously adopt a “double strategy: redeem [one] self specifically from the mark of derivativeness by signifying on modernity and the West in a certain way, and engage [one]self in the multilateral demonstration that there is nothing that is not derivative” (“Derivative Discourse” 790).
The illusory character of his categorization of Berber culture debilitates the political ramifications of his argument as the concepts on which he predicates his vision are indubitably questionable in the light of later texts, such as “L’Eternel Jugurtha.” Therefore, the alternative presented to the modern inscription of subjects into history relies on a delusion, which remains incommensurable to the material demands of nationalist anti-colonial praxis. His vision cannot eventuate in productive nationalism- first, due to the antinomy of the subject-position from which he writes, but also because the imagined, mythical Berber past that he calls upon is discrepant with the purpose of the Arab Muslim majority. Therefore, from its inception, his project is doomed to political failure. Deprived of materialization, his invocation of an archaic past is confined to a marginal, ahistorical position in the midst of the process of nation formation which consecrated the inclusion of the Algerian nation into history. Although resigned to the de facto necessity of the category of the nation in the fight for independence, his configuration of national politics retains the same fragmentary, non-totalizing logic which he opposed to Eurocentric categories. His transnational national ideal based on the coevalness of cultures and the unalienable right to expression and protection within the frame of nation cannot withstand the irresistible logic of nationalism as a necessary stage in the emancipation process. Its project thus contravenes the modern narrative of nation formation, which necessarily requires the imaginative construction of a common historical tradition, particularly though the silencing of minority voices. The fate of his political configurations was sealed. It is thus little surprising that his death at the eve of the war of independence
should have been interpreted as the utmost expression of the historical failure of his project (Guibert). The ambiguity which plagued him to the end of his life made his liminal position untenable despite his inscription in anticolonial struggle. In hindsight, one can see how futile his attempts at preserving a hybrid form of culture inclusive of revised French humanist ideals proved to be in the face of rampant Arabization and anti-French loyalty. More convincing, however, is his discussion of Berber traditional literature as an alternative to Eurocentric forms of modernism.

**Spatializing modernism: the issue of derivation in global visions of modernity**

It is first and foremost through his critical production that Amrouche’s anticolonial resistance comes to light. In the context of French North Africa, Amrouche strived to bring vernacular Berber, and beyond it, Algerian literature on a par with European modernism and symbolism. Amrouche’s dealings with both modernism and colonial modernity must be considered in the ambiguity and complexity of his position as a colonial artist, since his introduction to modernism was to be over-determined by the rhetoric of his colonial education. Going a long way towards complicating recent questionings of the ideological implications of dominant periodizations of modernism (modernism as global literary system originated in Europe and North America), Amrouche discounts any consideration of typicality or Eurocentrism to focus on modernism as the spirit of the age of modernity. Amrouche’s conflation of symbolist poetic aesthetics and “traditional” Berber oral poetry put to the fore the ubiquity of
certain strands of modernist aesthetic practices independently from geographical, cultural, or historical considerations. By elaborating an *ars poetica* inspired by both from canonical French modernism and Berber forms of expression, Amrouche obliterates the primacy of the center/margin paradigm of cultural development when looking at aesthetic responses to modernity and attempts to disengage “traditional” forms of expression from primitivist recuperations, such as the ones lying at the root of European modernist literature. The argument will shed light upon the relation existing between modernism as an aesthetic practice and its reflection of colonial politics as it will lay bare the relation that Amrouche’s production establishes between African writing and a reformed egalitarian, multicultural Algerian society. If, like Susan Stanford Friedman, we consider modernism to be the “expressive dimension of modernity” in any place and in any form, then Amrouche’s accentuation of a (limited) aesthetic congruence between two supposedly independent and potentially conflicting poetic traditions shows that considerable non-derivative forms of the modern can come to life in parts of the world which social science, since the advent of modern historical and anthropological consciousness, has described as lying on the margins of history (Friedman “Periodizing Modernism” 432). In point of fact, Amrouche is reluctant to consider the modernist features of Berber cultural production in terms of a mere duplication or adaptation of modernity (in a transcultural dynamics à la Ortiz): with its aesthetic first, but also, in keeping with Friedman’s theory, with the modern as a discursive formation. As these modernist features appear in “traditional” (i.e., purportedly “pre-modern”) forms of cultural production, several questions emerge: to
what form of modernity does this aesthetic respond to? How does that modernity relate to Western modernity? What is its position on the global map of the modern? How does the modernism which it engenders relate to European models? The following pages aim to investigate Amrouche’s associations further and to consider their multi-fold implications, both for the analysis of Berber oral literatures, but also for definitions of what constitutes modernism and where and when modernity can be considered to have occurred, in various forms.

In her article “Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies,” Susan Stanford Friedman makes a convincing plea against absolute, Eurocentric conceptions of what does or does not constitute modernism. Adapting global relational theories to the cultural encounters forced by colonialism, Friedman questions the relevance of theories that would limit modernity and its cultural expression to one period and location. She argues that dominant modernist criticism limits its paradigms to the unique consideration of European models of modernism, which invariably locate the subject’s poetic agency in the West, or center. In a related fashion, she contends that the cultural production of the newly-decolonized margins is excluded from the modernist canonical corpus. For Friedman, the emergence of postcolonial spaces brings about the concurrent emergence of indigenous forms of modernity. She associates this engagement with modernity (which, in a colonial context, always appears as the exclusive prerogative of the colonial power) to the nationalist experience, which she presents as a central, formative occurrence in the accession of formerly colonized nations to the very
phenomenology of modernity. We will come back to the problematic nature of that claim. One of the most significant thrusts of the argument draws on theories of multiple modernities. Friedman emphasizes the permeability of the cultural and geopolitical boundaries isolating societies and describes the novel (sometimes violent) interactions brought about by colonial encounters as a fruitful reciprocal exchange between formerly relatively isolated cultures. Modernism, therefore, both in its canonical forms and as it emerged in marginal spaces, bears the mark of this mutual indebtedness, be it under the guise of primitivism (one only needs remember the Africanist leanings of Picasso’s cubist period) or in the incorporation of Western modernist strands in local cultural production: “Traveling and intermixing cultures are not unidirectional, but multidirectional; not linear influences, but reciprocal ones; not passive assimilations, but actively transformative ones, based in a blending of adaptation and resistance.” She then concludes, “All modernisms develop a form of cultural translation or transplantation produced through intercultural encounters” (430).

It is the modalities of this concept of “transplantation” as well as its implications that I would like to interrogate here. Friedman is careful to distance her argument from diffusionist theories. She appropriates geographer J.M. Blaut’s concept in *The Colonizer’s Model of the World* to designate the Eurocentric dynamics undergirding dominant narratives of modernity, which consider the concept to be a typically European invention and a synonym for the Westernization of the Third World. This binary conception has further implications for emergent postcolonial national literatures as it construes them either as removed from modernism altogether,
but, at best, as deriving from Euro-American models. Friedman rightly makes the articulation of the issue of sequentiality (and simultaneity) between European and postcolonial forms of modernism the touchstone of her whole argument. Rejecting the diffusionist logic previously mentioned, she presents her own substitute concept—“indigenization,” which she envisions as “a form of making native or indigenous something from somewhere else […] which] presumes an affinity of some sort between the cultural practices from elsewhere and those in the indigenous location” (430). The term, she adds, suggest a sort of cannibalism between the two societies, which both incorporate alien elements, undergoing change and triggering it. Modernism in emergent literatures cannot therefore be only belated or derivative (from the center to the peripheries); it proceeds from a mutual enrichment between the two cultures drawn together over time. “Polycentric modernities” (426), a concept derived from Gaonkar, which I will here call vernacular, are formed from this ingurgitation of non-typical cultural practices adopted from elsewhere. The adjunction of imported “modern” elements to “traditional” practices forms a discrete form of engagement with the general concept of modernity, one that reflects the intrinsic socio-historical circumstances of the locale in keeping with Bhabha’s concept of “time-lag.” The newly-appropriated, newly-adapted strand of modernity then, through its fruitful reconfiguration, rejuvenates the concept itself and contributes to the renewal of the culture from which it was borrowed. In that paradigm, modernism therefore represents what Friedman calls “the expressive dimension of modernity” as its form reflects its engagement with the specific characteristics of a vernacular postcolonial modernity.
which, to Friedman, can only result from the incorporation of the new into the old. The mutually constitutive, reciprocal nature of this dynamics, which stands at the origin of both European and non-western forms of modernism, seems to eschews the totalizing logic of global literary periodizations based on a center-periphery model. I argue that Jean Amrouche’s juxtaposition of canonical symbolist aesthetics with what he presents as purely “traditional” Berber oral sung poetry in a colonial context somewhat complicates the issue.

**An aesthetics of silence**

Amrouche’s education familiarized him with the great classics of European literature and ensured his engagement with the canon of his time. In this respect, it is significant that his reflections on the nature of poetic creation should have developed along two complementary axes- the critique of the Great French modernists on the one hand and the recording and analysis of traditional Berber forms of expression on the other. I am interested in the fruitful intersection of both supposedly distinct forms of cultural production in the poet’s writings. I will limit my analyses to a reading of two seminal texts in the matter- his little-known article on French symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé “Saint Stéphane Mallarmé” published in 1941 as a one of his many contributions to the literary supplement to a Tunisian newspaper, *La Tunisie Française Littéraire*, and his introduction to *Chants Berbères de Kabylie*. 
“Saint Stéphane Mallarmé,” as its title adequately suggests, is a (mostly) laudatory opinion piece on the aesthetics perfected by the French Symbolist poet. A fervent admirer of Baudelaire’s treatment of the relationship between reality and an imagined world, Mallarmé develops the theory that poetic creation must do away with the impure form of everyday language(s) and must aspire to the condition of music—the sound closest in his eyes to the Supreme language, the “stamp of Truth Herself Incarnate” (Kolocotroni, Goldman, and Taxidou 124). With the desired immateriality of language, Mallarmé juxtaposes the auto-telic quality of the poetic text, whose intrinsic objective is to lend a voice to the “Spirit,” exterior to the poet, also expressed in musical terms. Mallarmé tells us, “If the poem is to be pure, the poet’s voice must be stilled and the initiative taken by the words themselves, which will be set in motion as they meet unequally in collision” (126). It thus appears that the true value of the poem rests in its obliteration of authorial intention; the rhythm, the structure spring from within as the Spirit becomes incarnate in the structure. Music is therefore presented as an ideal texture for an expression clear of the contaminating power of corrupted words. In Mallarmé’s view, silence reigns supreme in the economy of the work of art as impersonal, predestined interactions preside over the emergence of suggestion as the privileged mode of representation. Through the formulation of his theory of disinterested aesthetics, Mallarmé’s position is thus eminently symptomatic of the modernist escape from the hustle of the empirical, modern world into an estranged world of pure value. Amrouche’s withdrawal into the spirituality of Berber
reified tradition thus takes on new meaning when read in parallel with Mallarmé in keeping with Friedman’s strategy of “cultural parataxis.”  

“Saint Stéphane Mallarmé” presents a somewhat partial perspective on the poet. Amrouche immediately emphasizes the unorthodoxy of his reading as he distances himself from the hostile reception of the poet by French criticism on account of his detached and arcane expression. Amrouche introduces his personal fascination with Mallarmé as a provocation and it is as an outcast from French academia that he positions himself. He praises Mallarmé for the “despotism” of his writing, which in his eyes reflects the poet’s intentionality, a perspective which bluntly contradicts Mallarmé’s avowal of artistic impersonality (the meaningful misinterpretation underlies most of Amrouche’s argument). But more than his mastery, it is Mallarmé’s “purity” that seduces Amrouche, his absolute impassiveness in the face of the world. Despising both the fame and the solace that poetry can bring its author, Mallarmé is presented as a martyr-like figure at the service of a higher principle. Refusing the convenience of inspiration, Mallarmé, in Amrouche’s eyes, does not succumb to the imperious call of his inner voice. In this respect, Mallarmé comes to embody an ideal authorial position, one that Amrouche, who conceived of poetry as a means to find unity and harmony when suffering from the schism of colonial ambiguity, has so

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102 Echoing Mary-Louise Pratt and Arjun Appadurai, Friedman defines parataxis as follows: a “juxtaposition of texts from different times and places for the new light this geopolitical conjuncture sheds on each … [Cultural parataxis] means examining writers from different nodal points of modernity, recognizing the heterogeneity and stratifications of many centers around the globe as well as the reciprocal influences and cultural mimesis that result from transnational cultural traffic and intercultural contact zones. In this context, cultural parataxis helps bring to light how colonial and postcolonial contact zones produce not just racial oppositions but also forms of biological, linguistic, and cultural hybridity.” (“Paranoia, Pollution, and Sexuality” 245-7).
many times failed to attain. Mallarmé’s writing persona dons the form of a mere vehicle for pure *chant* (here, as in the *chants*, an invocation, a term closer in its connotations to the Latin *carmen* than to the more prosaic *cantus* from which the French word is etymologically derived). Through its autotelic aesthetics, his text reintroduces transcendence (both in the text and in its reader) in the shape of an inner metaphysical quality of the language: “He systematically elaborates a metaphysics of poetry, which he elevates to the level of divinity. He reveals in the language a specific virtue, which he assimilates to the divine Word” (“Saint Stéphane Mallarmé”). However, Amrouche does not *completely* value Mallarmé’s aspiration to the expression of universal truth in a depersonalized manner; on the contrary, to Amrouche, his endeavor is akin to a demiurgic attempt at playing God, a project which he envisions as aporic. The refusal of inspiration comes down to negating the power of poetic creation. Throughout his contradictory and at times misinformed analysis of Mallarmé’s dealings with poetic intentionality, it is the excess of asceticism that Amrouche comes to deplore in the symbolist’s work: “To abolish chance! Such a hubristic endeavor, a major and fatal temptation, which was to lead the poet to barenness […]” (“Saint Stéphane Mallarmé”). The temptation to play God is one from which Amrouche, through his resort to Berber tradition as a source for inspiration is preserved: in the immemorial wisdom of his people, Amrouche gains

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103 “Il compose systématiquement une métaphysique de la poésie, qu’il élève au rang de la divinité. Il découvre dans le langage une vertu spécifique qu’il assimile au Verbe divin.”

