Out in Morocco: Homosexuality and Transnationalism in the Writings of Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa

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Short Abstract

This is the first comprehensive study of the work of Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa, two contemporary Moroccan authors whose writings deal with same-sex desire. Offering a close reading of the work of Rachid O. and Taïa, this study assesses how same-sex desire is expressed in a discursive space which does not acknowledge homosexuality and to what extent these forms of desire need to be situated in the transnational space and amid the sexual-political context of Morocco and the West. One of the foci of this study is to compare and contrast queer contemporary Moroccan writing with western queer theory and to examine to what extent Rachid O.'s and Taïa's writings challenge or inform queer western scholarship. I offer two principal arguments. First, I suggest that Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa loosen rigid ideologies around masculinity, sexuality, and gender in Arab/Muslim culture and offer a new understanding of sexuality and sexual orientation in their culture. By re-appropriating a heritage around same-sex love rooted in Arab/Muslim culture, they proffer a more inclusive, visionary idea of Islam, affording space for the sexually different. Second, I demonstrate that the invention of different ways of experiencing masculinity, homosexuality, and Islam is also facilitated by the West – specifically France. It illustrates how both authors critically engage with western modes of homosexuality, the notion of being 'out', the idea of living in an equal relationship with a same-sex partner, sometimes adopting these models, sometimes creating hybrid forms, often, however, problematically distancing themselves from western concepts and assessing their racial bias. Drawing upon western queer theory, postcolonial studies and a

wide range of sociological accounts of homoeroticism in the West and North African society, this study makes an empirical and theoretical contribution to queer theory, to transnational conceptualizations of gender and sexuality, and to new understandings of masculinity in Morocco today.

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Long Abstract

Out in Morocco: Homosexuality and Transnationalism in the Writings of Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa is the first comprehensive study of the work of Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa, two openly homosexual Moroccan writers who deal with same-sex desire. Following the accession of Mohamed VI in 1999, which brought with it a relatively relaxed political atmosphere, Moroccan writers began to broach the unsaid, subject matter considered too controversial to tackle in novels, short stories, and films during Hassan II's reign (1961-1999).

Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's work sheds light on different concepts of sexuality, on debates around globalization of western LGBTQ politics, the re-appropriation and critique of Orientalism, and conservative versus liberal interpretations of Islam. Hailing from Morocco and rooted in North African Arab/Muslim cultures, Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's writings, furthermore, challenge paradigms of queer theory which have emerged in the western context. Finally, their writings bear witness to controversies around transnational sexualities and sexual identities arising in the migratory context.

Apart from a few articles focussing upon the literary expression of same-sex desire in the North African context, homosexuality in North Africa has been approached from a sociological or sociolinguistic perspective. In *Queer Maroc* (2013), which utilizes a

sociological optic, Jean Zaganiaris examines a variety of authors who thematize homosexuality in order to illustrate the changing perception of sex and gender in contemporary Moroccan society. In his *Queer Maghrebi French* (2017), Denis Provencher examines queer Maghrebi cultural production and lived experience in France from a sociolinguistic perspective, focussing upon the oral expression of queer Maghrebi French citizens, coining the term 'flexible accumulation of language'.

This study considers Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's writings alongside other late 20th century Moroccan writers in their socio-cultural context while comparing their ideas and concerns raised with concepts of masculinity and sexuality established by Arab/Muslim sociologists and western queer theorists. I approach Rachid O.'s and Taïa's work through postcolonial and critical theories, western queer theory, and sociological accounts of sexuality produced in North Africa and France. I first define and examine the debates around homosexuality in the Arab/Muslim world in order to understand the underlying tensions in their work. Comparing Rachid O.'s and Taïa's output with Joseph Massad's observation on western LGBTQ politics repressing local forms of same-sex desire (*Desiring Arabs*, 2007), I show that, by contrast, Rachid O. and Taïa to a certain extent embrace the visibility championed in Western LGBTQ politics in order to live out their same-sex desire. Benjamin Kahan's thoughts on a sexual world-system according to which knowledge of the hetero/homo binary, together with its lived experiences, collides with local forms of sexuality ('Conjectures on the Sexual World-System', 2017), more accurately sheds light on the writings of Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa, in which local concepts of sexuality are contrasted with the western binary system. What Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa endorse, in the end, is a transnational concept of sexuality in which Moroccan and Arab/Muslim concepts around same-sex love are re-invented in the light of the western binary system. Furthermore, their

writings also show that sexuality is linked to older colonial and imperialist ideas of race and sexuality against which recent western perspectives on sexuality have attempted to define themselves.

One aim of this study is to examine to what extent the writers reflect, but also re-assess, western models of sexuality as discussed in queer theory and sexuality studies. More specifically, I am interested in how these writers respond to the notion of visibility and 'outness' inherent in western homosexual identity today. Contrasting their understanding of same-sex desire in Morocco with western theories of homosexuality, this study shows how they create different concepts of sexuality which are more informed by cultural notions around modesty and shame. This creation of new models of same-sex desire is also enabled by the authors' diasporic experiences. Thanks to their diasporic experience both writers not only question notions around visibility but also combine Islam with their sexual orientation.

The first chapter, 'Homosexuality in North African Literature from Decolonization to the 1990s', examines legacies of North African literature thematizing same-sex love which feature importantly in Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's work. I read francophone North African literature in conjunction with Lee Edelman's analysis of heterosexuality's proximity to homosexuality in his 'Seeing Things, Representation, the Scene of Surveillance, and the Spectacle of Gay Male Sex' (1994), in order to show how in a similar vein North African authors de-naturalize heterosexuality and depict it as haunted by homosexuality. I then turn to Mohamed Mrabet's and Mohamed Choukri's writings and their collaboration with Paul Bowles. I illustrate the contradiction inherent in the production of Mrabet's and Choukri's works, on the one hand defending nationalistic values and projecting homosexuality onto the

West, whilst simultaneously being appropriated by Bowles, who advanced them on an international stage so as to promote an orientalist portrait of North Africa.

In the second chapter, 'Refused Identification, "Growing Sideways", and Autofiction: Childhood in Rachid O.'s *L'enfant ébloui*, *Plusieurs vies,* and *Chocolat chaud,* and Abdellah Taïa's *Mon Maroc, L'armée du salut,* and *Une mélancolie arabe*', I bring the authors' childhood narratives together with Butler's theory of refused identification (1997) and Bouhdiba's observations about growing into normative masculinity in the Arab/Muslim world (1975), in order to understand the authors' non-conforming masculinity and the unease this causes in a society which does not traditionally acknowledge homosexuality. Furthermore, using Stockton's theory of the queer child (2009, 2016), I shed light on Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's adolescent and child protagonists who unsettle notions of (sexual) innocence often linked to the child. I also argue that Rachid O.'s writings were steered by and used by the French literati in order to counter views on sexuality in France in the 1990s. The chapter argues that the idea of projecting a different sexuality onto the Other is perpetuated by the West in the sense that it uses the 'Orient' in order to negotiate its own sexual politics.

In the third chapter, 'Queer Muslim Diaspora in Abdellah Taïa's *Le rouge du tarbouche, Une mélancolie arabe,* and *Infidèles,* and Rachid O.'s *Plusieurs vies* and *Ce qui reste',* I argue in the light of queer diasporic theory that the diaspora becomes a site in which protagonists can to some extent reconcile their love with their cultural backgrounds. It is only outside patriarchal Moroccan society that the authors are able to invent a way of life and begin to experience a sexuality which they can root in their own culture. It is also from the diaspora that they are able to critically re-assess the Moroccan situation.

The final chapter, 'From the "garçon du bled" to "Tintin's Dog": Sexualization and Racialization in the Fifth French Republic in Rachid O.'s *Analphabètes* and Abdellah Taïa's *Un pays pour mourir* and *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé*', analyses Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's latest work. If in the early works living in France offered the hope of freedom, this gives way in the final writings to disenchantment and a critical attitude to France, leavened with a nostalgic look back at Morocco. Reading Rachid O.'s and Taïa's work through the lens of Mireille Rosello's performative encounters (2005) and Fassin's perspectives on policies concerning racial and sexual minorities in France today (2010, 2015), we see that male Arab subjectivity remains influenced by an imperialist discourse from which France cannot divest itself and which imprisons Rachid O.'s and Taïa's protagonists in rigid subjectivities from which they cannot free themselves.

This study offers two principle arguments. First, that Rachid O. and Taïa loosen rigid ideologies around masculinity and gender and offer alternative models of masculinity. Both writers pluralize and invent new forms of queer – in the sense of non-conforming – desires. In particular, they root their queerness in Arab/Muslim culture, or rehearse a queerness informed by Arab/Muslim concepts around sexuality, something which has not been discussed in the critical literature on queer North African writings. Furthermore, I argue that the invention of different forms of living one's masculinity, homosexuality, and Islam is also facilitated by the West – specifically France. Throughout the chapters, I show how both authors critically engage with western models, such as homosexuality, the notion of being 'out', the idea of living in an equal relationship with a same-sex partner, sometimes adopting these models, sometimes creating hybrid forms, often, however, problematically distancing themselves from them and assessing their racial bias. Whereas France – as much through its literary heritage as through LGBTQ politics – provides queer Moroccan authors with a platform from which they

can express themselves and to which they to a certain extent identify, older colonial histories, combined with a volatile racial and sexual minority rights situation, have thwarted these writers' attempts to fully integrate themselves into the Fifth Republic. However, as fraught as their relationship with France is, the country nevertheless empowers such individuals to write about and publish autofictions, novels, and short stories centring around a form of love criminalized in Morocco.

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Introduction

Recently, the Moroccan literary scene has seen the emergence of queer writers who openly thematize their non-conforming sexuality. Rachid O. is the first North African author – and presumably Muslim author – to have talked openly about his homosexuality in his writings. In reality called Rachid Oubaid, he took on his nom de plume in order to protect his family from homophobic assaults in Morocco. Born in 1970 in Rabat, he published his first collection of short stories, *L'enfant ébloui* (1995), followed by *Plusieurs vies* (1996) and *Chocolat chaud* (1998) with Gallimard. Spending 2000 as a pensionnaire at the Villa Medici in Rome, he subsequently published *Ce qui reste* (2003) and *Analphabètes* (2013), also with Gallimard. For *Analphabètes* he was awarded the Prix Mamounia in Morocco, a prestigious award aimed at promoting literature in Morocco. In 2016 Rachid O. co-wrote the scenario for the film *Prendre le large,* directed by Garel Morel and starring Sandrine Bonnaire, which was released in 2017.

Abdellah Taïa, born in 1973 in Salé, near Rabat, is another Moroccan author known for making use of his sexual orientation in his work and publicly declaring his homosexuality. He published his first collections of autofictional short stories, *Mon Maroc* in 2000 and *Le rouge du tarbouche* in 2004 with Séguier, before publishing novels, including *L'armée du salut* (2006), *Une mélancolie arabe* (2008), *Le jour du roi* (2010) for which he won the Prix de Flore, *Infidèles* (2012), *Un pays pour mourir* (2015), *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé* (2017), and *La vie lente* (2019) with Seuil. He has also published two books of photographs, one with Frédéric Mitterrand, *Maroc 1900-1960, Un certain regard* (2007), and one with Mahmoud Farag and Denis Dailleux, *Egypte les martyrs de la révolution* (2014), and edited *Lettres à un jeune Marocain* in 2009. Alongside his literary activities he has also directed a feature film, *L'armée du salut* (2015), based on his eponymous novel. It was shown at the Mostra Film

Festival in Venice and the Tangier Film Festival in 2014 and received first prize at the Festival Premiers Plan of Angers in France.

Partly due to Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's advocacy but also to the advancement of sexual minority rights outside the western world, North African queer literature and North African queer cultural production generally has begun to attract scholarly and journalistic attention. French journalists have sought to reveal the anxiety and tensions experienced by queer North African immigrants or queer French citizens of North African origin in the French banlieue. Journalist Franck Chaumont collected a host of short biographies of queer North African immigrants and French citizens of North African descent, which he published in *Homo ghetto – gays et lesbiennes dans les cités, les clandestins de la République.*[1] Furthermore, in *Un homo dans la cité: La descente aux enfers puis la libération d'un homosexuel de culturel maghrébine*, Brahim Naït-Balk recounts his experience of growing up in a Parisian banlieue and his liberation on arriving in the centre of the French city, a site associated with modernity and progress.[2] While these works focus upon the experience of being a queer North African in the French suburbs, less scholarship has appeared on contemporary queer North African writing. In *Queer Maroc, Sexualités, genres et (trans)identités dans la littérature marocaine*, Jean Zaganiaris examines the writings of a range of female and male Moroccan authors. Approaching literary works through a combination of sociology, cultural, and queer studies, he shows that the novels reflect the considerable societal change and shifting perceptions regarding sexual minorities in Morocco at the turn of the twenty-first century.[3] Denis Provencher's *Queer Maghrebi French* examines

[1] Franck Chaumont, *Homo-ghetto: gays et lesbiennes dans les cités : les clandestins de la République* (Paris : Le cherche-midi, 2009).
[2] Brahim Naït-Balk, *Un homo dans la cité: La descente aux enfers puis la libération d'un homosexuel de culturel maghrébine* (Paris : Calmann-Lévy, 2009).
[3] Jean Zaganiaris, *Queer Maroc, Sexualités, genres et (trans)identités dans la littérature marocaine* (Milton Keynes: Des ailes sur un tracteur, 2013).

the lived experience of queer Maghrebi and queer Maghrebi-French men who grew up in or moved to France.[4] Provencher, approaching from linguistic and anthropological angles the empirical evidence of the lived experiences of performance artists, novelists, film directors, and 'everyday' study participants, shows how queer Maghrebi French citizens or Maghrebi immigrants create a flexible language and have a different approach to temporality and transfiliation.[5] Lastly, the volume *Être homosexuel au Maghreb*, edited by sociologist Monia Lachheb, brings together essays by anthropologists, sociologists, and law scholars, but does not engage with literary studies at all.[6]

This study seeks to build on this existing scholarship by examining queer Moroccan literature produced in North Africa, specifically Morocco. The bulk of the thesis will examine Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's literary works; Taïa's last novel, *La Vie lente*, which appeared in 2019, will not be part of the corpus. Rather than focussing on the queer Maghrebi immigrant's lived experience in France alone, this study will consider queer Moroccan literary production seen through a transnational dynamic, that is, I will assess to what extent contemporary queer Moroccan cultural production and its depiction of queer ways of being is enmeshed in French, or indeed western, queer literary production and queer politics. How do Moroccan writers thematize being homosexual or indeed 'out' in Morocco today and what are the narrative structures they use to do so? Rachid O. and Taïa belong to a new generation of Moroccan authors who do not shy away from writing about intimacy, subject matter which was considered taboo in literature produced at the time of Hassan II. Consequently, both authors choose narrative forms, such as first-person narratives or epistolary novels, which lend

[4] Denis Provencher, *Queer Maghrebi French, Coming Out À L'Orientale* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).
[5] Ibid. Provencher argues that queer Maghrebi French speakers create different family structures by reaching across generations and reversing the direction of the transfer of knowledge between parent and child, a process he terms transfiliation (p. 40-48).
[6] *Être homosexuel au Maghreb*, ed. by Monia Lachheb (Paris, Tunis: Éditions Karthala, 2016).

themselves to the discussion of personal matters and which offer a convincing representation of subjectivity. Furthermore, for working class citizens without financial means or access to powerful social and cultural networks in particular, writing openly in Morocco about a sexual orientation which is still criminalized by law (Article 489 of the Moroccan Penal Code condemns 'lewd or unnatural acts with an individual of the same sex' to anything between six months' and three years' imprisonment and a fine of 120-1,200 dirhams) normally leads to ostracization for individuals and their families.[7] Added to which, the lack of a Moroccan or Arab/Muslim homosexual current in contemporary Arab/Muslim literature makes it difficult for queer Moroccan writers to draw upon and inscribe themselves into a pre-existing tradition. What role does French queer literary production and the promotional impact of French and western LGBTQ politics play for queer Moroccan literature? How can these writers reconcile their own cultural and religious backgrounds, in which their religion opposes same-sex love and in which the intimate and sexual is kept private, with a western, globalized gay identity, linked to visibility which, furthermore, is often antagonistic towards Islam?

I approach my primary corpus through a combination of queer and postcolonial theories and North African and western studies on sociology. Throughout this study, I aim to bring my authors into discussion with queer theorists such as Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Gayatri Gopinath, and Kathryn Bond Stockton, in order to reflect on the similarities between my authors' intentions and the aims of queer theorists. More importantly, I seek to assess the limits of western queer theory or concepts linked to a western LGBTQ culture and politics which are at odds with Arab/Muslim culture and indeed its own culture of same-sex love. What is perhaps most striking in Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's work is their interrogation

[7] See https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde29/7141/2017/en/, [accessed 16.01.2020]. See also Gianfranco Rebucini, 'Masculinités hégémoniques et "sexualités" entre hommes au Maroc', *Cahiers d'études africaines,* 53 (2013), 387-415 (p. 397).

of familiar constructs such as children's sexual innocence, the notion of 'home', or the rigidly gendered and sexual structures in Arab/Muslim culture. Bringing theorists such as Butler, Edelman, or Stockton into dialogue with Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa is fruitful in the sense that they each question social and cultural norms regarding sex, gender, or family structures. David Halperin provides perhaps the most useful definition of queer when he observes that:

> Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. […] "Queer" then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality *vis-à-vis* the normative…[Queer] describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogenous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance.[8]

Queer works always against the norm or in resistance to the norm, a resistance which is in itself always dynamic and changeable. The most pressing concern of queer theorists is to highlight the instability of concepts such as heterosexuality, sex, and sexuality, and examine how in the course of history specific meanings and structures have been attributed to these terms. By denaturalizing heterosexuality, for example, queer theorists re-assess confirmed concepts and thus point towards new ways of reflecting on and leading one's life.[9] Butler's denaturalizing ideologies and structures around sex, gender, and sexualities are echoed in Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's work which contests Arab/Muslim patriarchal structures and questions a society in which the sexually different is not recognized.[10] Likewise, Stockton's concept of the 'queer child', which deconstructs western notions around children's incorruptibility is reflected in Rachid O.'s and Taïa's portrayal of the sexually mature child.[11] What Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's writings gesture at is not only their attempt to deconstruct and destabilize Arab/Muslim ideologies around sex, gender, and conservative

[8] David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards A Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 62, in Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2003), p. 43.
[9] See Sullivan, pp. 50-54. See also Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 73-93.
[10] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity* (New York; London: Routledge, 1999).
[11] Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The queer child, or growing sideways in the 20th century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

Islamic doctrines, but reveal alternative modes of living, and pluralize rigid ideologies and notions around masculinity and sexuality, offering in the process a more liberal reading of Islam.

Yet Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's writings also reveal the limits of western models of queer theory and LGBTQ politics. Throughout their work, Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa examine the fraught notion of being 'out' in Morocco and in the West. As queer theorists Nikki Sullivan, Annamarie Jagose, and French sociologist Frédéric Martel observe, the notion of 'being out' is an intrinsically western phenomenon, linked to the western homosexual liberationist movement of the late 1970s.[12] Gay and lesbian liberationists advocated the process of 'coming out' linked to visibility with the aim of shifting the heterosexual order of society towards greater openness regarding sexual orientation and towards the creation of gay and lesbian identities, an idea I will return to.[13] The notions of visibility and exit from the closet were at the same time imported from American homosexual movements to France and were at the forefront of gay activism in France in the 1970s and 1980s.[14] The paradigm of the closet, however, was challenged by intersectional theorists who blamed its western and white female and male centred bias. Black studies critic Marlon B. Ross criticizes (white) queer theory in his article 'Beyond the Closet as Raceless Paradigm' as beset with what he calls "claustrophilia", 'a fixation on the closet […] as the grounding principle for sexual experience, knowledge and politics […]'.[15] He engages with theorists who have explored the closet and modern homosexual identity such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, observing that, in their discussion of the closet paradigm, these theorists overlook factors such as racial

[12] See Sullivan, p. 31-2, Jagose, pp. 38-9, Frédéric Martel*, Le rose et le noir, Les homosexuels en France depuis 1968* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), p. 665-6.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Martel, p. 666.
[15] Marlon B. Ross, 'Beyond the Closet as Raceless Paradigm', in *Black queer studies: a critical anthology*, ed. by Patrick Johnson and Mae Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 161-189 (p.162).

difference and non-white same-sex cultures whilst presenting their findings as universal.[16] Ross notes that:

> On the one hand Sedgwick defines "Western culture as a whole" as this closed set of elite white men's works obsessed with un/closeted desire. In other words, the "knowledges and understandings of twentieth-century Western culture as a whole" become the property of a clique, a tiny minority. On the other hand, she takes the closet binary in these racially select texts as exemplary of *the* epistemology of *the* closet – in other words, as a universal phenomenon […].[17]

Ross alludes here to Kosofsky Sedgwick's critical analyses of closeted/uncloseted desire in James, Proust, and Wilde and criticizes her for deducing a universal theory by analysing white, elitist male culture. Furthermore, given the cultural and political supremacy of the West, the closet paradigm and the hetero/homo binary system emerged as ubiquitous. Thus, Ross questions the widely rehearsed narrative of queer theorists, according to which the formation of modern homosexuality is produced by 'collective coming out'. In other words, backwards, closeted subjects migrate to large urban centres where they experience a form of freedom in gay or lesbian ghettoes.[18] As he notes, 'to become a homosexual, the African would have to leave behind any traditional notion of intragender sexuality'.[19] Hailing from a cultural background and a social milieu in which, as we will see, homosexual identity and, concomitantly, the process of 'coming out', is relatively unknown, yet consorting with western gay men, Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's engagement with the closet paradigm is complex. Taïa's famous revelation of his homosexuality to the journalist Karim Boukhari, which made the cover of the widely read Moroccan francophone newspaper *Tel Quel* in June 2007, in an article entitled 'Abdellah Taïa, homosexuel, envers et contre tous', can be

[16] Ross, p. 170.
[17] P. 170.
[18] Ross, p. 178.
[19] Ross, p. 174. Marlon B. Ross, African American studies scholar, has most probably African Americans or citizens from the continent Africa in mind when he uses the term 'African' here.

interpreted as his public coming out.[20] If this can indeed be seen as the writer's public declaration of his sexual orientation, by analysing works published before 2007, namely *Mon Maroc*, *L'armée du salut* and *Une mélancolie arabe*, I will suggest that Taïa's revelation of his sexual preference is complicated by cultural notions of modesty, shame, and reluctance to talk about the self. Only once in France did the author mention homosexuality in his work which remains nevertheless informed by Arab/Muslim notions of same-sex love. If, by contrast, the protagonists in Rachid O.'s early writings are 'out', my discussion will problematize this revelation by illustrating that the writer was steered by French intellectuals in order to make a point about contemporary French sexual politics. Rachid O.'s later works show how the concept of closeted and uncloseted desire is in conflict with local notions around sexuality informed by shame, modesty, and privacy.

Throughout the chapters of this study, I show then how both authors engage with western models and politics linked to LGBTQ cultures. I will divide the authors' work into three periods which will also structure my chapters. The first chapter, which falls outside the threefold periodization of their work, will look at preceding generations of Moroccan authors who thematize homosexuality in their writings and the legacies for Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa. The second chapter will be devoted to Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's early writings from the 1990s and around the turn of the twenty-first century which extensively discuss their respective childhoods. Here I will compare their ideas of growing into non-normative masculinity with western queer theories, contrast different concepts of non-normative masculinity, and discuss narrative structures. The third chapter will examine Rachid O.'s and Taïa's works produced in the first decade of the twenty-first century. I will analyse the diasporic experience and identify how the diaspora empowers their protagonists to create

[20] Karim Boukhari, 'Abdellah Taïa, homosexuel envers et contre tous', *Tel Quel*, 17 June, 2007. https://www.bladi.net/abdellah-taia-homosexuel.html, [accessed 01.02.2020].

queer spaces and enables them to write about their sexual orientation. In the final chapter I will examine Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's recent work in which I will identify an increasingly critical stance towards France and its sexual and racial politics. My discussion will offer two principle arguments. First, I suggest that Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa loosen rigid ideologies around masculinity, sexuality, and gender in Arab/Muslim culture and offer alternative models of masculinity. By re-appropriating a heritage around same-sex love rooted in Arab/Muslim culture, they point towards a more inclusive, visionary idea of Islam. This is especially the case with Taïa who enacts a version of Islam which affords space to the sexually different. Both writers pluralize and invent new forms of queer being rooted in Arab/Muslim culture. Second, my discussion will demonstrate that the invention of different forms of living one's masculinity, queerness, and Islam, is facilitated by the West – here, specifically France. Throughout the chapters, I will show how both authors critically engage with western models, such as homosexuality, the notion of being out, the idea of living in equal relationship with a same-sex partner, sometimes adopting these models, sometimes creating hybrid forms, often, however, problematically distancing themselves from it and assessing its racial bias. Whereas France – as much through its literary heritage as through LGBTQ politics – provides queer Moroccan authors with a platform through which they can express themselves and to a certain extent identify, older colonial histories, combined with a volatile racial and sexual minority rights situation, have thwarted these writers' attempts to fully integrate themselves into the Fifth Republic. However, as fraught as their relationship with France is, the country nevertheless empowers such individuals to write about and publish autofictions, novels, and short stories centring around a form of love criminalized in Morocco. While my chapter on their early works demonstrates how the literary and journalistic French culture promotes Moroccan queer writings and how the western model of homosexuality provides the adolescent narrator-protagonists with an identity, the following chapters illustrate

how Rachid O. and Taïa critically engage with the western model and proffer a way of being queer in Morocco or in the Arab/Muslim world, however illusory that may be. In the last chapter, I show how their works respond to and assess sexual and racial politics in France, informed by the Centuries-old tradition of Orientalism which projects sexual difference and backwardness onto the 'East'. In order to understand the tensions at play between Morocco and France, and between different models and conceptualizations of sexuality, I would like now to spend some time elucidating, from a historical and anthropological perspective, debates around homosexuality in the Arab/Muslim world before moving on to define the notion of transnationalism.

