

REVERSING THE SENTENCE OF IMPOSSIBLE
NOSTALGIA: THE POETICS OF POSTCOLONIAL
MIGRATION IN SAKINNA BOUKHEDENNA
AND AGHA SHAHID ALI

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La nostalgie future me lasse. Ce corps petit et tourmenté s'effiloche. Au lieu de vous conter mon histoire, je vous parle de l'absence; je vous dis mes manques, mes creux et mes songes. C'est parce que ma vie est ailleurs et que cet ailleurs est fissuré par la tristesse ordinaire que je m'accroche—et vous avec moi—aux pans de la folie et du rêve. Alors suivez-moi et renversez la phrase.

—Tahar Ben Jelloun, *La Réclusion solitaire*¹

[Future nostalgia tires me. This small and tormented body is fraying. Instead of telling you my story, I speak to you of absence; I tell you my lacks, my hollows, and my dreams. It is because my life is elsewhere, and this elsewhere is fissured by ordinary sorrows, that I cling—and you along with me—to the tails of madness and of fantasy. So follow me and reverse the sentence.]

I begin with these words from Tahar Ben Jelloun's *La Réclusion solitaire*, a novel that explores with lyric sensitivity the profound traumas of the North African migrant experience in France, because they provoke. Provoke us to rethink, through the mind of the postcolonial migrant, the syntax of nostalgia and its "cure." For here nostalgia is a longing not for the simple past, but for the past reconstituted and futurized, a past restored to an imagined pre-colonial, pre-exilic integrity and relived, elsewhere. By its very temporal and spatial impossibility, such nostalgia wears its sufferer's body and

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE STUDIES, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2003.
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story into scraps of absence: scraps that only a *counter*-story, as Ben Jelloun's narrator suggests when he challenges us to "follow [him] and reverse the sentence," can tell.

If we cling to the tails (and tales) of madness and dream and follow the logic of Ben Jelloun's narrator, if we fly the arc of the reversed sentence to reread the literature of postcolonial migration, where do we land? On a tentative conclusion: What is specific to the nostalgia of the postcolonial migrant is not that it yearns for a futurized past (or an anteriorized future), but why and how it does so. In *The Future of Nostalgia*—an original and acutely perceptive theorization of the psychological dynamics and ethical possibilities of longing—Svetlana Boym argues, rightly, that "[n]ostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective," thereby making of "la nostalgie future" a universal exilic condition.² Indeed, it is not the retrospective/prospective motion of nostalgia that distinguishes the longings of the postcolonial migrant, but, rather, the phenomenon of overreach: a two-way hyperextension towards "home," mandated by colonization's presence in the past and past-tense in the present, that draws and quarters the postcolonial migrant's history, geography, language, identity. For the home for which the exiled subject might (under normal conditions) long becomes, under the imprint of colonial history, already a site of dispossession, a home whose residents cannot feel at home. Thus the postcolonial migrant's nostalgia for "home" must reach both deeper into the past and farther into the future to retrieve (or conjure up) the longed-for object: deeper into the past because it must retrieve a time before colonization when the stay-at-home subject felt "at home" in his or her land and self (however illusory that feeling) and farther into the future because only there can the longing for "home" be consummated, the present "home"-in-exile being a space and a time that continue to deny the migrant's inclusion.

By reversing the sentence of story and history—by doing violence to the orders of space, time, being, and language—the writer of postcolonial migrant experience seeks (if one listens to Ben Jelloun's narrator in English) to "reverse the sentence" of exile: to escape the eternal pursuit of "wholeness" and embrace, instead, "holeness"—the temporal and spatial derangement of diaspora. Reversing the sentence of both "home" and the migrant subject who has left it, then, is an attempt to liberate both "home" and personhood from imprisonment in the endless repetitions of colonization, an imprisonment of which the migrant's impossible nostalgia is but a symptom. If nostalgia produces a chronotope of exchange—a substitution of one time and place for another (of pasts and presents near and distant, or

lands of origin and immigration and return), a translation of bodies and tongues through Jakobsonian or Rushdian metaphor—reversing the sentence yields a chronotope of what I will call *X-change*: a nexus of superimposed times and places, of simultaneous synchronicity and diachronicity from which fulfillment slips like a flyaway hair—an intersection (*X*) whose node of crossing is ever-shifting and elusive (subject to *change*), a disruption of the notions of exchange and commensurability that underlie the fantasies of an intact “home,” an equally containable “place of exile,” and the possibility of a complete “return.” Because home is not—has never been—home for the postcolonial migrant, but only the originary exile, displacement itself is not necessarily exile for him or her—it is potentially, uneasily, “home.” The translation of migrant bodies that the reversal of the sentence performs is metonymic, Benjaminian—perhaps metaphoric only, as I suggest at the end of this essay, in the Arabic (rather than the Greek) sense of the term.

Focusing on two literary representations of postcolonial immigrant experience published in 1987 in France and in the United States, respectively—Sakinna Boukhedenna’s *Journal: «Nationalité: Immigré(e)»*, a generically hybrid “novel” by a francophone Algerian-French (*Beur*) writer, and Agha Shahid Ali’s “A Butcher,” a poem collected in the late anglophone Kashmiri-American writer’s *Half-Inch Himalayas*—I argue that both texts operate under the spell of an impossible nostalgia specific to postcolonial migrancy. This nostalgia—this attempt to link an old “home” that is no longer home (and whose very hominess, like the “elsewhere” in Ben Jelloun already fissured by the sadness of colonial history, might in fact be vexed from the start) to a new “home” that never feels quite like home, whether because of the humiliating racism or simply the cultural dissonance the migrant encounters there—compels both texts to “reverse sentences,” to violently disrupt the syntax of language, identity, geography, and temporality. The narrator of Boukhedenna’s *Journal* constitutes an Algerian-French (*Beur*) female subjectivity by commingling colonial and postcolonial Algeria with imperial and postimperial (neoracist) France, by making the present past and the past present; however, these vertiginous reversals fail—despite, or perhaps because of, their violent challenge to the constraints of space and time—to construct a comfortable “home,” and eventually the narrator is driven to commit what amounts to ontological suicide: she kills off both her Frenchness and her Arabness and becomes by turns Exile and the temporally and geographically unlocatable female principle of Woman. When the émigré speaker of Ali’s poem, in turn, tries to reestablish a rela-

tion with the native-who-never-left on a footing of “equal” exchange—trading Urdu couplets with the Delhi butcher who doles out to him his portion of flesh, blood, and news of “home,” his reversal of the sentence itself snaps in mid-syllable, his unrhymed line abandoned to exile. Thus, for all their “reversals of the sentence”—that is, for all their attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable—the migrant subjects of both Boukhedenna’s text and Ali’s must, like the narrator of Ben Jelloun’s *Réclusion*, in the end abandon any nostalgia for “home,” for self-integration, to the time of the *futur antérieur*, the time of the “will have been,” the tiring time of the impossible.

My effort to link, in this essay, two writers whose texts traffic in different languages, histories, gendered identities, and genres may itself seem a reconciliation of the “irreconcilable.” But more connects Boukhedenna and Ali, and their fictional and poetic alter egos, than divides them. On the one hand, I explore the subjectivity of Boukhedenna’s Sakinna, a woman whose crisis of identity as a second-generation member of the Algerian community in France is rooted in the problem of her parents’ pre-1962 migration from a then-colonized territory, Algeria, to a then-center of empire, France. Sakinna is trapped between an Algeria that asserts the *post-* in its postcoloniality by refusing to recognize the French citizenship even of French-born descendants of Algerians like her, insisting that she is Algerian and Algerian only, and a France eager to cross out the “ex” in its ex-coloniality and reassert its imperial power. Clearly Algeria’s stance is a retroactive murder—in the postcolonial moment—of the pre-independence experience of colonization; yet, as politically justifiable as that gesture might be, it is still one that does violence to those children of Algerian origin who, born and living in France, would find it difficult to assert any right to place or space in French society if construed as “resident aliens” there. While France, in turn, acknowledges—unlike Algeria—the dual French and Algerian nationality of Sakinna and her “tribe,” its apparent indulgence masks a neocolonial imaginary that continues to symbolically usurp Algerian territory and identity: it allows those Algerians and their children who renounced French nationality in 1962 and adopted Algerian citizenship to essentially reannex themselves, via “reintegration,” to a France always already “theirs.” The riddles of nationality that the afterlife of French colonialism in Algeria has engendered for Algerian-descended Sakinna, born in France—what I will call the “irrational ratios” of her being and time—confound her ability to define herself as anything but the *X* of crossing, or of negation. Hers is a case of *appartenance* (belonging) by *départenance* (non-

belonging), to borrow a concept that Mireille Rosello has coined to describe the *Beur* condition: what I would dub a state of *being longing*.