104 “Abolir le hasard! Surhumaine entreprise et tentation majeure, tentation mortelle qui devait conduire le poète à la stérilité …”
a harmonious understanding of the workings of the universe, an insight of which purely modern subjectivities are, in his view, devoid.

The similarities between symbolist aesthetics and “traditional” Berber poetics are hinted at obliquely in his introduction to the *Chants Berbères de Kabylie*, which delineate a poetics specific to Berber culture. Whereas no direct discussion of Mallarmé or any other canonical modernist is introduced, the implicit comparison with symbolist aesthetics underlies the whole argument. Traditional Berber forms are said to naturally possess the purity of symbolist poetical language. While these poets have made opaqueness the hallmark of poetical language, Berber traditions offer a creativity that finds its origin in everyday life and its expression in the most popular forms of the language. The distinction between the beautiful and the useful is abolished as poetic creation is by nature intuitive, the expression of the poet’s absolute communion with his environment:

"Without a doubt, they are exceptionally successful. The work of art only expresses the real nature of things and of everyday life through detachment. Here, on the contrary, the work immediately reflects reality… our *chants* are at the same time works of art and useful instruments. They fuse nature and art” (66).105

The “works of art” mentioned here are undoubtedly symbolist creations and for their suspicious estrangement from the real world, the touchstone of the critique developed in “Saint Stéphane Mallarmé,” Amrouche substitutes a poetics of interaction and communication. Amrouche refuses to restrict the power of Berber poetry to the

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105 “Sans aucun doute, [ces chants] sont une réussite exceptionnelle. L’œuvre d’art n’exprime la nature profonde des choses et de la vie quotidienne qu’en se détachant d’elles. Ici au contraire l’œuvre adhère immédiatement au réel […] nos chants sont en même temps des œuvres d’art et d’utiles instruments. En eux s’accomplit la fusion de la nature et de l’art.”
primitive. The poetic experience rests on its spiritual affect. Berber poetry is described in its disembodied structure, its pure verbal logic. Purified to the extreme, just as it is in symbolist aesthetics, the underlying verbal weft is weighed, the density of each word highlighted while the resonance of the lines in the interspersed moments of silence provides the remaining words with intensity. Associative through complex associations of images, Berber poetry expresses through its minimalism the clarity of its vision, its insight into the dynamics presiding over the march of the world. The chant becomes the truest incarnation of the tribe’s Spirit (itself a common feature to both Berber poetry and Mallarmé’s disincarnate vision) and, as such, constitutes a vocal manifestation of its harmonious engagement with the world. Through the comparison with Berber poetics, commitment to the community is affixed to Mallarmé’s symbolist aesthetics: “Thus, one can say that our chants are simply what they are and do not pretend to be what they are not and that, because of that, they are deeply rooted in human nature” (66; author’s emphasis). The humanist ideals duplicitously advocated by French colonial discursive formations seem to have left their mark on Amrouche’s mindset. While his text moves beyond purely aesthetic considerations, his argument attempts to inflect uninvolved European symbolist visions of reality towards a moral concern for the world. It is also interesting to note that his political musings about the future of independent Algeria revolved on the same notion of a universal propensity to humanism, here redefined as a genuine ethics

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106 “Aussi peut-on dire que nos chants se sont contentés d’être au lieu de chercher à paraître, et que, à cause de cela aussi, ils sont profondément enracinés dans l’humain.”
that formerly colonized people need to embrace in order to achieve political justice and balance in their soon-to-be-formed nation.

Stripping Berber cultures from the primitivist perception of internationalist modernism, which envisioned their supposed archaism as a means of rejuvenation for an exhausted Western civilization, Amrouche reappropriates the traditional cultures of North Africa and displaces creative agency from the West to its peripheries, with the notable limits evoked earlier. By conflating canonical symbolist aesthetics and traditional Berber inspiration, Amrouche does much to challenge the very traditional/modern dichotomy and to disrupt the exclusive definitions dominant in contemporaneous Eurocentric taxonomies which reduce modernism to the West and non-Western cultures to exotic appropriations. By juxtaposing the two contexts of French high culture and Berber folklore, Amrouche emphasizes the similarities existing between both traditions and elevates Kabyle culture to the status of a legitimate alternative form of modernism.

Friedman’s concept of indigenization rested on the hypothesis that all forms of modernity rested on an adaptation of foreign concepts into a more local, malleable form. In her eyes, all modernities, and in a related fashion, all modernisms emerged from this creolization. Here, Amrouche’s treatment of the intersection between Berber culture and Euro-American modernism highlight additional considerations. First of all, contrary to Friedman’s anticipation, his elaboration of a vernacular form of modernism occurs at the height of the colonial period (the *chants* were published in 1939), not after independence and a successful nationalist experience have been
achieved. Friedman associated the development of (post)colonial modernity to the moment of nation formation: “Declaring the end of modernism by 1950 is like trying to hear one hand clapping […] we must not close the curtain on modernism before the creative agencies in the colonies and newly emergent nations have their chance to perform” (427). Although she seems to acknowledge a possible inscription of modernity in colonial emancipatory efforts predating independence, her adoption of 1950 as the cut-off date for incipient nationalist activism marginalizes earlier “[modernist] creative agencies in the colonies,” such as Amrouche’s. Her paradigm therefore seems to fall prey to the same logic of sequentiality that informs historicism as it is only through the adoption of the Western-inspired political form of the nation-state upon independence that colonial spaces can access modernity. Amrouche’s production therefore re-situates modernism in the interstitial space of early anticolonial activism. Furthermore, Amrouche simply underscores a common feature to two distinct, and supposedly isolated, strands of symbolist productions.\footnote{The very use of the term “symbolism” could here be perceived as problematic. Indeed, it is as a European critical category and in relation to European cultural realities only that the term has been coined. Applying it unreservedly to non-Western, alternative forms of “symbolism” could in itself be grossly generalizing. Berber oral poetry may therefore be best depicted in terms of plural, uneven symbolist characteristics held in dialectical tension with concomitant non-Western characteristics.}

Although the ancestral “purity” of “traditional” Kabyle culture has been the object of unmitigated conflation on the part of Amrouche, the symbolist characteristics of its poetry are first and foremost presented as endogenous, not as adapted. The strategic juxtaposition with French symbolist aesthetics is performed in an effort to instrumentalize the similarity between Kabyle and European cultures for the benefit of counter-hegemonic views of cultural politics in colonial Algeria. The similarity is
presented as an accident, a phenomenon that no global dynamics of cultures and histories could have infallibly caused. In the light of our previous comments regarding Amrouche’s ambiguity towards the modern/traditional binary, it may be wise to deem his presentation of Kabyle culture as being perfectly preserved from any contact with European modernity doubtful; unquestionably, there is more creolization at stake here than he claims to see - at least in the modalities of his own hybrid vision. His analysis of Kabyle culture therefore is to be considered less for its objective anthropological value than for its revelation of Amrouche’s typically modernist conflicting engagement with the issue of culture and tradition. However, of more significance than the issue of the degree to which creolization took place is the reconfiguration of the relational dynamics of the two concepts of the modern and the traditional that Amrouche’s modernist-inspired vision imposes on our contemporary considerations of modernism and, beyond, of the modernity that emerges through the dichotomy.

Amrouche’s revelation of the modern(ist) characteristics of Berber oral literature has multiple resonance. Whether the result of creolization or not, the presence of independent modernist features in Berber poetry successfully challenges the supremacy of European aesthetic models. Reintroducing incommensurability at the core of all cultures involved in the interaction specific to the historical context of colonialism in Algeria, Amrouche disengages characteristics usually associated with modernism from a homogenous, historicist perspective whose dynamics dominant Eurocentric periodizations reproduce, and redefines vernacular colonial cultural as
intrinsic “contact zones.” Although the socio-economic conditions for European modernity to emerge were not present in the Berber context of the analysis, the presence of modernist characteristics in its oral cultural production is undeniable, which suggests, if one adopts Friedman’s theory, that this “expressive dimension of modernity” constituted a response to the presence of at least some elements of modernity (i.e., characteristic of the European modern). Therefore, through the elaboration of a vernacular, Berber-specific acceptable form of modernism (i.e. up to par with Euro-American strands), it is a vernacular form of modernity that Amrouche presents. The characteristics of this modernity he will develop further in his political writings.

Through his critique of modernist detachment in Mallarmé’s aesthetics, which he associates with an unethical social position that duplicates colonial practices of exclusion, it is the very segregationist ideology of colonial modernity that Amrouche aims to disrupt. In his *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said emphasizes the shift from early twentieth century literature, nurtured by triumphantist geography, to a literature where artistic constriction reinvents spatiality as a purely formal attribute. He argues that, at some point during the twentieth century, the focus of modernist literature shifted from the reality that it purported to represent to a mere consideration of the aesthetics of this representation while, concurrently, modernist aesthetics distanced itself from a world perceived as inescapably slipping away (189-190). It is

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108 One could even argue, to extend Mary-Louise Pratt’s paradigm, that his attempt to reconstruct his Berber identity in a nostalgic, primitivist fashion constitutes a case of “autoethnography,” which, roughly speaking, she defines as “partly collaborating with and appropriating the idioms of the conqueror” (Pratt *Imperial Eyes* 9). In this respect, it is significant that the project should have been carried out through the mediation of the French language.
such a shift towards further detachment from the political and social reality of the empirical world that Amrouche condemns, a shift that he associates with a lack of ethical (especially anticolonial) engagement. His theorization of the gap separating theoretical humanism in French thought and its supposed applications in a colonial context appears to be central to his vision of aesthetics and poetic creation. If he condemns the unconscionable use of humanistic philosophy by colonial France, he nevertheless does not obliterate the intrinsic worth of the concept itself. Amrouche, like other contemporaneous francophone colonial intellectuals, seems to be reluctant to forsake the theoretical paradigm that has been so influential for his configurations. Therefore, rather than discounting French humanist modernity altogether, he prefers to question its universalism and to suggest a vernacular revision of the concept from a “traditional” Berber perspective in order to make it more appropriate to both his struggle against the inequity at work in colonial Algeria and to the country’s need for social and political change. His adjunction of the ethical dimension of Berber spirituality, one connected to the non-modern time of ancestral history, aims to revise humanism into a more adapted instrument of political emancipation, one “[seeking] to find the other within the hegemonic moment of representation in the name of a multilateral and universal alterity” (Radhakrishnan “Derivative Discourse” 791). For it is on this renewed concept of humanism and the respect of cultural and religious plurality that Jean El Mouhoub Amrouche bases his idea of a renewed, untainted form of modernity, which independent Algeria, beyond the war of independence, should aim to embrace while adapting it to its vernacular specificities.
The issue of cultural translation

Despite the failure of his political project and the problematic subject-position informing his writing, the most fruitful aspect of Amrouche’s work lies in his treatment of the issue of the local “translation”\textsuperscript{109} of Eurocentric modernity, that is in his outlook on the modalities of the interaction between a local that presents itself as a universal (the West) and a local which cannot afford to (the rest of the world). How to negotiate a space in the globalized economy of colonialism where the local can be mapped out on a par with the de facto universal model? Harootunian presents quite a pessimistic prospect as he argues that the only alternative to a diffusionist logic of culture lies in the exacerbation of “anticolonial nationalism as evidence of difference resting on the claims of authentic cultural resources that have managed to remain free from contamination,” a dynamics that “matched perfectly a view that has privileged the stolidity of an enduring and apparently unchanging spatiotemporal landscape where time is rooted in a primordial and infinite repetitiveness” (36). Regardless of his critique of the term “alternative modernity” and of its implications, it seems that in his perspective local embodiments of modernity are inescapably anchored in a Western-led developmental prospect. In fact, Harootunian ascribes an alternative character only to countries which have undergone late economic modernization- late with respect to linear time. In his view, the only possible foundation of an alternative modernity thus