Homosexuality in the Arab/Muslim world

Drawing upon sociology, journalism, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and classical and modern literature, cultural historian and literature scholar Frédéric Lagrange identifies four basic notions concerning homosexuality in classic and modern Arab/Muslim societies.[21] First, Arab/Muslim culture acknowledges male beauty and teaches that male beauty can cause disorder (*fitna)* in men and women.[22] Second, a male's appreciation of male beauty in an adolescent can lead to sexual desire between the two which according to the law (*fiqh*) needs to be resisted.[23] According to Arab/Muslim jurisprudence, one of the worst sins is committed if sexual desire between men is fulfilled. It is important to stress that Arab/Muslim jurisprudence does not acknowledge sexual identities such as homosexuality or heterosexuality, yet distinguishes between sexual acts, and also discriminates between the active and the passive partner.[24] As

[21] Frédéric Lagrange, 'Homosexuality in Arabic Literature', in *Imagined Masculinities, Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*, ed. by Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb (London: Saqi, 2006), pp. 169-98 (p. 171).
[22] Ibid.
[23] Lagrange, p. 172.
[24] Ibid.

Lagrange notes, however, the passage from desire to fulfilment is socially relatively accepted. If the social order (which means the maintenance of family and procreation) is not jeopardized, sexual intercourse between men is permitted, especially between a married man and one who submits to his authority owing to his age or his lower status in society.[25] Third, eroticism between men, especially in literature, is not only depicted as merely sexual but, like its heterosexual counterpart, can lead to love and passion.[26] Fourth, if, especially in literature and poetry from the classical period, the portrayal of love between a grown man and a boy is a common topos, the depiction of love and attraction between two grown men is rare, covert, or only features in literature of ribaldry (*mujun*).[27]

Lagrange notes a shift in Arab/Muslim social attitudes towards homosexuality and sexuality in general during the Arab countries' confrontations with the colonial powers and during the era known as the *Nahda* (Arab renaissance) in the nineteenth century. With the demise of the Ottoman Empire and under the influence of western colonial powers, the newly created Arab nations underwent a period of modernization and reform during which they adopted Victorian norms and European laws.[28] From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, Arab scholars and writers would read European orientalist accounts which castigated Arab/Muslim civilization as decadent, backward, and degraded under the Ottoman rule, and, in reaction to this, denied their own heritage and embraced more 'progressive', European values.[29] During this confrontation with European colonialism, European laws concerning homosexuality were adopted, and sexuality became 'normalized'.[30] Joseph Massad's *Desiring Arabs*, for example, shows how modern and contemporary Arab society and its historiography developed around a

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Lagrange, p. 173.
[28] Lagrange, p. 190.
[29] Lagrange, p. 191.
[30] Ibid.

denial of men's love for boys and of sexual desires in general which it identifies with the past.[31] With European colonization, and the concomitant desire to appropriate western values, European penal codes which condemned homosexuality were introduced in the newly created Arab/Muslim nations after the demise of the Ottoman Empire. Thus in Morocco, Article 489 of the Penal Code is a remnant of Morocco's colonial past, which was revived by Islamist parties following independence.[32] With the Arab/Muslim confrontation with European colonial powers' legal systems, a new vocabulary and new sexual epistemologies were introduced into Arab/Muslim culture.

Anthropologist Gianfranco Rebucini distinguishes two concepts of homosexuality which co-exist in Morocco today. Whereas the urban educated class adopted western categories of hetero- and homosexuality, the popular classes and rural society in particular do not distinguish between different sexualities, but rather between different erotic practices which are not dependent upon a categorization of sexuality.[33] In order to understand these erotic practices and the concomitant social stigmata, it is important to understand the conceptualization of masculinity in Moroccan society, especially among lower socio-economic classes. In Morocco masculinity exists in different degrees, ranging from the most masculine, or what Rebucini names 'hegemonic masculinity', to the least masculine.[34] Hegemonic masculinity, for example, to name a few of its features, distinguishes itself through economic independence, the capacity to make decisions, the display of physical strength, distance from the world of women, the insertive role in sexual intercourse, and the ability to create a family.[35] If this ideal of masculinity is never achieved, it should be aimed at.

[31] Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 1.
[32] Rebucini, p. 397.
[33] Rebucini, p. 399.
[34] Rebucini, p. 400.
[35] Ibid.

On the other end of the masculine spectrum are men who are economically dependent, display an inability to make decisions, are receptive in sexual intercourse, and so on.[36] These different grades of masculinity are not fixed, but subject to change, according to the person's behaviour and exist in relation to society and the individual's environment. The term *zamel,* which features often in Rachid O.'s and Taïa's works, should be understood in this context. Whereas it is often interpreted as merely the passive partner in sexual intercourse, the word denotes more than that.[37] If *zamel* may encompass this idea, it signifies first and foremost the one who offers his body to his partner and puts himself in a situation of dependence (also economically) on his partner.[38] Thus the shame and loss of honour associated with the term is also linked to the dependence upon others this word denotes. Every man at some moment in his adolescence or later life can incorporate a less masculine role or be put in the position of the *zamel*. Hence these categorizations should rather be conceived of as fluid and subject to constant change. In a society in which the individual should aspire to procreation and the establishment of a family, the position of the *zamel* is transient and to be abandoned with the onset of adulthood.[39] The one who is designated as *zamel* for this period loses his masculinity which, however, he can regain by engaging in marriage and procreation. The transient embodiment of *zamel* does not represent a real danger for a society in which the ultimate aim is to marry and create a family.[40] Thus the term designates a transient, fleeting phase, not a fixed, essentialized identity as the translation 'passive homosexual' would sometimes suggest.[41] More important than actual sexual preferences is the public display of one's masculinity in Moroccan society.[42] Public knowledge of a man's inclination towards other

[36] Ibid.
[37] Rebucini, p. 402.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Rebucini, p. 406.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Rebucini, p. 400.

men, or, even worse, public knowledge of his sexual preferences induces shame and ostracization for the person concerned and his family.[43] In Morocco, where the display of masculinity is intrinsically linked to the public space, being publicly decried as *zamel* produces a loss of honour.

A few words about the terminology used throughout this study. Lagrange observes that classical Arabic and local Arabic dialects have no term which denotes homosexuality, but rather categorize different sexual acts.[44] I will, therefore, use the term 'queer' when referring to same-sex desire, love, and erotic acts in the works of Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa. Although Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa, and their protagonists, refer to themselves as 'homosexuel' or 'gay' at times, their same-sex practices and forms of coupling are far from resembling western categories such as gay or homosexual. Their erotic practices, which resist normative forms of desire in Arab/Muslim culture, can best be described as queer which in a similar vein, as we have seen, highlights resistance to and destabilization of the norm.[45] I will not make use of the non-condemnatory Arabic term *mithli* which denotes homosexuality and means literally 'the same as me', but which has only been introduced in recent decades into the language.[46] When using the term 'homosexuality', I will refer to the identity category as it has developed in the West and spread across the world. In my first chapter, for example, in which I examine same-sex love in North African literature, I will use the term since it is used by the authors themselves and reveals the exportation of this western term into other cultures. When using the term gay or lesbian here, I will refer to gay or lesbian subjectivity as it has become recognized in the West following the sexual revolution and the rise of neoliberalism.

[43] Rebucini, p. 406.
[44] Lagrange, p. 170.
[45] See Sullivan, pp. 37- 56. Jagose, pp. 72-93.
[46] Human Rights Watch, *'They Want Us Exterminated', Murder, Torture, Sexual Orientation and Gender in Iraq* (New York, NY: Human Rights Watch, 2009), p. 9.

Gay and lesbian identity, a form of modern homosexuality, differs from mere homosexuality in that it refers specifically to a way of life which distinguishes itself from heterosexual kinship. After the sexual revolution gay and lesbian liberationists advocated for a recognition of same-sex couples, a form of kinship which was later protected by the law with the PACS and same-sex marriage in France.[47] If gay and lesbian identity refers then to this exclusive sexual orientation for a person of the same sex with the possibility to spend a life together, it invokes also the social networks and culture which was created for homosexuals in western Europe and in the United States. The form of life was increasingly supported by a market which provided for example shops, newspapers, fashion, and a nightlife geared towards persons who openly embraced their desire for the same sex.[48]

If, like Lagrange, Massad identifies a crucial moment in Arab/Muslim historiography and society (namely repudiation of the Arab/Muslim cultural heritage and the appropriation of western laws and norms concerning sexual regimes during the period of Arab/Muslim modernization), he also identifies another turning point related to western influence on Arab/Muslim sexual regimes. With the emerging agenda of sexual rights in the western world in the late 1960s and its internationalization in the 1980s and 1990s, the discussion of sexual practices and related human rights extended to the Arab/Muslim world.[49] Furthered by a century-old western tradition of same-sex tourism in the Arab world and increasing anthropological interest in the second half of the 20th century in same-sex practices among men in Arab/Muslim societies, western human rights groups began to pay special attention to the violation of 'homosexual rights' in Arab countries.[50] Organizations such as the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) and the International Gay and Lesbian

[47] Rebucini, pp. 392-95. Martel, pp. 664- 87.
[48] Martel, p. 665.
[49] Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, p. 37.
[50] Ibid.

Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) were established to protect and advance the right of all people subject to discrimination or abuse on the basis of their gender or sexual orientation or HIV status. Massad subsumes the activities of such groups, their missionary task, and the discourses and literature they produced under the term 'The Gay International'.[51] The literature produced by the Gay International revolved mainly around the notion that the Arab/Muslim world is still backwards regarding sexual and gender politics and needs to catch up with liberationist western sexual and gender models.[52]

Massad observes two phenomena linked with the rise of the Gay International in Arab/Muslim countries. First, the Gay International, part of the increasing presence of Europeans and Americans in the post-1967 Arab/Muslim world following Egypt's defeat in the Six Day War, was perceived as cultural contamination by Arab nationalists and Islamists. Supported by respective Arab states, conservatives and Islamists produced literature which linked sodomy or 'deviant' sexual behaviour to criminalization.[53] Islamists called for more restrictive sexual practices consonant with 'true' Islam and for corporal penalties for those who engaged in homosexual acts.[54] This background is important insofar as Rachid O.'s and Taïa's work is situated within these transnational tensions between conservative Islamist forces and western LGBTQ 'propaganda', an observation I will return to. As my discussion of Rachid O.'s *Analphabètes* will show, the violence caused by and to homosexuals in the novel emerges from the uneasy co-habitation of Islamist views on 'deviant' sexuality on the one side and western LGBTQ identity politics on the other.[55]

[51] Massad, p. 161.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Massad, p. 193.
[55] Rachid O., *Analphabètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013).

More central to this study is the second consequence of the spread of the Gay International which Massad observes. Massad argues that, contrary to Gay International liberationist claims and purposes, it produces gays and lesbians in a culture in which they are culturally non-existent and, second, it represses local forms of sexual desire and practice which refuse to be assimilated by that western identity politics.[56] Massad is very sceptical about scholars such as Judith Butler – whom he otherwise holds in high esteem – when she claims that: 'Indeed the task of international lesbian and gay politics is no less than a remaking of reality, a reconstitution of the human, and a brokering of the question, what is and is not livable.'[57] If Butler sees the constitution of the human in the West as something which had always excluded homosexuals and now calls for the inclusion of the sexually different, she is risking, according to Massad, another exclusion by universalizing this claim and imposing it on other cultures.[58] According to Massad, the universalization of LGBTQ rights not only represses existing local forms of desire which are not based on the western culturally informed binary hetero/homo system, but further ostracizes and endangers people who identify with these newly created identities in a culture which is opposed to the western homo/hetero binary system.

Massad's conclusions concerning the harmful implications of the internationalization of LGBTQ rights for the Arab/Muslim world has attracted a lot of critical attention from several scholars working on LGBTQ issues in the Arab/Muslim context. In 'The Past Is a Foreign Country? The Times and Spaces of Islamicate Sexuality Studies' in *Islamicate Sexualities, Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, Valerie Traub rejects Massad's claim that scholars and human rights activists working on LGBTQ issues in the Arab/Muslim world

[56] Massad, p. 162.
[57] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York, London: Routledge, 2004), p. 29-30, in Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, p. 40.
[58] Massad, p. 39.

approach that world via an ahistorical, identarian, western gay and lesbian perspective without taking into account local forms of sexuality and desire.[59] As she notes, constructionist theories of homosexuality reject the notion of a 'pre-discursive homosexuality' and queer theory itself is very aware of the polymorphous nature of erotic desire.[60] Mainstream lesbian and gay politics, she observes, which has arisen in neoliberal states in which its proponents have secured (limited) rights, has drawn much criticism, especially when such politics is applied to other cultures.[61] Furthermore, in the two-volume edited work *Islam and Homosexuality* Samar Habib critiques Massad's claims that the notion of 'coming out' and visibility strategies are useless western imports and colonial impositions that endanger the very people whose aim is to be protected:

> Massad champions the right to not come out and to resist activist resistance as though these are culturally unique ways of existence, instead of seeing these as resultant from the impact that prohibition has on the individual's readiness to resist and protest dominant/oppressive social forces.[62]

Rather than seeing concepts such as coming out and visibility strategies as uniquely western, she conceives of them as universal and intrinsic to all who experience oppression. She writes that Massad's criticism:

> […] oppresses those who, against all odds, *have* […] initiated local grassroots campaigns for LGBTIQ rights in the Arab world by reducing these initiatives, in an academic discourse, to nothing more than agents of Western/Imperialist sabotage of the Arab nations.[63]

[59] Valerie Traub, 'The Past Is a Foreign Country? The Times and Spaces of Islamicate Sexuality Studies' in *Islamicate Sexualities : Translations Across Temporal Geographies of Desire,* Kathryn Babayan, Afsaneh Najmabadi, eds (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 1-40 (pp. 5-6).
[60] Ibid.
[61] Traub, pp. 6-7.
[62] Samar Habib, 'Introduction: Islam and Homosexuality', in *Islam and Homosexuality*, ed. by Samar Habib, I (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), pp. 17-62 (pp. 18-19).
[63] Habib, p. 19.

Unlike Massad, Habib conceives of the importance of these grassroots organizations as assisting same-sex couples and homosexuals to lead a dignified and protected life, a view also shared by other scholars such as Denis Provencher.[64]

Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's works often illustrate the exposure of protagonists hailing from Arab/Muslim backgrounds to western forms of homosexuality or to a western-formulated gay identity. Their work, which exposes the transnational dynamic between France and Morocco, deploys different concepts of sexuality along with ensuing tensions due to cultural differences. More local models such as that discussed by Rebucini collide with the western model. Throughout the chapters, it will be seen that these different models co-habit with more or less ease. The co-existence of different models is already evinced by the material considered in my first chapter which provides an overview of homosexuality in North African literature. In my second chapter, in which I discuss Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's childhood narratives, I will show how child protagonists' relationships with grown-up gay men provide psychological and financial security through which they can recognize themselves in an environment in which their sexual orientation is not acknowledged. On the other hand, Rachid O.'s, and especially Taïa's work also show how the western model of gay identity represses or strips the characters of more local forms of same-sex desire, or indeed exists only thanks to its distancing itself from 'undeveloped', 'orientalist' forms of sexuality.

In order to further understand this complex dynamic between different models of sexuality in the transnational space between France and Morocco in Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's work, I would like now to turn to thinkers who have theorized sexuality in its global or transnational context, and whose work sheds a more accurate picture on tensions arising in

[64] See 'Epilogue *Queer Maghrebi French*: Flexible Language and Activism', in Provencher, *Queer Maghrebi French*, pp. 283-91.

contemporary Moroccan queer writing. The idea propounded by Benjamin Kahan of a unified system based on the homo/hetero binary across the world reflects the confrontations between different concepts of sexuality in Rachid O.'s and Taïa's work.[65] Kahan couples world-systems analysis with sexuality studies in order to examine how the homo/hetero binary governs sexual orientation throughout the world.[66] According to Kahan, the sexual world system is divided into four zones: the core, the semi-periphery, the periphery, and external areas.[67] The core is the site in which sexology, psychiatry, and medicine has a profound impact on and regulates sexuality, thus emerging as the main generator of sexual discourse.[68] Not all ideas and concepts around sex and sexuality emerged autonomously from the core. Semi-peripheral and peripheral zones are sites in which its inhabitants have little or no knowledge of the core creation of sexual discourse and sexology.[69] However, the production of core sexual knowledge and sexology occurs through interaction with peripheral and semi-peripheral zones; the periphery makes us aware of the racial, imperial, and orientalist underpinnings of sexology in its creation and production of 'normal' (or indeed heterosexual) sexuality.[70]

Kahan's notion of imbrication of different sexual world-systems reflects the collision of different sexual models in contemporary queer Moroccan literature. The novels discussed here expose how the homo/hetero model as it emerged at the core has been appropriated or rejected by Moroccan society. In fact, the homo/hetero binary also operates within the

[65] Benjamin Kahan, 'Conjectures on the Sexual World-System', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 23 (2017), 327-57.
[66] Kahan, p. 327.
[67] Kahan, p. 332.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Kahan, p. 333. Mary Louise Pratt uses the term 'contact zone', referring to liminal spaces where self and other meet and engage in intercultural exchange. Unlike Kahan's, Pratt's 'contact zone', however, does not only refer to sexual knowledge and exchange. See Joseph Allen Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 27, and Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York; London: Routledge, 1992).
[70] Ibid. Kahan here alludes to Orientalists' ideas of homosexuality being widespread in the Arab/Muslim world.

Moroccan periphery as a model with which subjects identify and which protects them from homophobia. In the second chapter, in which I discuss Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's childhood narratives, I argue that, despite the problematic relationship and power differentials which exist between western gay men and Moroccan adolescents, the western gay model introduced by the adult men empowers Moroccan adolescents in the sense that they can begin to understand and name their (exclusive) love for the same sex. While in Taïa's childhood writings, the term 'pédé' – which is used by French homosexuals to name themselves – is never explicitly named, in Rachid O.'s writing on childhood, which emerged, as I will show, in collaboration with French intellectuals, the term is appropriated together with the physical form of love. Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's writings in general contribute to the expansion of the western homo/hetero model in Morocco. This is clearly seen in Rachid O.'s *Analphabètes* where at one point a taxi driver, insecure about his libido, retorts to the narrator, 'Alors, dis-moi, tu dois penser et analyser comme psychologue, comment je dois faire avec ma foutue libido?'[71] Having read the narrator's 'histoires de pédés',[72] the taxi driver is now unsure about his sexual drives and would like to be able to name them. Finally, Kahan's idea of the production of sexuality at the core occurring at the expense of the racialized Other onto whom backward and orientalist characteristics are projected, is also recalled in Rachid O.'s and Taïa's work. The last chapter of this study argues that French gay identity and the French homosexual scene only exist in the form today due to the projection of 'barbaric' sexuality onto the 'banlieusard' or ethnically different. Kahan's theory of the sexual world-system is ambiguously re-appropriated in Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's work. Their literary development clearly evinces a shift from a western homosexual and/or gay identity being liberating for their protagonists, to a situation in which (as Massad suggests) homosexual

[71] *Analphabètes*, p. 51.
[72] Ibid.

identity represses local forms of desire, and, indeed, exists only by projecting backward and barbaric sexuality onto the Other.

A Transnational Approach to Sexuality

If Kahan's model of the sexual world system and the importance of the homo/hetero binary system is reflected in contemporary Moroccan queer literature, it is also flawed in the sense that, at least as applied to my discussion of the works of Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa, it does not consider more local forms of desire, especially as they are reflected upon in Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's work. Kahan's idea of western homosexuality as a model increasingly adopted in the peripheral and semi-peripheral sphere is of crucial importance and is consonant with the discussion in Rachid O.'s and Taïa's novels in more than one sense. It would be wrong to reject the homo/hetero binary model outright as Massad does in *Desiring Arabs*. However, considering the co-habitation of different sexual models – western and local – in Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's work, and their frequent re-appropriation and re-invention of an Arab/Muslim heritage of homoeroticism which co-exists with the western model, it makes more sense to approach their sexuality from a transnational perspective. If as a result of the impact of identity politics, social movements and the sexual revolution of the 1960s studies of sexuality established themselves in non-clinical academic circles, with the rise of postcolonial and diaspora studies this scholarship became globalized.[73] Theorists such as Michael Warner, however, have been quick to point out that approaching sexuality studies from a global perspective does not do justice to the complexity of sexual politics and sexuality which is

[73] See Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, eds, 'Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality', *GLQ, A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 7 (2001), 663-79 (p. 663). See also Elizabeth A. Povinelli, George Chauncey, eds., 'Thinking Sexuality Transnationally: An Introduction', *GLQ, A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* 5 (1999), 439-50.

always and at once informed by local, cultural, and national politics.[74] Discussing sexuality from a global perspective often implies ignoring neo-colonial forces and the exportation of capital and ideas from the West to non-western countries, which is precisely what Massad critiques.[75] However, to imply that any Muslim or Arab who adopts gay or lesbian ideals and concomitantly visibility, equality and civil rights has been appropriated by the West overlooks, as Boone contends, that men and women and their desires and self-identification are always in the process of change and evolve in unpredictable ways.[76] In order to better serve the complex nexus of local forms of desire with western sexual models and sexual politics in Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's work, theories of transnational sexuality seem to be the most appropriate framework through which to analyse their writings.

In an article published in 2001 entitled 'Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality', Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan encourage us to use the term 'transnational' in studies of sexuality in order to avoid the reification of 'monumentalist gay or lesbian identity'.[77] A transnational approach to sexuality studies addresses more adequately inequalities and new formations of sexuality in the age of globalization.[78] According to Grewal and Kaplan, the term 'transnational' calls attention to migratory processes between two countries, and points towards a borderless world.[79] The idea that cultural encounters are more meaningful than the political is also reflected in contemporary queer Moroccan writings.[80] As Grewal and Kaplan also point out, 'transnational' has become increasingly

[74] Michael Warner, 'Introduction', in *Fear of a queer planet: queer politics and social theory*, ed. by Michael Warner (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 7-31, (p. 12).
[75] Grewal, Kaplan, p. 663.
[76] Boone, p. 31.
[77] Grewal, Kaplan, p. 664.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid. Talking of a borderless world makes more sense at the turn of the twenty-first century when globalization was at its heyday than today. Ironically, today, borders and ideas of nationalism have again grown increasingly important.
[80] Grewal, Kaplan, p. 665.

synonymous with ‘diasporic’. Diasporic groups, often resisting the nation-state in which they reside and harbouring complex relationships with the nation-state from which they hail, can best be approached through transnational politics.[81] In fact, one of my main arguments is that it is in the diaspora that Rachid O. and Taïa, being free of the patriarchy at home and in contact with western LGBTQ politics, re-invent new ways of experiencing same-sex love. Finally, and as previously suggested, transnationalism distinguishes itself from the global in that – in the context of sexuality studies – it encompasses local forms and critically assesses neo-colonial or neo-imperialist forces at play in transnational movements or formations which are often ignored by use of the term ‘global’. Transnationalism always signals cultural and national difference, whereas ‘global’ does not.[82]

According to Grewal and Kaplan, ignoring transnational formations has left studies of sexuality without the tools to address issues around cultural influences, race, class, medical discourses, politics and nationalisms; all elements which inform sexuality.[83] If Rachid O.’s and Taïa’s work features the two existing models of sexuality, one based on the homo/hetero binary system and the other on the gender/sexual practice system, studying their work through the transnational lens reveals their formation of and experience of sexuality as far more fraught and complex. If we come to recognize that in Morocco gay tourists provide the adolescent narrators with a certain security and enable them to put a name to their desire, we will also see that Taïa, for example, still conceives of the relationships he has as an adolescent with elder tourists as a form which hails from the Sufi tradition in which adolescents were guided and taught by older men and which also encompasses eroticism.

