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ALGERIAN ROUTES

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At the present time, over a hundred Algerians are installed in shops in Lalelli, one of the business areas of Istanbul, in association with Arab-speaking Moslem Mardinli - Kurds from the Turkish-Syrian border region, in particular the town of Mardin². They receive thousands of tourists, "suitcase tourists", from Algeria and Tunisia who come to shop every month in Istanbul (M. Peraldi, 2001). In Dubaï there is a resident and transient Algerian population (R. Marchal, 2001). From individuals in Istanbul we heard about earlier stays in Aleppo and Damascus in particular. Algerians go there to shop and, recently, to work in workrooms and shops in the Bazaar. Alicante has become a major port for European trade with Algeria and a commercial complex comparable to the "comptoir marseillais" (A. Tarrius, 1995) has grown up there as a result of initiatives on the part of Algerian and Marseillan entrepreneurs (A. Tarrius, 2002; J. Sempere, 2000). Numerous young Algerians are involved in the street economy in Milan (A. Colombo, 1998). They have been in Genoa since the 80s and, in Naples, Algerians take a considerable part in the development of small shops and street trade (C. Schmoll, 2000). According to a recent study there are 32 Algerians in Gorizia, a small town on the Italo-Slovenian border (L. Leonidou, 2001).

From the 70s onward, large numbers of Algerian students abandoned the traditional destinations of their elders - French universities - and chose to complete their studies in English or American universities. Young Algerians or Franco-Algerians, children of migrants settled in France, chose to emigrate to Québec (M. Hachimi-Alaoui, 1997). Algerians implanted in Morocco, in particular in the Rif area and in northern ports, Nador and Oujda, and those who trade regularly and intensively with Tunisia are not exactly migrants. They have been around for some time but their numbers have increased considerably over the last two decades. There are well-established and well-known trade routes from the Algerian South via Niger, Tchad and Mali to the whole of French-speaking Africa (E. Grégoire, 1998). When I was in Istanbul, the little group of expatriate Algerians there often talked about an inhabitant of Oran who, after spending some time in Istanbul, settled in Bulgaria where he married the daughter of a former minister of the last communist government and then became a major importer of second-hand cars and spare parts. Algerians often turn up in the second-hand car markets in Belgium and Germany. Finally, during a journey to Qatar, G. Kepel recognised young Algerians shopping in one of the large commercial centres by their use of "verlan", the slang typical of city outskirts in France (Le Monde, 31-01-02).

From "diapositives" (C. Geertz, 1986) of this sort it can be seen that over the last ten years Algerian migratory routes have undergone radical change. Up to the 70s these routes fitted into the territorial, politico-economic and social frames of neo-colonial Franco-Algerian space-time. They have now broken away, destinations are different as are the modes of circulation and the activities and status of the "new migrants" in host societies. The migrant worker has been replaced by the hawker, the commercial traveller, the smuggler or the long-distance trader. These are the images now projected by the Algerian on the move. The term "migration" no longer applies to what are often back and forth or circular movements, exploration of new worlds or caravan treks between older migrant settlements

¹ And Patricia Fogerty for the translation.

² Moslem Arab-speaking Kurds from the Syrian-Turkish border region, in particular from the town of Mardin.

with occasional returns “home”. Many of the travellers involved, however, are still “mental” migrants because they have distanced themselves from Algerian society and are culturally uprooted they have undergone. Those who travel regularly between Istanbul and Algiers for commercial reasons say they very soon feel foreign both “here” and “back there”. They have the mark of the “double absence” which, for Sayad, is a basic trait of the migrant mentality (A. Sayad, 1999). The persistence of this sort of anachronistic self-representation presents a puzzle and one it is very difficult to characterise correctly with any of the words at our disposal, even those of our scientific vocabulary.

Our problem is therefore how to identify social forms and relational worlds that, although detached or liberated from the original territorial grounding, have no really firm ties to the host countries in which these travellers move, live and do business. Or, in other words, these new forms of mobility confront us with individuals who make up ephemeral gatherings, groupings, gangs, linked by circumstantial solidarity but not necessarily social group. They are relatively delocalised with respect to the social and cultural world they come from, at least to the extent that they no longer share in all its values or can content themselves with their supposed place in it. Nor are they prepared to fit into any other world or take any larger part in its codes and values. They are “free agents” and a sort of humanity on the move; metaphorically they are in a state of social weightlessness, since they no longer seem to belong to anything more than the sort of “emotional communities” mentioned by A.Appadurai (1996), to whom, by the way, this analysis owes a great deal : groups of individuals who share dreams and feelings rather than values and norms.