\textsuperscript{109} Chakrabarty associates the issues surrounding “capitalist modernity” with what he calls “a problem of translation” between cultures (17). Similarly, Amrouche’s main concern in recording the Kabyle \textit{chants} lies in the impossibility to translate their specificities through the use of a European language (here French).
necessarily lies in the speculation of an imaginative non-modern authenticity of which local culture can avail itself and which gives it legitimacy on the global level. However, this legitimacy rests on an illusion (that of cultural isolation) and eventually merely duplicates dynamics of temporal inequality. We have seen the limits of Amrouche’s use of an imaginative authentic tribal culture as a starting point for nationalism. Although the imaginative construction of a national past is indispensable in the context of nation formation, the legitimization of local culture in a Eurocentric geopolitical paradigm is coeval with its accession to the temporality of linear history, i.e., as Friedman argued, with its accession to independence when the local culture is elevated to the status of national culture. Amrouche offers an alternative solution less vulnerable to recuperation into the binaries of colonial modernity. He emphasizes the presence of ubiquitous features of cultural modernity in different spaces independently from considerations of economic modernization. If Berber culture can evince elements of a pre-modern mindscape and still retain modern features intrinsically (as does Indian modernity for Chakrabarty), its intrinsic hybridity precludes any essentialist reading of its past. Therefore, the linear representation of time as a teleological process whose ending stage is necessarily exemplified by Western modernity is an irrelevant theoretical construct in the specific context of the native cultures of Algeria. Berber cultures do not fit into a homogenous, continuous conception of history; they possess their own internal time. Unlike Harootunian,

\[\text{Fanon’s discussion of the problems specific to this concept of “national culture” in a postcolonial context is illuminating (see The Wretched of the Earth in particular).}\]
Amrouche does not seem to draw irrevocable conclusions as to their lack of modernity.

The purpose here is not to supplant Europe in Eurocentric perspectives, but rather to dismantle the practice of Eurocentrism. Although these notions pervade Amrouche’s critical production, it is important to note that no consistent theory of alternative modernity is even hinted at in his work. On the contrary, Amrouche lays claim to the primacy historically granted to the categories of European political thought, albeit unsuccessfully. The preponderance of these representations remains undefeated and it is with the embracing of its inherent limitations that the task must be undertaken. Amrouche’s contribution therefore lies in his elaboration of fluid critical models for the analysis of native productions and of their relation to global systems of modernity. In this respect, his approach advantageously reveals site of resistance where the “disjunctions” of global modernity can be investigated (Appadurai). Chakrabarty’s concept of a “politics of despair” successfully records the inevitability of European thought as the structural framework informing implementations of political modernity on the global level. Our analytical practices, according to Chakrabarty, must remain true to the material realities of our world: “The point is not to reject social science categories but to release into the space occupied by particular European histories…other normative and theoretical thought enshrined in other existing practices and life archives” (20). Only through this accurate reading of contemporaneous, non-totalizing cultural practices in the perspective of history can we
expect our theoretical paradigms to provide compelling, albeit utopian, correctives to “despair.”


Two of the texts discussed in chapter 3- “Saint Stéphane Mallarmé,” *La Tunisie Française Littéraire* (21 Mars 1941) and Armand Guibert, *Jean Amrouche* (1906-1962) *par un témoin de sa vie* were procured from the *Fonds Roblés- Patrimoine Méditerranéen* at the Université Paul Valéry- Montpellier III, France.
Ser polizón es estar en transito, ser clandestino
Estamos en las metáforas que se hacen realidad

[Being a stowaway is being in transit, being clandestine
We are in a time when metaphors turn real]

Trino Cruz, “Semillas, pecios y paraísos”
[Seeds, flotsam, and paradise]

Globality is the condition of the present. Late capitalism has been marked by the internationalization of corporate capital, whose spread across the globe has formed networks of production and consumption that connect peoples and cultures in an uneven world order. Although the contemporary debate on globalization has been centered on the evocation and theorization of current-day practices of planetary homogenization through the leveling effect of global capital (“the global village,” in S.R.G’s terms), the concept itself harks back to a much more ancient history of humanity. Starting with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the “triumph” of the American capitalist model, the study of Western-led globalization has made a foray in the academic world. This new discourse has attempted to shed light on the changes in

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111 See Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (which traces the origin of globalization back to the Roman and Mongol empires); Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (which construes the fifteenth century as the point of origin of the process).
economic practices and information technology (e.g., the internet boom) that made the
1990s the pinnacle of the global consciousness which had resurfaced in the second half
of the nineteenth century. The period stretching from the 1870s to the mid 1920s was
marked by a sharp increase in global interactions. The rise of transnational political
projects, culminating in the foundation of several international institutions and events,
testifies to the emergence of a new global consciousness concomitant with the
modernist period (Cuddy-Keane). Considerations of this earlier, “modern” period of
globalization convince us that the study of the phenomenon cannot without much loss
limit its investigation to the economic dynamics that it has generated. Richard
Sandbrook defined globalization as “the progressive integration of national economies
into a global market economy, as measured by the increasing flows of trade,
investment, and skilled personnel across national boundaries” (Sandbrook 13).
Globalization is therefore also about the connectivity enabled by wide-spread internet
access, the rise of corporate capitalism and its associated consequences on labor
migratory movements from the global South to the global North, the situations of
multiculturalism that these new fluxes of people have fostered worldwide, as well as
the “convergence” (Eisenstadt) of syncretic cultural forms towards a Western-inspired
model of culture. Bruce M. Knauft’s discussion of contemporary dynamics fruitfully
distinguishes between “capitalism” (based on production and its dissemination), and
“globalization” (centered on consumption and associated concerns of Westernization
and social betterment through consumption).\footnote{Incorporation into the global dynamics
processes has been a major factor in the development of modern societies.}

\footnote{Incorporation into the global dynamics processes has been a major factor in the development of modern societies.}
of development is articulated through direct participation in the process of global capitalism. The fact that much of the global South today still mediates its aspirations to an improved social life through the embracing of material progress speaks volumes about the symbolic value of processes of global consumption in relation to notions of modernity and progress. Knauft emphasizes the “continuing desires for a style of life associated with economic development and Western-style material betterment” (4). These values, he writes, “interact powerfully with the constructions of selfhood and social or material endeavors in diverse world areas.” This interactive process, however, is far from homogeneous, as the mediation of Western forms of life oscillates between a consolidation of Western cultural and material hegemony and forms of resistance to it. Knauft’s distinction between production and consumption productively marks out two distinct geographies of globalism. Capitalism rests on a geographical redistribution of profit on the global level. Its development is predicated on the exploitation of labor and resources. While some zones emerge as zones of production, the profit generated is redirected towards the core through global trajectories and flows, which foster an unequal redistribution of wealth and the emergence of centers and peripheries (Wallerstein). The transnational nature of corporate capitalism thus works to reinforce the hegemony of centers of capital over the marginalized, under-developed spaces of production. I contend that Knauft’s conception of globalization acts as a corrective of this iniquitous dynamics. Running against the differential deployment of capitalism’s benefits in territorialized spaces,

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and development in a contemporary world” (Knauft 18)
globalization emphasizes flows and what Knauft calls “lateral axes of circulation and distribution” (38). Its deterritorializing mode of deployment opens up alternative spaces where resistance to the uneven forces of global capitalism can emerge.

The critical literature on globalization has stressed its ability to complicate homogenizing discourses of the global world order in terms of inescapable hegemony and exploitation. (One remembers Wallerstein’s conviction that uneven development was a necessary by-product of the capitalist world system dynamic.) In her insightful “Modernism, Geopolitics, Modernization,” Melba Cuddy-Keane excavates the genealogy of the concept of geopolitics. Coined in 1899 by a Swedish political scientist, geopolitik was used to refer to the Darwinian-inspired displacement of “weaker organisms” by “stronger” ones (540), a model which underpinned European politics until 1945. In this context, the territorial frame of the argument is therefore paramount as power is conceived as a concept predicated on territorial expansion. In contrast, Cuddy-Keane presents geographer Brian Blouet’s work on globalization, a concept which he delineates as open, unbounded, and circulatory and thus reminiscent of the space of the sea itself.¹¹³ This evocation of the sea’s spatiality reverberates with the emancipatory projects which emerged in the space of the Mediterranean in reaction to land-locked conceptions of identity and global positionality. Knauft impresses that the conceptualization of globalization undergoes a shift “particularly in cultural terms, from globalism in general to a horizontal stratification of global subject positions- to cosmopolitanism, flexible citizenship, various types of transnationalism,

¹¹³ Interestingly, the concept has historically emerged as a Dutch-inspired maritime ideology. See Brian W. Blouet, Geopolitics and Globalization in the Twentieth Century (2001).
or different kinds of flow” (39). However, these multifarious directionalitys do not replace the vertical, hierarchical structures of power contingent to capitalist development. Albeit reformed as a more flexible, multidirectional trope, capitalism remains by and large the main engine of global interactions, and endows them with a substratum of inequity and dominance.¹¹⁴ Because the same discriminatory Eurocentric perspectives that animated the modern period are still very much relevant to the age of globalization, the main imperative for projects such as this is to elaborate approaches to marginal cultural contexts which would not obfuscate the centrality of subaltern circumstances. Concepts of vernacular modernity have allowed the consideration of local experiences of difference in relation to trans-cultural, uneven larger structures of power: “through their articulation with economic and political dynamics, [these approaches] illuminate axes of difference and domination that emerge with respect to gender, sex, and generation, as well as those of class, ethnicity, and nationality” (40). As they have shifted the focus away from purely economic or political frameworks, they have advantageously set subjective experiences and engagements with global modernity in relief. This chapter examines two such experiences of alterity and disjunction in the contemporary poetry from two major poets of the Western Mediterranean: Tunisian Tahar Bekri and Gibraltarian Trino Cruz. Rewriting modes of belonging outside of the territoriality of the category of the nation, these two poets directly situate themselves in circumstances of exile and

¹¹⁴ Critics of visions of globalization as a happy new age free of subordination and power relations include Victor Li (“What’s in a Name: Questioning Globalization”) and Arif Dirlik (“Is there history after Eurocentrism? Globalism, Postcolonialism, and the Disavowal of History”).
reconfigure critical, revised transnationalism as the only adequate corrective to discriminatory global fluxes and circuits of production. Offering a fractal perspective informed by their dialectical relation to their cultural and locational identity, these authors propose a vision of Euro-African relations that displaces the framing of the space of the sea along the lines of capitalist exploitation and cultural division between North and South. Focusing specifically on the trope of the sea, this time dissociated from its representations as either a limit to the land or as a contact zone between both shores and civilizational models, their production puts to the fore a redefinition of the Mediterranean as a space where identities are rewritten and hybridized.

If, however, tropes of displacement and interaction constitute an undeniable aspect of global modernity, either as emancipatory fluxes or engines of discriminating hierarchies, the reality of spatial segregation in the Mediterranean remains paramount. Paradoxically, the age of migration has coincided with the apogee of restrictions and legal codifications bearing on the prerogative to (geographic) freedom: “The very right to travel, to journey, to migrate today increasingly runs up against the borders, confines, and controls of a profound ‘unfreedom’ that characterizes the modern world” (Chambers 3). Colonial structures of power erected marginality into the inescapable fate of colonial spaces. In this respect, they over-determined the positionality of peripheral territories on the global map of capitalist modernity. Their disappearance in the wake of decolonization did not put an end to the necessary dynamics of segregation that they implemented (necessary for homogenizing modernity to prevail). New forms of hierarchization and exclusion were established which relegated
migrants from the South to a position of abjection and duplicated the process of epistemic annihilation of the subaltern honed in a colonial context. In a Mediterranean setting, the mobilizing of legal institutions within the European Union for the construction of a juridical status of citizenship and its associated rights ensured the negation of alterity upon which the legal definition of Europe is predicated. Iain Chambers cogently argues that it is on the “juridical status [of the immigrant that] the state most assiduously articulates its frontiers” (4). The nation-state (or, in the case of the European Union, its extended form) rests the delineation of its national identity and confines on the rejection of the illegal immigrant. The management of human flows thus detracts from the logic of the free market, which capitalist Euro-America has otherwise championed in relation to market forces and free-trade policies. The abjected immigrant subject is reduced to its position within the global chain of production, to the skills and competences by which he comes to be recognized. His constant, uncontrolled irruption into national life jeopardizes the state’s structure of power inscribed into every aspect of social life. For that reason, the modern migrant constitutes the most conspicuous threat to “the materialization of [European] authority,” of which, for Chambers, borders are the embodiment (6). The modern migrant thus symbolically becomes the physical incarnation of the ambivalence plaguing modernity, of the spaces of incommensurability existing within the system, spaces that the increased disciplining and control emanating from the center is unable to eradicate. From the migrant’s interaction with the European modern surges an alternative discourse which cannot be co-opted as unequivocally partaking of
commodified culture. His radical alterity is not of the kind that market forces can subject, “re-package” to fit residual desires for an Orientalized other, and thereby defuse.\textsuperscript{115} His is intractable in its difference. It is evocative of dead young people attempting a voluntary crossing to the chimerical abundance of the North, of internment camps for illegal immigrants reminiscent of dark, repressed times in the history of Europe. His position is a discrepant one that exposes the fundamental weaknesses of the dominant discourse on globalization. He comes to embody the over-determined sites of contradiction from which he hails. He emerges as a figure of radical resistance infiltrating the seemingly smooth surface of global development. Localized in the interstices of the virtual “worlding” of the global South (here, the Maghreb and, further away, Africa), his existence also denies the stability and authority of modern representations of European identity on which recent evolutions in legislative apprehensions of the migrant are based.