[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Grewal, Kaplan, p. 666.

Furthermore, the process of 'coming out' or 'being out', a concept that is to a certain extent adopted by Taïa, is nevertheless problematized by both authors, in the sense that cultural notions of privacy and modesty and the importance of the collective prevent them from exposing their sexual preference in a western sense. In a similar way, despite their travelling to France and coming into contact with gay French men, Rachid O.'s and Taïa's narrators and protagonists do not simply adopt a gay identity. Although Taïa mentioned in his 2007 interview for *Tel Quel* and in an interview I conducted with him that he adopted to a certain extent the gay/homosexual denomination which, as he says, confers upon him a symbolically protected status, and which allows him to be recognized in France and in the West, I show that he creates his own queer Muslim identity or episteme which has little to do with western gay identity.[84] The relationships his protagonists form with other Muslim men are informed by patriarchal elements and, furthermore, his protagonists re-appropriate and ground their desire in Arab/Muslim traditions and cultural forms of same-sex desire which are far removed from a western homosexual cultural heritage. These hybrid forms of desire lead, eventually, to the pluralization and ease of rigid sexual and gender models in Morocco but also in the West. The behaviour of Rachid O.'s protagonists is more like homosocial behaviour than homosexuality itself. Their relationship oscillates between friendship and the erotic, while outward manifestations of modesty and shame still inform their conduct. In order to understand how Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa experience their sexuality, we need to understand the legacies and practices through which they produce their own forms of desire. Furthermore, a transnational approach to sexuality makes us aware of the problems discussed by Massad and Kahan, namely the orientalist underpinnings of the formation of the hetero/home binary system and more contemporary issues around 'backward' sexual politics in North Africa and the Middle East and 'progressive' politics in the West. Reading Rachid

[84] https://www.bladi.net/abdellah-taia-homosexuel.html, [accessed 01.02.2020], Philippe Panizzon, 'La vraie liberté n'existe nulle part', *Francosphères*, 8 (2019), 183-207 (p. 202).

O.'s and Taïa's work through a transnational perspective uncovers how specifically French gay politics emerges by projecting a different, more backward sexuality onto the ethnic Other.

Considering the importance of 'eastern' and 'western' forms of sexuality, I would like to add a brief note on Orientalism here, since I frequently use the term throughout this study. Edward Saïd, in his seminal work *Orientalism,* first brought our attention to how the West projects fantasies onto the Middle East. Saïd argues that, through a combination of scholarship, international policy, and widespread popular stereotypes, the West has reconstructed the East not only with the aim of apprehending it but also of subjugating it. By endowing the 'East' with characteristics such as mysterious, exotic, and uncivilized, the West could distinguish itself as rational and civilized. The French colonization of Morocco, for example, cultivated and attempted to shape the country's culture in order to create the oriental fantasy the French and European traveller craved.[85] Under General Hubert Lyautey, bureaucratic institutions in and scholarship on Morocco furthered the image of the country as embodying stereotypes rooted in the orientalist imaginary.[86] As Valérie Orlando notes, under the French protectorate, France became the 'author' of Morocco and its national identity, rendering an ideal distinction between myth and reality impossible.[87]

A corollary of orientalist writings is to project onto the East sexual fantasies made taboo by law and culture in the West. As Saïd observes, the sexually available Other was often conceived of by the West as female and to be conquered. In his book *The Homoerotics of Orientalism,* Joseph Allen Boone is interested in Anglo-European and later U.S. writers, travellers, and artists who attempt to represent what to them seems a relatively open culture of

[85] Orlando, p. 4.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.

male homoeroticism in the Middle East and North Africa compared to the repressed West.[88] He discerns two tropes which caught the interest of these writers and artists, namely that of the beautiful boy and the hyper-virile male Other.[89] The youth loved by men, a recurring topos in Arab/Muslim poetry, has fuelled European writerly fantasy as has the Middle East as a space in which homosexuality is prevalent.[90] In a similar vein, the image of the hyper-virile male of undefined sexuality who has to be tamed by European civilization belonged to well-rehearsed tropes of Orientalism.[91] As Rachid O.'s and Taïa's work shows, these tropes have cultural and political resonance even now. Concerning specifically French colonial literature featuring homosexuality, André Gide and Roland Barthes are perhaps the primary examples.[92] Whilst this has sometimes been questioned by critics or critically analysed, both authors reveal their colonial attitude towards North African men and women by depicting them mainly as being open to sexual experience without possessing much agency, echoing Saïd's metaphor of the Orient as the sexually available Other.[93]As we will see, Rachid O.'s and Taïa's work inscribes itself into the orientalist imaginary only to a certain degree. They draw upon these images but also distance themselves from them in order to shed critical light on European appropriation and colonization of North Africa and the North African male body. If both authors cannot avoid the homoerotics of Orientalism, they also draw upon indigenous legacies concerning homosexuality from their own culture.

[88] Boone, p. 21.
[89] See chapter 'Beautiful boys, Sodomy, and Hammams', in *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*, pp. 51-107.
[90] Boone, p. 54.
[91] Boone, p. 90.
[92] Roland Barthes, *Incidents* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1987), André Gide, *L'immoraliste* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), *Si le grain ne meurt* (Paris : Gallimard, 1995)
[93]See Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*, Ross Chambers, 'Pointless Stories, Storyless Points', in *Loiterature* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), pp. 250-69; Jane Hiddleston, *Poststructuralism and Postcoloniality: the Anxiety of Theory* (Liverpool : Liverpool University Press, 2010); Michael Lucey, *Gide's Bent* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Lawrence R. Schehr, *Alcibiades at the Door, Gay Discourses in French Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995); Judith Still, 'Not Really Prostitution: The Political Economy of Sexual Tourism in Gide's *Si le grain ne meurt*', French Studies, 54 (2000), 17-34.

The first chapter, 'Homosexuality in North African Literature from Decolonization to the 1990s', examines legacies of North African literature thematizing same-sex love which will feature importantly in Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's works. I will read francophone North African literature in conjunction with Lee Edelman's analysis of heterosexuality's proximity to homosexuality in his 'Seeing Things, Representation, the Scene of Surveillance, and the Spectacle of Gay Male Sex', in order to show how in a similar vein North African authors de-naturalize heterosexuality and depict it as haunted by homosexuality. I will then turn to Mohamed Mrabet's and Mohamed Choukri's writings and their collaboration with Paul Bowles. I will illustrate the contradiction inherent in the production of Mrabet's and Choukri's works, on the one hand defending nationalistic values and projecting homosexuality onto the West, whilst simultaneously being appropriated by Bowles, who advanced them on an international stage so as to promote an orientalist sexual portrait of North Africa.

In my second chapter, 'Refused Identification, 'Growing Sideways', and Autofiction: Childhood in Rachid O.'s *L'enfant ébloui, Plusieurs vies* and *Chocolat Chaud* and Abdellah Taïa's *Mon Maroc, L'Armée du salut* and *Une mélancolie arabe*', I will bring Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's childhood narratives together with Butler's theory of refused identification and Bouhdiba's observations about growing into normative masculinity in the Arab/Muslim world, in order to understand my authors' non-conforming masculinity and the resulting unease this causes in a society which does not traditionally acknowledge visibility regarding same-sex love. Furthermore, using Stockton's theory of the queer child, I will shed light on Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's adolescent and child protagonists who, in their depictions, unsettle notions of (sexual) innocence normally linked to the child. I will also argue that in Rachid O.'s case, his writings were steered by and used by the French literati in

order to counter views on sexuality in France in the 1990s. This chapter argues that the tradition of projecting a different sexuality onto the Other is perpetuated by the West in the sense that it uses the 'Orient' in order to negotiate its own sexual politics at home.

In the third chapter, 'Queer Muslim Diaspora in Abdellah Taïa's *Le rouge du tarbouche, Une mélancolie arabe* and *Infidèle*s and Rachid O.'s *Plusieurs vies* and *Ce qui reste'*, I argue in the light of queer diasporic theories that the diaspora becomes a space in which protagonists can to a certain extent reconcile their love with their cultural backgrounds. It is only outside patriarchal Moroccan society that the authors are able to invent a way of life and begin to experience a sexuality which they can root in their own culture. It is also from the diaspora that they are able to critically re-assess the situation at home.

The final chapter, 'From the 'garçon du bled' to 'Tintin's Dog': Sexualization and Racialization in the 5th French Republic in Rachid O.'s *Analphabètes* and Abdellah Taïa's *Un pays pour mourir* and *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé*', analyses Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's latest work. If in the early works already considered there is hope of freedom by living in France, this gives way in their final writings to disenchantment and a highly critical attitude to France, leavened with a nostalgic look back at Morocco. Reading Rachid O.'s and Taïa's work through the lens of Mireille Rosello's performative encounters and Fassin's perspectives on policies concerning racial and sexual minorities in France today, we see that the subjectivity of the Arab man remains influenced by an imperialist discourse of which France cannot divest itself and which imprisons Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's protagonists in rigid subjectivities from which they cannot free themselves.

By comparing Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's work with concepts and models established by western queer theory, it will be seen how both authors in turn appropriate, change, reject, and re-assess western models whilst simultaneously re-inventing concepts of childhood, masculinity, and faith in their own culture.

Chapter 1

Homosexuality in North African Literature from Decolonization to the 1990s

Introduction

This chapter examines homosexuality in the work of Moroccan and Algerian authors writing from the era of decolonization to the 1990s. The aim of this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of homosexuality in North African literature from the 1950s to the 1990s, but rather to reveal legacies and themes which will feature importantly in the work of Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa. I will begin with Driss Chraïbi's *Le passé simple* (1954), a francophone novel written during Morocco's struggle for independence which reveals sexual hypocrisy and corruption of Moroccan society. Contrary to the nationalist and conservative attempt around the time of decolonization to reinstate Arab/Muslim values regarding the family, the gendered order and religion, Chraïbi depicts a society in which religious hypocrisy prevail and non-conforming sexuality is afforded a place. I will then discuss Mohamed Mrabet's stories dictated in Darija[1] to the American writer Paul Bowles which were produced at a later time under the reign of Hassan II. In these autobiographical tales Mrabet depicts his own life at a time when Morocco's national identity was re-defined and, concomitantly, values such as Islam and patriarchy were promoted. Homosexuality is conflated with weakness and the effeminate and is projected onto the West, the former colonizing nations. I will also examine Choukri's *Al-Khubz Al-Hafi* (1982) or *Le pain nu* (1980), written at about the same time as Mrabet's stories and which dwells upon concerns similar to those in Mrabet's. Written originally in Arabic and later translated by Bowles into English and by Tahar Ben Jelloun into

[1] An Arab dialect spoken in Morocco.

French, *Al-Khubz Al-Hafi* testifies also to the strengthening cause of Moroccan independence and Arab/Muslim cultural values.

All of these writers locate their discussions of homosexuality in the broader context of decolonization, the resurgence of Moroccan (and Algerian) national identity and discourses on sexuality which were circulating at the time. Massad observes that the restoration of pre-colonial Islamic traditions as a foundation for the present was a widespread tendency during the decolonization era in the Arab/Muslim world.[2] Massad shows how during this period Arab/Muslim historians excavated sources from the era of classical Arab/Muslim civilization in order to first stress the purity of Arab civilization, second, lay the foundations for the present, and finally distinguish themselves from the colonizing powers.[3] Thus nationalists and religious leaders would use history and the Quran as a template for the present.[4] According to Massad, Abdelwahab Bouhdiba's *La sexualité en islam*, published in 1975, also inscribes itself in this nationalist project of remembering the past in order to explain the present.[5] As Massad shows, Bouhdiba offers a version of Islam, purified of all impositions which had led Islam away from its origins, in order to form the basis for modern Arab civilization.[6] Thus Bouhdiba reminds the reader of the Quranic vision of sexuality in which clear separation of the (biological) sexes and of gender is said to be godly and reflects the creation of the world:

> La bipolarité du monde repose sur la rigoureuse séparation de deux "ordres", le féminin et le masculin. L'unité du monde ne se fait que dans l'harmonie des sexes réalisée en pleine connaissance de cause. Le meilleur moyen de réaliser l'accord voulu par Dieu c'est pour l'homme d'assumer sa masculinité et pour la femme de prendre en charge sa propre féminité.[7]

[2] Massad,'Remembrances of Desires Past', in *Desiring Arabs*, pp. 99-159.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Massad, pp. 112-22.
[5] Massad, pp. 144-52.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Abdelwahab Bouhdiba*, La sexualité en Islam* (Paris: Presses universitaires françaises, 1975), p. 43.

The sexes, sexualities, and gender are clearly separated. Failing to follow the order laid down by God would be to revolt against the worldly order and revolt against God. Homosexuality, for Bouhdiba, exists, but it is primarily induced by the strict separation of society into male and female spheres which motivates same-sex relations. According to Bouhdiba, the pristine status of Islam does not allow 'deviant' behavioural patterns since they 'impliquent en effet le même refus d'accepter le corps sexué et d'assumer la condition féminine ou masculine. La déviance sexuelle est révolte contre Dieu'.[8]

Chraïbi, Mrabet, and Choukri respond to the conservative view of the rigidity of the gendered and sexed order. Chraïbi affords non-conforming desire a place in Moroccan society and also denounces the conservatives' hypocrisy. A brief comparison with Algerian literature produced around the same time illustrates that Algerian francophone authors' concerns regarding homosexuality were quite similar in so far as, through the figure of the homosexual, they reveal North African society to be more inclusive than conservative forces would favour. Mrabet and Choukri, however, producing literature from the 1970s on during Hassan II's rule, are more faithful to conservative ideology; their protagonists fulfil the conservatives' demands in that they cherish Islamic values and that their gender determines their sexual orientation.

The Threat of Homosexuality in Driss Chraïbi's *Le passé simple*

Chraïbi's *Le passé simple* was published in October 1954, during the heyday of Morocco's decolonization era. Its scathing critique of Islam, patriarchy, and the corruption of the neo-

[8] Bouhdiba, p. 44.

colonial government triggered vivid reactions in nationalist circles and the author was accused of being an 'assassin de l'espérance' at a time when Morocco needed to construct itself as an independent entity.[9] As Abdellatif Laâbi remarks:

> En ce sens Chraïbi fut un pince-sans-rire, un dérangeur au moment précis où l'on voulait passer sous silence toute une tourbe intrinsèque pour ne mettre en avant que l'héroïsme et mériter de l'historiographie future (noms de rues pour les martyrs et bonnes places pour les rescapés).[10]

Rather than revealing the corruption and dirty secrets inherent in Moroccan society and its elite ('tourbe intrinsèque'), it was felt that the writer at that time should set an example to people and society and pave the way for Morocco's future 'flawless' historiography. In *Le passé simple*, however, Chraïbi denounces precisely those who hide sexual secrets, enrich themselves through corruption or hypocritically propagate religious views. Chraïbi depicts a society in which homosexuality is pervasive and in which the western homosexual model, as seen with Kahan, coexists with the local model.[11] My discussion will show that Chraïbi challenges the conservatives' view such as that propagated by Bouhdiba, for example, which establishes that a certain sexual desire is accorded to a certain gender. With the figure of Driss we will see that the line between heterosexual and homosexual masculinity is not as clearly drawn. Normative masculinity, in *Le passé simple*, is imperilled by homosexuality and femininity and for the former to exist, the latter has to be either abjected or ridiculed. Echoing Kristeva's theory of the abject, 'qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles', the homosexual in fact embodies the liminal

[9] Isaac Yétif, *Le thème de l'aliénation dans le roman maghrébin d'expression française de 1952 à 1956* (Sherbrooke : CELEF, 1972), pp. 88-92.
[10] Kacem Basfao, 'Pour une relance de l'affaire du Passé simple.', in *Littératures maghrébines : Colloque Jacqueline Arnaud,* 2 vols (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990), pp. 57-66 (p. 57).
[11] See Kahan, 'Conjectures on the Sexual World-System', and Rebucini, 'Masculinités hégémoniques et "sexualités" entre hommes au Maroc'.

figure and disturbs the sexual order, or in other words, reveals the tenuous border between normative and non-normative sexuality.[12]

In a first-person narrative Driss recounts his struggle and revolt against his father, Fatmi Ferdi, also called Seigneur. The novel starts when on the first day of the Ramadan, Driss comes home in the evening and the father forbids his entire family to break the fast as a punishment for his eldest son having sinned. Whilst Driss accompanies his mother to Fès in the next chapter in order to receive the benediction of the *fqih* Si Kettani for his imminent completion of his baccalauréat, he receives a telegram from home informing him that his youngest brother, Hamid, has died, most probably due to excessive punishment by his father. When Driss, upon his return to Casablanca, reveals his father's hypocrisy, in that he drinks, smokes and furthermore keeps a concubine, he invites all the family members to spit on his face. Driss is thrown out of the house and he has to realize that all his school friends refuse to grant him shelter out of fear of spoiling their own fathers' business relations with the Seigneur. When Driss comes home after successfully having passed his baccalauréat, he finds that his mother has committed suicide. His father offers him to pay for his studies in France whereupon he leaves, having postponed his revolt against his father indefinitely.

The pervasiveness of homosexuality is already evinced at the beginning of the novel in which Driss, while waiting for his elder brother to come home, recalls the episode between the two merchants Abbou and Ould Rib. It is about a boy who is hired by the merchant Abbou to sell toasted grasshoppers but who also 'dut passer entre les jambes du Père Abbou, pédéraste notoire'.[13] Because the boy eats too many grasshoppers, Abbou chases him away. Ould Rib, the watermelon merchant, takes care of the young boy who has to help him sell his products

[12] Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection* (Paris : Seuil, 1980), p. 12.
[13] Driss Chraïbi, *Le passé simple* (Paris : Denoël, 1954), p. 51.

and accord him sexual favours. When Abbou misses the boy and takes him back, Abbou's wife becomes jealous and takes the young boy to the judge who, the story says, 's'en occupa très bien en effet, mieux que ne le firent jamais ni le Père Blague ni le Fils du Vent'.[14] Told in the style of *mujun* literature, a tradition denied by conservatives and Islamists, it reveals the hypocrisy of those in power and sheds light on the sexual secrets and the hypocrisy of the protagonists in the novel.[15]

In fact, *Le passé simple* denounces the hypocrisy of a society in which homosexual behaviour is the norm. Driss reminisces about his time at the Quranic school where he spent dreary hours exposed to the whims of the teacher, 'Sans compter que les perversités des grands contaminent les petits et que presque toujours ces écoles servent de cours tacites de pédérastie appliquée avec ou sans le concours de l'honorable maître d'école.'[16] Thus Driss's first homosexual experiences occurred at the Quranic school with the complicity of a teacher who would most probably sweep them under the carpet. The hypocrisy of religious institutions is also revealed in the figure of the *fqih* Si Kettani. When in the second chapter Driss is sent with his mother on a journey to Fès to ask Si Kettani to pray for the successful completion of his bachelor's degree, he happens to be there during the 27th night of Ramadan, called *La Nuit du Pouvoir*. Driss hears Si Kettani preaching excerpts from the Quran before the crowd such as 'Au nom de Dieu clément et miséricordieux…'[17], or, 'Celui qui pour le mâle la femelle, pour la femelle le mâle, universellement, a créé….'[18] However, meeting the *fqih* at his uncle's house, Driss soon realizes that Si Kettani lusts after him ('Ses appétits de moi.')[19] and is a

[14] *Le passé simple*, p. 64.
[15] For a similar reading of this episode, see Jarrod Hayes, 'Rachid O. and the Return of the Homopast: The Autobiographical as Allegory in Childhood Narratives by Maghrebian Men', *The Journal of Twentieth-Century/Contemporary French Studies revue d'études français*, 1 (2008), 497-526 (p. 506).
[16] *Le passé simple*, p. 39.
[17] *Le passé simple*, p. 104.
[18] *Le passé simple*, p. 108.
[19] *Le passé simple*, P. 82.

notorious homosexual, thus undermining the precepts he preaches which stipulate that men are only created for women and women for men. Furthermore, when Driss hears that his brother has passed away and begs Si Kettani to lend him his car in order to reach his family in Casablanca, the latter only does so on condition of enjoying Driss's favours, thus undermining his precepts about God's clemency and mercy. On the contrary, when Driss refuses to give him this favour, Si Kettani replies: 'Juste sous tes pieds il y a une trappe. Par laquelle je précipite les fils de putain de ton espèce dans une oubliette. Où les attendent pour les violer trois chimpanzés – ils sont dressés.'[20] Subordinates who do not obey his commands are thus raped, perhaps an allusion to the torture methods used in the prisons established by the colonial power and taken over by the government in post-colonial Morocco.

Driss himself seems to have homosexual tendencies or at least had homosexual experiences in the past other than those at the Quranic school. After their first encounter at his uncle's house in Fès, Si Kettani asks Driss to pass by whereupon Driss replies, 'Je suis actif.'[21] When Si Kettani replies, 'Eh bien?', revealing his versatility in sexual intercourse, Driss answers, 'Je n'aime pas les vieux,'[22] implying, seemingly, that he is not averse to same-sex experiences if his partners are younger and assume a passive position. This is also corroborated in the episode in the third chapter in which Driss leaves his family and asks Roche, the French teacher, to put him up for the night. Roche denies, out of fear of Driss's father, adding, however, 'Si tu étais encore passif…mais tu ne veux qu'être actif…', seemingly implying that Driss is not averse to homosexuality.[23] These brief moments see Chraïbi describe a society in which homosexuality exists. Whereas Driss's behaviour reflects the Moroccan model according to which a man still retains his masculinity if he engages sexually with men and

[20] *Le passé simple*, p. 111.
[21] *Le passé simple*, p. 95.
[22] Ibid.
[23] *Le passé simple*, p. 200.

women whilst embodying the active position, Si Kettani can be identified as a homosexual according to the western model. In fact, Driss calls him at some point in the novel 'Si Kettani, truand. Je ne le savais pas homosexuel',[24] thus testifying to the fact that the word together with the identity exists outside Europe before the sexual revolution, as we have seen with Kahan in the introduction of this study.[25]

In fact, Driss is concerned to distance himself from Si Kettani, who disturbs Driss's normative masculinity. Si Kettani is depicted as abject, revealing bodily products which normally should be hidden from everyday life. Si Kettani receives Driss in his bathroom with his body described as 'épais, lourd, dégoulinant de pétrole', as if the viscous material trickling down his skin was an extension of his body.[26] The appearance of abject bodily products which threaten bodily borders arises also in the episode when Driss meets Si Kettani for the first time and the latter tells him: 'Parmi mes valets […] il y en a un dont les fonctions exclusives consistent à m'accompagner tous les matins à 11 heures 40 dans un endroit dit vécés afin de me torcher net et promptement.'[27] Echoing Kristeva's reflection on the abject, Si Kettani's body poses a threat to the normative body which normally abjects bodily waste. In Si Kettani's case, the waste comes to the fore and threatens his surroundings. As if echoing his sexuality, Si Kettani's bodily integrity is not clearly defined and could be seen to threaten the bodily integrity of others. Hayes in his article sees a parallel between Driss's abjection of Si Kettani and Driss's abjection of his mother. Hayes writes: 'Driss as well, in spite of his seemingly feminist condemnation of his mother's subservient position in the household, sees her as an embodiment of the abject'.[28] In order for normative masculinity to exist, according

[24] *Le passé simple*, p. 80.
[25] See Kahan, 'Conjectures on the Sexual World-System'.
[26] *Le passé simple*, p. 111.
[27] *Le passé simple*, p. 86.
[28] Hayes, p. 508.

to Hayes, homosexuality and femininity have to be kept at bay.[29] The line between homosexuality and heterosexuality, or normative and non-normative masculinity is depicted to be porous and challenges thus Bouhdiba's vision according to which sexual desire follows from one's gender.