If the identities of Boukhedenna and Sakinna crack at the fault lines of competing and conflicted nationalities, so too do those of Ali and his speaker. A Kashmiri born in New Delhi in 1949—just after the 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent *into* India and Pakistan and the 1949 partition, in turn, of the autonomous princely state of Kashmir *between* India and Pakistan—he is born to a divided state (Kashmir, home to his ancestors) within a divided nation (India, his birthplace). He is caught in a welter of postcolonial relations as tangled as any that ensnare Boukhedenna: both writers are tied by blood, not birth, to subjugated states, and both were born in the very nations that dominated and continue to dominate the lands of their ancestors.³ As the colliding and colluding interests of departing British colonizers and of aspiring Indian and Pakistani nationalists intersected to spur the subjugation of Kashmir—a majority-Muslim state invaded by Pakistan in 1947 and then “given up” to India by its fleeing Hindu ruler (who had settled in Delhi), divided under a 1949 ceasefire and a flashpoint of both indigenous liberation struggles and India-Pakistan war ever since—how was a Kashmiri born in New Delhi but raised in Kashmir and educated in both, as well as in the United States to which he immigrated, to define himself except as all and none of the states that claimed him, as a series of broken couplets much like Boukhedenna’s irrational rations? Indeed, although Ali described himself, during his lifetime, as a Kashmiri-American (from his graduate-school days until his untimely death on 8 December 2001, his “home” was in the United States), he also considered himself a “triple exile.” His poem “A Butcher” journeys to the neocolonial epicenter of Kashmir’s trauma, India, which—waving the banner of *Hindutva* more insistently than ever—continues to fight Muslim forces (some seeking Kashmiri independence, others backed by and advocating union with Pakistan) over Kashmir’s fate. Like Boukhedenna, then, Ali occupies the space of the colonized postcolonial. In place of the brutal intimacy of France with Algeria viewed, in Boukhedenna’s novel, from a fantasized Mediterranean island of non-belonging to both, we have the brutal intimacy of India with Kashmir viewed, in Ali’s “A Butcher,” from the unnamed distant shores of the United States.

If, as Svetlana Boym writes, nostalgia is a “historical emotion,” “the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory” (xvi), what better way to see whether the nostalgia of the postcolonial migrant—and its overthrow—

follow a syntax specific to them, not easily generalizable to the universal experience of exile, than to look trans-intra-nationally at the post- and neo-colonial historicity of such strange lands as Boukhedenna's *Algériance-Françalgérie* and Ali's *Kashmirindiamerica-Indiamerikashmir*?

The Irrational "Ratios" of Immigrant Being and Time

Striving to construct ratios between terms whose relationship cannot be rationalized—whose relationship must remain “irrational” or irreconcilable—Sakinna Boukhedenna's *Journal: «Nationalité: Immigré(e)»* (1987) sentences itself to the vertiginous translations of “la nostalgie future” for an Algeria still too broken by colonization to acknowledge her and a France too triumphantly ex-colonial to embrace her, and, ultimately, reverses the sentence of belonging to flee to the seemingly liberatory *X* of exile. Susan Ireland has argued that Boukhedenna's *Journal* constructs the loss of identity as the loss of place.⁴ In Boukhedenna's text, Ireland claims, Algeria and France are represented as two opposite poles, geographical and cultural; the hyphenated “Franco-Maghrebian,” especially the hyphenated “Franco-Maghrebian” woman, is forced to construct an identity across a hyphen that separates two mutually exclusive terms, two “irreconcilable opposites,” even as it links them (1024). While Ireland is right to foreground the reconciliation of the irreconcilable that Boukhedenna's *Journal* attempts, Boukhedenna's text in fact presents a richer formulation of the contradictions that haunt *Beur* female identity than Ireland's notion of hyphenation suggests and constructs the loss of place as the *acquisition* (admittedly troubled and troubling) of identity. Hyphenation, after all, traffics in binarisms, and—as Mireille Rosello's trenchant critique of journalistic, sociological, and even literary definitions and constitutions of *Beur* identity insists—binarisms ignore the fact that the wound between presumed “opposites” ultimately bleeds into each, generating confluences of identity as well as conundrums and outright contradictions.⁵ From the outset, then, of Boukhedenna's *Journal*—indeed, from the text's title and dedication—we find the world of Sakinna, a woman who happens to be a second-generation member of the Algerian community in France, described not as a coupling of hyphenated terms, but as an unsettled analogy—or ratio—between them: *nationalité : immigré(e); Algérie-France : France-Algérie; femme : exil; la (femme-terre) Palestine : l'immigré(e) algérien(ne); algérien(ne) autochtone : algérien(ne) immigré(e); [nationality : immigrant; Algeria-France : France-*

Algeria; woman : exile; the (mother-land) Palestine : the Algerian immigrant (woman); native Algerian (woman) : Algerian immigrant (woman)] and so forth.⁶

Generally, we define a ratio as a “relation in degree or number between two similar things”; mathematically, we define it as the “relation between two quantities expressed as the quotient of one divided by the other,” where the ratio of, for instance, two to one would be written 2:1 or 2/1.⁷ But Boukhedenna’s analogies, whose analogical glue is forever dissolving, are really *irrational ratios* between ever-shifting binaries in which the two terms in tension cannot be reconciled because they are not so different after all, because they *contaminate* one another—binaries that render the binary itself a rather empty descriptor of the postcolonial migrant condition. Thus Boukhedenna’s *Journal* positions the migrant’s time and space *within* the tension that separates the lay definition of the ratio as, essentially, an analogy—a relation that foregrounds “likeness” or at least commensurability, though shot through with the differentiation of degree or number—from the mathematical definition of the ratio as, fundamentally, a relation of inequality or division, an incommensurability masked by the deceptively comparative sign of the colon.

Sakinna, the first-person narrator of Boukhedenna’s text, does violence, then, to the established order of things—dis-orders a world predicated on logics of space and time that cannot describe her—so that she may put things *in* order, make sense of the world. Indeed, her *Journal* can only come into being as an *X-change* that cancels the irrational ratio between two literary genres at once intimate and opposite, each denoted in French by the term *journal*: the text is a cross between the *journal* as diary, that most private of texts (potentially written, however, for public consumption—after all, the “secret” diary is often an open secret, written with a conscious or unconscious wish for a reader) and the *journal* as newspaper, that most public of texts (usually consumed, however, in silent, “private” reading). Moreover, the text addresses a chiasmus, an interlocutor as unknown as the *immigré(e)* is unrecognized: a “cher X.” [“dear X.”]. The *journal*’s simultaneous closeness to and distance from its audience is implied in this address, at once intimate, personal (“cher”) and anonymous, public (“X”). Finally, the text’s temporality is chiasmic: the *journal* interrupts the linear narrative of untroubled personality, and untroubled nationality, by, say, interjecting a decision made in 1981 within the space of an entry supposedly penned in 1980. And its run is irregular: it is at times a daily, at others a monthly; sometimes it skips years.

Thus, against Benedict Anderson's contention that the newspaper creates the temporality of simultaneity—the time of the meanwhile—necessary to the extrapolation of the collective from the individual, necessary to the idea of “nation,” we can read Sakinna's *Journal* as a kind of anti-newspaper, as an anti-text of the nation.⁸ Indeed, *Journal* pieces, from the forgettings of both France and Algeria, a collective memory for a “nous” whose only home is the zone of *X-change*, outside territory and time: the “nous” [“us”] of the “deuxième génération” [second generation] of Algerians in France, of “[t]outes ces jeunes femmes immigrées” [all those young immigrant women] and “tous ces jeunes hommes immigrés” [all those young immigrant men] exiled from the nation(s). Witness the language of Sakinna's dedication:

Journal

J'ai écrit ce journal à la mémoire de tout jeune immigré(e) qui rentre dans sa terre arabe et qui découvre soudain le sens amer de l'exil. Toutes ces jeunes femmes immigrées, tous ces jeunes hommes immigrés qui grâce au mensonge et à l'illusion du retour, et aussi, grâce à l'esprit colonialiste qui règne à l'École française, sont devenus les:

NATIONALITÉ : IMMIGRÉ (E)

Le passé de nos parents, c'est notre présent, et notre présent de deuxième génération sans nationalité a-t-il un futur?
C'est en France que j'ai appris à être Arabe,
C'est en Algérie que j'ai appris à être l'Immigrée.

Sakinna, novembre 1985⁹

[I wrote this journal to the memory of every young immigrant who reenters his or her Arab land and suddenly discovers the bitter sense of exile. All those young immigrant women, all those young immigrant men who, thanks to the lie and illusion of the return, and also thanks to the colonialist mentality that reigns in the French school, have become those defined as:

NATIONALITY: IMMIGRANT

Our parents' past, it's our present, and does our present of second-generation-without-a-nationality have a future?

It is in France that I learned to be an Arab,
 It is in Algeria that I learned to be the Immigrant.
 Sakinna, November 1985]

Because the “immigré(e)” in this text is, at least figuratively speaking, stateless (later, she likens her “state” to that of the dispossessed Palestinian, musing that she might in fact be “sous-palestinienne”), because she occupies the chimerical state of exile, a nowhere between France and Algeria, her “national” newspaper must be a personal account of searchings across voids—and finally, an acceptance of the void as the state itself. Time and again in *Journal*, the chiasmus—the figure *X* of crossing, transgression, and negation—trumps the delusory colon of the migrant’s attempted ratios. The text is ever performing the “reversal of the sentence” that negates the possibility of any rational relation between the spaces, times, and identities that Sakinna inhabits and highlights the actual irrationality and irreconcilability of these relationships: the spaces of France and Algeria, each by turns “hostel” and “hostile” to one another and to the migrant split subjects they share; the times of the immigrant parents’ first generation and the (misnamed) “native immigrant” children’s second; the identities of French, *Beur*, Algerian, or Arab and the sought-after female versions of each of these reigning (tacitly imperial, tacitly male) constructs.

