



A Bison Original

Shantytown Kid

By Azouz Begag

Edited and with an introduction

by Alec G. Hargreaves

Translated by Naïma Wolf and Alec G. Hargreaves

One day an illiterate Algerian immigrant in Lyon gave his son, Azouz Begag, a book, saying, "This book is a bird." How Begag took flight on the wings of learning is one of the stories that unfolds in this captivating autobiographical novel of growing up amid the multicultural complexities of contemporary France.

Determined to leave behind the poverty of his shantytown life, Begag works to become a star pupil at the local primary school—earning the jealousy and rejection of his Arab playmates even as he contends with the anti-Arab racism of his French peers. Begag's moving and often comical account of negotiating a path between the competing cultural spaces encountered during his childhood is a compelling tale of coming of age in a world of ethnic and racial tensions. A story for all ages, it is also very much of the moment, offering unique insights into the reweaving of the social fabric of France in response to growing ethnic diversity.

Azouz Begag, widely acclaimed as both a novelist and a researcher at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), was appointed France's first minister for equal opportunities and was the nation's first cabinet minister of North African immigrant origin in 2005. He is the author of more than twenty books, including the sociopolitical essay *Ethnicity and Equality: France in the Balance*, available in a Bison Books edition. Alec G. Hargreaves is Ada Belle Winthrop-King Professor of French and the director of the Winthrop-King Institute for Contemporary French and Francophone Studies at Florida State University. Naïma Wolf was educated in Tunisia and Paris and lives in England, where she has taught modern languages and worked as a freelance translator.

"Begag breaks into the French language and Republic with subversive humor and style, forcefully rendered in the first English-language translation of a personal trajectory intimately intertwined with the evolution of French society since the 1960s."—Danielle Marx-Scouras, author of *La France de Zebda 1981–2004*

"This beautifully translated and brilliantly introduced novel will hereafter serve as the essential starting point for an English-reading public desiring to make sense out of the urgent immigration and housing debates in contemporary France."—James D. Le Sueur, author of *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria*

April 2007

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