Le passé simple depicts a society in which the western model of homosexuality is fully integrated into Moroccan society and co-exists with the Moroccan model, as defined by Rebucini. It is depicted in the tradition of *mujun* literature, but also, in the figure of Si Kettani, as a sexual identity as it occurred in the West. More importantly, homosexuality is depicted as threatening the heterosexual order, as we have seen in the interaction between Si Kettani and Driss. In contrast to Bouhdiba, who draws a clear distinction between normative and non-normative sexuality, or between gender and sexual object choice, the borders between sexual orientation in *Le passé simple* are not that clearly drawn. Driss actively needs to resist Si Kettani's attempts to engage in a sexual relationship with him. These are depicted as threatening his bodily surface and his self. Unlike Chraïbi, Mohamed Mrabet and Mohamed Choukri writing from the 1970s onwards, conceive of homosexuality as a decadent western phenomenon. Protagonists in Mrabet's and Choukri's work may well embody the sexual model as discussed by Rebucini. However, this does not threaten their masculinity and passivity in sexual intercourse is projected onto western men. It is only in works by Rachid O. and Taïa that homosexuality is again depicted as fully integrated into Moroccan society and that a different form of masculinity, one that no longer differentiates activity and passivity in sexual intercourse, is assumed.

[29] Ibid.

A Comparison with Algerian Literature at the Time of Decolonization: Homosexuality in Rachid Boudjedra's *La répudiation* and Jean Sénac's Poetry

Here I wish to compare Chraïbi's discussion of homosexuality in *Le passé simple* with the depiction of homosexuality in Rachid Boudjedra's *La Répudiation* (1969) and Jean Sénac's poetry. Boudjedra's *La répudiation* shares similar concerns with Chraïbi's *Le passé simple*. In a similar vein to Morocco, after decolonization, the powers in Algeria were concerned to redefine national values which was accompanied by a revival of Islam. However, after the Algerian War of Independence, the surge of Islamist and nationalistic values happened far more violently in Algeria than in Morocco, due to the French colonizing powers' repression of Algerian national culture and religion.[30] Like Chraïbi, but perhaps more fiercely, Boudjedra and Sénac challenge the idea of a monolithic culture and national identity based on conservative values as defended by nationalists.

Like Driss in *Le passé simple*, Rachid in *La répudiation* recounts his childhood which in a similar vein is marked by an authoritarian, wealthy father and the repudiation of his mother. If in *Le passé simple* Si Kettani is openly homosexual, in *La répudiation* Rachid's older brother, Zahir, is depicted as a homosexual and in a relationship with the Jewish Professor *Heimatlos*. Like with Driss in *Le passé simple*, with the figure of Rachid, *La répudiation* shows the line between normative and non-normative masculinity to be much more tenuous than conservative forces would acknowledge. As my discussion will show, Rachid is, more so than Driss in *Le passé simple*, inclined to homosexual desires. However, as in *Le passé simple*, *La répudiation* shows that these desires have to be kept at bay and repressed in order for normative masculinity to exist.

[30] See Hugh Roberts, *The Battlefield Algeria, 1988-2002* (New York; London: 2003), pp. 3-33.

In *La répudiation* Rachid recounts a childhood marked by the repudiation of his mother and the ensuing disintegration of his family to his French lover Céline while being cured in a psychiatric hospital in Algiers. The narrative, however, never clearly establishes whether Rachid also finds himself in a prison cell in which he is interrogated and tortured by the MSC ('Membres Secrets du Clan'), a barely hidden allusion to the FLN and the post-independent ruling elite. Rachid's father, Si Zoubir, is a wealthy merchant who, despite displaying a very nationalist attitude, has collaborated with the French colonial power and probably still has close connections to French power ('Tous les juges français étaient des amis de mon père, malgré ses opinions politiques nettement tranchées.').[31] If his father was on the side of the Algerian nationalists during colonization, he now belongs to the new ruling elite which, according to Fanon, has replaced the French oppressors.[32] The father most probably has links to the new elite and the secret police. In a similar vein to *Le passé simple*, Rachid's father's mistreatment of his mother is supported by the holy scripture and the patriarchal society which derives its power from a conservative interpretation of Islam.

Homosexuals, in *La répudiation*, are depicted as liminal figures, disturbing the societal order and normative masculinity. Thus Zahir's uneasy position is not only emphasised by his relationship with a Jewish professor who, at that time, was seen by Algerian society as an outsider, but also through his activities which consist of roaming the harbour where he frequents suspicious dives, smokes hash, indulges in alcohol, and engages in homosexual activity with men.[33] He defiles the Muslim tradition by dying in France which is seen by the clan as 'trahison'.[34] At his funeral his homosexual friends and hash smokers disturb the

[31] Rachid Boudjedra, *La répudiation* (Paris: Denoël, 1969), p. 207.
[32] Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspero, 1961), pp. 124-25.
[33] *La répudiation*, p. 81.
[34] *La répudiation*, p. 157.

ceremony and a repellent stench emanates from the coffin in which the corpse is brought on a ship from France. As the coffin is being carried by a crane from the ship to the pier, due to a technical problem, it dangles on the crane between the sea and the mainland, bringing with it a repellent odour, and recalling in this liminal position Kristeva's discussion of the corpse as the very embodiment of the abject.[35] Even in death, it seems, Zahir is a threat to the family and the clan. Si Zoubir rejoices upon his son's death: 'Le père, transfiguré de joie, dansait autour de l'éternel coffre-fort ; il haïssait son fils'.[36] In fact, according to Rachid's mother, Si Zoubir might eventually be found to have been involved in his death.[37] Like Si Kettani in *Le passé simple*, Zahir is depicted as disturbing the social order, revealing the borders between the repulsive and the acceptable to be tenuous.

Like Si Kettani in *Le passé simple*, he also threatens normative masculinity, or, heterosexual masculinity. When Rachid is commanded by the women of the house to bring the sheep's head to the communal oven for the feast of Eïd, a man known to Rachid for his religious devotion forces the adolescent into homosexual activities. Whilst he is waiting at the oven for the sheep heads to be cooked, the man makes a pass at him:

> L'homme, déjà, s'est agenouillé à mes pieds et a sorti son membre viril, tellement énorme que j'ai tout à coup la sensation d'avoir les dents très fraîches ; il me force à le toucher et malgré la raideur de l'organe, je pense à la cervelle de mouton sortie précautionneusement de la boîte crânienne par des mains de femmes, rougies d'un sang resté vif ; […] une envie folle d'uriner me prend soudainement.[38]

Whilst being exposed to the man's sexual organ unknown erogenous zones are being awakened in Rachid ('les dents très fraîches', 'une envie folle d'uriner') and revives an ambiguous, erotic feeling. This confusion leads him then to forget to fulfil his duty, namely to

[35] Kristeva, p. 12.
[36] *La répudiation*, p. 152.
[37] *La répudiation*, p. 169.
[38] *La répudiation*, p. 210.

bring back the sheep's head at home, and whilst he runs away he reflects that, 'seul Zahir pourrait expliquer l'épisode du four.'[39] At this moment a scene from his childhood surfaces in which his mother, his sisters, and himself were present, involuntarily, at a spectacle in which Zahir had sex with a neighbourhood boy:

> Lui que ma mère a surpris, un jour, dans une position scandaleuse, en compagnie d'un gamin du voisinage; elle ne comprenait pas et n'en croyait pas ses yeux; abominable, le spectacle de son enfant monté en grande pompe sur le dos légèrement duveteux de l'autre misérable avec sa sale figure de petit jouisseur; emportés tous les deux dans un monstrueux va-et-vient qui ébranlait leurs corps élancés, la tête ballottante, à la recherche d'un plaisir, somme toute, formel, entrevu à travers les fanfaronnades des grands, pressenti chez les femmes qui erraient, l'aine lourde, dans la maison comme si elles se rendaient compte tout à coup du plaisir que pourrait leur procurer ce fouillis de poils et de chairs vives, rouges et molles, annonciatrices, déjà, de l'ivresse du tréfonds.[40]

This spectacle has profoundly disturbing effects on his mother and Rachid, who is reminded of a sexual pleasure ('recherche d'un plaisir') which he links vaguely to female sexuality with which he, at that moment, identifies ('les femmes qui erraient, l'aine lourde'). If after the episode at the communal oven Rachid comes to the conclusion that 'Il faut se taire',[41] his mother reacts in a similar vein: 'Ma finit par nous chasser de la pièce, ferma la porte à clef: "ce n'est rien qu'un jeu brutal", dit-elle'.[42] The spectacle has to be veiled, forgotten, for its disturbing effects and indeed, in the narrative the whole episode of the spectacle is placed in brackets.

Like the episode at the communal oven, homosexuality activates feelings and desires in Rachid which, as a heterosexual man, he should have left behind. I would suggest that Rachid's sexuality is seen in Boudjedra as being much more fluid than, for example, theoreticians at the time such as Bouhdiba tend to view sexuality. I would like to briefly

[39] Ibid.
[40] *La répudiation*, p. 211.
[41] *La répudiation*, p. 210.
[42] *La répudiation*, p. 212.

compare Boudjedra's illustration of sexuality with Lee Edelman's ideas in his article 'Seeing Things, Representation, the Scene of Surveillance, and the Spectacle of Gay Male Sex'.[43] In it the queer theorist argues precisely that homosexual spectacles need to be disavowed because they remind us of the tenuous border between homosexual and heterosexual desire, thus pointing to an eroticism which discourses on heterosexuality have repressed or left behind. Edelman uses a Freudian case study of a bisexual man. In it the psychiatrist links his patient's bisexuality to the latter's witnessing during his early childhood his parents in a coitus a tergo. Instead of following the law of castration and leaving his desire for men behind, the patient still identifies with both his parents. The same-sex spectacle then, Edelman observes, re-instates in the onlooker different erotic sensations which the law of castration, or, the cultural law, would normally have repressed. Edelman writes:

> Playing out the possibility of multiple, non-exclusive erotic identifications and positionings, the spectacle of sodomy would seem to confirm precisely those infantile sexual speculations that the male, coerced by the bogy of castration, is expected to have put behind him.[44]

According to Edelman, the spectacle of sodomy always reminds the heterosexual male of what he had to leave behind according to the law of castration, that is a different eroticism and different positionalities. In order to maintain the law of castration, the gay man must, therefore, be disavowed – or, in fact, abjected.

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[43] Lee Edelman, 'Seeing Things, Representation, The Scene of Surveillance, and the Spectacle of Gay Male Sex', in *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literature and Cultural Theory* (New York; London: Routledge, 1994). Edelman's theory derives from Freud and the latter's concept of the Oedipus Complex. The question which arises is whether such a psychoanalytical theory can be applied to North African narratives, considering that Freud derived his theories from the European nuclear family model. Whereas application of the Oedipus Complex to North African literature has, for example, been questioned by critics such as Claude Montserrat-Cals in *Psychoanalyse et texte littéraire au Maghreb*, Charles Bonn observes in the same volume that in order to analyse the works of francophone North African authors, especially those who contest the social order, it is fruitful to bring their works into conjunction with psychoanalytical theories. Thinking in particular of Boudjedra, Bonn writes that, through different forms of resolved and unresolved Oedipus complexes in his novels, Boudjedra denounces the brutality inherent in patriarchy. For more on this, see *Psychoanalyse et texte littéraire au Maghreb* (Harmattan: Paris, 1991).

[44] Edelman, p. 185.

Edelman's explanation of the threat the homosexual spectacle poses to onlookers clarifies Rachid's and his family's fears when witnessing 'spectacle' of Zahir. Witnessing his brother's sexuality brings out in Rachid a different eroticism ('à la recherche d'un plaisir') he was supposed to leave behind. Watching his brother, Rachid identifies with the women in the house who would be aroused by this scene ('plaisir que pourrait leur procurer ce fouillis de poils et de chairs vives, rouges et molles, annonciatrices, déjà, de l'ivresse de tréfonds'). The spectacle throws him back to a stage at which he suddenly became unsure of his own masculinity and has therefore to suppress it, as the brackets in the text evince. The episode has to be silenced, therefore, in order for normative masculinity and the patriarchal order to exist. Likewise, when Rachid sees the man's erect penis and is aroused, he needs to forget and silence the memory of this sight ('Il faut se taire').

As in *Le passé simple*, the main character's sexuality in *La répudiation* is made fragile by homosexuality; or, in other words, the borders between homosexuality and heterosexuality, or straight and homosexual desires are not as clearly drawn. With the figures of Driss and Rachid, both authors challenge Bouhdiba's view of gender determining sexual desire. However, both novels also show that there is no space for the homosexual and that he has to be disavowed for heterosexuality to exist. Homosexuality is shown to disturb the order in that it reflects Kristeva's conceptualization of the abject or draws masculine sexuality too close to feminine sexuality.

I want to turn briefly to Jean Sénac in order to emphasize my point that the homosexual may well exist in North African society during decolonization, but that he had, like Si Kettani in *Le passé simple* and Zahir in *La répudiation*, to be suppressed in order for heterosexuality to exist. Sénac's poetry also shows another concern, namely his wish to create a religion in

which he can root his non-normative sexuality, a concern he shares with Taïa who in a similar vein invents his own queer Muslim faith. Written at the dawn of the Algerian War of Independence, Sénac's poetry depicts a society in which homosexuality can be lived out freely. In *Les Leçons d'Edgar* (1954), devoted to his lover at the time, the poet's love for Edgar is integrated into Algerian society. For example, Sonnet nine, which reads 'Si chanter mon amour c'est aimer ma patrie, je suis un combattant qui ne se renie pas', intertwines his love for Edgar with his love for his country.[45] In the same way as the poet fights for his country's independence, he also fights for his homosexual love. Sonnet eleven, for example, depicts a society which allows him to live out his love for Edgar in a carefree manner:

> Souviens-toi, vers minuit les cinémas se vident,
>
> La foule autour de nous retourne au rêve étroit,
>
> Toi tu mimes la lutte et serré contre moi
> Tu refais face à tous tes caresses rapides.[46]

Whereas the crowd returns to their 'rêve étroit', the poet and his lover continue to indulge in their romance. In *Citoyens de beauté* (1963), the poet expresses love for the revolution, but also love for its people, next to the idea of inclusivity in which everyone, regardless of nationality or gender, belongs to the nation. It also conveys the inclusion of homosexuality in the new national body:

> Les mots, dis-moi ô mon amour, les mots nous allons les remettre à neuf, Les tirer à quatre épingles – qu'ils n'aient plus honte dans la gangue où le malheur les avait mis – Qu'ils sortent , qu'ils aillent dans la rue, sur le Môle, dans les champs. Comme toi, qu'ils aient le sourire apaisé.[47]

It is a matter, then, of re-inventing the words, by liberating them from (homosexual) shame, but also empowering them to testify to the new revolutionary love and the new nation. After

[45] Jean Sénac, *Œuvres complètes* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1999), p. 129.
[46] *Œuvres complètes*, p. 131.
[47] *Œuvres complètes*, p. 400.

Houari Boumediène's 1956 coup d'état and the rise of Arab/Muslim nationalism, his poetry becomes an act of resistance, aiming to destabilize the morals of the time. The idea of resistance to the political, religious, and sexual order imbues the collection entitled *Le mythe du sperme-méditerranée* (1967). On the one hand, the title evokes the sacralization of orgasmic pleasure and the ejaculatory act, evoking the dionysiac rituals of Ancient Greece.[48] On the other, it affirms the poet-persona's self and his resistance to the religious and sexual order of the time and reflects Zahir in *La répudiation* who resists the established order with his sexuality. This resistance to the religious and political order is illustrated in the second poem of the collection:

> Dieu dans mes couilles met à l'affût
> Adam, Jacob et Job-et l'ange juif
> Et l'ange arabe. Il m'a nommé
> Provocateur du foutre pour que les étoiles
> Tombent une à une sur l'Assemblée
> -la brûlent-sur les villas-les brûlent !- les HLM.
> […]
> Ginsberg, viens, attachons nos barbes.
> Fabriquons une corde de conscience-choc contre leurs
> ventouses.[49]

The religion the poet believes in is one which allows the co-existence in Algeria of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim people. The poet sees himself as a descendent of all three religions and is chosen by God to provoke through his semen the national assembly. Allen Ginsberg, the gay American poet of the Beat Generation shall come on board and help Sénac craft a wake-up call against the apathy and single-minded society metaphorized by suction cups. Sénac's poetry bridges occidental and Arab culture by tracing his ancestry back to figures who belong

[48] Dominique Combe, 'Le "Corpoème" et la quête du nom ; hommage à Jean Sénac', *Awal, Cahiers d'études berbères*, 12 (1995), 39-65 (p. 57).
[49] *Œuvres complètes*, p. 540.

to Jewish, Christian, and Muslim culture ('Adam', 'Jacob', 'Job'). Furthermore, these three figures allow Sénac to justify his homosexual existence in this homophobic environment in that they embody a queer filiation, embedding his homosexuality in both cultures yet simultaneously distancing it from normative procreation. The creation of a queer filiation foreshadows Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa, who in an often homophobic or xenophobic environment justify their existence through the production of a queer ancestry.

In the poem 'Noir c'est Noir' in the same collection Sénac links homosexuality to the abject. The poem conveys a sense in which he is alienated from society, he portrays fleeting sexual encounters occurring at the margins of society. The link with other people is then only excrement and sperm: 'Nous qui n'avons partagé que les excréments et le sperme?'[50] The homosexual persona now embodies the abject himself, the liminal space disturbing the societal order, recalling the depiction we found in Driss Chraïbi and Boudjedra. In fact, Boudjedra, recalling Sénac in his journal, writes: 'Jean Sénac a été la première victime de l'intégrisme islamiste algérien. […] Plus algérien que n'importe quel autre, poète génial, perturbateur formidable et homosexuel patenté qui détournait les jeunes de la morale des ancêtres'.[51] In Bouhdiba's view, Sénac and his poetry had to be forgotten and killed off precisely because they would challenge 'la morale des ancêtres', the morals Massad mentioned which were revived during and after independence to bring society onto the right path.

This excursion into Algerian literature has shed light on Chraïbi's work and shows that the concerns were similar. Homosexuality is depicted as existing in North African society around decolonization but also as threatening and disturbing the sexual and gendered system which,

[50] *Œuvres complètes*, p. 546.
[51] Rachid Boudjedra, *Lettres algériennes* (Paris: Grasset, 1995), p. 71.

according to the advent of conservative forces, had to be revived. Sénac and Boudjedra mirror Chraïbi's approach to homosexuality which is depicted as challenging the sexual and gendered system. All three authors afford a place to the sexual different. However, this place is fragilized by conservative forces and in order for heterosexual masculinity to exist, the homosexual has to be abjected. With Sénac, we have seen that the homosexual persona has to invent a queer religion in order to survive in a society in which the religious system provides no space for the homosexual. In all three cases, homosexuality is seen to be disavowed, something which will only change with the appearance of the works by Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa.

Transactions of Sex and Stories: Mohamed Mrabet's *Look and Move On* and *Chocolate Creams and Dollars*

I would like now to turn to the work of the storyteller Mohamed Mrabet and his collaboration with the American writer Paul Bowles. Like the writer Choukri and the storytellers and artists Ahmed Yacoubi and Larbi Layachi, Mrabet frequented the expatriate circle in Tangier which was also patronized by Paul Bowles.[52] Being a talented storyteller, he began to dictate stories to Bowles who transcribed, edited, and promoted them on an international stage. Unlike Chraïbi who belonged to the educated elite and wrote in French, Mrabet was an arabophone storyteller, illiterate, who grew up on the streets of Tangier and depicted Moroccan street life. Mrabet witnessed the reign of Hassan II during which Morocco, following the French protectorate, sought to regain a national identity and distanced itself from the former colonial powers. As we have seen, Arab/Muslim intellectuals, historians, and politicians would excavate only certain sources from the past in order to stress the purity of Islam as a

[52] For further background information on Paul Bowles and Moroccan storytellers, see Greg A. Mullins, *Colonial Affairs* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

foundation for the present, a policy also adopted under Hassan II's regime. Unlike Chraïbi, who at the time of decolonization questioned nationalist ideals, reveals the corruption of the elite and shows society to be much more inclusive not least regarding sexual orientation, Mrabet adheres to the nationalist and conservative ideal by re-affirming in his depiction of Moroccan society conservative ideals such as patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity and the revival of Islam. As in Chraïbi's work, both models of homosexuality, the western and the local, exist. However, in contrast to Chraïbi, the western model is projected onto the West and seems not to exist in Moroccan society. Mrabet's work corroborates the nationalist concern to reinstate values consonant with conservative religious views in Moroccan society following decolonization.

Mrabet's depiction of traditional values, however, is complicated by his collaboration with Paul Bowles. Bowles belonged to an expatriate circle in Tangier which settled in Morocco precisely in order to live out their non-conforming sexual orientation which was still criminalized in the US or at least not welcomed.[53] Writing in the 1950s and 1960s, Bowles belonged to the iconoclastic generation of writers which produced literature before the sexual revolution occurred in the West which would reverberate across the world. Their approach to Moroccan culture and sexuality, as critics have shown, is informed by Orientalism.[54] The Moroccan model of masculinity, which does not exclude same-sex relationships, is conceived of by the expatriates as a sign of Moroccan polymorphous sexuality which contrasts with restricted sexual mores in the West. Mrabet then, like other story-tellers who collaborated with Bowles, is complicit, to a certain extent, in reiterating orientalist stereotypes.

[53] Michael K. Walonen, *Writing Tangier in the Postcolonial Transition: Space and Power in Expatriate and North African Literature* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 21.
[54] Ralph M. Coury, 'The persistence and rehabilitation of Orientalism', *Third Text*, 11 (1997), 67-75; Mullins, *Colonial Affairs;* Walonen, *Writing Tangier in the Postcolonial Transition: Space and Power in Expatriate and North African Literature*.

Mrabet's stories situate themselves in this complicated nexus, on the one hand defending intrinsic Moroccan values, and, on the other, drawing upon Bowles' interests precisely for their orientalist values. In the eyes of Bowles and his readers these stories perpetuate orientalist values in Morocco as a space of unbounded sexuality. From Bowles' and the expatriate perspective, these stories respond to western sexual politics in the sense that they are used by Bowles to make a point about the restrictive politics of the West and the freedom in the 'East'. This is an aspect which foreshadows Rachid O.'s childhood writings which emerged in collaboration with the French writer Mathieu Lindon. If critics have emphasized the colonial and orientalist aspect of Mrabet's work, I would like to emphasize that values such as those of Islam and patriarchalism are nevertheless cherished. I will restrict my discussion to two texts - *Look and Move On* (1976) and *Chocolate Creams and Dollars* (1993).

Mrabet's autobiographical writings in *Look and Move On* depict homosexuality as a passing phase in the protagonist's life which has to be disavowed in order for Islamic values to triumph. *Look and Move On* relates the story of the adolescent Mohamed who spends his life on the streets of Tangier, working as a fisherman or occasionally hustling for tourists. When one day he meets an American couple, Maria and Reeves, he engages in a *ménage à trois*, pressures Reeves into financing his house, and accompanies them to the United States. Upon his return to Tangier, he meets Jane and Paul Bowles and succeeds in making a living by dictating stories to Paul Bowles and eventually marrying Zhora with whom he forms a family.

Mohamed agrees to sleep with Maria and with Reeves, but in return he asks Reeves for financial support in order to buy a house in Tangier which will secure him a position and

authority, in case he would marry later.[55] Lacking literacy, he knows that the only way to acquire wealth is to sell his body. However, during sexual intercourse Mohamed is keen to emphasize his active position, distancing himself from the 'unmanly' passive position. Later, when he meets Jane and Paul Bowles after his return from America, he realizes that, rather than securing a livelihood by selling his body, he can sell some stories and starts working with Bowles:

> I began to go to see him several times a week, and each time I spent two hours or so recording stories. Finally I had a good collection of them. Some were tales I had heard in the cafés, some were dreams, some were inventions I made as I was recording, and some were about things that had actually happened to me.[56]

Rather than engaging in sexual matters with Bowles, Mohamed starts to recount his own life, intertwined with his own fantasies or popular folktales.