Yet I get ahead of myself. The chiasmic transgressions that interrupt Sakinna’s attempts to rationalize “home” do not categorically reverse the sentence of her nostalgia until she embraces, in the novel’s later scenes, the state of exile or *X-change*. Her life at once overdetermined and not quite articulated by the histories that have (dis)located her parents, Sakinna is sick, throughout much of *Journal*, with an impossible *nostalgie future*: a double yearning for an idealized pre-colonial *arabité* and a France not quite ready to fulfill its much-sung promises of justice and equality. For chief among the irrational ratios that she must reconcile is the vexed relationship of the past of her immigrant parents to her own present. Her crucial question in the dedication, “Le passé de nos parents, c’est notre présent, et notre présent de deuxième génération sans nationalité a-t-il un futur?” [Our parents’ past, it’s our present, and does our present as second-generation-without-a-nationality have a future?], points both to the continual contamination of the present by the past and the questionable possibility of a future for a present forever tugged backward by that past. Recognizing *in* the past of her Algerian immigrant parents the present of French-born “deuxième génération” children like herself, she struggles to balance the imperative of recuperating the

parents' past with the imperative of not recuperating it as is, of *reforming* its form without *deforming* self in the process (as the self's present, after all, happens to be the parents' past). Thus the relation between the "deuxième génération" Sakinna and her "première génération" [first generation] immigrant parents is a curious blend of identification and distance—reminiscent of the positioning implied by the address "cher X.," and perhaps best evoked by these lines from an entry aptly titled "Souvenir d'avant . . . novembre 1979": "Où est la vie, où est l'amour quand la mort est près de toi . . . / Amour amer" (43) ["Memory of before . . . November 1979": "Where is life, where is love when death is close to you . . . / Bitter love."]. Curiously, this poignant half-rhyme of love and bitterness, this irrational "ratio" of a state and a modifier emotionally opposed—this "amour amer"—also describes Sakinna's feelings toward Arab men, in France and in Algeria, who regard "deuxième génération" women like her as "putains" ("whores") for transgressing, as they come of age in Europe, the taboos that govern Arab women's social and sexual interactions with men.

Indeed, when Sakinna wishes to assert her difference from her parents yet affirm her roots in defiance of a French society that would sever them, when she wishes to attack the double standards to which Algerian men subject women yet affirm her love for those men in the face of French racism, she does so in a *single* poem titled "Poème de femme immigrée que je suis" (62–63). ["Poem of the young immigrant woman that I am."] On its face, the title does not surprise us; after all, Sakinna has already identified herself as a young "immigrée" in the dedication, where she addresses herself to "tout jeune immigré(e)," to all those youth of Algerian ancestry who are French-born—who in the most literal sense are *autochtones* of France and immigré(e)s to Algeria—but who remain ghettoized as "aliens" within French culture, politics, and society as if not French-born, as if they *are* their parents, newly arrived, Algerian-born "immigré(e)s." Yet certain elements in the poem are so at odds with the facts of Sakinna's life that we realize that she has assumed the voice of a woman very much a member of her parents' generation, not her own. Sakinna, for instance, does not stay home while the men of her community frequent cafés and nightclubs, as the speaker of this poem does; rather, she is enmeshed in a raw urban French youth culture of rock music, alcohol, and drugs. Moreover, she is fluent in French, her *journal* itself a testimony to the command of idiom and linguistic range of a native speaker. In contrast, this speaker—this "femme immigrée que je suis"—emphasizes her *inability* to speak French, as a sign both of her exclusion by her Algerian husband from French public life and of her resis-

tance toward that husband and the colonizing France she feels he represents: “Je ne parlais pas français,” she declares, “toi tu parlais un peu cette langue qui nous faisait monter les larmes aux yeux, / cette langue si dure avec nous Algériens, cette langue de la rage, de la tristesse que nous survivions” (63). [“I did not speak French. You, you spoke a bit of that language that brought tears to our eyes, / that language so harsh with us Algerians, that language of rage, of the sadness that we survived.”] Indeed, the speaker metaphorizes her betrayal by her philandering husband in linguistic terms, suggesting that his affairs with French women (who, incidentally, despise him) echo his adoption of the colonizer’s language.

Still, the fact that the poem is *in* French, the language its speaker supposedly cannot speak—and indeed plays *with* French to aim some of its most pointed barbs at immigrant Algerian men and the Euro-French women who (do not) love them—points to the ghostly *presence in the past* of Sakinna herself, a figure who can only, to the “première génération” speaker of the poem, represent the future. Consider, for example, this accusation, perhaps the most brilliant of those the speaker levels at her husband: “Tu fumais des blondes, tu offrais des pots à la première / qui passait à côté de toi. Tu te faisais avoir, mais / t’y croyais à ces filles qui ne t’aimaient pas” (62). [“You’d smoke blond tobacco cigarettes, you’d offer drinks to the first blond girl / who’d come your way. They’d take you for a ride but / you’d believe in those girls who did not love you.”] In these lines, the word *blondes* undergoes a startling metamorphosis of signification from cigarette to blond woman, such that the Algerian man is accused of an almost narcotic intoxication with the blondness of French women, with the physical characteristic that sets them apart from many of the Algerian women these men leave behind in the projects. Sustaining this metaphor of intoxication, the speaker goes on to allege that her unfaithful husband offers “drinks to the first woman who comes [his] way” [“pots à la première / qui passait à côté de [lui]”]. (The fact that she does not specify the referent of “la première” only underscores the sly semantic glide from [*cigarette*] *blonde* to [*femme*] *blonde*.) Clearly, the husband buys drinks as evidence of his largesse (he woos women, after all, by pretending to be a single, moneyed Italian); the word *pots*, however, conjures up the deliciously relevant French idiom *pots-de-vin*, which infuses the socially acceptable drink (acceptable in France, at least) with the damning shadow of the bribe. To her husband’s charge that she is nothing but a whore, selling herself to men (“[. . .]tu criais que / je ne suis qu’une putain”), the speaker retorts: You pay French women to make love to you.

Interestingly, then, these moments in “Poème de jeune femme immigrée que je suis” read as sallies Sakinna *herself* might launch against those Arab men who cite her smoking habit as evidence of her non-Arabness—when they tell her, for instance, “[T]es comme les Françaises, tu fumes” [“You’re like Frenchwomen; you smoke”]—or those who dismiss her as a “putain” (74, 71). Hence the doubleness of the poem’s title, “Poème de jeune femme immigrée que je suis,” whose relative pronoun, *que*, both separates and connects two generations—two groups of women defined as “immigrées.” The *double entendre* of the verb “suis” also dances between rapprochement and division: taken as the present tense of *être* [“to be”] it forges identity from duality (unites the “jeune femme immigrée” with the “je” as one and the same subject); taken as the present tense of *suivre* [“to follow”], it suggests the second generation’s following of the first, a succession that makes the “présent” of Sakinna’s generation echo the “passé” of the parents’ generation, but also holds those realities apart, intimating the differences between them. Moreover, the use of the *imparfait* throughout the poem recalls the line “Le passé de nos parents, c’est notre présent” of Sakinna’s dedication. The past of the postcolonial migrant is not the past perfect, not the completed past, but the past imperfect, the continuing past—and the past that undergirds the migrant’s dream of returning “home,” the futurized past of the migrant’s nostalgia.

And so this song of two cases of “[a]mour amer”—the “irrational” bitter love that bonds and divides an Algerian man and an Algerian woman and the equally “irrational” bitter love that bonds and divides the past of *la première génération* from the present of *la deuxième*—traces a chiasmic *X* between two “rational” but not-so-rational relationships, man-woman (past-past and present-present) and parent-child (past-present), whose common ground is also the ground of their divergence. Within and between these relations, no simple refrain echoes: indeed, when the speaker of this poem laments her husband’s transgressions in a haunting sequence of lines—“Oh! Mon amour, pourquoi ce noir soleil?”, “Oh! Mon amour pourquoi ce soleil noir!”, “Oh! Mon amour pourquoi ce soleil tout noir!”, and “Oh! Mon amour, pourquoi tout ce soleil noir!”—she toys with the syntax of that refrain each time, such that each instance constitutes a repetition with a difference. “Ce noir soleil” becomes “ce soleil noir” (the first rendition emphasizing the sun’s blackness, the second subordinating that blackness to the image of the sun itself); “ce soleil tout noir” becomes “tout ce soleil noir” (the first rendition stressing the intensity of the sun’s blackness for the speaker, the second *how much* black sun she has endured).

As the syntax and signification of *noir soleil*, *soleil noir*, *tout ce soleil noir*, and *ce soleil tout noir* shimmer and shift, mirage-like, in Sakinna's various "reversals of the sentence," we hear the tangled refrains of history that trouble the nostalgia of the postcolonial migrant. The first-generation Algerian woman sings the first refrain: as she laments the wayward husband's promiscuous sex with French women, her *noir soleil* and *soleil noir* echo the miscegenation of *blondes* (French) and *noirs* (Africans) so powerfully encapsulated in the earlier trope of smoked blondes (indeed, the image of blonde cigarettes disintegrating into black smoke stages an interracial heterosexual union in which conventional gender roles turn inside out to reinforce racial hierarchies—here European women, as phallic cigarettes, enter and essentially "emasculate" the smoke of Algerian men even as they dissolve in union with it). Sakinna, the second-generation alter ego who has composed this woman's lines, offers a second refrain that her "mother" could just as easily sing: a shape-shifting interrogation of the status of Algerians (indeed, of all Africans) in France. In the phrase *ce soleil tout noir*, she suggests the transformation of France by a postcolonial influx of immigrants: now "blacks" have eclipsed the (French) sun, traditionally identified with Louis XIV, the Sun King; with Enlightenment reason; with "whiteness." But she also suggests that the counter-invasion of immigration, while appearing to be a postcolonial "reconquest" of the French ex-metropole, has subjected Africans on French soil to present-day reverberations of their past colonial subjugation: they have been and are still being made to suffer the "darkest" aspects of French "civilization," so much black sun, *tout ce soleil noir*.