\textbf{Of globalization and critical cosmopolitanisms}

I consider the term “cosmopolitanism” as a counterpoint to globalization and its supposed homogenization. Walter Mignolo has unraveled the modalities of the dichotomy between the two terms (“The Many Faces of Cosmo-Polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism”). His vision considers the world as an entwined geography of “global designs” and “local histories” (721). On this intricate

\textsuperscript{115} I here use the term “re-package” in the sense developed by Richard Watts in his cogent study of the “packaging” of Francophone literature (\textit{Packaging Post/Coloniality: the Manufacture of Literary Identity in the Francophone World}).
web of interactions, he superimposes another map of dominance, where some regions lie at the core of global circuits while others have to negotiate the consequences of those world-wide dynamics on their local context. Mignolo defines “cosmopolitanism” as “a set of projects towards planetary conviviality” (721). The notion of “con-vivere,” of living together should not be construed here as denoting the harmony or civility between cultures that the concept of *conviviencia* in the history of Al-Andalus evokes. In point of fact, Mignolo puts to the fore the congruence between the development of colonial modernity and the notion of cosmopolitanism. He draws a distinction between two types of cosmopolitan orientations: the “global designs” (“managerial” projects) and the “emancipatory” ones. While global designs have underpinned the macro-narratives of modernity associated with the rise of coloniality after the fifteenth century, emancipatory cosmopolitan projects, such as Kant’s, have proven incapable to bring the subjects that they aim to emancipate into focus (723). These two historical approaches to cosmopolitanism have therefore proved insufficient, which spurs Mignolo to call for a new definition of the concept in the form of “critical” or “dialogic” cosmopolitanism.

This critical project Mignolo conceives as a response of criticism to the logic of globalization. While “emancipatory” projects aimed to relieve the homogenizing, obliterating excesses of global designs, their intrinsic structure nevertheless remained caught up in the contradiction of the project of modernity. As a result, their detachment from national and ideological imperatives remained at best sporadic; they ultimately obeyed the logic dictated by global designs themselves and their critical
thrust suffered from this subordination. Rather, Mignolo proposes a “globalization from below,” i.e., the reaction to globalization from those populations and geohistorical areas of the planet that suffer the consequences of the global economy” (721). From the intersection between a cosmopolitan ethos and a careful consideration of the hidden face of globalization a new kind of project surfaces. In contrast with “emancipatory” schemes, it is rooted in the colonial margins that, although subject to the development of global capitalism, are construed as lying outside modernity (in coloniality) and are therefore immune from recuperation by its irresistible dynamics of annihilation. The concept of “exteriority,” however, does “not mean something lying untouched beyond capitalism and modernity, but the outside that is needed by the inside. Thus, exteriority is indeed the borderland seen from the perspective of those ‘to be included,’ as they have no other option” (724). The advantage of exteriority bestows upon those spaces and their populations the ability to use their irrevocable, ontological difference from the center of modernity as a fulcrum with which to pry open the interstices of the modern monolith. Their marginality is therefore fruitfully appropriated and instrumentalized. Their peripheral position functions as a vector of non-assimilation into the all-encompassing machine of modernity. It is interesting here to consider this dynamic in the light of Foucault’s notion of resistance to modern technologies of power; resistance always already exists within the apparatus that it seeks to disrupt. Modernity can be construed as possessing within itself both its excess and the ability to reform it from within since, as an institution of power, it encapsulates loci of resistance to its own movement. Staging a critique of modernity
from outside the machine therefore eschews the danger of obliteration of this resistance. Subjects located inside colonality therefore negotiate a subject position for themselves “issuing forth from colonial difference” (724). As a result, they enter the global scene from a unique position of alterity and agency, and distance themselves from both “benevolent recognition” (Taylor 1992) and “humanitarian pleas for inclusion (Habermas 1998)” (Mignolo 724). The form these interventions take Mignolo calls “border thinking,” which he defines as “the recognition and transformation of the hegemonic imaginary from the perspectives of people in subaltern positions. Border thinking then becomes a “tool” of the project of critical cosmopolitanism” (736). The form this thinking should take is the most delicate issue faced by Mignolo’s argument. Monolithic conceptions of cosmopolitan projects are discounted as undesirable. However, the imperative of a “critical” or “dialogical” approach needs to be marked out from the risk of cultural relativism, which obscures the intrinsic forces of coloniality and their influence over the fashioning of different cultures. Mignolo proposes to anchor his whole conception in this notion of “coloniality,” which he makes into the bedrock of critical cosmopolitan practice. These processes are all part of the discourse of resistance put forth from marginal positionalities, as “‘connectors’ in the struggle to overcome coloniality of power from the perspective of the colonial difference, rather than as full-fledged words with specific Western content” (742). Taking the example of Zapatista discrepancy within the Mexican nation-state, Mignolo insists that border thinking occurs when “diversality (diversity as a universal project)” (743) becomes the patent goal of
cosmopolitanism, i.e., when the pretension to an abstract universality is renounced. Instead, it is a localized universality (rooted in the idiosyncrasy of one particular context, its universality being reconfigured as the intended “project[on]” beyond one’s locale) that Mignolo advocates, a suggestion which in his view avoids the dangers of cultural relativism and abstraction both while emphasizing subaltern agency. Diversality therefore emanates as a “practice,” a performative process that is endlessly, universally enacted: “If you can imagine Western civilization as a large circle with a series of satellite circles intersecting the larger one but disconnected from each other, diversality will be the project that connects the diverse subaltern satellites appropriating and transforming Western global designs” (745).

**Violating the sacred space of modernity**

Trino Cruz’s approach to the trope of the “stowaway” (polizón) partakes of this investigation of the fragmentary, conflicting nature of global modernity. The poetic works of Trino Cruz cannot be fully understood independently from their intrinsic relation to the liminal space of Gibraltar. A self-governing overseas British territory, the town of Gibraltar lies on the extreme South of the Iberian Peninsula. However, it is not in relation to the history of British imperialism that Cruz’s poetry must be considered. His poetic output is really interested in revealing novel and historical intersections between neighboring Spain and its former colonial Moroccan Protectorate. Separated from North Africa by the eight-mile wide eponymous Strait,
Gibraltar epitomizes through the vicissitudes of its history the complex relationship uniting Europe and North Africa. From the seventh century Arab rule over Spain, Spain and Morocco have been intricately entangled both culturally and politically. The recent resurgence of the debate on the fate of Ceuta and Melilla, two Spanish enclaves in Morocco, and on the flows of illegal immigrants to Europe through the Strait, has shed new light on the continuing connections (and tensions) uniting both territories. The relation between the two countries has recently taken a new turn towards discernible distrust and suspicion in a context of global migration and religious polarization. Amidst such troubled times, the strategic space of the sea lying across both countries is endowed with heightened relevance as it is only from the recognition of a history of exchange and mutual influence that principles for a common future can be negotiated. Trino Cruz’s imaginary emerged in relation to the repressed presence of the Moroccan other, whom the fortuitous development of local history relegated to a distinct territoriality and cultural model. Cruz’s poetry thrives on the retrieving of the common preoccupations that, in his view, unite all Mediterranean subjects living on the edge of the sea, whose experience of global modernity unites them in a default (although modulated) position of difference. Familiarity and rupture both inform relations between the two spaces of Spain and Morocco and Cruz’s Gibraltarian imaginary can be said to have built on the trope of exile and departure, tropes experienced not as physical displacement (of his journeys, Cruz says in his interview with El Bouanani and Abdelouahab, “He vivido en varios lugares, pero mi cosmopolitismo es intelectual. No presumo de haber viajado mucho...” [I lived in
different places, but my cosmopolitanism is intellectual. I do not presume to have traveled much], but rather from a sense of the loss of one’s missing alter ego without whom the self cannot be complete. On either shore of the Strait, subjects are alike and it is by transcending the artificiality of politically-imposed border lines that true solidarity between marginal populations can come to life. Cruz’s works aim to reinscribe this North African other in the central position that is rightly its own as the figure of the migrant comes to haunt the dialectical process of identity formation to which the poet subjects himself in the wake of his estrangement from the conventional uses of poetic language.

His rather scarce poetic output compensates its tenuousness with the complexity of its fine-tuned structure. An opera aperta engaged in the refinement and rewriting of a few key concepts, Cruz’s poetic creations develops along overlapping fields of experience marking the hybrid, border-inspired character of contact zone writing.116 The vital space of exchange which he delineates provides a unique localization for his poetic persona, whose concern with the universal human condition is criss-crossed with renderings of particular, localized experiences of the global. From this fundamentally hybrid aesthetic surges a ground-breaking reflection on the power of language in its convoluted relation to the evocative power of the image. For Cruz’s poetry is first and foremost an ontological effort through which the poet uncovers the complexities of his own Gibraltarian identity: “La escritura es para mí un acto de enfrentamiento conmigo mismo, una forma de indagar en mi propia identidad”

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116 Semillas, pecios y paraísos, for instance, was written exclusively from the liminal locations of Tarifa, Gibraltan, and Tangiers (Yborra “Espejos”), a positionality which reverberates with the poet’s dissection of a disconnected structure of feeling of which the migrant character is emblematic.
[Writing is for me a means to confront myself, a way to investigate my own identity] (El Bouanani and Abdelouahab). His inclusion in the poems of an interlocutor against whom the poetic voice is articulated sheds light on the dialectic relation that the poet’s persona maintains with its other. This other is very often associated with the voracious space of the sea (“el charco” [Rihla 43], a term used to refer metaphorically to the crossing of the vast surface of the ocean in a transatlantic perspective). To the maritime space, the other (the epitome of the migrant) but also Cruz himself, moved by absolute solidarity with his condition, ultimately succumbs. The compilation of his poetic works from 1983-2002 is suggestively entitled Rihla. The Arabic word for “journey,” rihla usually denotes a type of travel abroad which is undertaken for the sake of knowledge and spiritual advancement. The word rihla ultimately came to designate the narrative which the traveler usually produced in the wake of the journey. Rihla as a genre counts many illustrious examples in the history of Arabic literature, a history in which Morocco figures in good place. Ibn Battuta’s narrative, often dubbed “The Rihla of Ibn Battuta,” recounts the fourteenth-century Moroccan scholar’s journey to Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and various locations in the Mediterranean, which many considered marked the apogee of a genre that would persist well into the modern period.\footnote{A later example of Rihla written by a Moroccan scholar can be found in Mohammed As-Saffar’s journey to Paris in 1845 (translated into English as Disorienting Encounters: The Travels of a Moroccan Scholar in France in 1845-1846).} The work was of such significance that it inspired Nobel prize-winning Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz nearly six centuries later to devote a novel
to the rewriting of the journey, albeit in an imaginative mode. Subsumed within such as title, Cruz’s evocation of illegal crossings of the Mediterranean intends to replace the migrant’s experience of disjunction in the illustrious tradition of *Rihla*, a move which emphasizes the discrepancy between a real golden age of early modern international relations, when travelers were welcome to cross borders, and the current dehumanizing circumstances of the journey across the sea.

His fascination with the recurring trope of the mirror (*espejo*) accounts for the inclusion in his volumes of paintings by major artists from the Strait region (Guillermo Pérez Villalta and Ahmed Ben Youssef). His collection of poems *Lecturas del Espacio Profanado* [Readings of the desecrated space], which opens his *Rihla* anthology, associates to each poem a drawing or painting by Ben Youssef, which becomes a visual correlate of the linguistic composition embodied by the poem. Inspired by the traditional garb of rural Morocco, these pictorial representations rest on the systematic use of an imagery which condenses in one symbol the meaning expressed by the appended verse. The painting placed on the cover of the collection, *Libertad* [Freedom], where the recurring symbol of the dove makes its initial appearance, sets the tone for the whole volume. Of this omnipresence of the bird and its symbolic value, Cruz wrote, “Fue necesario que un buen día la paloma inventase a Ben Yessef y lo convirtiese en eje de su discurso, en el hilo conductor de una

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118 I am referring to Naguib Mahfouz’s *Rihlat Ibn Fattumah*.

