

Summers in the Motherland

by Yasmine Siblot

From the 1980s onwards, the practice of vacationing in the Maghreb homeland became widespread, and gradually replaced any hopes of resettlement. These summer vacations allowed people to return to their roots in a family setting and temporarily escape the subjugation and social labels they endured in France.

Reviewed: Jennifer Bidet, *Vacances au Bled. La double présence des enfants d'immigrés*, Raisons d'agir, 2021, 322 pp., €20.

Since the 1980s, the subject of "vacations in the *bled*" – holidays spent by Maghrebi emigrants from France in their country of origin (the *bled*), or by their descendants in their parents' country – has given rise to a significant literary and documentary production focusing on countries such as Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. This output has expanded in recent years. Examples include *Bons baisers du bled*, a film by Linda Bendali broadcast on France 5 in June 2021, and *La route du bled*, a podcast by Halima Ekhatib broadcast online on Arte Radio in 2019. Two comic books with similar titles have also been published: *Nos vacances au bled*, a personal account by Chadia Chaïbi-Loueslati of her family vacation in Tunisia (éditions Marabout, 2019), and *Vacances au bled*, published by Casterman (collection Sociorama, 2018), a "sociological comic strip" by Jennifer Bidet and Singeon, based on the same research that is presented more extensively in the book reviewed here. Most of these documentaries have a nostalgic and humorous tone. They are based on personal accounts and private archives covering the 1980s and 1990s, and feature a few individuals or families. This is also the narrative mode adopted in the (excellent) comic strip co-written by Jennifer

Bidet, centered on a few characters (Férouze, Sélim, Nesrine, Sabrina), although their vacations take place much more recently.

A study of the second generation

We meet these characters again in this book, but they are joined by many others. Above all, their backgrounds, practices and points of view are also put into context and contrasted in greater depth. These two publications highlight the breadth of a subject which, despite giving rise to numerous personal accounts, has hitherto received little attention from the social sciences in France. Bidet's book is the first in the field of sociology to address this theme in its entirety, based on a survey of the experiences and viewpoints of "second-generation" adults. While the topic of vacations may seem light-hearted, it proves fascinating under the author's watchful eye, as she constructs an ambitious and rigorous research approach. The book's subtitle, "la double présence des enfants d'immigrés" ("the double presence of the children of immigrants"), is an explicit reference to the work of sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad, in particular to *La double absence*. The researcher works at the crossroads between the sociology of migration and the sociology of mobility and social class. She adopts an intersectional approach, with a special focus on gender relations and the social relations of race and ethnicity. Her research draws on a variety of data and methods: archives and documents (relating to the Algerian state's policies on the "foreign national community" and tourism, and the French state's migration and "integration" policies), statistical data from the *Trajectoires et origines* survey (INED-INSEE¹), and, most importantly, a field survey. The latter combines a series of in-depth interviews conducted in France (in the Lyon region) and Algeria (in the region of Sétif, a medium-sized town to the east of Algiers) with 56 adults descended from Algerian parents, who were either born in France or moved there at a very young age, and an ethnographic survey carried out in Algeria during the summers of 2009, 2010 and 2011, in the area around Sétif and Béjaïa (a town on the nearby coast), partly involving the same people, and based on numerous observations. Photographs taken by the author are shown at the beginning of each chapter.

The first two chapters are based on interviews with the oldest adults (born in the 1960s and 1970s) and the corpus of documents and archives, as well as a substantial

¹ A partnership between the National Institute for Demographic Studies and the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies.

bibliography covering Algerian immigration to France and working-class vacations. They provide an insight into how and in what forms vacations in Algeria became possible from the 1980s onwards. Up until this period, the prospect of "returning" to one's country of origin had been nurtured by both countries, and remained at the heart of migratory projects; family visits to the country of origin were only conceivable as a way of preparing children for future (re)integration in Algeria. The chances of resettlement faded and were abruptly ended by the decade of civil war in the 1990s; summer holidays, conceived as vacations in their own right, gradually became commonplace. This normalization also makes sense in the light of the social history of leisure activities in working-class areas, with the families of Algerian immigrant workers contributing to the emergence of camping in France, while teenagers and young adults gained access to supervised holidays through urban policies, and those with the financial and cultural resources began to enjoy tourism abroad. From this point onwards, vacations in Algeria began to diversify in terms of their length, type and significance, due to the "small social differences" between parents who appeared to have a close relationship in France, but whose situations proved stable to a greater or lesser extent, and who came from families with different social positions in Algeria. This diversity also stemmed from the educational, professional and family trajectories of the children who were now adults.