Between the "reversals of the sentence" that mark the relationship of past and present in the condition of postcolonial migration, the consciousness of the *première génération* parent and that of the *deuxième génération* child are intertwined. Small wonder that Sakinna observes, wearily, "Ma tête est lourde, je sens toute notre faiblesse: nés ou pas nés dans cette patrie coloniale, nous sommes des boucs émissaires et on nous accuse d'être les responsables du chômage, d'être les salisseurs et les salisseuses de la France, mais que pouvons-nous faire, divisés comme nous le sommes en 1^{re} et 2^e génération?" (71–72). [My head is heavy, I feel all our weakness: born or not born in this colonial homeland, we are the scapegoats and they accuse us of being responsible for the unemployment rate, for the dirtiness of France, but what can we do, divided as we are into 1st and 2nd generations?] In the end, the space of the "patrie coloniale" appears an inescapable tautology: the "patrie coloniale" can refer at once to the colonized Algeria of the past

and to the racist France of the present; what is more, in the *patrie* in which one generation is not born, the other is.¹⁰ The frontiers separating the past from the present, the first generation from the second, and pre-1962 Algeria from post-1962 France are artificial ones indeed.

That is why, to return once more to the dedication of *Journal*, Sakinna calls the belief of the *jeune immigré(e)* in the possibility of “home” a lie and an illusion. Indeed, by the final lines of the dedication, both France and Algeria become sites of negative pedagogical formation, schools that do not so much form identity as displace it, that constitute identity *as* displacement: “C’est en France que j’ai appris à être Arabe,” Sakinna writes, “C’est en Algérie que j’ai appris à être l’Immigrée.” According to Sakinna, the *deuxième génération Beur* daughter is the unwanted child of two *patries coloniales*. She is a *bint haram* in both senses of that Arabic phrase: a woman forbidden because she commits the forbidden—transgresses, by being unabashedly sexual and rejecting virginity as an index of self-worth, the norms of sexual propriety in Algeria, and transgresses, by being unabashedly *Beur* and discrediting French pretensions to equality and justice, the limits of social and political acceptability in France (98). She is also, to invoke another sense of *bint haram*, equally idiomatic in Arabic, the illegitimate child of both France and Algeria—the child conceived in sin, on the border of the (post)colonial. Though legally claimed by both France and Algeria, she is disowned by both *patries*, both fatherlands: each of which will have nothing to do with her and insist on hiding the “obscene copulation” (in the words of Assia Djebar) that conceived her in the first place. As Alain Gillette and Abdelmalek Sayad have argued in their study of Algerian immigration in France, it is “the problem of recognition or lack thereof of the colonial fact [i.e., the fact of colonization] that is at play” in the clash (and the confluence) of French and Algerian citizenship laws (109; translation mine).

Gillette and Sayad chart a succession of laws enacted in July 1962, December 1966, and January 1973 that affected the nationality of immigrants of Algerian origin and their children in France. These laws have split the descendants of Algerian immigrants in France into two general groups: those born before and those born after 1 January 1963. France insists that Algerians and their children born before 1963, whether in France (like Boukhedenna, born in 1959 at Mulhouse) or in Algeria, were French at birth but lost that status when France recognized Algeria’s independence on 3 July 1962 unless they or their parents had opted for French nationality before 1963 or filed a later declaration of reintegration (*déclaration de réintégration*) into French nationality. *Beurs* like Boukhedenna/Sakinna, born

before 1 January 1963, are not considered automatic French citizens even if they were born on French soil (a violation of the old principle of *jus solis*, citizenship by birthplace); they must actively “reclaim” a French citizenship that was always already theirs and would have been automatically so—French law seems to chide them—had they or their parents not renounced it, since Algeria was once “a part” of France. France does, however, continue to recognize those born before 1963 as dual nationals of France and Algeria even after they have “reintegrated” themselves as French nationals. Algeria refuses to recognize the dual nationality of any Algerian or person legally regarded (under complex regulations) of Algerian descent, whether born before or after 1963—even if born in France—and claims them as Algerian nationals only; by so doing, it erases the “taint” of any form of postcolonial attachment of Algerians to France, however real that attachment may be, from these citizens.¹¹

Yet Sakinna’s Algerian citizenship—presumably her birthright—makes her no more “natural,” and no less alien, to the Algerian nation than she is to the French one, as her experiences with customs and immigration officials on her “return” to Algeria suggest:

Stupéfaction: je voyais que les douaniers divisaient les immigrés, des Français. On nous disait de reculer, pour laisser passer les Français. . . . *Nos gueules ne revenaient-elles pas aux complexes du colonisé algérien?* . . . Les douaniers étaient peu accueillants avec les immigrés. Ils lançaient nos valises vulgairement, après les avoir fouillées de fond en comble. *Ils faisaient une croix dessus et criaient: «Yalla Amchi».* Quant aux Français, ils leur faisaient des grands sourires en leur souhaitaient la bienvenue et un bon séjour en Algérie, enfin dans la république algérienne démocratique et populaire. (75–76, emphases mine)

[Stupefaction: I saw that the customs agents were separating the immigrants from the French. They told us to back up, to allow the French to pass . . . Didn’t our faces boil down to the complexes of the colonized Algerian?

. . . The customs agents were not friendly with the immigrants. They threw our bags vulgarly, after searching them thoroughly. *They put an X on them and cried, “Yalla Amchi.”* While with the French, they gave them big smiles, welcoming them and wishing them a nice stay in Algeria, that is, in the popular democratic Republic of Algeria.]

Significantly, Sakinna attributes her brusque dismissal—indeed, humiliation—at Algerian customs to Algeria’s troubled recognition of its colonial past in her face and in the faces of immigré(e)s like her. She bears the marks of her delegitimized French birth, the stigma of being born on the soil of the country that colonized the land of her parents for over 130 years. Precisely because she is by turns Algerian and French, because Algeria can see its own bifurcated history in the mirror of her *gueule*, she reminds her “homeland” of its disempowerment. To the Algerian nation, “purely” French visitors are more palatable than she: the Algerian customs officers place an *X* on her bags—the *X* of interdiction; when they let her pass, they do so with words that carry more than a hint of irony, for the Arabic “Yalla Amchi” literally means “Go ahead; leave.”

The experience evacuates Sakinna’s identity entirely, leaving her—as she returns to France—with the foretaste of exile: “Une douane est une douane, qu’elle soit Française ou Arabe, un flic est un flic d’où qu’il vienne,” she concludes. “Je montais dans l’avion qui allait à Lyon et je me sentais vide. J’avais l’impression que je n’avais plus rien en moi. Je sentais soudain ce que signifie se pencher en direction de l’exil” (104). [A customs office is a customs office, whether French or Arab, a cop is a cop no matter where he’s from. I boarded the airplane going to Lyon and felt empty. I had the impression that I had nothing left in me. I suddenly felt what it means to lean in the direction of exile.] Instead of recovering identity from memory, she suggests, one must claim forgetting *as* an identity. The ratio “Nationalité : Immigré(e)” is irrational, unworkable; she must, therefore, live on the *X*. of exile. If she wishes to return to Algeria, she must return to a homeland *sous rature* [under erasure], under the sign of the *X*. Thus Sakinna answers Algeria’s gesture of placing a cross on her bags—exiling her with the ironically Christian (colonial) cross even as it “checks” her into its presumably Muslim (postcolonial) borders—with the equivalent gesture of crossing out Algeria, of banishing “home” even as she retains it as a ground of identity: “Je décidai de partir, de tout laisser pour cette fois-ci, de mettre une croix sur l’Algérie,” she writes. “Trop d’interdits . . .” (123). [I decided to leave, to leave behind everything this time, to put an ‘X’ on Algeria. Too many interdictions.]

To say that Sakinna must live on the *X*. of exile, or on the colon of the unworkable ratio “Nationalité : Immigré(e),” is to say that she must die first. Interestingly, in fact, Sakinna dedicates her *journal* “to the memory of” every young *Beur* who returns to “sa terre arabe” and discovers the bitter sense of exile. Her use of the locution *à la mémoire de* is startling, for it

makes her *journal*, ultimately, a call to perpetuate the memory left by someone gone. Thus positioned, the text carries not only the impulse of preservation (the life-warmth implied by the *cher* of “cher X.”), but also the scent of death (that absence implied by the *X*. of the unmarked migrant subject).

This dichotomy is, in fact, embedded in the ratio of the “nationalité : immigré(e).” For while the colon in that phrase leads us to expect a definition of “nationalité,” some sort of designation of identity, it instead sets up a negation: it defines identity only as non-identity, or at least as an identity totally inassimilable within the category of the nation, “immigré(e)” and not “Algérien(ne)” or “Français(e).” Sakinna herself claims non-identity or identity-in-diaspora as her only possible self-definition, given her inability to root herself in any nation-space: “Moi, je n’étais de nulle part. Ou peut-être d’une diaspora” (73). [I was from nowhere. Or maybe from a diaspora.] The immigrant self is “nothing” because it is a moving coordinate; *le soi* can only be *soi-disant* (a phrase that appears repeatedly in Boukhedenna’s text), the self is a would-be self, a so-called self, articulated at the moment of articulation or utterance (and contingent on the positioning of the speaker).