1- Routes are not roots

Though it might seem straining the classical anthropological conception of territory we need, if we want to arrive at a useful analysis of mobility, to consider that “routes are not just concrete travel itineraries but, more basically, cultural artefacts (J.Clifford, 1997). These routes are imprinted in collective memory and re-emerge whenever something occurs to revivify them and a new use is found for them. Moreover information about them comes from the same sources as the collective memory. Here, however, collective memory serves to disperse rather than to gather together and, in this, it differs from territorial memory.

It is in this sense, then, that today’s routes are mainly those of the expansion of Islam. They include, of course, pilgrimage routes to holy places, of which Istanbul is one. Doubtless the customary experience of the pilgrimage to Mecca opens up other routes and horizons. There are also those other places where the presence of even a modest number of fellow believers means it is possible to observe religious rights and find business associates in whom one can have the necessary minimum of confidence . Paradoxically, the construction of the European Community has opened up new routes for Algerians; implantation in France and the integration of the French entity in the European makes it possible to move into European territory as a whole: towards Belgian and German second-hand car markets. In these places one encounters more and more young people from the Paris outer city areas, from Alsace, or, for North Belgium, from the Pas de Calais and also Marseilles. They buy for themselves and for their friends and sometimes, if they are really organised, for shipping to the Maghreb. There are also European drug routes, from tolerant Amsterdam to Paris, Lille (D.Duprez, M.Kokoreff, 2000) though the drugs may have been produced in South America, Morocco or Lebanon. There are the Francophone Algerian routes towards Québec in particular (African routes are both Moslem and Francophone). There are also those opened up by the International of « brother countries » of the former socialist empire. The Syrian route, for instance, is a combination of the socialist and the Moslem routes, and Russian trade routes meet the Algerian in Istanbul. Finally there are the routes of the Bazaars which, like the caravan routes of old, link together market-places whose reputations are built up by word of mouth in Mosques and cafés, on boats or in buses: Marseilles, Alicante, Naples, Istanbul, Dubai. These market-places are moreover centrepieces where various routes and different sorts of traveller come into contact: in Istanbul, merchants meet pilgrims, novice

“trabendistes”³ and old-timers who have moved up into the container trade under the protection of apparatchiks of the régime, customs officers’ wives and adventuresses from bars and dives in Paris and Marseilles.

The new routes followed by the “ants” of today’s suitcase commerce, hopeful migrants or anyone trying to escape from a fate he feels to be humiliating, were opened up by sailors, students, pilgrims and, for Europe, by cross-border migration.

The pioneers of the Istanbul route were young Algerians, Tunisians or Moroccans hired by Armenian shopkeepers in the Egyptian Bazaar to serve the occidental tourist clientele. They all had university backgrounds, were perfectly fluent in French and often spoke English. They arrived in the wake of cohorts of European tourists heading for Sancta Sophia. But there were also other routes leading to Istanbul. Ali, one of the oldest in the commercial sector, since he arrived in the early 90s, is now a partner with a Turk in a clothing business that is an obligatory port-of-call for Algerians in Istanbul. Originally from Algiers, he owes his position in the business world to his perfect command of Russian, Polish and Romanian, gained during university studies in Moscow at a time when socialist Algeria sent some of its élite to be trained in brother countries and also from crews on the ships he worked on. Among the pioneers there were also seamen working on oil and gas tankers from Algeria that regularly supply the industrial terminals in Izmit. Nacer, seaman on an Algerian LPG tanker since the 80s, always did his shopping in Beyazit (Istanbul) whenever his ship called in, even before there were Algerians in the shops, when the whole area was given over to trade with the Russians.