119 Ahmed Ben Youssef is a Moroccan painter from formerly Spanish town of Terouan, who relocated to Seville in the 1960s and dedicated most of his art to the exaltation of historical, harmonious patterns of Spanish-Moroccan relations. Although the text can be found in the opening pages of *Rihla*, the illustrated edition studied here was published separately in 1992 by the author (Cruz *Lecturas del Espacio Profanado*).
esperanza inquebrantable” [One day, the dove has to manifest itself to Ben Yessef and to be converted in the gist of his discourse, the backbone of his unwavering hope] (In “El discurso de la Paloma (percepción y origen o apuntes para un juicio final)” [The Discourse of the Dove (perception and origin or notes for a final judgement)]. This hope, he interestingly associates with an earlier history of cooperation and cultural contact in the region- Al-Andalus: “Al Andalus perdura como patria espiritual de estas criaturas que simbolizan paz y amor, criaturas que denuncian injusticias” [Al-Andalus remains as a spiritual homeland for these creatures, which epitomize peace and love, creatures which denounce injustice.]” Cruz superimposes the imaginary geography of Al-Andalus onto the stark denunciation of the tense relations between Spain’s South and North Africa. He thus creates a transhistorical space of common belonging, in which to redraw restricted literary and cultural affiliations. In the prose poem, the doves effectuate a migration from the mythical capitals of the East (“Palomas de Damasco, del Cairo, de Palestina o de Tetuán” [doves from Damascus, Cairo, Palestine or Tetouan]) to the reconstructed gardens of the Arab palaces dotting Andalusia (“un patio o jardín de Sevilla, de Córdoba, de Granada” [a patio or a garden in Seville, Cordoba, or Granada]) before returning to their point of origin. This to and fro movement so characteristic of the relations on either parts of the Strait (although reconfigured on an East-West axis here) is tinted with lingering nostalgia for a conterminous geography of Orient and Occident, a nostalgia which also triggers off the poetic voice’s sensation of incompleteness when considering the conspicuous absence of it repressed other. The symbol of this desire for interaction, the dove, is
imagined as a self-sufficient entity, whose redundancy testifies to the power and attraction of the utopia it embodies. No actualization in the realm of reality is required for its evocative power to be acknowledged: “La paloma trae un mensaje/su mensaje es una paloma” [the dove brings a message along/its message is a dove]. In fact, its power rests on the imaginative construction it evokes; therein lies its disruptive power, which the onslaughts of violence against the bird verify: “Paloma a la que a veces alcanza una piedra o la metralla” [Dove which sometimes a stone or shrapnel hits]. Its authority rests on its absence (brilla por su ausencia) as the repressed other to reality (la realidad, here as the manifest dynamic of modern life) threatening to return and disrupt the seemingly stable order of things.

The symbol of the dove reappears in eleven of the seventeen paintings, sometimes several times in the same piece. The bird is usually superimposed onto a central white-clad figure, whose luminosity contrasts with the tenebrous background, thereby emphasizing through their common whiteness the dyad that the two form. The fluid lines of the veil covering up the painting’s faceless subject and becoming its only attribute is echoed in the feathery ripples ornamenting the representation of the birds’ wings, as if both were made of the same material. The veil becomes the subject’s only attribute in that he or she is devoid of any other form of identification. Its very gender is obliterated as the trope of the veil, which is usually associated with femininity in a North African context, here detracts from the usual aesthetics of female veiling. The veil is draped all over the subject’s front without any opening for the eyes, which effectively annihilates any possible recognition of its defining features. It therefore
should be construed as a symbol of concealment as the subject is only recognized in the light of its relation to the figure of the bird. Several meanings can be ascribed to the fact that the subject’s face is either completely covered in the white veil or at the very least averted from the viewer. In the light of Cruz’s discussion of the dove’s significance, however, I would tend to read in this concealment the same dynamics of voluntary, fruitful self-deception that Cruz later mediates on the distorting surface of the sea. Only with its face covered does the subject really gain introspection into the real (i.e., the imaginary, in Cruz’s antinomic mode of representation), as the first painting in the series, “Dejadme en Paz” [Leave me alone], seems to intimate. In that canvass, the subject’s face is uncovered (albeit averted) and faces towards the East, the direction of nostalgia as Cruz suggested in his commentaries on the paloma, a feeling that his facial expression corroborates. The very averting from the space occupied by the birds suggests the subject’s initial reluctance to face the reality to which the doves will ulteriorly introduce him. The position of the three doves on the painting testifies to a subtext of violence; the contemplation of truth is not a painless process. This first painting is also the last one where the veiled figure will show its face. It is as well the last one where it will not face forward, in the direction of the viewer who is significantly located in the paloma’s realm.

The paloma and its imaginative legacy become the fulcrum with which the interstitial spaces of incommensurability pervading reality are pried open. In this respect, Ben Yessef’s artwork provides the bird with a medium through which it can express itself it and convey the hope of its message to a vast audience: “[la paloma] se
The dove finds refuge in the brushstrokes of a painting, in the lines of an etching, in some poem. The blinded subject is blind only due to the pervasive power of reality; its field of vision materializes through the contemplation of the *paloma*, through the idealization it permits. The realm of experience represented on the paintings is therefore an oniric, utopian one (in the original locational meaning of “that which does not exist anywhere”). The depiction takes on the form of a chimera, of an immaterial level of experience superimposing itself onto realist representations of life, the superimposition of the two permitting to bind both levels in a metaphorical relation, just as the recurrent contiguity of the dove and the veiled figure binds together the human subject and its dream. The dove is clearly presented as belonging with the white-clad figure, as suggests the painting entitled “Al fin llegó” [Finally it arrived], the last one where both figures appear together. This painting follows a series of real-life portraits, which one could imagine form the latent scenes of the *paloma’s* journey (*rihla*) following its ailment. The canvass entitled “La paloma está enferma” [The dove is ailing] is marked by the stigma of disease. This ailment metonymically affects the figure, whose stretched out hand, the only visible part of its body, evokes a beggar’s indigence. The feeling of despair pervading the piece is only resorbed in the next framing of the two figures in “Al fin llegó.” Without the *paloma*, the harmony and balance metaphorized as health becomes impossible to achieve. This idea is found again later in the last untitled drawing of the book, which accompanies Cruz’s last poem of the collection devoted to Ben Yessef’s art. The etching was made in 1989,
shortly after Ben Yessef’s convalescence following the traffic accident that took place earlier that year. Interestingly, the shape of two birds looms in the distance, as two guardians watching over the serenity and peacefulness of the scene, as if their mere presence was enough to create this harmonious setting.

I do not mean to imply that white-clad figures and resurgent birds alone characterize the diverse art of Ben Yessef. As a counterpoint to this chimerical world, Ben Yessef also appends portraits of real-life native figures in their natural environment, with or without the dove, which provide an echo of the ethos expressed in the verse. “Paz en la Tierra” [Peace on earth] is the opening portrait of the series. The canvass depicts an old, sun-burned man in traditional garb, a dove perched in his shoulder as the owl on Athena’s. His meditative expression, as well as his forward-facing position, indicate that he has already been graced by the message of the paloma. The painting in itself only portrays an additional actualization of the power of the symbol of the dove, not only in the realm of utopia, but also in “real” life. What seems particularly interesting in this double page is the association performed between the words from the verse and the image: “antes de la memoria te pienso/ tu mano inconsciente me toca/ te siento para siempre/ luego / la memoria te palpará” [Before memory I imagine you/ your unconscious hand touches me/ I feel you forever/ later/ memory will sense you.] The strong sensual subtext is characteristic of Cruz’s engagement with conceptual representations and ideas and therefore not of direct interest here. What is striking in these few lines is rather the distinction marked out between the stage of memory and one of primal, original anamnesis, which reaches
consciousness without any form of mediation and which pre-dates it in the formation of the subject. The touch, the feeling it provokes are evocative of the immediacy and primacy of the senses in Mediterranean experiences. (One only needs to recall Camus’ and Audisio’s anti-intellectual notions of felicitous barbarity.) This primal anamnesis is not circumscribed to the subject; it also affects the space of the sea and its representation of difference in a European/North African context. Cruz’s poetry focuses on the notion of border, of limit: the “orilla” [the shore]. The contours of both continents, though contiguous along the space of the Strait, mark the fault lines between civilizations and “realities.” If the sea is a space of crossing and multivocality, the shore partakes of a logic of hyper-territorialization that the nation-state embodies. The primal anamnesis brought about by the dove’s utopia is confounded with the flux of the sea, an instinctive dynamics constitutive of the subject’s identity even before intellectual mediation occurs. It is on this level that a pan-Mediterranean identity common to both shores of the sea is predicated. The anamnesis provoked by the dove belongs to that ontological level of experience. It is not a mere intellectual reconstruction of a historical past; it is an atavistic remembrance of ontological unity. The sea becomes the bedrock of this original identity. In the piece dedicated to Ben Youssef, the sea is configured as a space of oblivion, of rebirth: “el mar te arroja” [the sea hurls you.] The wave, the sea–tide loses its unique directionality. It is reconfigured as circular, redundant. It does not reach the shore; it does not crash against it in a constitutive pull away from the center of the sea. The tide keeps revolving around that center, holding spaces in balance from this original hub: “dejar que germine la
memoria/ que la paloma nos habite/ y la ola/ sin romper sobre la orilla/ como una mano paralizada por el asombro/ será el puente que alcance la noche” [let memory germinate/ the dove dwell in you/ and the wave/without breaking on the shore/like a hand paralyzed by the surprise/will be the bridge that reaches into the night.]

The land surrounding the sea, the strictly localized shore, fades into the distance; only this watery dynamic becomes meaningful. It is an inevitable matrix (una matriz inevitable) leading into the realm of light. This epiphany is mediated through the surface of the canvass: “entre el cuerpo y la prefiguración/ entre el mar que te arroja y la terca metáfora que se resiste/ el lienzo arde” [between the body and the prefiguration/ between the sea which hurls you and the stubborn metaphor that resists you/ the canvass is burning.] This surface of the canvass Cruz likens to a mirror on the reflecting surface of which identities are predicated through a metaphorical process which, alone, can guarantee access to the real.

I would like now to pause on this notion of metaphor for a moment. If the poetry of Trino Cruz signals a point of entry into an alternative epistemology from the margins, which highlights the contradictions inherent in continental philosophy’s concepts of truth and objectivity, it is around the concept of metaphor that this critique

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120 The mention of the bridge is certainly reminiscent of Massimo Cacciari’s concept of pontós (bridge, but also, in Greek, sea). Acting like a bridge between the shores, the sea unites what Cacciari calls an “arch-pélagos” (another word for sea in the Greek language), which links together a fundamentally heterogeneous space that emerges in a position of resistance: “The idea of the Archipelago is not that of a return to origins, but rather that of a counter reply to the history-destiny of Europe” (in Chambers’ translation; qdt. In Chambers 24).

121 Much could be said on the symbolism of light in the Lecturas. The first cycle of poems (I) deals exclusively with the concept. In these lines, the notion is associated with memory as from their combination (the ray of light becomes the vector of memory) emerges the awareness of the true reality of the world- that of its harmonious and comprehensive nature.
is articulated. Starting from the premise that all knowledge, despite the claim to universal truth constitutive of modern epistemology, is by nature subjective and contingent, Cruz provides a mode of relation to reality (and relation of reality) which questions the boundaries of knowledge and its recourse to reason as a guarantee of its supposed universalism. The following cycle of poems, “como la mirada que ha de pervertir este espejo o las imagines como fuente de conocimiento” [Like the gaze which has to pervert this mirror or images as the source of knowledge], delineate the contours of this alternative epistemology. The symbolisms of the sea (fluxes) and of the mirror (as a reflecting surface) become intertwined to form a new, complex genealogy of meaning. Language is reconfigured as elastic (Cruz talks about pulling language to its limits, *tensar el lenguaje*). It is conceived as a mirror on the surface of which representations of reality are formed. The representation process is characterized by a deformation. Cruz acknowledges the potentiality of the mirror (i.e., its reflecting surface) but not the reflection that emerges from it: “veo el espejo pero no el reflejo que en él se configura” [I see the mirror but not the reflection that it configures.] Rather, it is through a journey (*buceo* i.e., diving) through its surface that the world can be construed. The mirror remains indeterminate, full of possibilities. It opens the door to another level of experience not directly perceptible to the eye: “la presencia del espejo desata una serie de complicidades/ que no me son inmediatamente aparentes” [the presence of the mirror unleashes a series of complicities/ that are not immediately apparent to me.] The mirror’s unorthodox approach to reality is relished for its mendacity. It creates mirages, illusions, which
alone have the power to transcend the deceitful appearance of things. The mirror therefore becomes a “limbo,” an in-between space from which Cruz can develop his alternative approach to reality; he, literally “invents a new location for himself” (*me invento un lugar*). The touchstone of this alternative epistemology is the image, or more exactly the metaphor. The steady interest in Ben Yessef’s art partakes of Cruz’s aspiration to the transparency and immediacy of the image. In his *Discurso de la Paloma*, Cruz comments that “la transparencia de[ll] lenguaje [de] Ben Yessef nos seduce” [the transparency of Ben Yessef’s language is seductive.] It enables the productive instability necessary for this alternative experience to come to life. Its restless movement diffracts origins, rewrites discourses of belonging and exclusion. In the metaphoric power of the image, a new genesis is made possible (*cualquier genesis es impensable, inconcebible sin la metáfora*” [any genesis is unthinkable, unconceivable without a metaphor.] A vector of personalization of one’s environment, the metaphor allows for free association and creativity. Through the collapsing of two concepts, it fosters a dynamic space of negotiation between the two original notions, as the sea constitutes a space of dialogue and interaction between the two shores. Neither one nor the other, metaphors, like the sea, function on a totally different level.