The phrase “nationalité : immigré(e)” does more, however, than introduce a definition and then substitute a negation for that definition. The ontological negation it presents is also ontological reconstitution, a recasting of the national record in the terms of postcolonial migrant subjectivity. The phrase reconstructs the very meaning of nation as *anti-nation*, as the colon therein mathematically sets up a ratio between two terms not generally considered analogous at all: the concept of “nationalité” and the person of the “immigré(e).” Thus the nation, too, becomes a moving coordinate. In the end, in fact, the *tampon d’identité* with which Sakinna initially marks herself when she sports the red henna her French teachers consider “dirty” (68) cannot stop the hemorrhage of fixed nationality and fixed personality. Indeed, *Journal* ends with the suggestion that Sakinna’s only hope of an identity lies in reclaiming the very label she hates, that of the “ressortissant algérien,” with all of its paradoxes (*ressortissant* means “national,” as in “Algerian national”; yet oddly, the noun is also a present participle of the verb *ressortir*, which means “to stand out in contrast”—essentially, to *not* belong—and “to go or come out again and again”). Her *nationalité* must be the exile’s multiple-entry visa, or the passport bearing the *double tampon* of Algeria and of France, two nationalities held in perpetual metonymic suspension:

... Pourquoi n'aurait-on pas, nous femmes immigrées, le droit à la protection, le droit à l'asile puisque nos patries arabes ne nous reconnaissent plus? Pourquoi nous sommes obligées de prendre des papiers français? Nous pouvons dire, nous sommes de «Nationalité : Immigré(e)». Ni Français, ni Arabes, nous sommes l'exil... «Nationalité immigrée», je rentrais en France avec ce nouveau passeport tamponné par l'Algérie et par la France. J'étais fière d'être restée femme et non sœur, mère, ou putain...

Femme arabe, on m'a condamnée à perpétuité, car j'ai franchi le chemin de la liberté, on m'a répudiée, maintenant me voilà immigrée sur le chemin de l'exil, identité de femme non reconnue je cours le monde pour savoir d'où je viens. (126)

[... Why wouldn't we, us immigrant women, have the right to protection, the right to asylum since our Arab homelands no longer recognize us? Why do we have to have French papers? We can say, "We are from 'Nationality: Immigrant.'" Neither French, nor Arab, we are a people of exile, we have an identity that is not recognized, let us fight to reclaim it, let us not be taken by the Arabs and by the French. 'Nationalité: Immigrée,' I will return to France with this new passport stamped by Algeria and by France. I was proud of having remained a woman, not sister, mother or whore...

As an Arab woman, I was condemned in perpetuity because I had crossed the road to freedom, I was repudiated, and now here I am an immigrant on the road of exile, with a non-recognized female identity, travelling the world to learn where I come from.]

Writing cannot ultimately make sense of Sakinna's world, or cannot do so in terms that would ground her subjectivity in recognizable zones of time and space. Discarding unworkable ratios as she moves along, she can only exist in the end as the principle of Woman. Earlier I construed the notion of Sakinna's illegitimacy—her status as *bint haram*—as a metaphor for her transgression of both the inferior racial status France would assign her as a *Beur* and the subordinate gender role to which Algeria would expect her to conform as a woman, as well as for her uneasy citizenships in both France (where she straddles two nationalities, the French granted only by request) and Algeria (where she is permitted only one, denied the French half of her nationality). Yet ironically, indeed, current Algerian nationality laws do not recognize *actual* illegitimate children as Algerian, since citizenship must be

authenticated and legitimated through the paternal line; according to Jacqueline Costa-Lascoux, “les enfants naturels sont seulement français parce que non reconnus comme algériens par le droit algérien” [“illegitimate children are French only because unrecognized as Algerians by Algerian law”].¹² Sakinna surely invokes this provision of Algerian law when she describes herself, even in metaphoric terms, as *bint haram*—excised from the very possibility of Algerianness because she refuses to define herself through men and thus rejects ideological patrilineage. It is to that provision, among other forms of exclusion, that she alludes when she lambastes the refusal of Arab nations to “recognize” women, arguing that Algeria has effectively “forced” women like her to “choose” French papers over Algerian because to do otherwise would be to renounce her feminist commitments, to relinquish a womanhood not subordinated to men or to children as sister, mother, whore.¹³ To assert a viable identity, then, she must become the third term in the ratio of the “Nationalité : Immigré(e)”—that extra (*e*), set off in parentheses, which injects gender as the further force of exclusion from stable national identity, and from stable immigrant identity. Yet that definition is not especially satisfying: by becoming so universal a subject, she betrays the multiple yet *specific* axes that define her—points French, Algerian, working-class, Muslim, immigrant, female.¹⁴

Perhaps Sakinna’s abstraction is inevitable, given where she locates the ideal self and the ideal nation, reaching into the past beyond the past for a future beyond the future: In the quintessential move of impossible nostalgia, a move that does violence to temporality and reality, she writes: “Je cherche des vraies racines, pas celles que me proposent les Arabes. Ils veulent que je prouve mon arabité en me cloîtrant. Jamais. Je cherche la vraie culture arabe qu’eux-mêmes ne connaissent pas” (71). [I seek real roots, not those offered by the Arabs. They want me to prove my Arabness by cloistering me. Never. I seek the real Arab culture that even they do not know.] What, indeed, can it mean to search for a “true Arab culture” that Arabs themselves do not know, cannot recognize? In the end, Sakinna’s self-abstraction can only leave her on the utopic island of nowhere, on the island she dreams of constructing between Marseilles and Algiers to make peace with non-identity: “Je rêvais de construire une île entre Marseille et Alger,” she writes, “pour enfin qu’on ait, nous, les immigrés et immigrées, la paix. Je compris que nous n’étions ni Arabes ni Français, nous étions des «Nationalité : Immigré(e)»...” (103). [I dreamed of building an island between Marseilles and Algeria, so that we immigrant men and women could finally have peace. I understood that we were neither Arabs nor French, we were “Nationalité: Immigré(e)”...]]

Broken Couple(t)s, No Happy Returns

Like Sakinna Boukhedenna's *Journal: «Nationalité: Immigré(e)»*, Agha Shahid Ali's "A Butcher," published in his 1987 collection *The Half-Inch Himalayas*, evokes the impossible nostalgia of the immigrant for the once-and-future home and the "reversals of the sentence" required to sustain that elusive—because illusory—dwelling. Ali's émigré speaker, like Boukhedenna's Sakinna, is figuratively (perhaps even literally) "stateless." There is, after all, no independent Kashmir in which Ali or his poetic alter egos can dwell; Kashmir is, at present, what Ali would call in a later collection "the country without a post office," as much a geopolitical fantasy suspended between India and Pakistan as Sakinna's "island" between Marseilles and Algiers is a personal one, and the United States to which Ali and his speakers have emigrated is itself, in this context, an "island" of exile (perhaps refuge) from the web of recent colonial and postcolonial histories, British and South Asian, that determine the vexed borders of "home."

It is thus significant that when the émigré speaker of "A Butcher," if we read him as a stand-in for Ali, goes "home," he goes to Delhi—as if "home" itself, in Kashmir, has been short-circuited and can only be reached through India. (The poem appears in a sequence of poems that attempt returns to that city, suggesting Delhi as the setting, and the Urdu spoken suggests the need to use a South Asian Muslim lingua franca to communicate, rather than Kashmiri or any of a number of other languages "local" to Kashmir.) Given the unusual coincidence of Ali's biography with that of post-1947 Indian and Kashmiri history, such a dislocation of "home" at its very origin—not unlike the dislocation, by the historical fact of French colonization in Algeria, of any comfortable "home" in France for Boukhedenna/Sakinna—is not surprising. Since the repeated fissions of the Indian subcontinent over the centuries, including those of the post-1947 era, have engendered Kashmir, "India" is in a real sense its motherland—just as it is the motherland of Ali himself, the birthplace of Ali's body and, indeed, of Ali's own mother. But it also happens to be (with its older progeny, and enemy, Pakistan) co-colonizer of Kashmir: of the very birthplace of Ali's identity. He is the postcard with no destination, with no office in Kashmir to "process" him, variously double-stamped like Boukhedenna's Sakinna, perhaps even triply so: by the India of his birth and the Kashmir of his upbringing and the Kashmir-India-United States of his educations, by the ghostly play of a departed Britain (the ex-colonizer) in his old "homes" of India and Kashmir, and of those now almost-

ghostly origins in his new “home” of the United States (witness the final poems in his *Half-Inch Himalayas*).

Like Boukhedenna’s *Journal*, indeed, Ali’s “A Butcher” attempts to set up a ratio, a couplet, between those who return “home” and those who have probably never left. For a second, the ratio holds; the couplet is complete. But by poem’s end, its phrases snap “in mid-syllable,” and the couplet—the foundational unit of the Urdu *ghazal*, the form in which both Ali and his poetic alter ego, from their exiles in English, strain to speak—is left unpartnered and unrhymed. The resulting ratio is irrational; the exchange that would make past and future time and space substitutable and make the very notion of return realizable in the present fails, the consummation of nostalgia impossible: after wending its way through twelve obedient couplets, the poem ends with a lonely, solitary line, undiscipl(in)ed like Judas. The knives on knives of polished Urdu lines reverse the sentence of impossible nostalgia, liberate the *X* of *X-change* from the imprisoning illusion of the possibility of exchange: After traveling the *X* of inter-diction and interdiction so many times, attempting to return, in an unforeseeable future, to a home decentered at its very origin—to reproduce Kashmir out of the space of Delhi—Ali’s speaker finds that he can only reverse the syntax of history so far; he must, in the final line, reverse the sentence of the very attempt to belong itself and set it free, allow it to *be longing*, just as Boukhedenna’s Sakinna—after herself traversing the cross that Algeria puts on her baggage and that she, in turn, puts on Algeria as any sort of potential “home”—decides to *be exile*.

On a semantic level, then, Ali’s poem divides into two unequal parts: the first (lines 1–20), the scene of connection (not, however, unproblematic); the second (lines 21–25), the scene of disintegration. The exchange of meat, money, and words between butcher and speaker transpires in a minority space within New Delhi—a Muslim space, like Kashmir, within majority-Hindu India, marked as Muslim by its location near Jama Masjid (sounding an echo of another Jama Masjid, this one in the Kashmiri city of Srinagar) and by the use of Urdu, a minority language, the Arabo-Persian-scripted “stepchild” to its Devanagari-scripted sister-tongue, Hindi.