New destinations like these would seem to be the result of the internationalisation or even globalisation of Algerian societies: that of Algeria after independence, that of the migrant “diaspora” implanted in France. But what we have here is a sort of globalisation by the bottom (A.Portes,1999). neither intended nor welcomed by institutions or Nation States. These movements are always the consequence of suffering people have are no longer willing to put up with and, because of this and of the conditions in which they take place, we cannot perceive here anything that might be taken to be rational career choices. The new Algerian mobility is primarily the result of political and social chaos prevailing in Algeria as a result of the “state of war”(A.Moussaoui, 2000) which the groups in power doggedly continue to fuel. But their destinations are determined also by the double closure of the Schengen space: political closure because former migratory flows are now cut off at the borders, economic closure of the Fordist labour market where Algerians had found a place. European borders have been closed in both directions and the States concerned have furthermore undertaken to abolish or attempt to abolish the cultural, economic and social links that used to extend over a Franco-Algerian territorial continuum. Social scientists sometimes tend to be misled by the reality effect of taxonomies adopted by the administration and the police. they take as social fact administrative subdivisions of migrants according to the status given them - refugees, illegal migrants, legal migrants, tourists - subdivisions resulting largely from the global tendency to criminalise migratory activity (S.Palidda, 2000). A different view can be taken however and we can analyse the dynamics of movement and itineraries or migration routes in terms of patterns of flux. If we do so we can perceive four major patterns and see also that one of them has disappeared. Indeed, there are now very few Algerians on the labour markets they had entered en masse from the 70s on - building and industry - and even fewer in the now deregulated markets that employ large numbers of illegal migrants - the hotel business and the garment industry especially. First, there are students who come to pursue studies in France and Europe but also in any universities at the ends of the transnational routes mentioned above. Then there is the flux of young, sometimes very young, people from city areas, wanderers, often rapidly drawn into the lowest echelons of the criminal economy (S.Palidda, 2000; A.Colombo,1998). Third, there are those who travel for personal, family reasons between the various implantations of the former migration diaspora, mainly in Europe. Marriages, celebrations, all sorts of family affairs, but also the running of, and intrigues concerning, places of worship all entail a great

³Term derived from the Spanish “contrabando” - smuggler - used in Algerian to designate persons who make a profession of suitcase commerce

deal of movement. Finally, there are the men and women who engage occasionally or regularly in “suitcase commerce” between the various market-places, Marseilles and Alicante, Nador and Naples, Damascus and Istanbul, that now make up the Algerian commercial arena.

In recent years those researchers, ourselves included, who have taken an interest in the new migration patterns, have concerned themselves mainly with this last type of movement and somewhat neglected the others; it should be noted, however that flux related to the “suitcase trade” is particularly interesting in that also actually touches on all the other forms : whatever the type of movement, hardly any of those involved travel with empty hands and suitcases...and many a migrant career begun as student, job-seeker or visitor to emigrant relatives develops later in business or money-changing.

2- The Algerian commercial arena

In Marseilles in the 70s a centre of intense commercial activity aimed at the neighbouring Maghrebi populations grew up in the heart of the old seaport area, around the thoroughfare of the Cours Belsunce (A.Tarrius, 1995; M.Peraldi, 2001). In 1982 tradespeople of Algerian nationality in Marseilles numbered almost 500, most of them implanted in this district and this was only a small, the most stable, part of a vast commercial ferment. Algeria was faced at the one and same time with a relative abundance of currency - thanks to income from oil - and a dearth of consumer goods. Those were what the bazaars of Belsunce had to offer. To begin with at least, the commercial façade was Algerian, the clients mainly Algerian, the products, though not absolutely specific, in fact aimed at them. But this “comptoir” actually instrumentalised a whole set of economic actors who adapted their activities to the conditions in this run-down city area. Hotel-keepers and garage owners were ex-colonists repatriated from North Africa who had saved modest capital they from the disaster and invested it where prices were lowest and the real-estate market depressed. Clothing wholesalers and manufacturers were Armenian and Sephardic, some café owners Corsican, left over from a time when the Corsican underworld had dominated the neighbourhood (P.Monzini, 1999). Finally, although the original “comptoir” was in the hands of Algerians, or rather of the couple made up of Sephardic wholesalers and Algerian retailers, it developed later along “musical chairs” lines and outsiders could move in to the original milieu as long as they opened up new commercial prospects. The 80s saw the arrival of Syrian traders, then Tunisian, Senegalese, Moroccan and, lastly, Lebanese.

From 1974 to 1985 the number of passengers on the sea line between Algiers and Marseilles increased from 219,000 to 550,000. To which we must add the number travelling by air: just over 500,000 in 1976, almost 1.2 million in 1985.

The most relevant characteristic of this mosaic is not what a romantic cultural view might call “orientality », something that has never existed except in occidental imagination. It is primarily in the fact of being outside, foreign to certain norms, organisations and conventional arrangements local societies consider correct and advantageous for the conduct of business. These businesses don't use banks to obtain capital, they launch personal ventures, mobilise contacts and networks rather than hierarchically organised skills and functional division of labour. We could say they are informal in nature, if we do not take the term in the narrow sense it usually has. Belsunce business does not disregard the rules of the State, French or Algerian, or the police, or book-keeping principles or other legal and penal institutions. On the whole, Belsunce businesses pay their taxes - eventually - and do not try any more or less than others to get round the law. But the places and the sectors they operate in, the way they set up their affairs would, in terms of conventional norms, be judged obsolete, inefficient and unprofitable. We can agree with A.Tarrius (1995) when he claims that the “comptoir” is a cosmopolitan trading society and a recreation, without the political conflict and hegemonic precedence, of what colonial urban rule had established in the Maghreb. But this cosmopolitan entity stands outside the moral and cognitive framework of the political economies which dominate the local societies where it operates.