In his essay “Metaphor and Reference,” Paul Ricoeur conceived of metaphors as “living” tropes, that is as renewing our perception of the world and unleashing our capacity for creativity.  

122 Metaphors become the framework of Cruz’s rewriting of the world. Rejecting the possibility of literal meaning, the metaphor creates a different

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122 In *La Métaphore Vive* (1975).
reference, a new world beyond the word. Poetic language therefore is ideally re-envisioned as a multi-layered medium that the poetic voice needs to pick apart (escarbar). This excavation of an underlying layer of meaning characteristic of poetic language stands in sharp contrast to rational discourses based on logic and causality. Joining the critiques of modernity put forward by Adorno and Horkheimer in their Dialectic of the Enlightenment, Cruz considers non-poetic discourse to be a “perverse justification” (“la lógica es perversa/porque justifica despiadadamente” [logic is perverse/because it provides ruthless justifications.) Instead, Cruz advocates a “violation” of this scared space of reason and epistemology. This disruption, however, lasts only for an instant and it is on a pessimistic note of failure (“fracas[é] precisamente como debiera” [I failed just as I was supposed to]) that the collection ends.

This failure, the absence of images and of the hope it brings along, is associated with the condition of the illegal immigrant. The poem “Semillas, pecios y paraíso” [Seeds, flotsam, and paradise] addresses the issue directly. The text is dedicated to Moroccan author Mohammed Choukri, who spent a significant portion of his life in the Moroccan coastal town of Tangier. The text recounts the vicissitudes of a failed illegal journey across the sea undertaken from the hold of a commercial liner. The ship’s connection to the high commercial routes of the Mediterranean in a global economy is significant; it is literally as an inside threat to the integrity of the capitalist machine, here epitomized by the liner, that the stowaway materializes. The trope of the ship emerges in relation to what Iain Chambers called “the new middle passage
across the Mediterranean” (9). Following Paul Gilroy’s analysis of the trope of “the ship in motion,” I consider the trans-Mediterranean liner as a new “chronotope” coming to life in the interstices of the capitalist all-encompassing machine. Quoting Bakhtin, Gilroy defines a chronotope as “a unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ration and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented… The Chronotope is an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring” (qtd. in Gilroy 224 n.2). It is Cruz’s appropriation of the atemporal, non-localizable entity of the ship that I wish to examine here. Removed from fixed dyadic geography (it is by nature transgressive), the ship is suspended, just like the tide, between the two shores of the sea. Doomed to shipwreck (naufragio), its raison d’etre lies in the crossing itself, in its passage through the cracks of the policing system of European modernity. The ship is voyage, never destination. Its non-controllable mobility becomes a vector for the realization of Cruz’s metaphor. The journey and the ontological refashioning that it imposes (“a partir de aquí ya nadie sabe que existes” [from here onward nobody knows that you exist]) provides the defamiliarization necessary to approach global modernity from a position of exteriority (Mignolo). From the ship, diversality can be enacted. It takes the shape of a disorientation, an amnesia that affects the migrant’s sense of self, but also of a parallel anamnesis in the poetic persona: “tu viaje tiene el claro propósito de devolverme la memoria” [your journey is clearly meant to restore my memory.] The relationship between the poetic voice and its alter ego is one of antithesis and dichotomy; only in relation to the migrating figure can the poetic voice regain its sense
of self. The space of the hold becomes an embedded symbol of drifting subjectivity, both for the North African migrant and for the poetic voice: “con frecuencia me habitas, me posees, me escoges como nave para algún viaje. te inventas una nave que navega en mi interior, a la deriva en un océano insaciable ” [frequently you haunt me, you possess me, you pick me to be your ship for some journey. you invent a ship for yourself, which navigates within me, drifting in an insatiable ocean.] The two subjectivities overlap in an original solidarity reminiscent of Cassano’s *pensiero meridiano* unifying in a same framework of alternative praxis the marginalized populations of the global South. Through his dialectic identification with the stowaway, the poetic persona thus reveals a critical cosmopolitanism of affect, which imaginatively bridges the material and social disparities separating the two figures and reunites them in a common position of difference. Avoiding what he construes as the pitfall of cultural relativism, it is the universality of the migrant’s condition that Cruz puts to the fore here as the stowaway’s experience comes to inflect the poet’s own sense of identity. The potentialities of this cohabitation, however, are short-lived as the mobility enabled by the journey comes to a tragic end in the shipwreck episode. The desire for the shore, that of Europe and its abundance (“imaginándote orillas” [imagining shores]), remains frustrated. Ultimately, the life-giving metaphors evoked by Cruz (“sin ellas nos esfumaríamos” [without them we would vanish]) succumb to the threat of redundancy, of irrelevance: “…algo se transforma en una inquietante metáfora de sí mismo” [… something becomes a disquieting metaphor of itself.] The instability generated by the figure of the migrant is thus resorbed as the poetic persona
re-directs the disruptive power of his message to the sole medium of the poetic (and visual) image.

**Tahar Bekri’s aesthetic of wandering**

Born in 1951 in Gabes, Tunisia, living in France since his exile in 1976, a professor of Maghrebi literature and Arabic at the Sorbonne and University Paris X-Nanterre, Tahar Bekri seems to defy usual categorizations of authors in terms of one univocal national identity expressed through the medium of one single language. Writing his poetry in French or Arabic (but never translating his poems from one language to the other), Bekri’s poetic output inhabits a space of multiple belonging- in terms of language, but also in its appropriation of symbolic representations of the Mediterranean region, an identification transcending the France-Tunisia dyad. In this section, I wish to focus on the modalities of Bekri’s engagement with tropes of displacement and dislocation in the Mediterranean contact zone between North and South (Europe and Africa), tropes which he envisions as pertaining to the contemporary Mediterranean mindscape. I trace Tahar Bekri’s aesthetics of wandering back to his 1985 collection of poems *Le Chant du Roi Errant* (The Song of the Wandering King) and, subsequently, in his 1993 collection *Les Chapelets d’Attache*. I argue that, in the first volume, this aesthetic is predicated on his fascination with three mythical wandering figures: Odysseus, pre-Islamic prince-poet Imru’ul Qais (a tribeless wanderer who eventually joined the Court of Emperor Justinian in
Constantinople), and Spanish social realist poet Antonio Machado dead in exile in Collioure, a small fishing community in French Catalonia. I argue that his aesthetic revival of a Mediterranean tradition of voyage puts to the fore the ubiquity of mobility as a constitutive Mediterranean trait, which associates the poetic persona with the universal figure of the exile throughout history and reinvents wandering as a productive concept lying at the source of encounters between cultures in the Mediterranean contact zone.

This aesthetics of wandering is first and foremost a reflection of Bekri’s particular position with regards to the French language in which he wrote the majority of his poems. (Some of his collections of poems were written in Arabic). A native speaker of the Tunisian Arabic dialect, Tahar Bekri, as many other Maghrebi authors before him, only learnt French as a foreign language upon starting his studies at the Lycée. Many cogent arguments have been written on the complex relation of Maghrebi writing to the French language over the past decades, which there is no need to repeat here. See in particular, Malek Haddad, “Les Zéros tournent en rond;” Abdelkébir Khatibi, Amour Bilingue [Bilingual Love]; Annae-Emmanuelle Berger, Algeria in Others’ Language; Jacques Derrida, Le Monolinguisme de l’Autre [The Monolingualism of the Other]; Albert Memmi, Le Portrait du Colonisé [Portrait of the Colonized].

123 Suffice it to say that Bekri’s relation to the French language was marked, as is often the case, by a differential, nomadic sensibility which, unlike previous generations of Maghrebi authors (Malek Haddad’s in particular), he perceives to be productive. Using a European language to express Arab realities, Bekri’s writing emerges in the space lying in-between poetic expression and reference while the imaginative space of the Mediterranean acts as a crucible of cultures. Interestingly,
Bekri associates the use of the French language with emancipation. He wrote: “I do not feel marginalized in the French language... I feel that the time has come for Maghrebi writers to stop feeling guilty about using French. Exile can also be an enriching liberation, an acceptance of difference.” (Qtd. in Toso Rodinis 20). His unique inscription of Arab sensibility at the core of the French language is performed through the adoption of early Arabic aesthetic form (the *muallaqa* (ode), a long epic love poem in the *Chant* for instance), which marks the French language with an Arabic cadence, but also more interestingly through a specific move that rejects what Reda Bensmaia called “the reterritorializing return to Arabic or an Arabification of French.”

Rather, he boldly locates his writing in the in-between space of Khatibi’s “bi-langue,” in the performative, ever-shifting zone of overlap between French and Arabic, both French and Arabic in a “cross-eyed” perspective (“loucher” in Khatibi). His poetry therefore emerges from this wandering in the in-between space of language and reinvents cross-linguistic relations at the core of the poem. In this respect, it is significant that he should never have translated any collection of poems written in either Arabic or French into the other language. His poetic imaginary is one of coexistence, which reflects the fundamental interaction of Mediterranean cultures. Of his inscription in the Arabic tradition, he says: “I am interested in the *Thourath*, the Arab or Muslim cultural tradition …because I truly intend to create dialogue between cultures, within one single text; it avowedly makes the issue of reference more

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124 The *Mullaqat* comprise seven pre-Islamic poems, which are told to have been hung on the walls of the Ka’ba for all to see. Since pre-Islamic Arab culture was mostly oral, these poems were originally recited and memorized by the poets’ followers. Imru’ul Qais is said to have written the best poem of the *Mullaqat*. We can see that Bekri’s incorporation of Qais includes formal imitation as much as the symbolic evocation of his historical significance.
complex; yet it also makes it more interesting as does any effort to promote a cross-cultural perspective which has become so necessary in this time of identitarian intolerance and bigotry” [“Ecrire, lire les textes littéraires du Maghreb”).

Bekri uses poetic creation to turn nostalgia for the lost land and the pain of political exile into productive wandering. In an interview with M’Henni, Bekri describe his project as “exploiting the poetical dimensions of this biographical episode to promote open-mindedness and cultural interaction” [in the original French, “exploiter les dimensions poétiques de ce phénomène biographique pour appeler à l’ouverture et au croisement des cultures.”] Let us remember that in 1985, when the poems were published, Bekri himself had been in political exile from his homeland for 9 years. (His exile ended in 1990). It is therefore not surprising that, in Le Chant du Roi Errant, Bekri should identify with prince-poet Imru’ul Qais. Bekri, however, presents a somewhat unconventional version of the poet’s story. Qais was one of the major Pre-Islamic poets of the 6th century AD. In Bekri’s account, the prince-poet was supposedly condemned by his father to wander the Arabian desert as punishment for reciting poetry, which, as Bekri writes in his preface to the volume, was considered dangerous due to its notable influence on local tribes. His life was one of bitterness as he never succeeded after the death of his father to regain his kingdom fallen prey to rivals. Interestingly, this account significantly differs from the one recorded in Arab historiography. Arab historians do not ascribe Qais’ exile to his poetic inclination. In fact, it is only after the death of his father that Qais supposedly left his kingdom. Forsaken by his allies in the middle of the punitive war against the Banu Asad, which
he waged in retribution for the death of his father, Qais is said to have wandered about
the Arabian desert seeking alliances and protection in the hope of regaining his
father’s long lost kingdom. Devoting his life to avenging his father’s untimely demise,
his journey ultimately took him to the court of Byzantine emperor Justinian, where,
according to legend, he died from a poisoned shirt that the emperor himself sent him
to punish him for his illegitimate tryst with his daughter. Therefore, Qais’ journey is
not strictly speaking one of exile. His estrangement from his homeland was voluntary
and, although his poetry often reverberates with feelings of homesickness (the word
“ghareeb”, stranger, is often used to talk about his persona), his alienation cannot
without much loss be likened to Bekri’s forced exile outside Tunisia. However, for
being oblivious to historical facts, Bekri’s imaginative interpretation is nonetheless
very noteworthy. By reclaiming the historical figure of the Arab poet into his trilogy
of exiles, Bekri makes his affiliations clear: only through the mediation of
displacement across borders can poets aspire to the expression of a universal, although
localized, experience.