In a polemic article in *Le Monde* entitled 'Une technique de viol' Tahar Ben Jelloun accuses Bowles of translating his own phantasms into Mrabet's stories and conceives of these stories as pure western fabrications.[57] In a similar vein, Greg Mullins observes in his book *Colonial Affairs* that Mrabet's stories 'call attention to themselves as colonial texts and foreground the economic and sexual dimension of their production'.[58] Furthermore, Mullins illustrates how western homosexual men are subjected to fantasies informed by orientalist discourse regarding Arab/Muslim sexuality.[59] In his article 'The persistence and rehabilitation of Orientalism', Ralph M. Coury argues that Bowles' work reflects many 'features that have

[55] Mohammed Mrabet, *Look and Move On; An Autobiography as Told to Paul Bowles* (London: Peter Owen, 1989), p. 14.
[56] *Look and Move On*, p. 91.
[57] Tahar Ben Jelloun, 'Une technique de viol', *Le Monde*, 9 June 1972.
[58] Mullins, p. 134.
[59] Mullins, p. 125-130.

characterized the representation of the Arab/Muslim since the 19th century'.[60] Coury quotes excerpts from an essay by Bowles which appeared in 1955 entitled 'Mustapha and his friends' in which Bowles draws a collective portrait of the typical Moroccan Muslim, thus denying Moroccans any individuality.[61] For example, in Bowles' portrayal Mustapha lacks honesty, social virtues, a sense of civic responsibility, puts his faith in despotic rulers, and is prone to cheat and use force and ruse.[62] Furthermore, Mustapha gives himself over to unrepressed instincts and has no self-control. Bowles concludes at the end of the passage that "'one has the fleeting impression living in Mustapha's world that one is living among children playing at being grown-ups'".[63] Coury concludes:

> What Bowles and critics have neglected or not understood is the link between Bowles's understanding of the Arab/Islamic and the history of Orientalism, and of the way in which Bowles's confinement to the friendship and culture of the Arab poor and illiterate has reinforced his Orientalist assumptions.[64]

In fact, analysing Bowles' personal and sexual relationships with the working class and illiterate Moroccans, Coury observes the writer's tendency to engage in these relationships because of his desire to be dominated, betrayed, and financially exploited by Moroccans.[65] According to Coury, Bowles' own amorous experiences with Moroccan men corroborate his vision of Morocco and North Africa as a place of 'disorientation or destruction of the western ego'.[66] Several critics and biographers have commented on Bowles' vision of the aggressive

[60] Ralph M. Coury, 'The persistence and rehabilitation of Orientalism', p. 67.
[61] Coury, p. 68.
[62] Ibid. See for further discussion of homoerotics and Orientalism, Joseph Allan Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*.
[63] Paul Bowles, 'Mustapha and His Friends', *Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue*, (London, 1963), pp. 82-94 in Coury, p. 68.
[64] Coury, p. 71.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.

and ambiguous sexuality of Moroccan men, their tendency to dominate and at the same time be dominated and blackmail western tourists.[67]

Thus as Mullins has shown, Bowles was keen to emphasize sexuality and violence in Mrabet's work, all characteristics which, as Edward Saïd shows, are associated in orientalist discourse with Arab/Islamic civilization.[68] If we return to *Look and Move On* as a case in point, I suggest that the episodes in which the narrator falls into a trance during a dance in which he seizes a blazing log and smears it over his face, or his wedding night with Zhora during which he defies cunningly another lover, are all elements which stem from an orientalist imaginary.[69] Furthermore, Mohamed's visit to Reeves' family in America precisely conveys Bowles' vision of Moroccans as a threat to western civilization and the western self. Estranged by Reeves' parents' conservative and ordered lifestyle, Mohamed bewilders the village by starting to hunt wild animals in Reeves' parents' garden, catching fish in the river, cooking them on a fire while destroying their kitchen facilities. Mohamed's presence is seen to threaten the achievements of civilization and attempts to reintroduce it in a pre-civilized state.[70] In some episodes Mohamed embodies the well-rehearsed orientalist trope of the savage who reflects 'the anxiety and titillation generated by the return of the repressed in the shape of the non-European colonial and neo-colonial who threatens to destroy western capitalist domination'.[71]

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[67] As Coury, Mullins, and Walonen have noted, Bowles' interest in translating Moroccan stories into English is closely linked with a personal attraction to storytellers. Examining Bowles' relationship with Ahmed Yacoubi, who first taught him colloquial Arabic and with whom he had a relationship, Mullins notes that Bowles' interest stems from his desire to have access on an erotic and intellectual level to 'untarnished' Moroccan culture. This statement betrays Bowles' colonial approach to Yacoubi and other Moroccan authors. Bowles' interest in Moroccan culture and motivation to translate these stories can be situated in a nexus of desire for Moroccan men and their culture. See Mullins, pp. 133-34.

[68] Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (New York, London: Routledge, 1978), pp. 31-92.

[69] *Look and Move On*, pp. 96-7 and 103-4.

[70] *Look and Move On*, pp. 108-12.

[71] Coury, p. 71.

If Bowles' projection of orientalist stereotypes persists in Mrabet's *Look and Move On*, as regards the orientalist vision of polymorphous Arab/Muslim sexuality, there is, I suggest, a clear wish on the part of the first-person narrator to distance himself from expatriate circles and to cherish values linked to patriarchy and Islam. The end of *Look and Move On* illustrates Mohamed's transformation from a young man who frequents expatriates and engages in homosexual experiences to a pious Muslim man who privileges patriarchal family values and Islam over expatriates. In his renunciation of alcohol, by marrying Zhora and forming a family, Mohamed turns into a guarantor of Islamic faith.[72] This defence of local values is also highlighted when Mohamed witnesses an Italian hitting a Moroccan girl whereupon he seriously injures the Italian man ('A Nazarene does not have the right to hit a Moslem girl').[73] The story emphasizes the importance of the honour of both people and religion for Mohamed and by extension the honour of his country.

Mohamed's reserve towards homosexual white expatriate men and the latter's detrimental effect on Moroccan culture is also seen in the episode with the Englishman at the beginning of *Look and Move On*. Mohamed displays his pride and disdain for Europeans when he responds to an Englishman who wants to invite him for a drink, 'I am also a man who hates Europeans. That's why, if you want to have a drink with me, you have to let me invite you.'[74] Mohamed's answer evinces his notions of honour, independence, and pride, all directly linked to his virility which he wants to distinguish from the Englishman's. When the Englishman invites him later to a party at his place in which he witnesses, together with other English men, two Spanish boys being sodomized by the black butler, Mohamed remarks to the black butler:

[72] *Look and Move On*, p. 122-25. See for a similar reading Raj Chandarlapaty, 'In Defense of Tradition: Mohammed Mrabet's Postcolonial Leanings and the Confrontation of "Kif Wisdom" with Modernity', *Storytelling, Self, Society: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Storytelling Studies*, 3 (2007), 32-50 (p.38).
[73] *Look and Move On*, p. 71.
[74] *Look and Move On*, p. 16.

> Happy with any American or Jew or Englishman, or any filthy Frenchman, yes? They come here and you show them your backside and everything else you've got. And they take pictures of you doing your work, and sell them later in Europe. And you like that. […] You could carry sacks of wheat on your back at the port, I told him.[75]

In their dehumanization, featuring as bodies whose exoticism might appeal to a European spectator subjected to orientalist fantasies, the black man is involved in the pornographic industry and has no power whatsoever over his activity and the photographs of his body which circulate in Europe.[76] While speaking Arabic to him and suggesting he take an honourable job at the port, Mohamed attempts to restore his dignity and that of his country, denying colonial and postcolonial dependence upon the West. However, Mrabet himself is to a certain extent complicit in broader erotic and literary economics since his stories perpetuate orientalist stereotypes. Like the black man, he has no power over the eventual impact of his stories which have been edited by Bowles.[77] *Look and Move On* depicts Mohamed's literary and sexual exchange with expatriates in Tangier. Whereas his portrayal may well describe a 'polymorphous' sexuality for the 'naïve' reader, as we have seen with the Moroccan model, this does not threaten his masculinity. On the contrary, Mohamed stresses his dignity throughout, his distance from expatriate circles, and his return to local values. Homosexuals, or the one embodying the 'shameful' passive position, are expatriates such as Reeves or the two Spanish boys at the Englishman's party.

These tensions between on the one hand being complicit in reiterating orientalist stereotypes and on the other defending Moroccan values linked to strength and Muslim faith, also inform

[75] *Look and Move On*, p. 19.
[76] For further discussion of sexual transactions between Morocco and the West, see Boone, Mullins, and Pascal Blanchard (ed.), *Sexe, race & colonies: la domination des corps du XVe siècle à nos jours* (Paris: La Découverte, 2018).
[77] Mullins, pp. 117-25.

Mrabet's final story entitled *Chocolate Creams and Dollars*.[78] The title alludes to a Moroccan song about American soldiers who in the aftermath of World War II introduced dollars and chocolate into Morocco, thus alluding to western influence.[79] The protagonist, Driss, is given responsibility for a villa in the sea resort of Azilah which belongs to an Englishman he saved from drowning. He has workmen undo the western modernization and starts refurbishing the home in Arab style, thus reclaiming it aesthetically. Unlike Mohamed in *Look and Move On*, who records stories and folktales, Driss records on a tape recorder the decadent lifestyle of western tourists:

> What I'm recording here is the truth. But to me it's like a novel, and I like the way it's going. Because I believe that if I live long enough, these tapes will be worth something, even though they're spoken by somebody who can't read or write. An idiot can win where an educated man can lose.[80]

Driss opposes western literacy with an illiteracy which will be to his advantage. During the Englishman Mr Hapkins' last visit, he puts fresh marijuana in his tea and when Mr Hapkins begins to tell inappropriate stories about his penchant for men, he records them for Mr Hapkins' family who have come, following his death, to reclaim the house. Threatening Mr Hapkins' family by revealing his landlord's homosexuality in a country in which homosexuality is criminalized, the family leave him the house in exchange for his silence.

The clear demarcation between Moslem and non-Moslem and, inherently linked, between Moroccan virility compared with European weakness and homosexuality, is thematized in an episode towards the end of the story. Being an owner of a successful fishing business, Driss sits one day in the café belonging to an Englishman to whom he used to sell clams before he set up his business. The Englishman says:

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[78] Mohammed Mrabet, *Chocolate Creams and Dollars* (New York, NY: Inanout Press, 1992).
[79] *Chocolate Creams and Dollars*, p. 107.
[80] *Chocolate Creams and Dollars*, p. 71.

> -Those American and English people who come there are all extremely rich.
>
> -They've got money, said Driss. And we have the strength.
>
> -What do you mean by strength? said the Englishman.
>
> -That's what I mean. He has the money. If I hadn't the strength I had, he wouldn't be alive today. You run this bar and restaurant and you've got four strong Moroccans working for you. They protect you too.
>
> -What do you mean, protect?
>
> -I mean all sorts of things. For instance, there are men and there are *maricones*. A man wouldn't say to another man: You've got a lot of money, haven't you. It's not a thing you can say. But because I used to sell clams to you, you think you're free to say it. So you see, you're not a man. If you're not a man you must be a woman. Isn't that right?
>
> -Get out of this café!
>
> I'm still having my coffee. I haven't finished yet. I'm in my own country, in my own town. And you want to put me out of your café. Try and put me out. I'll tear the place down.[81]

The dialogue dramatizes different notions of masculinity, contrasting the effeminacy of Europeans with the virility embodied by Moroccans. The Englishman, a metonym for the West, is debased and identified with 'maricones'. Driss's use of this term, an insult meaning an effeminate homosexual (perhaps best translated from Spanish as 'faggot'), illustrates that the very concept of effeminate homosexuals is foreign to Moroccan culture. It is an untranslatable concept in Moroccan culture since such words would not exist.[82] Furthermore, this dialogue also conveys a sense in which Driss rejects the foreign, thus reclaiming his space and, by extension, Moroccan culture.

Elements such as the refurbishment of the house, his successful business, the ejecting of decadent homosexual foreigners in *Chocolate Creams and Dollars* contrast western decadence with an awakening strength linked, I would argue, to Morocco's freshly acquired independence. Like Mohamed in *Look and Move On*, Driss's sexual dalliances with western

[81] *Chocolate Creams and Dollars*, p. 147.
[82] See Mullins, pp. 130-131.

tourists should rather be seen as a passing phase. Western tourists allow Moroccan men to acquire wealth, yet they are rejected by the country and seen as endangering Moroccan values. There is almost a reverse racism here, conflating whiteness with richness, decadence and weakness, whereas strength and cunning is linked to Moroccans. In *Chocolate Creams and Dollars* Driss tries to trace his cunning and bravery back to his ancestry. During one of his meetings with other fishermen, he has one of his colleagues tell him about his father's prowess and courage, virtues the son would like to perpetuate. His father was one of the first to dive under the fishing boat during an accident on the sea and perished whilst repairing the net underwater. 'He always liked dangerous work', concludes the fisherman.[83] Thus in the face of western decadence he attempts to found a lineage of brave men, and thereby convey the image of a brave nation.

If *Chocolate Creams and Dollars* conveys a sense of national literature and of reclaiming Moroccan space, this is somewhat undermined by Bowles' and the publishers' editorial processes. *Chocolate Creams and Dollars* is supplemented with illustrations which perpetuate orientalist discourse on Morocco, clearly designed for a western readership. Whereas the writer Alfred Chester, who features importantly in the story through his misbehaviour and contempt for Morocco in general, is represented by busts of Roman emperors, protecting and rendering this character anonymous, Moroccans are photographed (by the photographer and New York visual artist Philip Taaffe) in lascivious, sexually explicit positions. The photographs, which in an uninhibited way present young Moroccan men with erections or naked young Moroccan women, bolster this orientalist view, perpetuating a vision of uninhibited, untamed Arab sexuality in 1990s Morocco. Despite upholding traditional

[83] *Chocolate Creams and Dollars*, p.116.

Moroccan values and defining himself against from the West, Mrabet cannot completely free himself of western dependence which projects orientalist values onto his work.

There are two concepts of sexuality, or two models of sexuality in Mrabet's work, the western and the local. However, recalling Rebucini, the local model is only a passing stage. This, however, is misinterpreted here by Bowles and the expatriate circles as polymorphous sexuality. That said, detailed reading has shown that the narrators clearly wish to distance themselves from the expatriate and the homosexuals, which, as the term *maricones* evinces, is something they do not know in Moroccan culture. Thus there is a wish to maintain a distance to the West and to maintain it through patriarchal values on the part of arabophone Moroccan authors. My reading also illustrates that notion of co-writing, or indeed writing, steering texts in order to make a point about Arab/Muslim world in contrast to the West. Mrabet has no agency over the final impact and if my reading shows that in fact Mrabet wants to distance himself from the West, one can also read these stories as testifying to Morocco as a place of freedom. The West uses the 'Orient' in order to make a point about restrictions in the West. This changes with Mohamed Choukri's *Le pain nu*. As in Mrabet's story, homosexuality is relegated to the West. However, unlike Mrabet, Choukri's literacy, acquired later in life, empowered him to distance himself from Bowles and the expatriate circles and acquire agency over his own writings which are not 'misused' by the West in order to make a point about Arab/Muslim sexual mores.

Feminizing the West: Mohamed Choukri's *Le pain nu*

Al-Khubz Al-Hafi means literally in Arabic 'barefooted bread' and alludes to the Arabic idiom 'khubz haf' ('bare bread'), the meal of the poor people.[84] Choukri wrote *Al-Khubz Al-Hafi* in 1973 in Arabic, when Bowles, on behalf of a London-based publisher, asked him to write an autobiography. At the same time, he translated his work into Spanish and Darija for Bowles who translated it into English and had it published under the not exactly accurate name *For Bread Alone* the same year.[85] Tahar Ben Jelloun translated it under the name *Le pain nu* and it was published by François Maspero in Paris in 1980.[86] Due to the explicit depiction of sexual and homosexual scenes, Choukri's *Al-Khubz Al-Hafi* was rejected by publishers in the Arabic world and was not published until 1982 through a Casablanca press.[87]

Choukri's autobiography narrates the story of Mohamed's childhood and adolescence. In a first-person narrative Mohamed recounts how in the years of the famine he left the Rif region with his family in order to settle in Tétouan. Exposed to his father's violence, who eventually kills his younger brother, he soon leaves home in order to lead an independent life by working in cafés and restaurants. He frequents drug dealers, prostitutes, and eventually witnesses the anti-colonial revolt on 12 March 1952. After a brief stint in prison due to over-consumption of drugs and alcohol, he leaves for Larache in order to go to school to learn to read and write.

[84] Nirvana Tanoukhi, 'Rewriting Political Commitment for an International Canon: Paul Bowles's *For Bread Alone* as Translation of Mohamed Choukri's *Al-Khubz Al-Hafi*', *Research in African Literatures,* 34 (2003), 127- 44 (p. 127).
[85] Tanoukhi, p. 128.
[86] Mustapha Ettobi, 'Cultural Representation in Literary Translation: Translators as Mediators/Creators', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 37 (2006), 206-29 (p.210).
[87] For further information on the controversies around Choukri's *Al-Khubz Al-Hafi* in the Arabic world, see Ettobi (pp. 208-11), Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (pp. 318-19), and Tanoukhi (pp. 127-28).

It is, of course, problematic to base a discussion on a translated text, as is the case here. In Nirvana Tanoukhi's 'Cultural Representation in Literary Translation: Translators as Mediators/Creators'[88] and in Mustapha Ettobi's 'Rewriting Political Commitment for an International Canon: Paul Bowles's *For Bread Alone* as Translation of Mohamed Choukri's *Al-Khubz Al-Hafi*',[89] the authors have shown how both translations are informed by the respective translator's political and ideological views. Bowles, for example, aimed in *For Bread Alone* to convey an image of Moroccan culture as 'primitive', outside the civilized world. In her insightful article, Tanoukhi shows how precisely the English version diverges on two points, namely in its rendering of homosexuality and literacy.[90] Whereas Bowles presents Mohamed as a rebel who indulges in socially prohibited pleasures, thus, for example, emphasizing the polymorphous sexuality of the adolescent, Choukri's Mohamed, according to Tanoukhi, is forced into sex due to colonial oppression.[91] Furthermore, unlike Choukri, who interlinks Mohamed's personal with national emancipation, Bowles leaves out any allusion to the Moroccan struggle for independence.[92] Comparing Ben Jelloun's and Bowles' version with the original, Ettobi remarks that Ben Jelloun, himself Moroccan, shares with Choukri similar concerns, such as anti-colonialism, criticism of patriarchy, and criticism of the oppression of women, concerns which he tends to emphasise in his translation.[93] My analysis will be based on the French version except for a few episodes in which I will rely upon the Arabic version.

[88] Tanoukhi, 'Rewriting Political Commitment for an International Canon: Paul Bowles's *For Bread Alone* as Translation of Mohamed Choukri's *Al-Khubz Al-Hafi*'.
[89] Ettobi, 'Cultural Representation in Literary Translation: Translators as Mediators/Creators'.
[90] Tanoukhi, p. 135.
[91] Tanouhki, p. 139.
[92] Tanoukhi, pp. 140-141.
[93] Ettobi, p. 227.

Choukri's *Al-Khubz Al-Hafi* bears a couple of points of resemblances with Mrabet's *Look and Move on* and *Chocolate Creams and Dollars*. Like Mrabet's protagonists in the stories discussed I would suggest that when it comes to homosexuality specifically, Mohamed is keen to distance himself from it by ascribing it to a western practice; in other words, he feminizes the men he has homosexual relationships with, in order to highlight his own masculinity. Mohamed sees his masculinity as characterized by having an active role in a sexual relationship, ascribing passivity to western men. In a similar vein to Mrabet's protagonists, Mohamed's homosexual tendencies should rather be conceived of as a passing stage and a deliberate transgression of the social order due to emotional or economic despair. Like in Mrabet's stories, there is a close relationship in *Al-Khubz Al-Hafi* between prostitution, illiteracy and colonialism. However, unlike Mrabet's protagonists Mohamed in *Al-Khubz Al-Hafi* acquires literacy and thus independence from westerners who try to take advantage of him. Furthermore, I would suggest that Mohamed's independence in *Al-Khubz Al-Hafi* is reflected in Choukri's and Bowles' relationship. Choukri may well have been dependent upon Bowles to introduce his work to an English-speaking readership. However, his other writings to which I will briefly allude to here reveal that Choukri was also keen to distance himself on an intellectual level from Bowles and the expatriate circles. He was an established writer with agency over his own writings and enjoyed considerable fame in the Arab-speaking world.

One of the most problematic episodes in Choukri's autobiography is Mohamed's description of the rape of a young boy. Mohamed has moved to Oran to see his father's family and been employed by a French colon and his wife Monique to work as a servant in their household. One afternoon, he tricks a young boy into rape.[94] For Massad, the passage also portrays

[94] Mohamed Choukri, *Le pain nu* (Paris : Maspéro, 1980), p. 57.

Mohamed's interest in the young boy's penis which expresses a certain ambiguity on Mohamed's side.[95] If Massad is right to suggest that there is a homosexual tendency on Choukri's part ('je caressai son pénis qui commençait à s'ériger dans ma main'),[96] I would also suggest that there are some colonial and societal reasons at play which lead Mohamed to rape the young boy. While working for the colons, Mohamed is overcome by a strong erotic desire for Monique, the colon's wife, whom he sees naked on more than one occasion. Yet being aware of the colonial order, and social and ethnic difference, he would never dare approach her.[97] Furthermore, Monique's request of him to wash her husband's underwear is in Mohamed's view an offence to his masculinity, bearing in mind the importance of independence for Moroccan men.[98] Mohamed's powerlessness foreshadows the nightmare he has after witnessing the colonial authorities killing Moroccans later in the novel:

> Je venais de voir en rêve une rangée d'hommes nus dans une grande place. Ils défilaient un par un devant trois ou quatre personnages nus derrière une table sur laquelle ils avaient posé des outils de chirurgie. Ils leur arrachaient le sexe et le jetaient dans un baril. Autour de la place, derrière des barricades, des femmes nues pleuraient ces hommes.[99]

In both situations, the colonial order forces the colonized into powerlessness reflected by sexual impotence. Mohamed's rape of the young boy, then, can be explained by his feelings of shame and pent-up aggression against the colonizing order.[100] In front of his aunt, he apologizes, regretting that, 'j'étais dégoûté par les plaisirs de mon corps'.[101] However, his explanation, 'A Tétouan, je pouvais aller me perdre entre les cuisses des putains. Tu ne veux quand même pas que je me perde entre tes cuisses ! Monique appartient à son homme. Toi, à

[95] Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, p. 315.
[96] *Le pain nu*, p. 57.
[97] *Le pain nu*, p. 56.
[98] *Le pain nu*, p. 51.
[99] *Le pain nu*, p. 97.
[100] And is thus reminiscent of Fanon's discussion in *Les damnés de la terre* in which he analyses how violence, instead of being directed against the colonizers, turns against its own people. See Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris : Maspero, 1961).
[101] *Le pain nu*, p. 57.

ton mari. Et moi ?[102], also suggests that the young boy was a substitute for female friends with whom he would otherwise engage in sexual activities. In fact, in order to redeem his masculinity, Mohamed feminizes the boy, justifying, according to Rebucini's study of homoeroticism in Morocco, the lust he might feel for the young boy. In other words, his masculinity is not endangered through feminization of the boy ('un enfant fin et beau', 'les lèvres roses', 'j'étais amoureux d'une enfant andalouse jeune, belle, et brune').[103] The episode suggests that Mohamed's homosexual tendency here results from his flight from colonial violence.[104]

This tendency to feminize the other can also be seen in the other explicit episode in which an elderly Spanish man performs oral sex on Mohamed. After returning from Oran to Tétouan and escaping his father's violence at home, Mohamed leaves for Tangier and survives by stealing and predating. Having escaped a Moroccan man who attempts to rape him, he comes across a wealthy Spaniard who offers him fifty pesetas so as to have oral sex with him. In his description, Mohamed is keen to distance the Spaniard from himself. He describes the man as *ha-ss-aa-s,* which means sensitive and delicate.[105] By disputing masculinity in the Spaniard, he is less guilty when having sex with this man. This is corroborated by Mohamed's description of the man in general, which he endows with softness ('les lèvres molles', 'sa main était molle').[106] The othering of the Spanish man is also emphasized when Mohamed wonders whether this man finds the same pleasure in sucking a man's penis as he himself does while sucking women's breasts.[107]At this moment the Arabic texts says *loo-tiyy,*

[102] *Le pain nu*, p. 57.
[103] *Le pain nu*, p. 56.
[104] For a similar analysis, see Nirvana Tanoukhi. However, Tanoukhi misses the point, I believe, of Mohamed feminizing the young boy.
[105] I thank here Yousif M. Qasmiyeh for his help with the Arabic text.
[106] *Le pain nu,* p. 83.
[107] *Le pain nu*, p. 83.

meaning the one like Lot, alluding to the episode in the Quran according to which Lot was linked to the people from Sodom and Gomorrah who were known for their sinful acts.[108] Thus Mohamed carefully emphasizes his hegemonic masculinity in this compromising scene, avoiding any allusion to a possible attraction to the male sex.

