

1968: A Global Perspective

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The Man in Rubber Sandals: Local and International Solidarities in Kateb Yacine's Turn toward Popular Theater

In 1967, Algerian author and journalist Kateb Yacine paid a visit to Vietnam and became a first hand witness to the American bombings in the south. Although Yacine had started to sketch a play on the life of Ho Chi Minh as early as the 1950s, his first published work that linked the Algerian anti-imperial struggle to that of the Vietnamese appeared in Algeria in 1968, in the midst of the extended historical moment of national liberation movements and non-alignment. The link between Algeria and Vietnam other protagonists and subjects of imperialism was more fully explored in his 1970 play *L'homme aux sandales de caochouc* [The man in rubber sandals], a play that draws on Vietnamese history and popular theater and includes characters from the world stage such as president Nixon, Pierre Loti, Chairman Mao, Lenin, and Ho Chi Minh. *L'homme* was an internationalizing anti-imperial theatrical project but the play also marks a turning point in Yacine's literary production toward local, popular Algerian theater. Although the didacticism of *l'homme* yields politicized interpretations and thus bears some resemblance to Brechtian drama, it also cautions against reductive readings and the binary logic that Yacine saw as having usurped the post-independence leadership in Algeria. This paper explores two related topics: the multiple positions the play occupies between local and international solidarities in a post-colonial and neo-imperial context; and Yacine's intimate, affective re-working of the distancing aesthetics of Brechtian theater.