The following chapters focus on younger men and women, aged between around 20 and 40 at the time of the survey, and are based on interviews and observations carried out in a wide range of settings: first in Algeria, within the family home, at wedding parties, by the sea in private tourist resorts or on "family beaches", and in various public or consumer spaces in town; but also in France, inside their rooms in university halls of residence or family homes; as well as online, on Facebook pages where young *Staifis* and *Staifas* (from Sétif) share their memories of their vacations and prepare for the next ones.

Class relations

Jennifer Bidet seeks to identify common features and principles of variation (primarily in terms of generation, gender and class) among her interviewees' "vacations in the Maghreb" across five themes: links with family history and Algerian origins; forms of ethnic and racial identification and labeling among descendants of immigrants and non-immigrant Algerians, experienced at consulates and at the

border, but also at the beach or while observing Ramadan; the issues involved in building a house in Algeria, and the uses, transmission and appropriation of these assets; the practice of beach tourism as an indicator of class relations between descendants of immigrants and Algerian middle- and upper-class families; and the redefinition and negotiation of gender boundaries and norms within families, couples and friendship groups.

Three groups feature throughout the book. We follow the vacations of a group of young interviewees, men and women in their twenties with a limited secondary or undergraduate education, holding menial or supervisory jobs. During their summers in Algeria, they spend time with their families, but also in groups of "young people from France" who frequent restaurants, private beaches and nightclubs in the small number of tourist resorts. During the summer, these young working-class adults enjoy relative affluence and a symbolic upgrading of their social status back in France, but at the same time experience class contempt from more affluent Algerians. The two other groups are made up of adults in their thirties and forties. Some are close to the working classes, while others have moved away from them to join the middle or even upper classes. Those close to the working classes prefer to spend time with their Algerian families on a daily basis, but also appreciate having the freedom to escape sometimes restrictive social norms, particularly by acquiring their own accommodation. Those belonging to the middle classes combines family vacations with cultural tourism (visiting archaeological sites, discovering other towns and regions), or with vacations in seaside rentals.

Escaping social labels

The book also sets out to show how the different time and space people experience on vacation in Algeria enable them to escape the social labeling based on gender and race they endure in France. Take, for example, one woman who has built her own home and invested heavily in it with her daughters, while her husband loses interest; or a man who experiences the festive atmosphere in public spaces during the Ramadan period (which, exceptionally, takes place in summer during the three years of the survey). The author thus explores the many ways in which these men and women are socialized as descendants of Algerian immigrants, in a dual process of trivializing and specifying their social practices while avoiding any culturalism or miserabilism.

It is regrettable that the book does not take into account the specificities of the locations investigated: the Lyon region and the Sétif and Béjaïa regions (both located in Kabylia). We are also told very little about how the author encountered these interviewees, with such varied profiles, both in France and in Algeria. On the other hand, however, the relationships the author forged with them are the subject of detailed and fruitful reflection: the sociologist, perceived as a female "teacher" and a non-Muslim "Frenchwoman" with no immigrant ancestry, provides a detailed analysis of their attitudes towards her, as well as what her position does or does not give her access to, which in turn contributes to the findings on gender, class and ethno-racial relations. Furthermore, the author's use of social science research on contemporary Algeria, as well as her own fieldwork, reveal a wide range of practices and lifestyles in Algerian society (related to housing, consumerism and leisure), and this is a major aspect of the book's appeal. It would therefore be fascinating to know how this book has been received in Algeria, in academic circles and beyond.

Further reading

- *La double absence. Des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré*, Abdelmalek Sayad, Le Seuil, 1999, reprinted in paperback in 2014.
- *Vacances au bled*, a study by Jennifer Bidet adapted as a comic strip by Singeon Casterman, collection Sociorama 2018.
- « Capital social en migration », special issue of *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, n° 225, 2018.

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