The link between literacy and sexuality is evinced in the later episode in which, later that night in a graveyard, Mohamed attempts to read the signs on the tombstones and fails to do so. He then wonders : 'Mon sexe se vend bien à cinquantes pésètes. Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire ? Trop de questions compliquées.'[109] His illiteracy and his lack of understanding of the broader forces at play, specifically colonialism, prevent him from grasping the situation with the Spaniard in which a colonizer takes advantage of the colonized in order to live out a sexuality criminalized at home.[110] At this stage of the narrative he understands this sexual episode which he is reluctant to confess and unable to explain as the only means through which he can flee hunger and utter poverty. Mohamed here bears similarities with Mohamed in *Look and Move on* in which the latter in a similar vein deplores his lack of literacy, and 'uses' or 'is being used' by western men in order to make a living.

It is, however, in prison where Mohamed finds himself following a police raid on a brothel, that he becomes aware of his illiteracy and powerlessness before the colonial order. When his cellmate Hamid starts writing a verse of the Tunisian national poet Aboul-Qasem Echebbi, 'que si un peuple ou un homme est opprimé, s'il est en esclavage et s'il veut se libérer […], les chaînes se brisent grâce à la volonté de l'homme',[111] he becomes aware of the importance

[108] Translated by Yousif M. Qasmiyeh.
[109] *Le pain nu*, p. 84.
[110] See Richard, Cleminson, Francisco Vazquez Garcia, *'Los Invisibles', A History of Male Homosexuality in Spain, 1850-1940,* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 125.
[111] *Le pain nu,* p. 131.

of literacy as a means of empowerment against the colonial order. When he leaves prison and is asked by the security forces to put his signature on a document and is unable to do so, he ponders: 'Ils peuvent tout écrire et tout me faire dire tant que je ne sais pas lire.'[112] This humiliating episode motivates Mohamed to pursue an education and towards the end of the book he leaves Tangier in order to start school at Larache. Thus, in contrast to Mrabet's stories, *Le pain nu* narrates the story of Mohamed's construction of his male subjectivity and concomitantly his empowerment through literacy.[113]

Mohamed's acquisition of literacy, which occurs at the same time as Morocco's struggle for independence can be interpreted as a metaphor for Morocco's independence. The story of Mohamed in *Le pain nu* reflects also Choukri's own independence from the West. In the introduction to the volume of short stories by Moroccan storytellers and authors, entitled *Five Eyes*, Bowles recalls:

> When we were translating his autobiography *For Bread Alone*, he sat beside me, in order to see that I was making a word-for-word version of the text. If he noticed an extra comma he demanded an explanation. I was driven to reiterating: But English is not Arabic! Finally, we devised a modus operandi which involved our sitting on opposite sides of the room.[114]

This suggests precisely that Choukri was keen to have control over his work translated by Bowles, which, as Tanoukhi and Nirvana have shown, nevertheless considerably differed from Choukri's original work. Furthermore, like the protagonist Mohamed in *Le pain nu* who feminizes the West, Choukri is keen to distance himself from Bowles' homosexuality. In his *Paul Bowles in Tangier*, Choukri writes:

> From a distance I used to see Bowles, the founder, and his clique, but I didn't know any of them personally yet, and I hadn't read any of their works. […] In the field of

[112] *Le pain nu*, p. 135.
[113] For more on that, see Tanoukhi.
[114] *Five Eyes*, edited and translated by Paul Bowles (Santa Barbara, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1979), p. 8.

> literature, I still had to sow my first seed, and I didn't share their tendency toward homosexuality.[115]

Unlike Mrabet, whose work and life are intertwined with Bowles, Choukri is an independent writer who writes for himself and has agency over his writings. Like the protagonist in his novel, he distances himself from homosexuality and from dependence upon the West. Whereas the protagonists in Mrabet's work distance themselves from homosexuality, projecting it onto the West, yet are still dependent, reflected in Mrabet's relationship with Bowles, Mohamed in *Le pain nu* grows out of western dependence and concomitantly of any homosexual tendency, articulating a self-sustaining, independent, heterosexual masculine subjectivity.

Conclusion

This chapter sets out to examine important questions related to homosexuality in North African literature from the 1950s to the 1990s. In Chraïbi, we have seen that the western homosexual model is afforded a place in North African society at the time of decolonization. At the same time, Chraïbi depicts the border between homosexuality and heterosexuality to be tenuous, something which is corroborated by my discussion of *La répudiation* read in conjunction with Edelman. Francophone North African authors at the time of decolonization challenged the conservative view of gender determining one's sexual orientation; on the contrary, they depict homosexuality as widespread and normative masculinity, or heterosexual masculinity, as it were, as unstable. Furthermore, brief analysis of the Algerian Sénac's work illustrates that, as an outsider, the homosexual has to re-invent his own religion and lineage, observations which foreshadow Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's literary project.

[115] Mohamed Choukri, *Paul Bowles in Tangier* (London: Telegram, 2008), p. 37.

Unlike Chraïbi, for whom the western model of homosexuality is integrated into North African society, Mohamed Mrabet and Mohamed Choukri relegate homosexuality to the West. At a time when Morocco defined itself as a nation independent of the West, masculinity had to conform to conservative and Islamist masculine ideals and non-conforming masculinity would not be tolerated. Furthermore, Mrabet's and Choukri's work also illustrates the close imbrication of western sexual politics in Morocco. My discussion reveals the paradox inherent in Mrabet's and Choukri's literature in which homosexuality is shown as foreign to Morocco and Moroccan men, whereas for Bowles, Mrabet's and Choukri's literature reveals 'eastern' sexual freedom. Being persecuted for their sexual orientation in the West, Bowles and his expatriate circles found sexual freedom in Morocco and project orientalist characteristics onto Moroccan men. This tendency to use Moroccan literature to make a point about western or eastern sexual politics will also be seen in my discussion of Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's work. In the aftermath of the sexual revolution, from the 1980s on, the West demarcated itself as a space of progress regarding sexual minority rights and in order to emphasize this point it projected 'barbaric' tendencies onto the East. Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's literature inscribes itself in these tensions.

The issues discussed in this chapter foreshadow important themes I will examine in Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's works. If my reading of Chraïbi, Boudjedra, and Sénac has illustrated that these authors challenge the rigidity of the gendered and sexed order, my discussion of masculinity in Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's works will show that both authors undermine as well conservative views regarding Arab/Muslim masculinities.
Like Chraïbi and Boudjedra, Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa depict masculinity as encompassing elements which ideologies around normative masculinity, as seen through

Rebucini's studies, normally reject. Furthermore, the imbrication of literacy, sexuality, and colonialism in Mrabet's and Choukri's work foreshadow important aspects of Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's oeuvre. Rachid O.'s early works emerged in collaboration with the journalist and writer Mathieu Lindon who steered Rachid O.'s writings in order to respond to France's restrictive policy regarding children's sexuality at that time. As in Mrabet's works, orientalist, 'polymorphous' sexuality was thus projected onto Moroccan male protagonists. The topos of the sexually 'polymorphous' Moroccan man threatening the western achievement – here women's and sexual minority rights – which we have seen in Bowles' approach to Mrabet's stories, is thematized in Rachid O.'s and Taïa's later works. Both Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa appropriate the orientalist trope of violence and loss of self for the white homosexual man who is in a sexual relationship with the Arab man, one which features importantly in French queer discourse of the FHAR movement. Writers from North Africa cannot ignore the stereotypes that have circulated for centuries. Finally, the imbrication of literacy, sexuality, and independence encountered in Choukri's work is of crucial importance for Taïa. Taïa mentions Choukri's *Le pain nu* in *Mon Maroc* and in *L'armée du salut* as a landmark and an important memory of his childhood and youth.[116] Choukri's subversive quality, his frank depiction of sexuality, his independence, and acquisition of literacy are all issues which are played out in Taïa's oeuvre. Taïa can be conceived of as the spiritual son of Choukri who throughout his work continues Choukri's legacy by not being reticent about writing openly of sexuality and his own sexual experiences.

[116] Abdellah Taïa, *Mon Maroc* (Paris: Séguier: 2000), henceforth referred to as: *MM*. *L'armée du salut* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), henceforth referred to as: *AS*.

Chapter 2

Refused Identification, 'Growing Sideways', and Autofiction: Childhood in Rachid O.'s *L'enfant ébloui*, *Plusieurs vies*, and *Chocolat chaud*, and Abdellah Taïa's *Mon Maroc*, *L'armée du salut*, and *Une mélancolie arabe*

> 'Qu'y avait-il de si personnel dans ce texte?' Je lui ai dit: 'Je ne sais pas. Je pense que je ne me rends pas compte de la réaction au Maroc et qu'à la limite ça peut choquer.'
>
> Rachid O., *L'enfant ébloui*

> J'allais décoller, voler, écrire autre chose, aimer au grand jour, dire mon amour, être ce qui ne se dit pas, n'existe pas. […] Mon histoire, désormais, j'allais l'écrire seul, en silence, loin du groupe, loin du mauvais œil.
>
> Abdellah Taïa, *Une mélancolie arabe*

Introduction

The last chapter examined how different Moroccan authors have reacted to the reinforcement of nationalist and conservative values concerning non-conforming sexualities. We saw how in this context scholars re-appropriated sources of the past in order to justify clear divisions between gender, sex, and sexualities.[1] If Chraïbi's *Le passé simple* reveals the sexual hypocrisy of governing authorities and, furthermore, illustrates how the western homosexual model became integrated into Moroccan society, authors writing during the heyday of Morocco's nationalism under Hassan II relegate homosexuality to the West. During the end of Hassan II's reign and with the advent of Mohamed VI, Morocco underwent significant

[1] Bouhdiba's *La sexualité en Islam* inscribes itself in that project.

sociocultural changes.[2] Moroccan literature produced in and from the 1990s breaks with the nationalist discourse prevalent during Hassan II's reign which favoured the collective, and rather advances individuals' concern.[3] Marginalized voices, such as those of women, political dissidents, and sexual minorities, which formerly belonged to the sphere of the *non-dit*, emerged.[4] This new generation of authors distinguishes itself through similar preoccupations, such as challenging the rise of Islamism, questioning conservative views on sexuality, or healing family traumas caused by the repressive politics under Hassan II's regime.[5]

Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa belong to this new generation of writers who bear witness to Morocco's societal changes. Their early writings on childhood question conservative views on masculinity and gender roles as established by theorists such as Bouhdiba. In their celebration of a 'queer' masculinity informed by femininity, their writings pose a considerable challenge to patriarchal views as defended by conservatives. This chapter will examine their early writings which revolve around childhood, namely Rachid O.'s *L'enfant ébloui*, *Plusieurs vies*, and *Chocolat chaud*, and Taïa's *Mon Maroc*, *L'armée du salut*, and *Une mélancolie arabe*. Reading these works against a backdrop of queer theorists such as Judith Butler and Kathryn Bond Stockton who, like Rachid O. and Taïa, question normative views on the child, sexuality, and growing into adulthood, sheds light on how both authors overturn assumptions about normative masculinity or boyhood, as demonstrated by Bouhdiba.

One of the themes which stands out in Rachid O.'s and Taïa's childhood narratives is their arrival at their queer identities. Their protagonist-narrators' early adolescence is accompanied

[2] Valérie Orlando, *Francophone Voices of the 'New Morocco' in Film and Print: (Re)presenting a Society in Transitio*n (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 14.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Orlando, p. 15.
[5] Orlando, p. 16.

by rituals which traditionally punctuate any Moroccan boy's childhood. However, these rites of passage, such as circumcision or expulsion from the women's hammam, symbolizing the child's entry into the male sphere, are accompanied by complications for the narrators in that there is resistance on their part to entering the male collective. By refusing to participate in these rituals, the protagonist rather establishes – against the diktat of his culture – loyalty to the world of women. Indeed, in their desire for men the narrators construct their sexuality in relation to female figures. Rather than leaving the world of women behind and identifying with male figures, they incorporate female figures and female desire, thus endangering the culturally established normative masculinity.

Reading Rachid O.'s and Taïa's childhood narratives in conjunction with Butler and Stockton, we see that both authors challenge ideologies around masculinity as set out, for example, by Bouhdiba in his *La sexualité en Islam.* According to Bouhdiba, two passages in a boy's life are particularly crucial and mark his access to the domain of men; circumcision and expulsion from the women's hammam. Bouhdiba writes:

> L'émancipation du fils, les distances qu'il doit inévitablement prendre vis-à-vis de la mère représentent un moment essentiel de la vie que la circoncision, l'expulsion du hammam ont entre autres préparé mais de manière qui semble terriblement insuffisante. L'enfant est happé littéralement par le monde adulte masculin, le seul que la société apprend à prendre au sérieux et qui d'ailleurs s'impose d'emblée. Vivre avec le monde des pères c'est entrer dans le jeu collectif des responsabilités, c'est être accepté aussi par le groupe, légitimé, intégré. Rejeter le royaume des mères ou être marginal.[6]

Cultural laws, according to Bouhdiba, require the adolescent to distance himself from the sphere of the mother and to enter the world of men. Circumcision and expulsion from the female hammam prepare the young boy for this step, but insufficiently. In addition, cultural habits and laws require that the adolescent be surrounded by men and dismiss the female

[6] Bouhdiba, p. 272.

sphere (‘rejeter le royaume des mères ou être marginal’). In the early stages of a man’s life then, rituals prepare the boy to detach himself from female influence in order to enter the male sphere.

Furthermore, Bouhdiba observes that access to the men’s world is often accompanied by repression of the women’s. Bouhdiba notes that, from puberty onwards, the child has to direct all his energy towards a life shared with other men and towards the systematic depreciation of femininity (‘Plus gravement encore cela s’accompagne de la déréalisation du monde féminin.’).[7] Rachid O.’s and Taïa’s protagonists renounce this being ‘swallowed up’ by the male collective (‘Le garçon est littéralement happé alors par le monde masculin.’)[8] by establishing loyalty with female figures. By remaining in close proximity to women, they renounce submission to this, at times, violent rite of passage at the origin of the gendered body. Rather than consolidating their masculinity by denying all things feminine, they make visible their feminine component. In fact, their protagonists retain feminine elements from their past with which they identify and through which their masculinity is formed.

For Bouhdiba, more significant than circumcision is the boy’s expulsion from the women’s hammam. It marks the initiation of the boy into the world of men and the systematic depreciation of the female world. Until his expulsion, the boy was allowed to accompany his mother or other female relatives to the women’s hammam and was surrounded by female figures. Passage to the male hammam marks symbolically the imperative which commands the young boy to leave the feminine world behind. In his socio-psychological account of the role of the hammam, Bouhdiba observes that if the boy was allowed to identify with female

[7] Bouhdiba, p. 208.
[8] Ibid.

figures in his early stages, especially by accompanying his mother to the hammam, expulsion from it forces him to repudiate the female milieu:

> Le hammam, chose importante, participe donc de la fixation à la mère, mais il tend à dépasser cette fixation. La conduite du hammam a pour résultat en effet d'empêcher la libido en régression de s'arrêter au corps physique de la mère.[9]

In Bouhdiba's view, proximity to the mother's body causes regression in the boy's development. Expulsion from the women's hammam is then of crucial importance if the young boy is to follow development into normative masculinity. It follows from this that, for most men, memories of the women's hammam are buried deep in the self so as not to endanger their masculinity. Bouhdiba writes:

> Innombrable hammam, lieu hanté de tant de souvenirs, de tant de scènes, de tant de visions mêlées où la mère et les sœurs, les charmantes cousines, les énigmatiques voisines composent ce bouquet onirique de la féminité que chaque homme porte en soi.[10]

This 'bouquet onirique' irrevocably constitutes part of the masculine identity, which, however, must be repressed in order for normative masculinity to exist.

Bouhdiba's observations on the different stages in the boy's development into a man, marked by abandoning the world of women and, more importantly, repudiating any identification with the female, resonate with Butler's critique of the coming-into-being and prevailing order of heterosexuality as set out in 'Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification'.[11] Butler's concept of 'melancholic gender', rests, in agreement with Bouhdiba, on the idea that the young boy or girl has to give up their love for the same sex or, expressed differently, must repress their identification with a different sex, in order to grow into a 'normal' man or woman.[12] In

[9] Bouhdiba, p. 212.
[10] Bouhdiba, p. 209.
[11] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 132-66.
[12] Butler, 134.

Bouhdiba's words, the young boy has to leave behind that 'bouquet onirique de la féminité que chaque homme porte en soi', or repress it in himself so as not to jeopardize his masculinity.[13]

In *Gender Trouble; Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* and in *The Psychic Life of Power, Theories in Subjection,* Butler is interested in other ways of experiencing gender and sexuality that do not follow the fixed ideology pre-established by culture and in which gender and desire follow from biological sex.[14] Butler's critique of normative development echoes in Rachid O.'s and Taïa's writings when both probe pre-established patterns and ideologies around 'normal' development. In both texts Butler challenges the idea that an individual's gendered character is naturally given and demonstrates that it is prescribed by cultural laws and prohibitions.[15] In the essay 'Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification' in *The Psychic Life of Power, Theories in Subjection*, Butler turns to Freud's *The Ego and the Id* in which he argues that the character of the ego is constituted by sedimentations of lost and formerly loved objects.[16] Melancholic identification, according to Freud, is the incorporation of, and identification with, the object which the person is unable to abandon.[17] In this melancholic identification, whilst the lost object can be abandoned in the real world, it continues to inhabit and haunt the ego as one of its composite elements.[18] Butler then speculates about whether Freud's theory of melancholic identification is also linked to the formation of gender which in turn is inherently linked to processes of identification. Butler returns to Freud and challenges claims made in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* that a person's gender and sexuality

[13] Bouhdiba, p. 209.
[14] See Judith Butler, 'Freud and the Melancholia of Gender' in *Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York; London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 79-89, and Butler, 'Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification'.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Butler, p. 135.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

is formed through the loss of certain sexual attachments, losses which are neither avowed nor grieved for, according to Freud.[19] Cultural laws and ideologies compel a person to give up their homosexual attachments in order for heterosexual desire to emerge. According to Freud, heterosexuality is not only produced through the prohibition against incest but, prior to that, through the prohibition of homosexual attachments.[20] The ego must give up its homosexual attachments, a process which causes, according to Butler, an 'unlivable passion and ungrievable loss'.[21] For Butler, the prohibition against homosexual attachments is linked to the culture in which heterosexuality prevails, one in which there is a clear distinction between the feminine and the masculine. According to this logic, homosexual attachments are seen as dangerous, threatening the gender order which must be seen to be completely feminine or completely masculine. Following from these prohibitions and laws, a woman who experiences homosexual desire may be conceived of as not entirely feminine, a 'failed woman', as it were, and the same goes for a man who experiences homosexual desire.[22] Regarding boys, Butler argues that, in order to become a 'man', the boy must give up his desire for his father and is not allowed to transfer this love to substitute masculine figures. Only on this condition can the mother become an object of desire and the father a site of identification. In Butler's words:

> Indeed, he will not identify with her, and he will not desire another man. That refusal to desire, that sacrifice of desire under the force of prohibition, will incorporate homosexuality as an identification with masculinity. But this masculinity will be haunted by the love it cannot grieve […]. [23]

In order for heterosexual masculinity to be established, the boy must give up his femininity and attachment to same-sex objects. This loss then induces him to incorporate these objects which become the site of melancholic identification, in the sense that he is haunted by or

[19] Ibid. See also Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, ed. by James Strachey (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000).
[20] Butler, pp. 135-6.
[21] Butler, p. 135.
[22] Butler, p. 136.
[23] Butler, p. 138.

composed of these lost objects which, however, have to be repudiated and repressed in order for heterosexuality to exist. In her Freudian reading of *Mourning and Melancholia* and *The Ego and the Id*, Butler demonstrates that the heterosexual man is inhabited by repressed feminine components and the love for men he is forced to abandon, thus, in order to compensate for this loss, he identifies with his father figure and other men. According to Butler, 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are formed through identifications which are in part composed of 'disavowed grief'.[24]

If Butler established in the 1990s the concept of a melancholic gender formed through refused identification in order to explain the prohibition against homosexuality pervasive in western culture and, in particular, to explain the West's inability to account for the ravages of AIDS, her analysis of a heterosexual masculinity haunted by disavowed feminine identifications and disavowed love for men is apposite to the discussion of prevailing masculinity in North Africa as set out by Bouhdiba.[25] As we have seen, Bouhdiba argues that the man must abandon, through rituals and by entering the collective of men, the feminine part of him which may continue to haunt him. We found this also in the preceding chapter of the discussion of *La répudiation* or *Le passé simple* in which the protagonists' childhood is threatened by a female and homosexual components which, however, are then disavowed in order for normative masculinity to exist.[26] By contrast, Rachid O.'s and Taïa's narratives precisely challenge Bouhdiba's observations in which the young boy must abandon his love for men and leave his feminine components behind in order for masculinity to form. Their childhood narratives

[24] Butler, p. 139.
[25] Butler, pp. 138-40.
[26] In the chapter 'The Joy of Castration' in *Queer Nations* Hayes shows how filmmakers and writers Férid Boughédir in *Halfaouine*, Albert Memmi in *La statue de sel*, and Mohammed Dib in *Qui se souvient de la mer* offer childhood narratives in which masculinity might be threatened by a female past. Boughédir's, Memmi's, and Dib's protagonists' masculinity, however, Hayes argues, is never threatened by 'female' pasts to the extent that their heterosexuality is questioned. Jarrod Hayes, *Queer Nations; Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 241-61.

show that both writers integrate feminine components into their masculinity. Rather than repudiating and distancing themselves from the feminine component and homosexual attachments, they integrate their femininity into their masculinity. In that sense, rather than melancholic incorporation of the masculine, they mourn their loss of the loved masculine object and displace it onto different masculine figures. They identify with female figures and encourage a queer masculinity, which is not built on repudiation of the female.

In a culture which does not furnish secure spaces for non-conforming gender and sexualities, Rachid O.'s and Taïa's different conceptualizations of masculinity result in the ostracization of protagonists from family and surroundings. While examining the writers' descriptions of childhood and adolescence, I will compare them to ideas raised by Stockton in her book *The Queer Child or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*.[27] Stockton is particularly interested in the cultural depiction of 'strange' children and writes that one child which brings this strangeness particularly into focus is the 'gay child'.[28] Stockton is interested in the 'gay' child, one who, according to her definition, vaguely knows what 'gay' means or, perhaps more accurately, realizes that things do not turn out as expected.[29] She avoids the identity-laden word 'gay' and instead uses it to explain the disquiet which seizes all children as they grow up, but is perhaps more acutely present in those children who feel that they are not growing up as expected.[30] As a 'gay' child, one might feel that one will grow into a future labelled with terms such as 'gay', 'queer', and 'faggot' – words used by other children – rather than 'with the object of one's dreams', in other words, heterosexual coupling.[31] 'Gay' children's development into adulthood can be accompanied by fear of growing up, since they

[27] Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the 20th Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
[28] Stockton, p. 2.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Stockton, p. 3.
[31] Ibid.

have simply nowhere to grow.[32] Stockton calls the 'gay' child 'ghostly', precisely because the words 'gay' or 'lesbian' are only given retrospectively to him or her.[33] Stockton's observation of the child's inability to name their nascent erotic feelings for a same-sex partner recalls Taïa's and Rachid's situation; neither can explain his attraction to his male peers.

A notion closely linked to the idea of the 'gay child', which will be important to our discussion of Rachid O. and Taïa, is the idea of delay, or 'growing sideways'. Conventionally, growing up is seen as a vertical movement upwards, towards marriage, work, reproduction, and creating a family.[34] The 'gay' child who knows that they will not fulfil these expectations fashions a pause in growing up.[35] According to Stockton, adult partners can be outlets for a child's 'sideways' relations, a crucial observation to be followed up in Taïa and Rachid O.. Stockton explains that 'sideways growth' may be a common phenomenon for the 'gay' child, but it concerns all children. Children 'grow sideways' as well as up because they cannot advance to adulthood until the adults say 'it's time'.[36] Hence Stockton conceives of the usual understanding of 'growing up' as a limited explanation of human growth, one achieved when human beings reach sexual maturity. Rather, 'growing sideways' encompasses a person's experiences or ideas, their motives, exchanges, and emotions which pertain at any age, thus they bring adults and children into lateral contact:

> […] "growing sideways" suggests that the width of a person's experience or ideas, their motives or their motions, may pertain at any age, bringing "adults" and "children" into lateral contact of surprising sorts. This kind of growth is made especially palpable, as I plan to show, by […] the ghostly gay child – the publicly impossible child whose identity *is* a deferral.[37]

[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Stockton, p. 4.
[35] Stockton, p. 5.
[36] Stockton, p. 6.
[37] Stockton, p. 6.