Commercial potential on the spot is not enough to ensure the development of a “comptoir”, unless those concerned have the corresponding capacity to draw into the market-place the goods the

Algerians will expect to find there. The operation of networks set up by Sephardic wholesalers in the Parisian Sentier neighbourhood and of the equally efficient ones involving Armenians living in Marseilles, clothing workshops in Issy les Moulineaux (M.Hovanessian, 1992), and footwear manufacturing in the Department of the Drôme, was, of course, decisive in drawing substantial demand to Marseilles. Algerian consumers arrived just at a time when there was a series of micro-revolutions in production cycles which meant that the market and access to merchandise could be broken up into smaller components. Like the “big” mass retail firms, the Belsunce business people got to know of the routes to Spanish and Italian districts for footwear, garments and household appliances. Like them, they made contact with importers of Asian manufacturers when the latter first penetrated the European market. Like them, they learnt to comb warehouses and factories, auctions or seizures to buy up lots from sales, factory rejects and clearances, remainders, ends of lines. The difference was one of the scale of the businesses involved. The fact is that, except for about fifty well-established businesses which constitute the stable back-bone of Belsunce, the comptoir existed mainly by virtue of initiatives by people new to commerce, for which they were not really destined, people who rarely or only briefly rose above the critical level of small business.

Algerians who came to Marseilles in the 70s and 80s arrived in a world which had no place for them, even though most of them had relatives settled there, Belsunce business people or workers living in the northern city areas. The places were already taken, access almost impossible. Very few business people, even the well-established ones, could afford to take on the cousins who landed in. Their profit margins on goods were very narrow, they had investment commitments in their patrimony in Algeria, the commercial sector they worked in was subject to fluctuation. Furthermore, even if they were willing to offer jobs it was no longer easy to obtain a resident card. French authorities would only grant 3-month visitors' visas. Workers were not being taken on and soon there began the great haemorrhages in manufacturing and building. The Algerian cousins got into the way of disappearing for a few days to Italy or Spain at the end of their three months and then coming back with a new 3-month visa. During these routine visits, to the Ventimiglia market, for instance, they took the opportunity to buy up goods they then came to retail in Belsunce. If business was slow in Marseilles, or the market slack, they went off to Lyons, Belfort or Paris to visit other families, hawk a few goods, glean more information and vaunt the charms and attractions of Belsunce. In this way they lured new customers who would call in on their way home, which necessarily passed through Marseilles. Or they went back to Algeria, with full bags, sold their merchandise through family networks or on improvised stalls in the streets of the city shopping areas or at informal markets at the borders. They then came back to Belsunce with a load of new orders. On the roads and at the borders they ran into Tunisians and Moroccans, gathered more information and, when their visa next ran out, tried something new, in Germany for instance, where there were numbers of inexpensive second-hand cars in highly coveted categories. They spread the information in the bars and restaurants in Belsunce, named places visited, boasted of their exploits and so new routes opened up. Another paradox: as France inexorably closed its doors, Europe to some extent opened up. But when doors close and ways through become narrow it is vital to operate alone. Emancipation from the familial, clan or tribal order is an inherent condition for mobility, even though their roving, their instability lead to lateral sociabilities with peer groups.

Just who, then, are these Algerian cousins and what are they doing in trade? From 75 to 85 they were mostly sons of small businessmen, of civil servants, just out of secondary school, students, sons of the first, often unsuccessful, entrepreneurs to try their luck in Algeria itself (J.Peneff, 1982). They thirsted for adventure and freedom to partake in the rites of “global youth” they knew only from television but, even more than for this reason, their departure was a symptom of the difficulty Algerian society had to give everybody a place, particularly those who felt entitled to a “decent” one by virtue of their studies or their father's position. As Algeria became more and more unstable politically and economically it drove its supernumerary and disinherited youth into trying their luck elsewhere. These young people were not the poor and needy in the usual sense - and this is in contradiction with the

humanitarian myth that has grown up around the question of illegal immigration - but people who could have some direct or inherited claim to a decent position in society but whom the State has abandoned by the wayside. They are students who have started or completed courses in Algeria or abroad, workers put off by national firms, students who became engaged in union activities, trade unionists and, later, during the years of open warfare, executives, intellectuals, professionals, civil servants who lost job security. In trying commerce they are not so much, or not just, hoping to become well-off or rich. They are trying to regain some degree of personal dignity and social prestige, but they do it on their own without the support or authorisation of the State, the family, and the patriarchal order. What these new business people often dream of is a good marriage, of becoming a good prospect in the eyes of the match-makers, founding a family and building a house, regaining standing and impressing the civil servant uncle. Not many aspire to making a real career as entrepreneur or manager.