In Bekri’s case, the wandering is a transnational one on both shores of the
Mediterranean, one that possesses at its core the awareness of this crucible of cultures
that is the Mediterranean. Bekri characterizes the volume Chant du Roi Errant as a
“celebration of the life and legend of this poet, a true wandering king damned from
poetry.” However, the focus soon shifts from an evocation of the anxiety associated
with his permanent exile to that of the certainty of an eventual reconciliation with the

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125 See the accounts by Robert Irwin, Night, Horses, and the Desert: An Anthology of Classical Arabic
Literature, 7 and Abu-al-Faraj al-Isfahani, Kitab al-Aghani vol. 8, 62-77.
homeland after death. The second cycle of the volume, “The Quest for Light”, focuses on the poetic figure Antonio Machado, Spanish poet persecuted by the Franquist regime and dead in exile in the little Catalan Mediterranean village of Collioure. The Mediterranean kinship evoked between Machado and Ulysses in section 18 of the poem-soliloquy emphasizes his disruption of modern epistemic frameworks; the “continent of the sea” is reconfigured as reinventing both time and space as the two wandering figures are superimposed with no regard for temporal or geographic coherence. Instead, his poem creates a mythical, imaginary Mediterranean genealogy of exile, which he called the “oasis of his soul or imaginary garden”, the condition for the quest for light on which Bekri has embarked. On the possible meaning of that light, one can speculate. What is unambiguous is Bekri’s choice to start his second cycle by a question (“D’où viens-tu, lumière?” [Where do you hail from, Light?]), through which he disrupts dominant topographies of knowledge, rewriting the concept as a prerogative of postcolonial, subalternt creativity. Neglecting the comfort of reterritorializations in one single linguistic and national tradition, Bekri chooses the option of multiple identifications. His quest eventuates at the little cemetery of Collioure where lies the grave of Machado, which streams of visitors from his native Spanish village have covered in soil from the homeland in a posthumous attempt to bring about national reconciliation through its most concrete representation- the native soil. This reconciliation, however, Bekri cannot reach. His own reconciliation is performed on the poetic level, through affiliations with figures that have escaped the reifying logic of national belonging. His interpellation of Ulysses and Machado in
section 18 ends with this line: “The poem is a land at heart” (46). The temptation of rootedness nevertheless remains present as an ideal, that of the fig tree casting its shade over Machado’s grave, a symbol of the land of the Maghreb and of the Mediterranean, “the loving fig tree.” This tree is envisioned as the representation of true, unmitigated belonging, of an impossible and thus fantasized “errance enracinée” (rooted wandering), to which only poetry can provide a viable alternative. Estranged from the rootedness of a homeland in which the poet, as Imru’ul Quais in his analysis, has no place, Bekri forms alternative identifications through the ahistorical, mythical collapsing of different poetic figures in an alternative Mediterranean genealogy of wandering.

In an ulterior collection, *les Chapelets d’Attache* (1993), Bekri delineates another such genealogy of poetic writing in exile. The first book of poems, “L’Exil d’Ibn Hazm” [Ibn Hazm’s exile] employs the usual trope of a literary alter ego hailing from another historical period, but whose experience of displacement in the same space of the Mediterranean makes it a suitable mirror for Bekri’s own experiences. The study of this relationship excavates the modalities of a shared Mediterranean ethos of exile and creation, in which Bekri’s brand of cosmopolitanism is anchored. Again, the figure invoked is one from the past, from the mythical moment of Al-Andalus, so influential to many Mediterranean authors. However, here, the age of harmony and intercultural interactions is reconfigured as a direct parallel of the Tunisian nation-state from which Bekri was exiled. In point of fact, history reports that the medieval theologian Ibn Hazm was exiled from his hometown of Granada, while
his books were burnt in Seville. The poet ultimately found refuge in the East, in the Mediterranean coastal city of Valencia. The resemanticized geography of Andalusian *conviviencia* is quite unexpectedly superimposed on that of contemporary totalitarianism in a geography of excess. This excess, however, is not the one embodied by the subaltern lying on the edge of capitalist machine; it isn’t that of her repressed, incommensurable resistance. This excess is one standing in sharp contrast with Camus’ *pensée du midi* and Cassano’s transnational adaptation of the concept. It is a landlocked form of unreason while the open space of the sea emerges as a space of epiphany.

A careful reading of the collection cannot but reveal striking congruences with the illegal journey performed by the stowaway in Trino Cruz’s poetry. I propose to read the two poetic cycles in parallel and to trace the fecund interactions between the two poets’ contemplations of a common problematic: that of exile and belonging. The first cycle of fifty two poems opens with the familiar metaphor of doves flying away from “the paths of light” [les chemins de lumière I]. The cycle moves on to a consideration of the destructives power of oblivion, a concept which Bekri associates with a land-locked identity: “apeurée/ terre/ affaiblie par le doute et l’oubli/ comme une chanson amère/ calcinée/ sera ta rebellion ou Olivier en fleurs/ Née de la douleur du bourgeon/ la rosée” [frightened/ the land/ weakened by doubt and oblivion/like a bitter song/ calcinated/your rebellion will be or blossoming olive-tree/Born of the bud’s pain/ the dew] (II). The rebellion evoked, that against the powers of fundamentalism, cannot come to life unless the curse of oblivion is lifted. The
movement of the doves (here, as in Cruz, the doves of truth and constitutive anamnesis) flying away from the sun become the epitome of a dark age keeping the subject from the restorative power of light. Bekri’s blending of various temporal spheres (“je remonte le cours du fleuve sec/ Dans les arènes du souvenir, l’insomnie” [I trace the course of the dry river/ in the arena of remembrance/ insomnia] III) permits an escape from the over-determination of the present. Interestingly, it is through the recourse to a language lying beyond memory (“parole d’outre-mémoire” V) that this evasion from reality is expressed. The openness of the seascape on the Valencia coastline mediates the possibility of an alternative subject position marked by productive illusion, a concept reminiscent of Cruz’s *espejismo*: “amant de la mer à l’épreuve/ je dédie au large/ mes années en suspens/ Dans les rides de l’âge, l’illusion” [lover of the sea put to the test/ I dedicate to the high sea/ my suspended years/ In the wrinkled brought about by age/ the illusion.] The fascination with the direction of the East (represented in the poem by “le mihrab de sel” [the salt mihrab], the *mihrab* designating the niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the *qibla*, or the direction of Mecca, i.e., the East) overlaps with the mirage of Tunisia, the object of the poet’s longing, and it is little surprising that Bekri’s homeland should constitute the final stop in the odyssey of return narrated throughout the three poetic cycles of the volume. At first, this alternative is portrayed as an unreachable one as the surface of the sea is caught in a destructive stasis, its circulatory dynamics defused in a weary back and forth rhythm: “Vouées aux marées lasses, les vagues” [Doomed to a weary tide/ the waves.]. The productive instability of the sea, Cruz’s endless circular movement away
from the shores, is here rewritten as subsumed within an inescapable and debilitating politics of location as Ibn Hazm’s positionality on the shore over-determines his ability to reinvent himself in a productive exilic experience. The contiguous space of the sea is marked by abandon and obsolescence: “cette ancre rouillée sur le quai/ l’attente promise… /mes doigts comme de vieux cordages/ ne peuvent retenir l’accalmie en fumée/ futiles à l’épave échouée, les amarres” [this rusting anchor on the quay/ the promised expectation...my fingers like old ropes/ cannot detain the lull slipping away like smoke/ of no use to the stranded wreck, the moorings] (XLIX). It does not provide the context of a future reinvention of the self; it is encompassed in the past and this first cycle of poems (and, indirectly, the identification with Ibn Hazm that it stages) ends on a negative note.

The second cycle (and its resolution in the third one) depicts the journey undertaken by the poetic persona to the promised homeland of Tunisia. Distancing himself from Ibn Hazm, whose exile lasted a lifetime, Bekri revisits the trope of the voyage at sea in its liberatory dimension. The return home seems to be the logical last step of this epistemic journey from the confines of memory. The crossing itself is pervaded by threatening symbolism: the drowning hull, the empty hull, the uncertain light and the drowning passengers of the wrecked ship all emphasize the poet’s anxiety in the wake of his departure. The calamities encountered during the journey function as a minatory dynamic heralding the “baptême de la douleur” [the baptism of pain] expecting the poet at destination. However, this painful exploration of a desecrated memory, whose completion coincides with the return home, should not be
construed as an unproductive dynamic. In fact, the poetic persona makes the grueling experience the touchstone of his alternative discourse. Only through the passage back home can the “exploration” of an alterative reality be set in motion: “Autour des ténèbres opiniâtres/ Nous naviguons enlisés dans la chaux vive/ Explorateurs de l’éclipse sourde/ A la béance dans les dédales du firmament/ Captifs tatoués par le large victorieux” [Around the obstinate gloom/ We sail stuck in quicklime/ Exploring the muted eclipse/ On the edge of the gaping chasm in the labyrinth of the firmament/ Captives bearing the mark of the open sea’s victory] (VI 94). Therefore, just as the drowning passengers of the shipwreck evoked in the poems become the sacrificial victims of an insatiable sea (Cruz’s charco), the communal “we” of the third cycle of poems sacrifice their blissful ignorance to excavate a level of experience unattainable without the painful awareness of the surrounding darkness: “Et nous/ tressons/ de nos rayons orphelins/ Des aubades/ Qui percent l’étrange naufrage/ aux portes de la mer éplorée” [And we plait/ with our orphaned rays/ odes to the dawn/ which pierce the uncanny shipwreck/ at the gates of the tearful sea] (XVIII 106). The rays of light dispensed by the subjects, just like Cruz’s metaphor, pierce the thick veil of reality and reveal an imaginary, underlying layer of experience from which their reconstructed identity springs. The (meta)physical journey is said to have “set in motion the still waters/ there” (“Nous avivons… les eaux dormantes/ là-bas” XIX 107), waters that existed right below the surface and that needed to be reactivated. This process is an interactive one and Bekri invites the reader to join in the “brotherly poem” [“le poème
fraternel’’) through which solidarity between the dejected subjects of this world order is mediated.

From the failure of the experience of displacement (here, the failed identification with Ibn Hazm, which strips the sea of its emancipatory potential) surges the possibility of a new communal relation to the world. Bekri’s cosmopolitanism thus eventuates in the establishment of an alternate form of memory and group identification compensating for the loss of subaltern historicity. Deprived of the capacity to retrieve the memory of a common history, the marginalized subject recreates an imaginative locus of belonging where it enacts communal solidarity. The return home therefore constitutes a reverted image of Cruz’s illegal journey across the sea. The poet, unlike the stowaway, reaches his destination and it is from this renewed rootedness, one inflected by the memory of voyage, that his new identity is formed. The temptation of rootedness evoked in Le Chant du Roi Errant through the symbol of the fig tree casting its shade over Machado’s grave site is here enacted on the subjective level. His actual return to Tunisia in 1990 is likely to have influenced Bekri’s perception of the irrevocability of his condition as an exile. Therefore, it is in his position as a localized subject rooted in his native land that the poet can embrace cosmopolitanism. In this sense, his brotherly cosmopolitan project echoes Mignolo’s call for localized geographies of resistance. His experience of displacement and trans-historical identification with wandering figures provides him with the awareness of trans-cultural forces, which make exclusive definitions of subject in terms of a territorial identity inadequate. Through the remembrance of his exile, the poetic
persona “projects” itself towards alterity and therefore inscribes its imaginary reconfiguration in a localized universal paradigm.