From the outset, Ali forges intimate links between bodies and writing: the poem begins, “In this lane / near Jama Masjid, / where he wraps kilos of meat / in sheets of paper . . .” (1–4).¹⁵ The butcher of the poem’s title literally folds flesh into paper; the gesture establishes an immediate equivalence between the body and the page. But the lines take the analogy of body and writing to a deeper stratum, for the “kilos of meat” the butcher wraps are,

significantly, *measures* of flesh—wrapped, I might add, in measures of paper, in sheets. Here the metrics of the body and the metrics of poetry converge. For this double measure of flesh is, indeed, a poetic measure: it is the embodied equivalent of the couplet, the very form on which the Urdu *ghazal*—so important to Ali’s poetics—depends. That couplet is crucial, both on the level of form and on the level of signification, to the figure this poem makes: as we have already noted and shall shortly see in greater detail, Ali’s “A Butcher” explicitly constitutes the broken coupling of the migrant and the never-left as a broken couplet—a default on a contract of shared cultural memory that transpires, briefly, between the returned émigré and the rooted native.

In fact—at the risk of stretching Ali’s metaphor—I am tempted to read each kilo as an (approximate) doubling of the “pound of flesh” that Shakespeare’s Shylock, in *The Merchant of Venice*, exacts from Antonio should the latter default on the loan he has taken out. Indeed, to imagine such an allusion is perhaps not to stretch too far, for Ali’s poem, taken as a whole, *does* turn on a reverse-Shylockian moment: on the rupture of fulfilled exchange, wherein it is the creditor (the butcher) who hands out the two-plus-pound of flesh and the debtor (the migrant) who silently screams to the “home” he wishes to reclaim, “I will have my bond!” (I should add here that my assumption that the customer-debtor of this poem is a stand-in for the émigré rests on the position of the speaking “I” in other poems in Ali’s *Half-Inch Himalayas*. From the very first poem in that collection, “A Lost Memory of Delhi,” the “I” is a customer claiming a purchase on the homeland; he is the native son who emigrates and returns to a past before his past—the night of his conception—as a ghostly presence, asking his parents to let him in, knocking but not heard. The store is closed to him, or its door, at least, is stubborn.¹⁶ The migrant-client connection is perhaps even more explicit in “I Dream It Is Afternoon When I Return to Delhi,” where the returned emigrant “I” travels the city of ten years before with expired bus tickets, theater tickets, and friendships—and can depend only on beggars, outcasts of the nation, for love and money.)

Taking an aerial view of “A Butcher,” then, we could read the full text as a meta-couplet that attempts to exchange the poet’s writing (which we might well imagine as a wrapping of a kilo of ribs—the ribs of two people conversing, his émigré alter ego and the butcher back “home”—within “sheets of paper”) for the wrapping that the butcher performs of the poet’s alter ego within the skin of the poem itself. Like Boukhedenna’s *Journal*, Ali’s poem begins as a return of the postcolonial exile but fails to transact the

exchanges of time and space necessary to accomplish that return; instead, it ends as a retort to both nation and naturalization, to any possibility of going “home.”

Notice how Ali unfolds the butcher’s wrapping to more fully develop the page-body connection in the three couplets that follow, where

the ink of the news
stains his [the butcher’s] knuckles,

the script is wet
in his palms: Urdu,

bloody at his fingertips,
is still fine on his lips[. . .] (5–10)

As the “sheets of paper” of line 4 come into sharper focus here, they also undergo a series of translations, or exchanges. Belatedly we see that these are sheets of *newspaper*—that most quotidian of literary genres—translated into sheets of *newsprint*, an equally quotidian object of “pure” use. Across the span of a few lines, Ali has transmuted the meaning-value of the newspaper into use-value, stripped “news” of whatever newness it contains and reduced it to the ordinary. He has demystified the “news,” reversed the sentence. Yet the very transformation of writing from vehicle for meaning to object for use also suggests, paradoxically, that the extraordinary does, in fact, dwell *in* the ordinary—that an element of the *unheimlich*, the uncanny un-homelike, in fact resides in the concept of “home.” (After all, the daily newspaper—if we accept the argument of Benedict Anderson—also happens to be “author” of the imagined community of the nation, and as such is the home of “home.”) For news, though it might be published daily, rarely reflects the dailiness of living; its very designation *as* “news” suggests that its province is not dailiness—not the mundane—but currency, timeliness. And at the heart of newsworthiness beats the pulse of novelty: the very sorts of shocking events that make the average newspaper, across the globe and certainly in a contemporary India and Kashmir continually racked by communal and territorial strife, *truly* butcher paper (witness, especially, the poems “I Dream It Is Afternoon When I Return to Delhi” and “Houses”).

Yet just as Ali appears to have steadied the vertigo of his lines, the sentence reverses yet again; now it is the specter of the ordinary—the “butcher paper” in which meat gets wrapped—that inheres in the extraor-

dinary, the startling “news” of torture and death. Thus the newspaper’s meaning is its use; its use, its meaning. By embedding the ordinary in the extraordinary and the extraordinary in the ordinary, Ali denaturalizes “home”: the lens of the immigrant poet reveals the delusion inherent in any coupling of “nature” and “nation”—the very coupling implied in the term “homeland”—and thus the delusions that underpin both the conviction that the stay-at-home subject is “naturally” at home and the corollary assumption that the immigrant can be converted into a “naturalized citizen” of his or her new “home.” Like Boukhedenna in her *Journal*, her diary/newspaper of the anti-nation, Ali in this poem repeatedly turns and upturns, chiasmically, the meaning of the newspaper and the ideas of “home” and nation it is taken to represent. His newspaper calls to mind the *double tampon* that does not quite stop the hemorrhage of Boukhedenna/Sakinna’s identity: It stanches blood, healing the breach of the migrant with home, but it also bleeds; like the meat it wraps, it is hacked to pieces, as are the notions of “home” and “return.” Here the “meanwhile” of Anderson’s newspaper of the nation suffers a mortal wound: the superimposition of presents implied in the “meanwhile” cannot cure the impossible nostalgia of Ali’s migrant, who desires a return to a pre-colonial past in a postcolonial future.

But the butcher is not simply touched by the violence of the nation, stained by the blood of ink; he is also the bloodletter, the author who *writes* the nation’s news in blood, who butchers “home” and language as he writes them, or perhaps must butcher them in order *to* write them: “Urdu, / [is] bloody at his fingertips.” Indeed, in the non-linear movement of lines 5–9—which trace the zigzagging seepage of fluids from the butcher’s knuckles to his palms and back again to his fingertips, from one face of the hand (the knuckles, articulations on the back of the hand) to another (the unarticulated, inarticulate palm), and finally to the very points of articulation between the two faces of the hand, the fingertips—we find a *linear* evolution of writing from stain (articulated sign) to wet script (writing that is more developed, but still out-of-focus) to Urdu, a language finally given its proper name and thus fully articulated. The butcher decides the script, which is, after all, quite literally in his hands: “wet / in his palms.” As native, he decides how much “home” the émigré will get; he metes out portions of flesh and matches these to scraps of news, much as the letter-writing relative back home metes out select fragments of home to his or her migrant correspondent (as in the prefatory poem in this collection, “Postcard from Kashmir”).

Indeed, no term in these opening lines can maintain discrete borders for long. All is in flux. If the spaces of body and text—figured as kilos of

meat and sheets of paper—interpenetrate one another on both the metatextual and intratextual levels of the poem, so too do ink and blood, the fluids of writing and being, or writing and death: blood, dripping from the kilos of meat, soaks through newsprint and thereby unleashes ink (and thus national “news” of bloodshed) from the newspaper’s pages; ink, in turn, commingles with and undergoes a radical metamorphosis *into* blood as it migrates across the butcher’s hand. On at once the most literal and the most figurative levels, then, blood writes (rewrites?) blood: the butcher must marshal the violence of constructing the nation as “home” itself—that initial rupture of India that birthed nationality from coloniality, and, for Kashmir, coloniality from nationality—to write himself into the bloodline of “nativity” and determine the migrant’s kinship to him. The skins of person and nation, and of émigré and non-migrant, permeate one another, for—as “ink...stains [the butcher’s] knuckles”—news of the nation imprints the hands of the butcher himself, and by extension must imprint the measures of flesh the butcher is preparing for his émigré customer.

And yet, if the butcher invents Urdu at the tips of his bloody fingers, if he defines “home,” the fact remains that the blood with which “home” is written is the émigré’s. It is the émigré’s exclusion—or at the very least, his tenuous presence, his presence-in-death—that defines the native’s belonging: the émigré’s measure of flesh bears the news of the nation, declares its borders by leaving its borders. Indeed, the smooth continuity that “home” might represent to the native is *coterminous* with the violent rupture “home” might represent for the émigré, as we see in the leap from the blood of the written word to the delicacy of the spoken in lines 8–13:

[...]Urdu,

bloody at his fingertips,
is still fine on his lips,

the language polished smooth
by knives

on knives.[. . .]

For the butcher to hone the language of “home” so that it lingers “fine on his lips”—for the butcher to define the very contours of Urdu, both as a proper name marking a “home” in language and as a language itself—he

must polish it smooth “by knives / on knives.” Thus the beauty of “home,” whether that imagined by the non-migrant postcolonial subject whose ease “at home” depends on a forgetting of the bloodshed of the once-and-still-colonial nation or that imagined by the nostalgic immigrant who forecasts a once-and-future “home” unscarred by history, is born in violence: on the fine edge, as it were, between a couplet of knives. Or, perhaps, between violences: for, significantly, the knives of Self *by* which the butcher sharpens Urdu require the knives of the Other—the émigré?—*on* which to do their sharpening. “Home,” whether for the native or for the émigré, can only issue from the chink between the twin lines of a couplet, between the violence of living within the postcolonial nation and the violence of exile from that nation, somewhere within the kilo of meat, or kilo of ribs—in the *X* of inter-diction and interdiction.