In the streets of the Belsunce area they meet and sometimes clash with other pioneers from Algeria who took part somewhat earlier in the great migratory movement. These are workers and most of them are still employed. But working conditions for migrants in the Marseilles area have always been very different from those for migrants to the industrial north. They mostly arrived during the 70s, found jobs in Marseilles in building, in small workshops or in commerce within an economic fabric in which very small businesses were preponderant. Even in factories their working conditions and status were much less secure than in outer-city industrial areas of Paris, Lyons or Lille. Casualisation of labour is traditional in Marseilles and inherent to the seaport-industry complex there (B.Morel, 2000). In the late 70s, the slump had already arrived, immigrants were among the first labourers to be put off and they realised they would have to be adaptable. Many of them attempted to make a new start in Belsunce, given that on their trips home they had naturally acquired carrier skills, knowledge of what people in Algeria needed and wanted, of money-changing operations, of social relations. In brief, the basic skills required for suitcase commerce. Some used capital or savings they had in France or in Algeria, or their severance pay, to set up in business. Masons became retailers of car parts, of clothing. It is common knowledge that most repair-shop and garage owners used to work for major car-dealers in the region before opening their own businesses. Others, less adventurous, bought up run-down apartments they rented out to short-term tenants. Others, of lesser means, had to content themselves with carrying merchandise from one shore to the other. Like their (Algerian) "cousins" they feel that the world they live in and the place they have found in France no longer hold out any hope of the social betterment they had felt as wage-earners they had a right to aspire to. They also dreamt of acquiring property, of providing their children with the opportunity to study and to gain access to the comfort of a middle-class existence they had had no more than a glimpse of.

An on-going battle on the part of local powers against the invasive presence of bazaar trade (M.Peraldi, 2001), the restriction of circulation between Europe and the Maghreb and, even more, between Algeria and France, have without any doubt strongly contributed to the reorganisation and dispersal of the commercial "comptoir": though Marseilles remains an important strategic centre with its Mediterranean-wide reputation, other market-places have taken advantage of this fragilisation and some of the Algerian flux that used to be directed exclusively towards Marseilles has now been diverted, mainly towards Alicante, Naples, Istanbul, Dubai. Besides this, production-trade link-ups that always used to terminate in Marseille and the Belsunce shops have broken loose and become more mobile. This relative autonomy of production-trade chains is partly due to the tendency for large traders to "containerise" in one way or another what used to transit in shopping bags. (M.Peraldi, 2001). A businessman who started off in Belsunce with a brisk trade in spare car parts has now set up in the "offshore" zone in Bizerte in Tunisia. His merchandise now travels by rail (Bizerte is the last Tunisian station before the border) to Algeria and the rest of French-speaking Africa. This sort of "containerisation" has also come about because the most profitable businesses have been taken in hand in Algeria by networks of political protection involving people in key power positions in the Maghreb; a number of customs officers were no longer satisfied with mere bribes but rapidly set

about organising the various trade channels, diversifying them as the opportunity arose, organising convoys of trading “ants”, now towards Naples, then towards Alicante, then Istanbul, and less and less to Marseilles. This compelled the “independent” and venturous to go further up the production-distribution chain, to invent new routes, explore new market-places. The sedentarisation of some, along with the confiscation of sectors and profits can only be done with political protection and provokes even greater mobility in the others.

3- Like oil on water: transnationalism, deterritorialisation or diaspora?