Bekri successfully reconfigures exile as a beginning, a productive departure from exclusive notions of national and cultural identities and, as such, he can be considered to epitomize the distinctive multi-lingual and multi-cultural character of the Maghreb. Reinventing a transnational, Mediterranean identity through a communal exile figure, his poetry downplays North-South differences in the region and argues for a rethinking of the Mediterranean as a space of interaction rather than friction. Imagining a mythicized, communal Mediterranean identity could be a productive first step towards considering alternative relational patterns between first and third worlds and sketching new areas of cooperation that would allow configurations of global power to accommodate relational, non-exclusive identities. Both poets’ configurations, as well as Ben Yessef’s, advantageously illuminate both convergences and divergences between these identities, while never taking for granted the predominance of either paradigm. They thus allow us to account for such antinomic patterns in systematic relation to global dynamics mediated on the local level. In this respect, both Cruz and Bekri delineate productive poetic imaginaries where critical forms of cosmopolitanism à la Mignolo can take root. Their work fruitfully engages the poetics of mediation characteristic of the Mediterranean region. Because of that, it can be said to exemplify the kind of trans-cultural theoretical projects that the next pages will investigate.
Epilogue

For a Mediterranean Space of Mediation

In his introduction to the volume of Daedalus, S.R.G. associates the decentering of a monolithic form of modernity (“multiple modernities”) with what he calls “more hyperbolic phrases, like ‘the end of history’ and ‘the clash of civilizations’” (Eisenstadt V). The implications of this statement are multifold and somewhat representative of the usual conflation of two concepts in the social sciences: the emergence of decentered narratives on the global level and the exacerbation of cultural particularisms. Walter Mignolo warned against the dangers of cultural relativism on account of its obliteration of the global dynamics linking together diverse spaces (Mignolo “The Many Faces of Cosmo-Polis”). The solution that he advocated consisted is eschewing undue recourse to the concept of abstract universalism, preferring instead that of diversality. The universalism vs. particularism dyad underpins many accounts of civilizational conflict in the wake of the cold war. Samuel Huntington’s The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (1996) is one of them. The book argues that, with the triumph of American democracy over Soviet communism, the age of ideology has come to an end. Instead, a clash between civilizational and religious models (Christian and Muslim mostly, although other civilizational models are considered) has effectively replaced the former ideological mapping of the world in terms of its relation to the dynamic of the market. In his view, religious and cultural identities have thus taken the place of political or
ideological ones. They will henceforth become the primary source of conflict globally. Huntington’s argument thus exposes the Universalist pretense of Western civilization, which in his view is both oblivious to the reality of cultural particularism and dangerous for the fragile balance of international relations as it can only foster further resentment in the non-Western world and fuel possible civilizational conflict. It is in opposition to this delineation of civilizational relations in the context of the Mediterranean that I am writing.

Huntington’s deliberations on the nature of cultural difference draw on a long and complex tradition of Orientalism. If Orientalism was at first linguistic (in its classification of world languages into families, a process which constituted a prelude to the subsequent racial/racist considerations of cultures), its development soon shifted to the realm of literature as Orientalism was established into a distinct literary genre, mostly through travel narratives. Its main constant lay in the representation of various civilizations as radical forms of alterity to the West. Although Western civilization was first construed as “Christian” during the Crusades, it soon became associated with the rise of the notion of Europe, once the European nations became aware of the existence of a common future, a process facilitated by the feeling of solidarity which emerged in the face of the much-dreaded (and somewhat fantasized) onslaughts from the Islamic world, be they hailing from the East (Ottomans) or the South (Arabs). Thus, emphasis on the irreconcilable character of the two civilizations succeeded to the initial recognition of a common religious tradition -monotheism- demonstrated
through the Christians’ relentless efforts to convert Muslims to Christianity.\textsuperscript{126} That concept greatly thrived on the self-realization of Europe’s technical and military superiority, which culminated in the first defeat of the purportedly undefeatable Ottomans by the Venetians in Lepanto in 1571. Through the fear it was generating, Islam had secured a respected place in the European imaginary (to wit the numerous efforts to better understand the Arabic language and cultural production). Yet, after Lepanto, it was relegated to play second fiddle to a civilization that conceived of its superiority in terms of destiny: modernity was to be European and incumbent to its civilization was the duty to enlighten the rest of the planet.

In his \textit{Case for Islamo-Christian civilization} (2004), Richard Bulliet assesses the current day consequences of the notion of civilizational conflict that has become so prevalent in the field of political science. Bulliet extends his argument to the realm of American foreign affairs, where theoretical misrepresentations of Islam and, beyond it, every non-western civilization, are considered to be directly influencing the rhetoric of war and community exclusion underpinning contemporary American politics. Yet, his intervention resonates beyond the mere consideration of national issues of inclusion. It is indeed against a certain philosophical view of history that Bulliet positions his argument. While Said’s \textit{Orientalism} limited itself to laying bare the political nature of cultural practices, regardless of their apparent exclusive interest in aesthetic or philosophical considerations of exoticism, Bulliet disrupts their very working as he moves away from essentializing discourses and describes civilizations historically in

\textsuperscript{126} See the \textit{Epistle to Mohammed II} sent by Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini in 1460 to convince the victor of Constantinople of the virtues of Christianity and to enjoin him to convert.
an attempt to articulate alternative understandings of their origin and evolution in relation to one another. The main target of Bulliet’s critique is the purported religious intolerance of Islam. His first step is to dismantle theories of civilizations that rest on purely religious grounds (Islam vs. Orthodox Christianity vs. Judeo-Christianity, in itself a problematic concept). Nineteenth century thinkers, such as Ernest Renan, put to the fore the irreconcilable character of Islamic religious perceptions of reality with European critical practices based on scientific reason. Indeed, what originally constituted a circumstantial difference between two civilizations confronted to different technical realities imperceptibly became ascribed to an incompatible discrepancy in mind frames caused by the influence of Islamic religious thinking. Islamic fundamentalism has thus been essentialized as the default position of Islamic cultures on the global stage. Orientalist views of the Arab world in terms of the mythical concept of oriental Despotism still inform the binary perspective defended by Huntington and the likes of him. Islamic civilization, due to its intricate relationship with the Muslim faith, is presented as an unlikely candidate for successful secular modernization. This vision of history, which Bulliet is seeking to bring into disrepute, is thus a static one as it construes civilizational difference as intrinsic to each model. Marks of assimilation are only superficial as each culture is pre-determined by its original essence, one that is unequivocal and irresistible. Civilizational relations can henceforth only rely on a defensive dynamic; the goal is not to convert to Christianity anymore but to defend the Western model in the face of aggressive particularism.
In contrast, Bulliet aims to recenter the debate on the universal principles claimed by the West. Yet, his argument professes a revised version of universalism, one faithful to the historical dynamics of inter-cultural contact. His argument therefore aims to historicize Western superiority and to relativize it as being only partial and politically biased:

The contrast in wealth and material power that had so much favored the Muslims before the sixteenth century undeniably grew to favor the western Christians. But wait. (...) Suppose instead of inquiring about imperial riches, one were to ask what percentage of the world Muslim community today is composed of the descendants of people who converted to Islam between 1500 and 1900(...). In the great Afro-Eurasian land bloc and the adjoining region of southeast Asia, European Christianity and Islam went head to head in a contest for the souls of the indigenous peoples, and Islam unquestionably won (40-41).

By revealing the prejudiced nature of the criteria used to ascertain Western superiority, Bulliet seems to suggest that such interpretation appeared as an a posteriori justification of an existing situation –the technical superiority of Europe- rather than as its cause. The visible difference in evolution between the two civilizations would thus be due to different reactions to social circumstances specific to their area of expansion (the degree of acquaintance of the local people with monotheistic religions, for instance) and not to some intrinsic characteristic. Bulliet thus makes the case for a possible reconciliation of civilizations that should be considered as “sibling” ones (Bulliet’s term), thus presenting them as partaking of the same dynamic. It seems here that Bulliet’s provocative intervention, by distancing itself from hierarchic interpretations of civilizations (Huntington; Fukuyama) and by taking apart simplistic essentialized positions and rehabilitating historical and geographical specificities as
valid criteria for interpretation is actually shedding light upon the complexities of (non-Western) cultural claims (Hélé Béji’s “droit culturel” [Cultural Right]). Going beyond considerations of the place of Islam with regards to Western civilization, it is thus to a consideration of “culture” in general (as defined by Béji) that Bulliet introduces us.

Any comprehensive consideration of the issues at stake must begin with the phenomenon of decolonization. This is the starting point of Hélé Béji’s reflection on culture in her 1997 book, *l’Imposture Culturelle* [Cultural Imposture]. The logic of conquest (“civilization”) is presented as having given way to a break down of the binary hierarchization of culture. Variety ensued, which placed the notion of cultural authenticity at the center of nationalist demands. “La question des cultures” [the issue of culture] leads to a questioning of the validity of the category of civilization: “L’extension de l’élan de modernité aux mouvements nationaux a-t-elle fait naître une nouvelle civilisation?” [Has the increased momentum towards modernity gained by nationalist movements produced a new civilization?] (19). Yet, reliance on the phrase “culture occidentale” [Western culture] seems to emphasize a relative approach to hierarchical conceptions of culture. Western culture is one among many; it is thus stripped of its predominance as a universal model. It is even described as having borne the brunt of its ex-colonies’ accession to modernity: “Parce qu’on s’est polarisé sur les destructions des cultures traditionnelles, on a oublié de remarquer les mutations de la conscience occidentale confrontée à leur force de résistance” [Because we focused exclusively on the destruction of traditional cultures, we forgot to note the mutations
undergone by Western consciousness in the face of their resistance]. Both distinct civilizational models, therefore, seem to have undergone a process of “convergence” caused in part by their sharing of the experience of coloniality, albeit from diametrically opposed positions on the scale of dominance. This convergence cannot be construed as the widespread Westernization underlying conceptions of the global village. On the contrary, this convergent movement was effectuated towards a middle-ground position, one continually shifting and dependent on the evolutions of the relations between the two models.

In her article “Fundamental Misunderstandings: Issues of feminist approaches to Islamism”, Bronwyn Winter tightly connects the rise of Islamism to the workings of modernity as it has been experienced by newly-independent countries - intensive modernization, most notably through industrialization. Besides tracing back the origin of Islamism to colonial times, thereby showing its instrumentalization as a means of resistance to the colonial authorities, Winter emphasizes the double impact of modernity on those who are doomed to experience it from a subaltern position. She uses Béji’s configuration of the dual process of modernity to account for the conditions of emergence of what Béji terms “cultural radicalism.” Modernity in its theoretical sense rests on the extolling of uniformization through the adoption of Western models. At the same time, it encourages the development of a modern consciousness marked by subjectivity and independence, i.e., by a dynamic of emancipation from one’s immediate circumstances. In Europe, access to modernity produced a shift towards political consciousness, i.e., towards the recognition of the
necessity of the category of the nation-state, a realization usually accompanied by an acknowledgment of the supremacy of secularism and the use of reason. In her attempt to connect Islamic fundamentalism back to the origin of modernity, Winter emphasizes the engagement of all fundamentalist movements with the modern need for self-affirmation. Thus, religious fanaticism is presented as an attempt to liberate Muslim society from the dehumanizing uniformization of cultures. Substituting past models of national culture, albeit reinvented, for an unappetizing reduction of national identity to commodification is in itself a very modern endeavor. Fundamentalism, as Béji couched it, is thus a “volonté d’entrer dans le siècle, pas d’en sortir” [the desire to enter modernity, not to leave it] (61), that is the need to be accepted as agents in a modern framework. It is thus through traditionalist revolt against the obliteration of cultural identity that fundamentalist movements prove their inscription in the modern order of things. The conflation of self-assertive moderate Islam as both representative of Islamic practices and akin to Christian civilization thus makes perfect sense in the context of postcolonial cultural demands. It is utterly strategic. Through the universality of culture (“culture universelle” as the aggregate of all cultural demands), hierarchies prove irrelevant. The multiplicity of cultures, all benefiting from the right to access recognition, thus would seem to pre-empt the menace of exclusive reappropriation of theories of culture. In the light of the persistence of discourses of civilizational supremacy in the postcolonial context, recategorizing Islamic culture from irrecoverable particularism to an “equal yet different” perspective appears to be a very productive strategy to promote a non-hierarchical understanding of cultures as
entities marked by a common condition of universalism (Béji’s idea of varieties on the same human condition). This double pull both towards the local and the idiosyncratic as well as towards the universal (here considered not as fixed content, but as a common, universal condition in the global world), reverberates forcefully with Mignolo’s entreaty not to resort to mindless particularism. In the context of such refiguration of the world order in terms of what Bulliet called an “Islamo-Christian Civilization,” the space of the Mediterranean can play an unparalleled role. Mediating centuries of crossing from one shore to the other, its surface stands for the renewed hope of possible future collaborations between the two shores. Mauro Peressini and Ratiba Hadj-Moussa acclaimed the potentialities of what they termed “the multiple and uncertain present” of the Mediterranean (2). The region, they argue, is living a defining moment in its history. This moment is characterized by renewed opportunities of cooperation between the Northern and Southern shores, but also marred by the residual frictions caused by the recent phenomenon of mass immigration- legal or illegal for that matter. The hypothesis of a clash of civilizations therefore emerges as an issue of crucial relevance for all countries surrounding the space of the sea, both internally and internationally. The possibility of an “anti-clash of civilizations” model (Barbé) centered on the Mediterranean therefore resonates with more urgency than ever. One can only hope at the time when I am writing these lines, amidst the increased efforts on the part of the European Union to incorporate its Southern Mediterranean other, albeit imperfectly, but also at a time when forms of discrimination and violence towards the migrant other have been plaguing all major
cities in the continent, that the nations of the Northern and Southern shores both will be able to recognize the decisive character of this moment and to act with the poise and acumen appropriate to its historic significance. For as Gabriel Ausidio presciently wrote in 1936, “l’Utopie du jour, c’est l’oxygène de l’avenir” [The utopia of today is the air that we will breathe tomorrow] (Le Sel de la Mer 122).
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