Kathryn A. Kleppinger. *Branding the 'Beur' Author: Minority Writing and the Media in France, 1983-2013*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2015. xi + 271 pp.

Kathryn A. Kleppinger's well researched and contextualized work, *Branding the 'Beur' Author: Minority Writing and the Media in France, 1983-2013*, traces the implications of media usage of the term *beur* (a French-born person of North African descent) for authors and their varied strategies in claiming, rejecting, or complicating the label. Kleppinger and numerous other scholars, including Alec G. Hargreaves and Michel Laronde, to name a few, have described the enormous stakes involved in how the media and academic institutions represent these writers, their communities, and their work. Critics have pigeonholed these authors and branded their work as being part of certain sociopolitical or even ethnographic genres, while the artistry and literary worth of their creations have too often gone unnoticed.

The task that Kleppinger sets out for herself in this book is no small feat as she must account for multiple perspectives and much ambiguity concerning the *beur* designation, including not only changing attitudes among the general public over a period of three decades, but also individual writers' shifting relationships with the label over the course of their careers. As if this was not enough, Kleppinger also brilliantly situates debates in their social, political, and historical contexts without failing to include literary analysis, reception, and criticism of the main corpus of her selected authors. While the scope of this project is quite large, the focus on television and radio interviews with the authors serves as the core of her research and a useful lens through which to analyze differing readings of individual works and diverse perceptions of *beur* literary production. These interviews reveal the writers' individual perceptions of authorial identity that confront stereotypical French views and assumptions on literary universalism, immigration, and the Maghrebi milieus from which they hail. For every author discussed, Kleppinger notes their personal interview styles and, relying heavily on theory and vocabulary derived from Stuart Hall, qualifies their interview strategies based on how they generally respond to questions (ex. negotiated approach, forcefully oppositional approach, etc.).

After the first chapter, which serves as an introduction to her project and as an overview of *beur* literary production and its reception in the French media, Kleppinger's six following chapters are organized chronologically. Chapters 2 and 3 are dedicated to the 1980s, chapters 4 and 5 focus on the 1990s (and early 2000s), and chapters 6 and 7 are solidly located in the twenty-first century. Each chapter focuses on either a single author or two to three authors with contrasting views and/or interview techniques. While most of the authors under consideration produced literary works throughout several decades, their designation to certain chapters is determined by when they published their first work to gain widespread

national attention, when they appeared most frequently in broadcast interviews, and how well they spoke (through their literature as well as media appearances) to social and political issues of the era.

Kleppinger describes a wider 1980s French public perceiving *beur* authors in the media spotlight as representatives of their communities and thus in a position of needing to introduce the second generation of the Maghrebi diaspora to television and radio audiences despite the fact that members of this population were for the most part all French citizens who had lived their entire lives in metropolitan France. Journalists, hosts of literary programs, and even many academic scholars therefore often discussed the works of *beur* authors during this time period as ethnographies of sorts. Authors who accepted this fact or who succeeded in subtly negotiating for more nuanced interpretations (Kleppinger cites Mehdi Charef and Azouz Begag here) prospered on the interview circuit while those who insisted that their works be appreciated solely on literary and creative merit (Farida Belghoul and Leïla Sebbar are given as examples) foundered and consequently received much less media attention. By the 1990s the situation changed, and the French were now familiar with this minority group, although much of their "knowledge" came from sensationalized media reports associating *beurs* with stereotypical images of fundamental Islamism, inferior treatment of women (after the first *Affaire du foulard* 'Headscarf Affair' in 1989) and *banlieue* violence. It was primarily authors who had few actual literary ambitions but who appeared to confirm these stereotypes through autobiographical narratives that received the most air time during this period. Kleppinger cites Soraya Nini and Samira Bellil, the author of *Dans l'enfer des tournantes* ('In the Hell of Gang Rapes,' 2002, which documents her real-life experiences as a victim of gang rape) as popular guests on talk shows of the period and instrumental in the construction of the figure of the *Beurette*. It is no surprise then that after this proliferation of stereotypes, an increasing number of French writers of North African heritage in the twenty-first century appear uncomfortable with the *beur* label and tend to take a more confrontational approach when denouncing interviewers who place them and their work in overly restrictive, predetermined categories. In her final chapters, Kleppinger discusses Rachid Djaïdani, Faïza Guène, Sabri Louateh and the Qui fait la France? collective as artists who are determined not only to blaze their own paths, but to resist labels of any kind.

With its focus on the debate surrounding the term *beur* and its connotations and implications for minority writers seeking to gain widespread recognition, *Branding the 'Beur' Author* should be of interest to scholars of Francophone and/or Postcolonial Studies, as well as to those interested in the subject of minority representation in the media. Additionally, this book should appeal to anyone looking for a model of how an interdisciplinary approach can be

coherently and impressively executed. In this work Kleppinger successfully brings together divergent fields to elucidate complex issues, all the while remaining accessible and comprehensible to those who may not be experts on the subject.

Christopher Ice
University of Minnesota at Twin Cities