The commercial entities Algerians travel to and from are not ethnic niches but cosmopolitan societies held together by colleague to colleague relations based on the fact of being together in “outsider” situations, which may range from merely being “under suspicion” to real clandestinity, and common specific spheres of interest: in the terms of the good old law of the market, the protagonists have more reasons to come to an understanding than to quarrel. In Marseilles the prosperity of the comptoir depended on the couple (paradoxical from the geo-political point of view) formed by Sephardic wholesalers and clothing manufacturers and Algerian retailers. In Istanbul the role of “go-between minority” (E.Bonachich, 1987), analogous to that of the French Sephardic Jews is played by Mardinli Kurds, who are wholesalers, clothing manufacturers, bankers and even front men for Algerian shopkeepers since Turkish law will not allow foreigners to run businesses. The division of labour is most unequal in view of the fact that in this economic arrangement some occupy the capitalist level, wholesaling, manufacturing, banking, and the others the market-place. We found that Algerians in Marseilles rarely made careers as capitalists, or if they did they were short-lived, or they made them in Algeria, or in a sector other than that of production. The few Algerians who really make money from commerce prefer to invest in real estate or finance rather than in industry. At this level of commerce - shopkeepers, regular hawkers - the main concern is familial and transmission rarely goes further than a generation or two. Sons and daughters of business people prefer to become doctors, nurses, lawyers, surveyors rather than go into business. At the level above it is quite the opposite and family dynasties are the rule. At the really low level, among the ants, the occasional or regular carriers of merchandise, dealers or tourists, the dominant form of collaboration is that of bands, cliques, pairs or couples of friends, that is “lateral” solidarities, different from the familial and patriarchal order that prevails in the Maghreb. Childhood friends who drifted together round the same neighbourhoods in Algiers or Oran, girl neighbours or little cousins who go off together on their first business trips, and also acquaintances struck up in bars and hotels. There are not many stable units of more than two; “ants” form temporary bands who meet occasionally in the same hotels where they share rooms, take the same plane flights but conduct all their business on their own.

In Istanbul, the Algerian micro-society of business people, shopkeepers or travellers does not constitute a real community nor a structured foreign minority group with strands of solidarity in the various worlds the city contains. It is more in the nature of an expatriate colony suspended between two phases of wandering, made up of volatile circumstantial ties between individuals without any real foothold in local society. Most Algerians we met in Istanbul do not like the city. They don't know much of it as they are restricted to the commercial spaces they habitually operate in, they say they only have business contacts with the Turks whom they describe as peasants and brutes. They are homesick, both for an Algeria that no longer exists but which they remember as a world of peace and solidarity and for France where they have all been at least once and where all have family members whose success is a reference. In the stories told by these exiles, the brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts mentioned are rarely oppressed workers or depressed unemployed or demoralised and futureless outer-city youth.

Almost all the salesmen and shopkeepers we met were young, rarely over thirty, except for Ali, the veteran, who was over forty. Almost all of them said they left Algeria in a hurry even if they had jobs

or were doing studies. Among them we can find a cross section of the people driven into exile by violent changes : secular partisans driven out by the return of the religious, religious driven out by the return of the Army, former officials in disgrace, delinquents. Hassan, for instance, was preparing to become an electrical engineer. Hounded for religious and union activities in his university in Oran he left Algeria for Tunisia, then Syria, where he eked out a living for a while in Damascus working in the shops in the souk where Algerians came to shop. From there he moved to Istanbul where he has only been for three years. Today he works as “broker” in Ali’s shop and dreams of taking up his studies again, but in Switzerland, or of joining his brother settled in London. Like all Algerians he only has a tourist visa valid for three months and it costs him 20 dollars or 5 million Turkish pounds if he has to bribe the police who stop him in the street to check his papers. Hassan organises his time-table so as to avoid checks as much as possible. Of the city he only knows the commercial zones, Beyazit where he resides and works in the shop, Merter which he combs almost daily in search of new products. He learned his Turkish vocabulary from his contacts with business people and it is limited to a list of technical terms which he combines with Arabic and English if necessary. He is, as he himself says, “like oil on water”.

Most of the Algerian business people operating in Istanbul describe their professional environment as purely mercantile, where all relations are determined and dominated by money considerations. Status as foreign resident, as businessman, a bit of string-pulling or special links with suppliers, day-to-day help with little problems, all are for sale, everything has a price. The business association between Turkish boss and Algerian partner exemplifies this mercantilism : both partners contribute a share of capital, but it is assumed that that of the Turkish partner can be smaller in the prorata of the price he considers is due to him for the protection granted to the foreign partner. In Ali’s shop and in that of Brahim, another veteran in this field, each partner has his own stock, his own suppliers and clients and the shop operates with separate sets of accounts. Given that both partners are not always present in the shop at the same time because contacts with suppliers have to be maintained, that both speak Turkish and Arabic, well enough at least to deal with clients and that merchandise often comes from the same stocks, it is easy to understand that relations between partners are fraught with suspicion, conflict, arguments or endless haggling over shares in profits. In this type of context, partnerships are not long-lived and the place of Algerians in the system is all the more insecure in that they cannot appeal to any authority in case of outright dishonesty on the part of an associate.