For the ghostly 'gay' child who cannot yet label his sexual desire, relationships with adults which are not marked solely by the erotic but also by the exchange of experiences, are especially relevant. This kind of growth is especially apposite to Rachid O.'s and Taïa's narrators but also for older partners who engage in erotic relationships with them; they defer their growing into conventional adulthood since society does not recognize their sexual orientation. Furthermore, Stockton's concept of the 'gay' child's relationship with older men as an outlet in a society which does not acknowledge same-sex relationships is appropriate to the various love affairs with older men the child-protagonists in Taïa's and Rachid O.'s writings have. Similarly, Stockton's observation of the child's inability to name his nascent erotic feelings for a same-sex partner is appropriate to Taïa's and Rachid O.'s protagonists who, respectively, cannot explain to themselves their attraction to their brother or uncle.

If both authors' childhood writings probe normative development into masculinity, there are also crucial differences, especially related to the genesis of their works. The orientalist portrait Rachid O. in *L'enfant ébloui* conveys of himself – the boy who is readily available for sexual adventure, oscillating between innocence and eroticism – has been informed by French intellectuals with whom Rachid O. was connected at the time the book was written. His childhood writings have been steered in order to challenge the then-prevalent French view of children's innocence. Unlike Rachid O., Taïa's works emerged more independently. In fact, in his works the narrators are keen to establish themselves as Moroccan writers who write in the increasingly transgressive manner initiated by Choukri. However, both authors are similar in so far as they convey a fictionalized, highly constructed portrayal of themselves. Challenging some critics' views that Rachid O. and Taïa convey an authentic depiction of Morocco and

Moroccan life, my discussion will show that, on the contrary, through their autobiographical writings both authors impart a specific image of themselves or Morocco.[38]

Breaking taboos in Rachid O.'s *L'enfant ébloui*, *Plusieurs vies*, and *Chocolat chaud*

L'enfant ébloui and *Plusieurs vies*, published by Gallimard in, respectively, 1995 and 1997, are the first written works in which a narrator of Muslim confession openly admits his homosexual love. Jarrod Hayes calls it a 'turning point in Maghrebian literature written in French' while Hédi Abdel-Jaouad writes: '[…] this is the first time, to my knowledge, that an author addresses this question directly and from a personal perspective without provocation, outlandishness or prudish reserve…'.[39] If we have seen that the first-person narrators in Mrabet's and Choukri's works engage fleetingly in homosexual relationships, Mrabet's and Choukri's narrators, as I argued, depict these relationships as a passing stage in their adolescence, emphasizing their heterosexuality later in life. *L'enfant ébloui* and *Plusieurs vies* are also startling in that they convey an unexpected image of Moroccan society. Apart from depicting a different form of masculinity which seems to a certain extent accepted in the society, the narrator conveys an image of a father who does not oppose his son's countless affairs with Moroccan or western men, or his sister's pre-marital pregnancy. Even more surprising is the narrator's revelation of situations and events which normally would remain secret in Moroccan society. Thus he recounts without shame his sexual adventures with men and does not shy away from revealing incestuous relationships between his grandfather and the grandfather's daughter, grand-daughter, and himself. I would not contest the critical

[38] See Hayes, 'Rachid O. and the Return of the Homopast: The Autobiographical as Allegory in Childhood Narratives by Maghrebian Men'.
[39] Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, 'Review of *L'enfant ébloui*', *World Literature Today*, 70, (1996), p. 457. Hayes, 'Rachid O. and the Return of the Homopast: The Autobiographical as Allegory in Childhood Narratives by Maghrebian Men', p. 497.

opinion that the narrator frequents paedophiles.[40] However, bearing in mind Stockton's concept of 'growing sideways', I would like to shed more nuanced light on these relationships and argue that to some extent these men allowed the boy and the adolescent to live out affectionate relationships and acquire culture he otherwise would not be able to experience.[41] They allow him to name his desire – thus reflecting Kahan's theory of the expansion of the western homosexual model – and offer him substitute relationships he otherwise could not enjoy with his peers.[42] However, the emphasis on early childhood and adolescent sexuality, the countless affairs the narrator has with older men and tourists, leaves the reader wondering whether the narrator is not conveying an image of Morocco as a place where fantasies of permissive sexuality materialize. Valérie Orlando observes:

> Indeed, Rachid O.'s novels tend to cultivate a brand of orientalist fantasy that entreats us to wonder: Is he feeding his Western audiences the Maghrebian stereotypes they seem to crave, or is he accurately portraying the life of a gay-Moroccan man, reflecting his own experiences and views?[43]

Andrea Duranti in turn suggests that 'his novels have echoes of the paedophile loves and the sexual tourism of André Gide, Paul Bowles, Jean Genet, Truman Capote, and Michel Foucault, among others […].'[44] My discussion will illustrate that the first-person narrator inscribes himself in the orientalist tradition in that he proffers the image of the sexually available boy, combining innocence and sexuality in order to seduce older male lovers. However, my research has shown that the emphasis on childhood sexuality has been considerably steered by the French journalist and writer Mathieu Lindon who was involved, together with Philippe Sollers, sole editor of the *Infini* series at Gallimard, in the publication of *L'enfant ébloui*, *Plusieurs vies*, and subsequent work by Rachid O.. Lindon's cooperation

[40] See Andrea Duranti, 'Gay but not Queer: Defining Liminal Post-queer Identities in Maghrebian Literature', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 12 (2008), 79-87 (p. 85).
[41] Stockton, pp. 1-57.
[42] See Kahan, pp. 327-57.
[43] Orlando, p. 113.
[44] Duranti, p. 85.

with Rachid O. inscribes itself in the tradition of other western writers, as seen in the preceding chapter who, in exchange of erotic favours or not, advance Moroccan writers on the international stage.[45] However, *L'enfant ébloui* and *Plusieurs vies* stand out from these other writings which are chaperoned by established western writers or journalists since, in their emphasis on childhood sexuality, they respond to a shift in the politics around laws governing public outrages in France which was acknowledged by the circle of writers, artists, and intellectuals of which Lindon and Sollers were part. *L'enfant ébloui* and *Plusieurs vies* appeared at a time in France during which a host of other autobiographical writings and autofictions on child abuse were published and in which, after a period of relative relaxation around child-adult sexual relationships, the law reverted to its former stance of favouring the protection of child sexuality. In *L'enfant ébloui* and *Plusieurs vies,* Lindon and Sollers certainly offer a counter-example of a child for whom the child-adult relationship during his childhood was formative. The ethical question remains, however, to what extent the narrator has been dispossessed by the French publishers, literati, and homosexual intellectual circles, who themselves attempt to make a political point.

Women as Formative Models in *L'enfant ébloui* and *Chocolat chaud*

In both *L'enfant ébloui* and *Chocolat chaud,* a narrator by the name of Rachid revisits key moments of his childhood. *L'enfant ébloui* consists of five *récits* depicting the childhood and adolescence of Rachid, the homodiegetic narrator. In the first, 'Fugue', Rachid describes leaving home with a female friend in order to follow a man to whom they both feel attracted

[45] For further discussion on western intellectual figures involved in co-writing and co-editing works by North African authors, see Alec G. Hargreaves, 'Testimony, Co-Authorship, and Dispossession among Women of Maghrebi Origin in France', *Research in African Literatures*, 37 (2006), pp. 42-54; Anna Kemp, *Voices and Veils : Feminism and Islam in French Women's Writing and Activism* (London: Legenda, 2010); Mehammed Mack, 'Sexualized Collaboration and the Politics of Ghostwriting in Franco-Arab Literature: From Paul Bowles to "Tout le monde aime Mohamed", *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 44 (2013), pp. 121-44.

and who invites them to spend the night with him. In 'Mes femmes' the narrator tells the story of growing up in a female environment which eventually will inform his love for men. In 'Amours' he recounts his first loves with boys and men, including Antoine with whom he still lives at the end of the book. In 'Musulman' he discusses his Muslim identity and the controversies surrounding his homosexuality and, finally, in 'Mon père, mon héros' he describes his relationship with and love for his father.

Chocolat chaud was published in 1998, also by Gallimard's *L'Infini* series. Asked whether Mathieu Lindon was also involved in steering the subject matter of the novel, Rachid O. denied this, saying that it was the first ever work he wrote entirely alone.[46] Entitled a *roman*, the novel recounts Rachid's childhood and adolescence. Having lost his mother during his younger brother's birth, Rachid is educated by his father and Lalla, his nanny, an elderly Moroccan woman who introduces him to the French language. After being drawn to a young French boy called Noë who spends his summer holidays in Morocco, the narrator decides nevertheless to go out with Youssr, a boy from the neighbourhood. As to whether *Chocolat chaud* was autobiographical, Rachid O. said that it was entirely made up and featured no elements from his own life.[47]

Hayes observes that in *L'enfant ébloui* 'homosexuality comes out of this childhood past to play a major role in the narrator's articulation of his adult subjectivity in the present'.[48] In fact, in *L'enfant ébloui* the narrator revisits key moments in his life which bear witness to a queer childhood unusual in Moroccan culture, and which sheds light on Rachid's growing into queer subjectivity. Reading the chapter 'Mes femmes' in the light of Bouhdiba's

[46] Interview conducted with Rachid O. in Paris in June, 2018.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Hayes, 'Rachid O. and the Return of the Homopast: The Autobiographical as Allegory in Childhood Narratives by Maghrebian Men', p. 515.

observation about rituals concerning the childhood of the Arab/Muslim boy, alongside Butler's thoughts in 'Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification', reveals how the narrator defies the diktats his culture imposes on him.

In this sense, the title 'Mes femmes' should not be interpreted as the women he has amorous relationships with, but rather the women in his childhood who came to constitute his self. In this episode, the narrator recounts how he grew up overly protected by the women in his household since he was the last-born child before his mother's death. Whilst the women try to push him out into the world of men, the boy resists such separation, preferring to remain in the female sphere, especially since the women would talk about men:

> J'étais toujours derrière, derrière ou devant mais je préférais derrière car quand elles étaient entre elles à parler d'hommes et qu'elles s'apercevaient que j'étais là, elles disaient: "Qu'est-ce que tu fais là? Va jouer avec les garçons." Je préférais être derrière, on ne se rendait pas compte de ma présence et je pouvais écouter tout.[49]

The young narrator queers the habit in Moroccan culture in which, normally, only girls remain in the women's intimate sphere after school while young boys would go out and play with other boys on the street.[50] He shares the intimacy of women, adopts their language, and naturally also adopts their desire for men. He would wait impatiently until Friday afternoon during which, in his free time, rather than watching the serial *Sinbad et son perroquet*, he would surreptitiously listen to women talking about their husbands. He recalls:

> Quelquefois, elles ne savaient plus que j'étais derrière elles tellement elles étaient prises par leurs histoires. […] Et, de derrière, c'était comme un écran pour moi, je les voyais bien, il y avait un truc d'image. Je commençais à m'intéresser aux hommes comme elles s'y intéressaient. J'étais incapable de dire: "Les hommes me

[49] Rachid O., *L'enfant ébloui* (Paris : Gallimard, 1995), p. 25. Henceforth referred to as: *EE*.
[50] See Soumaya Naamane-Guessous' remarks on education in Morocco: 'Bien sûr, tous deux fréquentent l'école, mais au retour le petit frère ira jouer dans la rue, alors que la sœur devra aider la mère dans les tâches domestiques. C'est hors de la maison que se déploie le monde masculin, au-dedans que se développe le monde féminin, le champ de l'activité sociale se scinde ainsi en deux domaines tranchés, le foyer et la vie domestique constituant une sphère à part'. *Au-delà de toute pudeur, la sexualité féminine au Maroc* (Casablanca: Eddif, 1991), p. 17.

> plaisent.” Quand j’avais dix ans, je suis tombé amoureux d’un garçon d’un âge proche du mien.[51]

The narrator posits these childhood scenes, during which he shares female intimacy and desire, as a foundation for his sexuality. Rather than identifying with the adventurous Sinbad on the TV screen, an example of masculinity, he prefers to watch and listen to women talking about their men (‘comme un écran’) in order to form his sexual orientation. Returning to Butler, rather than repudiating his femininity and, concomitantly, his desire for men as a precondition of his heterosexualization, he assimilates their language and their desire.[52]

The resistance to entering the male sphere and his wish to remain in the female sphere is also emphasized in the episode of the hammam. As the narrator describes it, ‘À l’entrée du hammam, il y a deux portes collées, Hommes et Femmes. C’est un choc pour un enfant de ne plus entrer par la porte à côté où il a passé longtemps.’[53] The young narrator resists this separation and often begs his step-mother to let him accompany her to the women’s hammam. When he was nevertheless compelled to accompany his father, he would sit next to a little opening permitting him to glance or at least listen to the sounds coming from the female hammam:

> Juste en haut du mur, il y a un trou d’aération, bien haut pour que les hommes ne puissent pas y grimper. Et moi je me mettais contre le mur, tout contre, souvent j’étais fatigué à cause de la chaleur, souvent je m’allongeais par terre contre ce mur pour écouter parce que ça me manquait. Souvent je m’endormais.[54]

The narrator, like Taïa’s narrators later, defies the cultural law which requires him to adopt normative manly behaviour represented, for example, by following his father into the men’s hammam. In Bouhdiba’s words, ‘Dans la mesure où le hammam entretient la présence des

[51] *EE*, p. 31.
[52] Butler, ‘Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification’, p. 137.
[53] *EE*, p. 34.
[54] Ibid.

images parentales et de leurs impératifs il reste lié au souvenir de la mère et à l'identification au père'.[55] If Bouhdiba here traditionally advances the image of the hammam as a school for normative gender behaviour, in the sense that the process of sexualization and gendering of the young boy or girl in Arab/Muslim culture is informed by parental images encountered in the hammam, the narrator refuses to enter this narrative and retains female images of the hammam. The gesture of peeking into the women's hammam symbolizes that he wishes to retain the femininity he has cherished in the women's hammam ('parce que tout ça me manquait'). He cannot let the female part go, integrating himself with a femininity he should leave behind.

Loyalty to female figures, even identification with them, is also illustrated in Rachid O.'s later novel *Chocolat chaud*. Furthermore, by taking the side of women who are forbidden during their periods to read the Quran, the narrator does not shy away from transgressing religious laws as established by his culture. I am interested here in the episode in which the narrator compulsively dresses up as his mother and re-stages the birth of his brother, evincing a resistance to accepting his masculine gender and, conversely, adopting a female gender role.

As we have seen, Butler explains that the loss of the loved object leads to melancholic identification with that object, manifested through performance of their respective gender.[56] Forced to relinquish his attachment to male figures, the boy in 'normal' development incorporates the male gender by performing manly behaviour. In a reversal, the narrator in *Chocolat chaud,* who has lost his mother, rather than following the 'normal' development and performing the male gender, is forced to give up his attachment to the mother figure at her death and begins to perform femininity. According to Butler's theory, he would have to give

[55] Bouhdiba, p. 212.
[56] Butler, 'Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification', pp. 146 - 47.

up his attachment to men in order to fit into the heterosexual order and begin performing manhood in order to be attracted to women. Rather, *Chocolat chaud* depicts a queer childhood in the sense that performing the female gender for the male narrator and establishing loyalty to the women around him seems to be natural.

Thus Rachid would beg his nanny to tell the story of his mother's death during childbirth until one day he is overcome by the desire to stage this childbirth himself and imitate his mother. During every free afternoon, he would transform the intimate space of his parents' former bedroom into a place where he can live out his feminine gender. Dressing up in his nanny's clothes, smearing his legs with mercurochrome and replacing the infant with a football, he would hide in his deceased mother's bedroom and compulsively re-stage his mother's childbirth in front of a mirror:

> J'écartais mes jambes, dégageais les jupons de ma Lalla de sorte que je voie mes cuisses imberbes qui me plaisaient tant, et c'était nécessaire. […] Tout se passait exactement dans l'axe du miroir, mon but était de me voir sortir mon bébé, jusqu'à ce que mon plaisir soit assouvi. Ma folie augmentait, plus je gouttais le sang, plus ça me plaisait. […] J'avais beau me prendre la tête et serrer très fort pour me rappeler ma mère, rien du tout.[57]

This episode embodies Butler's notion of gender arising from the loss of the attached object choice. Except that here it is not a male figure but a female the narrator embodies. Through performance of the birth, Rachid re-enacts the femininity he had to give up upon the loss of his mother. Biologically, he will grow into a male; at the moment, however, he still enjoys, in drag, seeing in the mirror his thighs without hair ('de sorte que je voie mes cuisses imberbes qui me plaisaient tant'). For Butler, gender itself is understood in part as the 'acting out' of unresolved grief.[58] By 'acting out' his mother in *Chocolat chaud*, Rachid reflects Butler's

[57] Rachid O., *Chocolat chaud* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), pp. 20-21. Henceforth referred to as *CC*.

[58] Butler, p. 146. Butler is careful to point out that men's female attachments do not necessarily mean that men grow into homosexuals and that all drag performers are male or female homosexuals: 'It is important to underscore that, although drag is an effort to negotiate cross-gendered identification, cross-gendered

theory of gender being formed through the complex process of identification and mourning. Rachid mourns his mother he never knew. However, more importantly, it seems that Rachid O. the writer boldly depicts different forms of masculinity, here masculinity in feminine disguise, in an environment which does not accept non-conforming gender behaviour. He foreshadows Taïa's childhood writings which are similarly concerned to break ideologies around masculinity.

As in *L'enfant ébloui*, the narrator resists adopting a gender he does not feel comfortable with but which is prescribed by his own culture. This adoption of feminine gender also creates a complicity with girls and allows him to implicitly critique misogynistic societal norms. At school, during a reading of the Quran, the narrator is concerned when he sees a girl hiding the blood on her legs, bent over the holy book. When the teacher asks her to leave the class and she does so amid the mocking laughter of the boys, the narrator accompanies her home. More than a gesture of empathy, he feels concerned ('je me sentais concerné'),[59] also trying through this gesture to breach the cultural divide and misunderstanding which prevails regarding female sexuality in the Moroccan public sphere. When at home he begins to perform again, he breaks down in tears when he realizes that hair was growing on his thighs which become 'moins féminines'.[60] Reading *L'enfant ébloui* and *Chocolat chaud* alongside Butler, we see that the narrator contests Bouhdiba's view of pre-stablished rituals in Moroccan society which in his view lead to the gendering of human beings. He invents and performs a different masculinity which retains feminine components and channels its erotic desire towards other men. Like Chraïbi and Boudjedra, but in a more positive light, the narrator unravels the

identification is not the only paradigm for thinking about homosexuality, merely one among others.'
'Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification', p. 146.

[59] *CC*, p. 27.
[60] *CC*. p. 29.

artificial, culturally induced construct of masculinity and femininity in his culture and overturns assumptions regarding normative behaviour.

'Growing Sideways' in *L'enfant ébloui* and *Plusieurs vies*

If the narrator challenges the reader's view of Morocco in *L'enfant ébloui* and in *Chocolat chaud* as a place which suppresses gender insubordination and non-conforming sexualities, he also overturns our expectations of Morocco as a place where sexuality is silenced. *L'enfant ébloui*, *Plusieurs vies,* and *Chocolat chaud* all depict abundantly the narrators' sexual affairs with their peers and with grown up men. These relationships, I suggest, which have often been dismissed by critics as paedophilic,[61] can be interpreted, using Stockton's concept of 'growing sideways', as a means by which the narrator lives out his sexuality in a place in which same-sex relationships are viewed as problematic. I would like to base my discussion here on the two childhood narratives *L'enfant ébloui* and *Plusieurs vies*.

In the *récit* 'Mes amours' in *L'enfant ébloui*, the narrator depicts the complications arising from having to deal with a budding desire for his peers. Whilst his father is open to his son's amorous escapades, his classmates are rather repelled by Rachid's love for them.[62] Rachid's amorous affairs with older men can be interpreted as a way of living out his sexuality in a safe environment which his classmates do not allow to occur. In 'Mes amours', the narrator recounts the amorous affair he had as a 13-year old boy with his 30-year old Arabic teacher. Whereas for the young boy the affectionate and erotic bonding with his teacher signified emotional and sexual fulfilment, for the teacher the relationship with Rachid delayed his entry into adulthood. Both know that, owing to cultural prohibitions, this has to come to an end.

[61] See Duranti, p. 85.
[62] See *EE*, pp. 55-58.

During a school outing at which the teacher's girlfriend is present, Rachid remarks, 'Comme elle était d'une grande famille, proche de la sienne, il fallait qu'il se marie, en bon Marocain il devait aller avec une femme. Il n'en était pas amoureux.'[63] The teacher knows that, while with Rachid, he is delaying his responsibilities as a Moroccan man who should marry and create a family. On Rachid's love for men, he remarks, 'Tu ne devrais plus faire ça. Un garçon doit s'intéresser aux filles pour devenir un homme. On ne devrait plus se voir.'[64] Whereas the teacher will eventually follow the conventional path and marry the girl, Rachid will further engage in other 'sideways' relations.

Perhaps startling to the reader, Rachid's affair with his teacher is sanctioned by his father. In fact, when asking his father for permission to go on holiday with his Arabic teacher, Rachid's father agrees, 'Mon père ne pouvait rien dire, il a accepté. Heureusement que je n'étais pas une fille, ça aurait fait un scandale, on aurait pu le tuer. J'ai de la chance d'être un garçon.'[65] Through Rachid's perspective, having as an adolescent an older male lover incurs less shame than, as a girl, having a pre-marital affair and an illegitimate child. In fact, the narrator returns throughout *L'enfant ébloui* to the episode in which his sister becomes pregnant and is abandoned by her lover.[66] If the narrator depicts his pain when other boys treat him as a girl, he seems far more affected by his sister's pre-marital affair ('Donc j'ai été mal longtemps à cause de ça, ça me faisait énormément de peine pour ma soeur.')[67] Seemingly, for the narrator, pre-marital affairs are far more prone to induce shame and disgrace for the family than a boy's or adolescent's erotic relations with an older man. Having told his sister's story, the narrator concludes, 'Une histoire comme ça est propre à un pays comme le Maroc parce

[63] *EE*, p. 69.
[64] *EE*, p. 72.
[65] *EE*, p. 77.
[66] *EE*, pp. 35-39.
[67] *EE,* p. 37.

qu'une fille avec un enfant illégitime est vraiment une honte pour les musulmans.'[68] Contrasting this story with his own about his love affairs with the Arabic teacher and other grown-up men, the reader is left to wonder whether the narrator consciously conveys an image of Morocco in western orientalist tradition. In fact, Rachid's father is proud when the Arabic teacher picks his son up from home and is aware that Rachid mourns after the teacher when they split up.[69]

If the narrator was unable to engage in a relationship with his Arabic teacher, it is with grown-up men such as Antoine or his uncle that Rachid finds sexual and emotional fulfilment, thus epitomizing what Stockton calls 'sideways growing'.[70] Through these relationships, the adolescent can put a name to his erotic feelings and find sexual and emotional fulfilment he could not otherwise enjoy. Through Antoine, Rachid not only finds erotic fulfilment, it is also thanks to the Frenchman that he acquires self-confidence as well as literacy in French. This relationship illustrates Stockton's expansion of the term 'growing' in that Rachid – as well as Antoine – do not grow vertically towards marriage and fatherhood, but seemingly 'sideways', in that in their relationship Rachid, at least, grows emotionally and intellectually (as does Antoine, of whom Rachid says that this relationship 'l'a rendu plus stable').[71] Throughout the text, Rachid expresses gratitude for having known Antoine intimately and states that, thanks to Antoine, he becomes the person he is.[72]

Like his affair with Antoine, it is the narrator's relationship with his uncle in *Plusieurs vies* which provide Rachid with sexual and emotional fulfilment and exemplifies Stockton's

[68] *EE,* p. 38.
[69] *EE,* p. 75.
[70] Stockton, p. 11.
[71] *EE*, p. 104.
[72] *EE*, p. 105.