That is why the subaltern of the national “home,” the returned émigré, suddenly speaks, answering the measure of meat meted out by the butcher’s knife with a measure of verse meted out by his tongue, compelling the butcher to recognize the fundamental reciprocity of their relation:

I smile and quote

a Ghalib line; he completes
the couplet, smiles,

quotes a Mir line. I complete
the couplet. (16–20)

Here the émigré’s countering knife-thrust is subtle yet undeniable: I cannot help but detect an ingenious translingual pun in the émigré’s “Ghalib line” and the butcher’s “Mir line”—the name Ghalib, after all, hails from the Arabic *ghalib*, which means “conqueror” or “victor”; the name Mir is a homonym of the English *mere*, suggesting, certainly, the non-migrant’s simple self-sufficiency but equally (against so mighty a foe as *ghalib*) his inadequacy or defeat at the hands of the émigré. In the wake of this vindication of the émigré’s claim to “home,” lines 16–20 appear so perfectly balanced: two persons, two smiles, two quotations, two lines, two completions, two couplets. They trace a full circle, proceeding from the émigré’s smile and quotation of one-half of a couplet to the butcher’s supply of the missing half, then picking up the arc where it leaves off and proceeding from the butcher’s smile and quotation of one-half of a second couplet to the

émigré's supply of that couplet's missing half. Out of the two, one; out of dichotomy, reciprocity.

Yet things fall apart; the center cannot hold. Indeed, as his wry play on the resonances of Ghalib and Mir in the mind's ear already suggests, Ali plants the seeds of disintegration *within* the scene of potential reciprocity: the émigré quotes Ghalib, the Urdu poet who wrote his *ghazals* in a highly Persianized vocabulary and a questioning, philosophical mode; the butcher quotes Mir, the Urdu poet who wrote his *ghazals* in a simple, non-Persianized language and focused on matters of the heart. True, each voice completes the other; however, the two voices do not speak the same "mother tongue." The returned émigré speaks the language of loss and skepticism, a language laced with foreign loan-words and the fragrance of alienation, the language of a poet who witnessed the brutal British hangings of tens of thousands at Delhi in the wake of the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion; the rooted native, on the other hand, speaks the language of immediacy and feeling, the language of a plainspoken poet who wrote of matters of the heart in a less "colonial" eighteenth-century India, a language that evokes the plenitude of "home." Although the two speakers are "at home" in Urdu and on the Indian subcontinent, using the same language and living in the same nation, they are not at home in the same ways—they dwell so differently there, at varying points of origin and departure, and thus essentially in different—although closely related—"homes." If the Ghalib line that the customer ventures and the Mir line that the butcher initiates add up to a larger arch-couplet, it is—like the irrational ratios of space, time, and identity in Sakinna's *journaux*—an odd couple(t) indeed. Thus the *ghazals* the butcher and the émigré sing to each other represent a failed attempt to reconcile incompatible longings.

On a formal level, in fact, the exchange of lines that transpires between the butcher and the customer adds up to inequality, just as Ali's poem as a whole fails to break into equal halves. The exchange takes place not within two couplets, but *in excess of* two couplets. First, the customer's very first line in the poem, "I smile and quote," which initiates the exchange between the two parties, stands alone as the second line of the eighth couplet, outside the ninth and tenth couplets in which the dialogue of customer and butcher unfolds and concludes. Second, like the flow of ink/blood that zigzags from the butcher's knuckles to his palms and back again to his fingertips, the exchange here adds up to a threesome, not a twosome—it begins with the émigré customer, moves to the butcher, and zigzags back to the émigré. An end-stop after "a Mir line" separates the customer's final comple-

tion of the exchange from the rest of the dialogue, which is enjambed. The end-stop after “couplet”—no smile, mind you—situates the customer’s completion of the butcher’s Mir couplet as essentially a third term in the exchange. And this third term, like the (*e*) of Boukhedenna’s “immigré(e),” makes the illusion of reciprocity come undone.

But if a trace of reciprocity still lingers in this unequal exchange, it is completely effaced by the last five lines of “A Butcher,” the poem’s second unequal “half”:

He wraps my kilo of ribs.
I give him the money. The change

clutters our moment of courtesy,
our phrases snapping in mid-syllable,

Ghalib’s ghazals left unrhymed. (21–25)

Two end-stopped lines continue the rhythm of separation: “He wraps my kilo of ribs. / I give him the money.” From one scene of exchange, we proceed to another, somehow even less satisfying because even less reciprocal. On the surface, the action seems to proceed in a one-to-one ratio; however, the terms of exchange are unequal—here the conversion of commodity into currency is mystified, and instead of exchanging one couplet for another (however *opposite* those couplets might be), the parties exchange the measure of body and poetry for the metrics of money.¹⁷ Change transfigures the relation between the native and the émigré: in Ali’s playful terms, the clatter of “change,” the actual money handed back, “clutters” the relation, but so too does the reduction of what has thus far been a highly intricate exchange of words, blood, and flesh for cold cash transform the relationship between the two individuals, and—indeed—possibly between the returned émigré and “home.” Indeed, when Ali’s speaker says, in line 21, “He wraps my kilo of ribs,” his words carry more than a hint of irony. The ambiguity hinges on the possessive pronoun *my*: certainly the phrase “my kilo of ribs” can refer to the customer’s purchase; however, it can also refer to the customer’s body—*his* kilo of ribs, a piece of his person. The words associate the émigré customer with the “festival goats” the butcher “hacks” into pieces (13–15), for not only does he (like the festival goat) show up in Delhi mainly on holidays, thus earning the status of a festive part of the national body rather than the everyday voter in Ernest Renan’s “daily plebiscite,” but also,

like the ram slaughtered to confirm the believer's submission to God during the Islamic Feast of the Sacrifice, *Id al-Adha*, the émigré is sacrificed to confirm the native's pact with country.

Yet in fact the butcher of "A Butcher," to return to the notion that the entire poem might be read as a meta-couplet of failed exchange between the poet and the butcher within the poem, is not just the eponymous butcher selling meat in the shadow of Delhi's Jama Masjid, but the returned émigré too, the poet's alter ego: the customer whose money, as much as the butcher's knife meting out "his" kilo of ribs, cleaves phrases and severs the exchange of lines. Here the émigré is both, to echo Charles Beaudelaire's "L'Héautontimorouménos," *bourreau* and *victime*, as much executioner as he is executed beast. It is the returned native who reverses one sentence—that of postcolonial migration—only to reverse another sentence—that of the prison of impossible nostalgia itself. He initiates the circle of couplets and completes them, thereby healing his originary breach with "home," only to leave Ghalib's *ghazals* "unrhymed": only to conquer (as *ghalib*), to have the last word, to declare that he does not *belong*, but that he will *be longing*. In other words, he comes "home" only to set himself free of the prison of impossible nostalgia, the sentence that condemns him in perpetuity to seek the irretrievable Before and the unattainable After of the chronotope, or time-space, of "home."

In the end, this poem is formally a violation of the couplet structure of the *ghazal*, which calls for a very precise scheme of internal rhymes and absolutely no enjambments between couplets.¹⁸ Perhaps the breakdown, from the outset, of the *ghazal's* poetic form presages the breakdown, in the last five lines of "A Butcher," of the social relations Ali's customer associates with "home," the ultimate rupture of an exchange so nearly fulfilled, the dissolution of the possibility of return. So thoroughly is the prospect of communication demolished that the poetry of butcher and customer, the metrics of their words and bodies, snap not on the level of the line or the word, but on the level of the smallest possible unit of language: the syllable. And even the syllable cannot remain intact; it too must snap, brittlely, into halves. Ali's "A Butcher" ends on a somber note not unlike the half-rhyme of Boukhedenna's "Amour amer": on the timbre of loneliness—the migrant's loneliness—we hear in the final line, "Ghalib's *ghazals* left unrhymed." The exile's tentative effort to go home in language, to communicate his experience of loss and return through the invocation of Ghalib, the poet *of* loss and return—as a youth, Ghalib wrote in Urdu; he then abandoned Urdu for some thirty years, writing in Persian instead, before returning later in life to Urdu—goes unanswered.

The Migrant Nation as Metonym: Sentencing the Self to Be Longing

“Nostalgia,” Svetlana Boym writes, “charts space on time and time on space...it is Janus-faced, like a double-edged sword” (xviii). In this essay, I have been interested in the wound that that sword leaves in those who experience out-migration from the postcolony and attempt to go “home”: a wound that, I would argue, takes the form of *X*, the *X* of incommensurate *X-change* between histories, geographies, and identities that trumps any promise of their commensurate exchange. After all, although the sword of nostalgia cuts two ways, as Boym suggests, its cuts are not neatly parallel; the wounds it leaves are not only “retrospective and prospective,” to quote her incisive formulation, but both—achingly intersectional. Flirting with an impossible nostalgia for a once and future home, both Boukhedenna’s *Journal* and Ali’s “A Butcher” attempt to transact exchanges—reversals of the sentence—between the times and spaces that claim them and that they wish to claim as their “own.” When these exchanges fail, each text reverses the sentence of nostalgia’s dual temporality and geography altogether by escaping to a halfway house (Sakinna’s island) or half-rhyme (Sakinna’s “amour amer,” or Ali’s unrhymed line from Ghalib) of incommensurability: to the *X*-shaped wound that *X-change* slashes open.