Most of the Maghrebis we met in the world of the bazaars attribute this “savagery” to the Turkish mentality which, they claim, is violently mercantile, closed to outsiders and responsible for a society dominated by relations of interest. There is no point in taking issue here with this negative, embittered view of Turkish society but it can help us understand the cultural and practical dimensions of Algerian experience. This radically pessimistic talk tells us more about the Algerians themselves than about their business associates. This type of criticism of the cultural and social environment denotes retreat or withdrawal into oneself and this, in turn, reflects an apparent incapacity to take advantage socially of the position they have attained in the economy. In the overall commercial operation that suitcase trading gives us a glimpse of, they occupy the key position of “bridgehead”. They are the intermediaries who not only make possible an influx of consumers who would otherwise get lost in the urban and commercial maze of Istanbul but they also inform local entrepreneurs about their degree of adaptation to the market concerned. Contrary to commuters who retain ties with their local home societies, these traders have cut loose or been expelled from their home countries. Contrary to the large entrepreneurs, they cannot hope to do business on a scale that would make it possible to re-establish social position back home or elsewhere. Given the social and political conditions, no return is possible, either to the Algerian society they left behind or to French society which is the other side of their world. Nor is there any possibility of sedentarisation under the conditions imposed by Turkish society. So they are condemned either to continual roving or to destitution. They are the modern mutants in a global city which, so far, has not offered any political or social outlook other than that of

“going nomad” (G.Deleuze, F.Guattari, 1980) to those whose worlds are collapsing under the pressure of the new global order.

Suitcase carriers belong to a fairly young population. The youngest Algerian we met in the Beyazit hotels was fourteen and had been doing trips for four years, on his own but under the solid protection of groups of adults which sometimes formed at the airport itself. The oldest was about fifty, in a world of people mostly in their thirties. There are Algerian women in this market but they are not as numerous as the men.

Algerian “expatriate society” in Istanbul consists mainly of single men. On the other hand the suitcase carriers from Tunisia are mostly women, in a proportion of 8 out of 10. At the departure and arrival of flights from Tunis the few men present are either Algerians who choose the route because they can then go through the border on the ground, which is considered more “permeable” than the airport barrier, or they are brothers, husband or fiancés of the women they claim to be accompanying. Young men, then, and women of all age-groups. On the move in the suitcase trade we therefore find both those who are supernumerary and those who are dominated in the patriarchal lineage societies of the Maghreb. (L.Addi, 1999)

Here we should stress once again that suitcase carriers were not necessarily poor or deprived in the urban social worlds they came from. The young people we met often had tertiary educational qualifications and had sometimes already started work in a field with some prestige attached. But, though educated young people are in the majority, there is also a good number of young Algerians who are often illiterate and, unlike the others, barely speak French, or do not speak it at all. Often younger than the educated group, they constitute a sort of second generation of “trabendos”, closer in type to the those illegal immigrants who haunt European borders and are the livestock exploited by professional migrant smugglers. There is a clear difference in status in the sense that, whereas the former are independent and conduct their own affairs, the latter often operate in groups supervised by older persons called “grossistes” (wholesalers), or according to those concerned - “installés”, under orders from businessmen who are usually customs officers, police officials or army personnel who provide the capital for the trade. The “installés” proclaim with bitter humour that they are just their “bourricots” (“donkeys”, beasts of burden). Nonetheless, up to the present, educated young people form the majority in the world of suitcase commerce.

Among the women we find the same range of status, and groups that have more solidarity and unity than those of the men. There are women who are often educated, have (had) jobs as teachers, nurses, air-hostesses, to mention some of the professionals encountered in the streets of Beyazit. There are wives of civil servants and, finally, women who arrived with the latest wave of peasant migration to Algerian and Tunisian towns, most of whom are widowed, divorced or repudiated, but they are fewer in number than those of the categories first mentioned. Then again, the Algerian women differ from the Tunisian in that they often have past experience as migrants in France where they had jobs, but in the shady world of bars, sometimes as prostitutes, rather than in the usual migrant labour sectors. If there is one characteristic general to the life experiences of those who go in for suitcase commerce and one that provides ample reason for mobility, it is that all these people are “disaffiliated” from a society that is determined by reference to patriarchy and lineage. Many of the young men encountered in the streets of Beyazit are younger sons rather than older and, as such, they have not merely been allotted an inferior place, but no place at all. From divorced women to graduates, either unemployed or condemned to non-qualified jobs, women migrants uprooted from the family universe they belonged to, the suitcase people have, either voluntarily or willy-nilly, embarked on a journey that cut them loose from the social worlds they came from. They have in common the double certainty that they cannot find a place in the world they came from and have had thrust on them a condition of isolated individual, disengaged and emancipated from established social orders. They are genuinely “marginal”, not in the criminological sense but in that proposed by Park (1928): persons who, though making a life between several social and cultural worlds, do not belong to any one of them.

This characteristic plays a crucial role in the development of the sociabilities and relational arrangements which are the stuff of suitcase commerce. Of course we do see here Algerians with other Algerians and Tunisian women in their own groups. Men and women of the suitcase trade mix very little with local Turkish society. They stay in hotel rooms that are almost exclusively reserved for them or, for the most experienced, rent apartments by the week from Beyazit businessmen. They crowd in for the duration of their stay, often more than ten together. It's not rare to find twelve Tunisian women staying in two rooms and sleeping on the floor. The groups that stroll round together, share luggage, ask about business, occasionally lend each other money often have a common origin, as determined by durable national frames. These women here are neighbours, Aïcha is cousin to Naima who is taking her to Istanbul, Ali grants special prices to childhood friends from Bab el Oued etc. But this register of identity, which would seem to be the basis for sociability, is of no moment unless taken in conjunction with another one which, for lack of a better term, we can call circumstantial, because the ties made depend on the circumstances of shared travel experience. Women forming an improvised group at the airport to share out excess luggage, friendships born during long hours of waiting in hotel corridors or airport halls, spontaneous solidarity to come to the aid of some "unfortunate" in trouble with one of the officialdoms passengers have to contend with - even if, in all these cases, origin and ties to home come to the fore, it is the individual who is the really active principle of solidarity. Personal commitment has more weight than identity assigned by birth. It is by virtue of this that the space-time of commerce exists as a "moral region". Finally, and above all, it leaves an opening for encounters with strangers, ephemeral and contingent though they may be.

As experience, commerce has an intensity comparable to that of sport, art or religious devotion - to mention the three most frequent similes used by those concerned to describe their activity. To do business is commitment, is personal, individual and individualising. Though solidarity and community may at times be very strong, they only last as long as the business operations, operations carried out in a universe where individualisation is the rule. There are "good" and "bad" individuals, heroes of stories told in the evening in hotels, bars, restaurants, during the long hours of waiting in airports, on footpaths, in the corridors of customs offices, in shop queues. These are the places where they develop the sociabilities that organise the universe of the suitcase commerce. Sociabilities that have as much to do with with real exhausting effort as with partying or merry-making. The space this trade occupies is one of both individual liberty and of servitude and cannot be understood merely in terms of routine carrying-out of collective obligation. That is why, even though the commercial complex this activity is part of can be termed ethnic in that it mobilises chains of relational links between people who are aware that they share goods and services, exchange information and money because they feel they fit into the same identity framework, the ethnic mark alone is insufficient to characterise correctly the social experience involved.

Thus there is nothing in the social forms of these businesses that could lead us to expect the emergence of a caste of schumpeterian entrepreneurs who might, in a new cycle of "creative destruction", reinvent forms of market capitalism out of the ruins of the Fordist society. What we are witnessing is more in the nature of the curtailing of the emergence of a middle class which began as a process of social advancement under State protection through schooling, access to intellectual or white-collar employment. But the process was brought to a halt by the economic redeployments of the contemporary world, with the result that these groups are now obliged to try and complete it on their own, each man for himself. They are doing it under the cultural and social conditions that were those of social advancement vaunted by the wage-society, that is, under conditions of personal emancipation and achievement. Commercial exchange relations have become a field for adventure for those raised in the conditions of social advancement promised by the welfare state and the monetary state, no longer find in their social worlds the necessary conditions for this sort of personal fulfillment.

Unless we transform the term 'diaspora' into one of those rather vague notions that social science sometimes uses to patch over an incapacity to envisage completely original emergent social forms, we cannot really consider the activities and movements described here as a sort of extension or redeployment of diaspora sociabilities. In this period of globalisation, societies are disintegrating and splitting and that is the process we see rather than stable forms of a "new global order". Post-colonial societies were to some extent "diasporic" in that they comprised social continuities and permeabilities between the home territory and society and the host societies, but they are now breaking apart and generating movements without real anchor points and groupings, without any 'public sphere', not even a diasporic one (A.Appadurai, 1996). There can only be one conclusion: the frame of the nation state is no longer the relevant one for description and evaluation of the cultural dynamics, relational commitments and social and professional careers in which these populations organise their lives. In the strict sense they live between several worlds, but their universe is both more restricted than the territorial frame of the nation states because it is urban, metropolitan - they frequent towns and networks of towns (they do not know France, only Marseilles, or Europe, but just Marseilles, Naples, Milan, Düsseldorf, they do not visit Turkey, only Istanbul) and also broader in that it allows for continuity and permeability between worlds separated by political and cultural frontiers: From Moslem space-time to the "moral region" of business, the sociabilities that are formed are relations between locations rather than territories and they are marked with the triple seal of emancipation, deterritorialisation and transnationalism, in excess of the post-colonial order.

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