And so Salman Rushdie’s sanguine conviction that something might also be gained in translation, and not simply lost—while in many ways true—seems to tell only a half-story of the metaphors of migrant translation.¹⁹ For translation or exchange in the literature of postcolonial migration often does not simply “bear across” or transport meaning from one register to another, as the Greek origin of the term *metaphor* (*metaphorein*) would suggest; more frequently, it must prise meaning loose from one context and rivet it to another, only to watch the logics that bind the old to the new come undone. The classical Arabic notion of metaphor, or *isti’ara* (“borrowing”), might come closer to describing translation in the literature of postcolonial migration, for it implies the borrowing of a term from a context with which it is normally associated and the loan of that term to a context with which it is not normally associated. Such an understanding of the temporality and spatiality of metaphor seems more provisional and temporary, more capable of holding in tension the possibility of incommensurability in an act of ostensibly “mutual” or “reciprocal” meaning-making—the possibility that the relationship between two terms in metaphorical translation is not that of equals, but that of “creditor” and “debtor.”²⁰

Ali himself suggests as much in his theory of the migrant's relationship to more than one land and to more than one culture, which he enunciates most eloquently in his introduction to *A Rebel's Silhouette*: "Someone of two nearly equal loyalties must lend them, almost give them—a gift—to each other," he writes, "and hope that sooner or later the loan will be forgiven and they will become each other's" (xi). Interestingly, in fact, both his "A Butcher" and Sakinna Boukhedenna's *Journal: «Nationalité: Immigré(e)»* attempt to lend conflicting allegiances of "home" and "elsewhere" to one another. But that loan is hardly interest-free. The violence required to execute it—the fact that it entails, rather than *metaphorein's* innocent (though tyrannically irreversible) "bearing across" of meaning, *ist'ara's* wrenching (though potentially reversible and thus potentially libratory) abduction of meaning from one context and bondage to another, a perpetual reversal of sentences—keeps the forgiveness Ali longs for at bay, pitching the reconciliation of the migrant's divided subjectivity, and the resolution of his or her impossible nostalgia, into the time and space of E.M. Forster's "not yet, not yet" and "not here, not here."

The classical Arabic understanding of metaphor, then, sees metaphor as more association than substitution, moving the term closer to metonymy. In this it echoes Homi Bhabha's subtle shift in "DissemiNation" from describing the migrant nation as metaphor to describing it as metonym.²¹ For the postcolonial migrant, for Ali's Kashmiri-American émigré-customer or for Boukhedenna's dual-generation *Beurette*, the longed-for "home" may be substitutable neither with the old "home" nor the new. Unable to find a way "home," the immigrant may long for a "home" only contiguously related to the origin, a term close to the origin's skin but not equivalent to it, a "home" that belongs to a long irretrievable Before or an unrealizable After, an origin that recedes in a series of infinite regressions or is catapulted into a series of equally infinite progressions. This longing for the unattainable "home" is the condition of migrant nostalgia, and this condition of nostalgia the impetus for violent attempts to reverse the sentence of unrequited longing—violent because struggling to turn contiguities into substitutions, national metonyms into national metaphors. Twice convicted by colonization and displacement, the postcolonial migrant finds in being longing, rather than in belonging, her or his only reprieve. And that reprieve, Boukhedenna and Ali suggest, is more parole than freedom.

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Notes

I wish to thank the anonymous peer reviewers of *Comparative Literature Studies* for their rigorous readings of my essay and most valuable suggestions for revision. I am equally grateful to Karl Britto for his response to various drafts of this essay, which owes its genesis to his fall 2000 graduate seminar on immigration and identity in contemporary literature at the University of California, Berkeley. An earlier version of the essay was presented on 5 April 2002 at "Diaspora, Descent, Dissent," the first graduate conference of the University of California Multicampus Research Group on Transnationalisms and Transcolonialisms, at the University of California, Los Angeles. Any errors that remain are, of course, my own.

1. Tahar Ben Jelloun, *La Réclusion solitaire* (Paris: Denoël, 1976) 93–94.
2. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001) xvi.
3. I should point out that Ali's mother, although she would be buried in the Kashmiri city of Srinagar, was born in Lucknow, capital of the Indian province of Uttar Pradesh. Such a genealogy makes him on one level "Indian": not just by birth, but also by "descent." Yet the history of Lucknow itself speaks a tongue as forked as Ali's own: site of a major siege of the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion against British colonial rule in India, the city was also—ironically—the hotbed of movements to partition India and create the state of Pakistan between 1942 and 1947.
4. Susan Ireland, "Writing at the Crossroads: Cultural Conflict in the Work of Beur Women Writers," *The French Review* 68.6 (May 1995): 1022–34.
5. Mireille Rosello, "The 'Beur Nation': Toward a Theory of 'Departenance,'" *Research in African Literatures* 24.3 (Fall 1993): 13–24. I am grateful to Karine Rabain for this reference.
6. For another approach, see Alec G. Hargreaves, *Immigration and Identity in Beur Fiction: Voices from the North African Immigrant Community in France*, updated ed. (New York: Berg, 1997) 90–94. Hargreaves examines Sakinna's ever-shifting use of personal pronouns, especially the personal pronoun *nous*, as an indication of her unstable affective ties and ultimately unstable identity. See also Michel Laronde, *Autour du roman beur: immigration et identité* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993); Laronde makes the crucial point that *Beur* identity does not rest on a simple binary opposition between two terms, but is, rather, seized in the passage from opposition of two terms through negation of both to their "double inclusion" (44). Boukhedenna's *Journal*, which he treats elsewhere (82–85, 147–49), clearly informs his very theorization of *Beur* subjectivity.
7. "Ratio," *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed.
8. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1991). Note that the left-wing French newspaper *Libération* betrays Sakinna's struggle for liberation, failing to publish her; Algeria's *L'Actualité* fails to report her *actualité*, her reality. No newspaper can admit her; she must publish her own.
9. Sakinna Boukhedenna, *Journal: «Nationalité: Immigré(e)»* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987) 5.
10. For the foundation of my analysis, I am indebted to Michel Laronde's argument that the relationship between Boukhedenna's "immigrée" of the first generation and her more figurative counterpart in the second is tautological (83).
11. For a full account of the nationality laws affecting Algerian immigrants and their children, see Alain Gillette and Abdelmalek Sayad, *L'Immigration algérienne en France*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Editions Entente, 1984) 108–112. Alec Hargreaves offers another account (23–24).
12. Jacqueline Costa-Lascoux, "La Nationalité des enfants d'Algériens en France: identité et appartenance," *Les Algériens en France: genèse et devenir d'une migration*, ed. Jacqueline Costa-Lascoux and Emile Temime (Paris: Publisud, 1983) 361.
13. In glossing the logic of Sakinna's association of women's rights with France and the denial of recognition to women with Algeria, I in no way wish to suggest that her estimation of the status of women in Algeria versus that of women in France is "accurate." Clearly she

fails to discern and analyze the ways in which patriarchy continues to subjugate women in France, under guises perhaps different from those in Algeria.

14. Sakinna's earlier self-definition, her brilliant reworking of the Cartesian *cogito*, is much richer: "Moi qui étais musulmane con et vaincue, donc convaincue" (Boukhedenna 89). She is a *con*—an "idiot" and a "cunt"—defeated by France as an Algerian colonial subject (*vaincue*), convicted by French society as an Algerian immigrant "criminal" (*convaincue*), and convicted by Algeria as a "wayward" Arab woman (for her *con*, cunt). But she is also formed, given identity, by all of these exclusions: she is persuaded; she has conviction; she is, in a word, *convaincue*.

15. Agha Shahid Ali, "A Butcher," *The Half-Inch Himalayas* (Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1987) 22–23.

16. Ali attributes the genesis of another poem in *The Half-Inch Himalayas*, "Snowmen," to a compelling scene in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* in which the ghost of Catherine knocks on Heathcliff's window and begs, "Let me in." The hunger to be "let in" to a home left behind—which requires access to a past before one's past—distinguishes Ali's poetics of postcolonial migrancy. See Agha Shahid Ali, "Calligraphy of Coils," interview with Rehan Ansari and Rajinderpal S. Pal, *Himal* (Mar. 1998) <<http://www.himalmag.com/march98/encounter.htm>>. On Ali's life and work, see Lawrence Needham, "Agha Shahid Ali (1949–)," *Writers of the Indian Diaspora: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson (Westport: Greenwood P, 1993) 9–14; see also Lawrence Needham, "The Sorrows of a Broken Time": Agha Shahid Ali and the Poetry of Loss and Recovery," *Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson (New York: Greenwood P, 1992) 63–76.

17. Or perhaps some form of reciprocity is retained, since one kind of "currency" (the "news" imprinted on the wrapped meat) is exchanged for another ("currency" as money)?

18. On the rhyme scheme of the *ghazal* and the effect it creates, see Agha Shahid Ali, introduction, *The Rebel's Silhouette: Selected Poems*, by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, trans. Agha Shahid Ali, rev. ed. (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1995) x. The *ghazal* stitches an umbilical cord between the two halves of the originary couplet by repeating the very same rhyming word or phrase at the end of each, then generates a longing for "home" by making each subsequent couplet, removed from the origin, only "half-rhyme"—only repeat the initial rhyme in the second line of the couplet, not in the first. Thus every couplet displaced from the origin only approximates return; its relation to "home" is metonymic. Moreover, the two halves of each such "latter-day" couplet are incommensurable; they come close to coupling, but divorce after only the faintest trace of a kiss!

19. See Salman Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands," *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991* (New York: Penguin, 1992).

20. On classical Arabic metaphor, see Wolfhart Heinrichs, "Ist'arab and Bad'i' and Their Terminological Relationship in Early Arabic Literary Criticism," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften*, vol. 1, ed. Fuat Sezgin (Frankfurt: Institut für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften an der Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, 1984) 180–211.

21. See Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990).