'sideways' notion.[73] It is striking that in depicting his uncle the narrator conveys the image of a man who defies the conventions of normative masculinity in Arab/Muslim society. As Rachid writes, 'il était libre et sans famille'.[74] In fact, the uncle seems to disavow the world of conventional adult relations. Like the 'gay child' who feels that he or she will never be straight, who puts the goal of socially sanctioned couplehood on perpetual delay, the uncle grows 'sideways' in relation to the society he evolves in.[75] The affectionate, at times erotic, bonding between Rachid and his uncle offers both the opportunity to live out their same-sex inclination. It is a relation outside normative couplehood, beyond society, a 'sideways' growing. Unlike the uncle, the narrator does not yet understand how to explain his nascent feelings for his uncle. In contrast to *L'enfant ébloui* and the narrator's relationship with his Arabic teacher, Rachid in *Plusieurs vies* is incapable of labelling his love for his uncle and embodies Stockton's idea of the 'gay child' who can only shed light retrospectively on his behaviour.[76]

What is perhaps most striking is the young boy's lack of sexual restraint in his relationship with his uncle. Rachid, ten at the time, often entices the uncle to engage in erotic actions the uncle retrospectively regrets having committed. This becoming aware of sexual attraction, aroused by the uncle's presence, is described in the episode in which he is with his family, including the uncle, at an aunt's wedding in the countryside. When all the guests go to the hammam with the bridegroom, Rachid manages to stay with the uncle. As he confesses, 'J'avais envie de le laver, une sensation qui, j'avais l'impression, me manquait, le voir nu,

[73] As Rachid O. later writes in *Ce qui reste*, his uncle was in reality a close friend of his father and not related by blood ties.
[74] Rachid O., *Plusieurs vies* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996) p. 8. Henceforth referred to as *PV.*
[75] Stockton, pp. 1-14.
[76] Ibid.

entièrement nu.'[77] Watching his uncle washing himself from behind, the young narrator is aware that something is happening in him, an intermingling of sensuality and astonishment:

> Je ne le voyais que de derrière, assis sur un tabouret en bois, un petit tabouret, et les mouvements de ses muscles avec l'effort qu'il faisait. […] Et depuis ce jour-là, j'aime l'os qui dépasse au sommet de la raie des fesses, je ne sais pas comment il s'appelle, chez lui il était évident et ça m'impressionnait, un mélange de sentiments, ça me frappait et me choquait, c'était sensuel à la fois.[78]

This mélange of desire, excitement, and novelty without being able to name this feeling precisely accords with Stockton's observation of the 'gay' child. Rachid then insists on combing his uncle's hair and later in the day he begs his father to let him spend the night with his uncle. When Rachid asks his uncle to let him sleep in the same bed he witnesses how the uncle, despite himself, ejaculates on Rachid's body. Rachid cannot grasp the situation, commenting, however, that, 'une fois de plus je me suis trop mêlé'.[79] The usual trope of man/boy love in which the man has the upper hand is reversed here in that Rachid seems to lead the uncle to illicit actions he would never have committed. On a different occasion in which Rachid boldly kisses his uncle, while playing with his lips, he is very aware that he has crossed a line ('comme si mon comportement me manquait').[80]

Thus *L'enfant ébloui* and *Plusieurs vies* depict a child who is not restricted in his sexual awakening. Indeed, responding to his libidinal impulses, Rachid becomes quite dangerous for the uncle who succumbs to his own and the boy's games of seduction which are only to a certain extent unconscious. In both works, emphasis on the boy's outward depiction of all matters sexual is striking. As we have seen, he would not restrain from depicting his own sexual awakening or his uncle's sexuality. He would depict in detail his Arabic teacher's,

[77] *PV*, p 11.
[78] *PV*, p. 12.
[79] *PV,* p. 17
[80] *PV*, p. 21.

Antoine's, and his own sexual life, contrasting it with that of his sister who is restricted by society and by notions of shame. Furthermore, he tracks down his own sexual impulses as a boy in all their detail. To return to Stockton, who contends that the law makes the child 'strange', 'innocent', a body in need of protection, into a normal body, one could ask whether Rachid in *L'enfant ébloui* and *Plusieurs vies* breaks free of all this in order to defend the boy's right to sexuality and agency.[81] Does he convey an image of Morocco in which a certain lawlessness allows adults and children to engage in free sexual relationships?

An Orientalist Work?

I suggest that the narrator in *L'enfant ébloui* and in *Plusieurs vies* strategically proffers the image of the sexually pre-mature boy, available for consumption, and to a wider extent Morocco as a place where the West's fantasies of a permissive sexuality materialize. By depicting himself as sexually mature, yet innocent, he inscribes himself on the one hand in orientalist writing, as Orlando and Duranti have observed, and on the other, challenges the post-Enlightenment European construction of childhood as an innocent state and sexuality confined to adults.[82]

The idea that sexual innocence is projected onto the child is also one of the arguments Kincaid, along with Stockton, advances in *Erotic Innocence, The Culture of Child Molesting*.[83] The notion of the modern child, as it emerged during the Enlightenment and the Romantic era, was construed in opposition to the adult. Whereas the adult was endowed with a set of characteristics such as sophistication, rational moderation, judicious adjustment,

[81] Stockton, p. 10-11.
[82] Orlando, p. 113, Duranti, p. 85.
[83] James R. Kincaid, *Erotic innocence: the culture of child molesting* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 15.

children were denied such attributes.[84] Rather, children were conceived of as innocent, pure and empty, which all point towards a blankness, void and surface, onto which the adult could then project his or her own desires.[85] Kincaid observes: 'Childhood, to a large extent, came to be in our culture a coordinate set of *have nots*, of negations: the child was the one who *did not have*'.[86] Onto the child's emptiness, we project our own desires. He continues:

> The [child] recalls, however dimly, the dream of savagery, the dream of that untrammelled sexuality lurking, Freud says, behind the child. The disobedient child gives the lie to the joke of "latency", suggests that sexual energy is never far from the surface of the child.[87]

According to Kincaid, then, the child, which has been made innocent and empty by the adult, also serves as a surface onto which the adult can project desires they had to give up as a 'rational' adult.

The topos of the sexually premature, 'oriental' adolescent has fuelled western fantasies about the Middle East and North Africa. In *The Homoerotics of Orientalism,* Boone examines the motif of the beautiful youth which recurs throughout orientalist homoerotics and which has fed western fantasies about the Middle East and North African sexual practices.[88] Thus, throughout history, in their encounters with the East travellers from the West have reported on how young boys in the Middle East and in the Maghreb used to accompany older men and even became part of their harem. With the establishment of European photographic studios in the Middle East and in the Maghreb which specialized in erotic images of indigenous life, the beautiful nude or half-nude boy entered mass circulation, a topos which found its literary

[84] Ibid.
[85] Kincaid, p. 15.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Kincaid, p. 58.
[88] Joseph Allen Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*, p. 54. Boone points out that the motif is most familiar to modern audiences in the form of the dust jacket of Saïd's *Orientalism*, which reproduced Gérôme's 1870 'Le charmeur de serpent'.

expression in countless travel accounts and novels, of which André Gide's, William S. Burroughs', and indeed Paul Bowles' writings as we saw in the preceding chapter, are only a small representation.[89] In *Si le grain ne meurt*, for example, Gide is dazzled by the flautist to whom Oscar Wilde introduces him ('un adolescent merveilleux')[90] and later he describes the adolescent body as, 'ce parfait petit corps sauvage, ardent, lascif et ténébreux',[91] rehearsing the orientalist stereotyping of the body.

I suggest that the narrator deliberately depicts himself as sexually mature in order to pander to orientalist stereotypes, but also to refute the view that children are innocent, without sexuality. On the contrary, as we have seen with his uncle, the narrator depicts himself as being aware of his sexual feelings and having some agency over them. *L'enfant ébloui* and *Plusieurs vies* are sprinkled with episodes in which the narrator-protagonist's innocence is counterbalanced by (dormant) sexuality. In the chapter 'Fugue', in which Rachid, six years old at the time, flees from home with his friend Saloua in order to spend the night with a seemingly important functionary in the palace of the King of Morocco in Rabat, the mélange of innocence, naïveté, and sexuality becomes apparent. Elements of childhood naïveté are juxtaposed with eroticized images.[92] For example, the description of them playing on the see-saws under the eucalyptus trees in Saloua's garden[93] contrasts starkly with the way in which the narrator almost eroticizes her as an adult person when he describes her swimming in the sea.[94] When they later elope to the man's home, a sumptuous villa bordering the gardens of the Royal Palace,

[89] Boone, p. 65.
[90] André Gide, *Si le grain ne meurt*, (Paris: Galllimard, 1954), p. 349.
[91] *Si le grain ne meurt*, p. 354. For more on this, see, Michael Lucey, *Gide's Bent*, Judith Still, 'Not Really Prostitution: The Political Economy of Sexual Tourism in *Gide's Si le grain ne meurt*'.
[92] *EE*, pp. 11-22.
[93] *EE*, p. 12.
[94] *EE*, p. 16.

Rachid, as a six-year old boy, experiences the night as something very sexual: 'Pour moi, ç'a été très sexuel, cette nuit. Il n'y a eu rien de plus que des attouchements. J'avais six ans…'.[95]

The episode in which the narrator-protagonist describes how he discovers his cousin's pistol also thematizes childish innocence behind which eroticism lies hidden. Spending time with his aunt's family, he is intrigued by his cousin's pistol who works as a policeman:

> Il y avait quelque chose qui m'obsédait comme un petit rêve: j'aurais aimé avoir le pistolet du fils, mon cousin, entre mes mains. J'ai attendu un jour où il ne travaillait pas, un jour férié pour lui, il était à l'extérieur – ce n'était pas un flic qui portait l'uniforme, c'était un flic habillé normalement, en costume, comme on voit dans les films américains, avec un pistolet - ce jour-là je suis entré dans sa chambre. Je savais où il le disposait. Ce n'était pas fermé à clé. […] Alors je l'ai pris entre mes mains. J'ai juste fait gaffe de ne pas tirer, je ne savais pas s'il était chargé ou pas du tout. C'était un garçon qu'à la limite je ne voyais presque jamais.[96]

The passage can be read as describing a boy drawn by a weapon, thus interested in playing soldiers. However, having followed Rachid's narrative about his childhood in which he describes his growing attraction to other men, a narrative in which erotic episodes are scattered throughout, the episode can also be interpreted as an implicit wish on the part of the narrator to have a same-sex experience. Behind this implicit wish, behind the alluring eroticism, danger awaits; playing with a pistol – playing at erotic games – without knowing whether it is loaded or not are both harmless and hazardous. In this episode the narrator-protagonist again offers the reader a moment in which, behind the layer of innocence and playfulness, sexuality lurks. Naughtiness, innocence, eroticism are at once counterbalanced. This is also reflected in the style of the passage. In its simplicity, the language echoes, so it seems, the naiveté of the child. The orality of *L'enfant ébloui* is emphasized by the choice of vocabulary: words such as 'flic', 'faire gaffe', and 'pas du tout' are drawn from the spoken

[95] *EE,* p. 20.
[96] *EE.* p. 43.

register and highlight the narrator's spontaneity. At the end of *Ce qui reste* the narrator looks back at *L'enfant ébloui* and writes:

> Je pense à *L'enfant ébloui*. J'ai raconté des années de sexualité avec des pédophiles de langue française dépeintes par la voix d'un garçon qui n'était pas une victime, avec des couleurs que je n'étais même pas sûr de bien connaître, simple comme du blanc pur, des mots si peu littéraires que des lecteurs sont tombés sous le charme.[97]

The words 'simple comme du blanc pur' and 'des mots si peu littéraires' echo Kincaid's observation about children being constructed as pure and innocent. It can be said that the narrator uses deliberately a language which entices the reader to project erotic desires into the lines. He exposes himself like a child model in an orientalist photograph, a type of photograph which circulated, as described in the first chapter, until the 1990s in Europe and onto which the western onlooker could project his or her own desires.[98]

L'enfant ébloui and *La loi de la pudeur*

The abundance of episodes alluding to the sexual and to pre-mature child sexuality in *L'enfant ébloui* is borne out if we look at the book's publishing history and the actors who had been involved in it. It is no secret that the journalist and writer Mathieu Lindon and Rachid O. were lovers and that the journalist and writer certainly had some interest in advancing Rachid O. on the international, or at least the French literary scene. Rachid O.'s stories of his sexual adventures, moreover, provided an interesting counter-view to contemporary perspectives on the importance of protecting children's innocence and pre-mature sexuality. Rachid O.'s stories, which depict a child who freely indulges in sexual relationships and seduces adults, challenged the contemporary view that children need protection. Lindon and Sollers, who

[97] Rachid O., *Ce qui reste* (Paris : Gallimard, 2003), p. 112.
[98] See Boone, pp. 271-5.

were both, and still are, involved in the publication of Rachid O.'s writings, frequented and were active in intellectual circles in the 1970s and 1980s which advocated for children's sexuality. Foucault, Lindon's friend whom Rachid O. also knew, opined that children's need of sexuality needs to be taken seriously in an interview entitled 'La loi de la pudeur'.[99] That it is precisely Rachid O.'s sexuality which triggered interest in literary circles is corroborated in the preface of Taïa's *Mon Maroc* in which the author, translator, and editor René de Ceccatty writes:

> Il [Abdellah Taïa] ne savait pas que j'avais été l'un des premiers lecteurs de Rachid O. et que j'avais conseillé à Mathieu Lindon d'envoyer quelques pages qu'il m'avait données à lire à Philippe Sollers. Je pensais que Philippe Sollers pourrait s'intéresser à ce regard sur la sexualité. Je ne m'étais pas trompé. Sollers avait aussitôt publié le texte dans la revue *L'Infini*. Des livres avaient suivi.[100]

According to Ceccatty, the reason Rachid O.'s text is so interesting (and perhaps why an established writer such as Lindon, aside from his personal interest in the writer, decided to help Rachid O. write the book) is because of 'ce regard sur la sexualité'. In order to understand the stakes at play in the publication of *L'enfant ébloui*, I will provide the historical and legal context around the law concerning sexual maturity.

In the context of the sexual revolution in France in 1968, the French Parliament was working on a revision of the laws concerning sexual maturity and the law pertaining to the age of consent. Whereas Article 331 of the Penal Code set the age of sexual consent at thirteen and then fifteen for heterosexual relations, it was set at twenty-one and then eighteen for homosexual relations.[101] In January and May 1977, public intellectuals, writers, and scientists addressed a petition to the Parliament calling for relaxation and revision of the law of consent, on the ground that the verdict was too harsh for adults who had consensual sexual relations

[99] Foucault, 'La loi de la pudeur', *Recherches*, 37 ('*Fous d'enfance*') (1979), pp. 69-82.
[100] *Mon Maroc*, p. 10.
[101] Anne-Claude Ambroise Rendu, *Histoire de la pédophilie: XIXe-XXIe siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 2014), pp. 165-7.

with boys and girls below or around the age of consent at the time.[102] The letter called for reconsideration of the law as it pertained to homosexual relationships, especially since intellectual discernment was accorded at the age of thirteen and that girls could ask to have the pill prescribed at that age. The letter, published in *Le Monde* in May 1977, was signed by intellectuals and scientists such as Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Simone de Beauvoir, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Philippe Sollers, and Françoise Dolto, the paediatrician and psychoanalyst.[103] It is important to note that the petition to reconsider the law was not so much about favouring and facilitating sexual relations between children and adults – as some paedophilic movements at the time were considering and advocating – but more about reconsidering the injustice of the law regarding discrimination against homosexuals and, most importantly, the repression of autonomy and discernment in children.

At the time, some movements, such as *GRED* (*Groupement de recherche pour une enfance différente*) and *FLIP* (*Front de libération des pédophiles*),[104] advocated for more freedom between adults and children in the context of consenting sexual relationships. Three reasons were cited. First, that adult initiation of a child into sexuality is not, according to these groups, harmful, if it is undertaken in a consenting way.[105] Second, informed by the writings of the philosopher René Schérer and the writer Guy Hocquenghem, the notion of the child should be re-considered and re-thought. Like Stockton or Kincaid, both argued that, culturally, the child was mainly that which is taboo, untouched and innocent, to whom no agency and sexual powers have been conferred.[106] Third, the family and the legislative context would suppress the sexual drives of the child, which these groups and adherents of paedophilia sought to

[102] Rendu, p. 183.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Rendu, pp. 169-72.
[105] Rendu, p. 179.
[106] Rendu, p. 180.

question and reconsider in order to give more freedom to the child.[107] Women writers such as Leïla Sebbar or Nancy Huston, however, indicted these groups for not taking into account sexual difference and accused these movements of a tendency to predatoriness and perpetuating a patriarchal order.[108] Debates around children's sexuality and paedophilia would, however, in the 1970s and early 1980s be widely disseminated, and triggered interest in important media such as *Le Monde*, *Libération*, while Philippe Sollers would also publish books featuring early childhood sexuality and sexual and amorous child-adult relationships in *L'Infini* edition at Gallimard. For example, Gabriel Matzneff, who wrote overtly of his experiences with underaged girls, was published by *L'Infini* around the time when *L'enfant ébloui* came out. *L'Infini* only began to acknowledge the highly problematic aspect of Matzneff's writings in January 2020.[109]

A commission responsible for reform of the Penal Code consulted with Foucault, himself very attentive to the conflicting ideas supported by various liberation movements at the time. In 1978, in advance of the impending amendment of the Penal Code concerning the law of consent, Foucault discussed childhood sexuality and sexual relationships between minors and adults with Jean Danet, a Nantes barrister, Guillaume Hocquenghem, writer and founder of the *Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire* (FHAR), and Pierre Hahn, journalist at *Le Monde* and *Le Gai-Pied*.[110]The discussion was broadcast on fourth April 1978 in the programme *Dialogue* by France-Culture, and later published under the title 'La loi de la pudeur' in the journal *Recherches* in April 1979.[111]

[107] Rendu, pp. 180-3.
[108] Rendu, pp. 191-3.
[109] Rendu, pp. 185-8. For further information on the controversy around Gallimard and Matzneff, see https://www.lemonde.fr/culture/article/2020/01/12/antoine-gallimard-justifie-l-arret-de-la-vente-du-journal-de-gabriel-matzneff_6025575_3246.html, [accessed 30 January 2020].
[110] Foucault, 'La loi de la pudeur', *Recherches*, 37 ('*Fous d'enfance*'), avril 1979, pp. 69-82.
[111] Ibid.

The discussion between Foucault, Hocquenghem, and Hahn responded to right-wing voices opposed to the relaxation of Article 331 and which were often supported by the conservative press. Foucault was sceptical about a penal system which categorizes children as being at the mercy of the sexual preferences of adults, therefore particularly vulnerable and in need of protection, while adults who indulge in such pleasures without violence were criminalized. Foucault criticized psychologists and psychiatrists who acknowledged the sexuality of children (abandoning the idea of the innocent and asexual child), yet conceived of such sexuality as specific, with its own latency period, which needed to be protected. In the psychologists' view, adults and laws would have to guarantee the specificity of the child's sexuality in order to protect it. Paraphrasing their arguments, Foucault said :

> Peut-être l'enfant avec sa sexualité propre a pu désirer cet adulte, peut-être même a-t-il consenti, peut-être même a-t-il fait les premiers pas. On admettra que c'est lui qui a séduit l'adulte; mais nous autres, avec notre savoir psychologique, nous savons parfaitement que même l'enfant séducteur risque et même dans tous les cas va subir un certain dommage et un traumatisme du fait qu'il aura eu affaire à un adulte. Par conséquent, il faut protéger l'enfant de ses propres désirs, dès lors que ses désirs l'orienteraient vers l'adulte.[112]

According to Foucault, views of the child's specific sexuality, together with long-established religious prohibitions around sodomy, would encourage the criminalization of an action which should not be seen as criminal. A person who practises sex with children, without any violence involved whatsoever, is seen as pervert, only because that person has such tastes. Thus a new sort of criminal would be born, the adult who has erotic relations with children.

Rather than condemning consenting, non-violent sexual relationships between adults and children, one should, according to Foucault, respect children, their sexuality, and listen to them:

[112] *Michel Foucault Dits et écrits*, tome II, ed. by Daniel Defert and others (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), p. 768.

> Or, quant aux enfants, on leur suppose une sexualité qui ne peut jamais se porter vers un adulte, et d'un. Deuxièmement, on suppose qu'ils ne sont pas capables de dire sur eux-mêmes, d'être suffisamment lucides sur eux-mêmes. Qu'ils n'ont pas suffisamment la capacité d'expression pour expliquer ce qu'il en est. Donc, on ne les croit pas. On les croit non susceptibles de sexualité et on ne les croit pas susceptibles d'en parler. Mais après tout, écouter un enfant, l'entendre parler, l'entendre expliquer quels ont été effectivement ses rapports avec quelqu'un, adulte ou pas, pourvu qu'on écoute avec suffisamment de sympathie, doit pouvoir permettre d'établir à peu près quel a été le régime de violence ou de consentement auquel il a été soumis. Aller supposer que du moment qu'il est un enfant on ne peut pas expliquer ce qu'il en est, que du moment qu'il est un enfant il ne peut pas être consentant: il y là deux abus qui sont intolérables, inacceptables.[113]

For Foucault, to deprive the child of the capacity to explain what happened (in the case of an erotic encounter or relationship with an adult), or to deprive the child of giving consent, would be intolerable and would not do justice to the child's personality.[114]

In June 1978, the Senate voted to revise the law concerning discrimination against homosexuality and the age of sexual consent, but it was only in 1982 that a law was adopted which no longer discriminated on the grounds of sexual orientation.[115] However, in the 1980s a series of events concerning child abuse curtailed this liberal atmosphere and the intellectual debates to which it gave rise.[116] This was accompanied by significant media interest and television broadcasts featuring young victims of abuse. Victims who experienced incestuous relations publicly testified about their pasts, sometimes in front of the perpetrators.[117] Denunciation of the sexual abuse of children in the public sphere aimed at recognizing that recourse to laws was indispensable not only to maintain the social order, but also to restore dignity and identity to the child. Judicial decisions were at the forefront of concern and

[113] *Michel Foucault Dits et écrits*, p. 775.
[114] Rendu, p. 183.
[115] Rendu, p. 200.
[116] Ibid.
[117] For example, Eva Thomas' experience of an incestuous relationship with her father which she recounted in *Le Viol du silence* and in which she stated at the end that 'il n'existe pas d'inceste heureux', triggered major interest and helped to change perceptions of adult-child sexual relations. Rendu, p. 206.

sometimes fiercely debated.[118] In July 1989, Parliament voted for a law to strengthen legislation to protect the child, which included an article to facilitate denunciation of the perpetrator.[119] In the 1990s, television images of countless victims denouncing the sexual crimes committed against them were broadcasted, while, coinciding with the publication of Rachid O.'s *L'enfant ébloui,* numerous autobiographical narratives on child abuse appeared on the literary market, amongst which was Patricia Pattyn's book *Mon enfance assassinée, le long martyre d'une petite fille du Nord*.[120] From the end of the 1980s, the child returned under the traits of the pure and innocent figure who needs to be protected, while voices advocating childhood sexuality, respect for the child's sexual awakening, or adult assistance in children's sexual awakening, were silenced.[121]

L'enfant ébloui and *Plusieurs vies* both responded to the shift in discourses on children's sexuality and criminalization. The emphasis on childhood sexuality in *L'enfant ébloui* figures then as a counter-discourse to the increasing anti-liberal view of childhood sexuality. Lindon and Sollers are interested in a certain image of the child they can articulate through Rachid O.'s writings, a figure which challenges the child's inborn purity and innocence, a view widely shared in debates around children's sexuality. It is difficult to establish the extent to which Lindon co-wrote or steered the subject matter. As Bowles would do with Mrabet and other Moroccan writers, Lindon certainly wrote the text which Rachid O. dictated to him and furthermore asked Rachid O. to 'keep his innocence'.[122] When in the final chapter of *L'enfant ébloui*, 'Mon père, mon héros', the narrator's father asks him why he has not written the book in Arabic, the narrator replies, 'J'étais gêné, j'étais à la fois gêné et je ne savais pas quoi dire,

[118] Rendu, p. 207
[119] Rendu, p. 201.
[120] Rendu, p. 214.
[121] Rendu, pp. 210-4.
[122] During the interview I conducted with Rachid O. in Paris in June 2018, he acknowledged that Mathieu Lindon was influential, saying for example repeatedly, 'Il fallait garder cette innocence […] il a eu une influence'.

j'ai dit que c'était personnel mais que, en France, ça s'était fait par un ami que j'avais et qui était dans le milieu de la littérature française.'[123] This acknowledges Lindon's influence on the genesis of this work. One might also wonder to what extent Rachid O. has been exploited by Lindon, as Mrabet was by Bowles. Reminiscing in *Ce qui reste* (2003) *L'enfant ébloui,* the narrator remarks, as we have already seen, that he depicted his childhood, 'avec des couleurs que je n'étais même pas bien sûr de connaître'.[124] This leaves the reader wondering whether Rachid O. has not been dispossessed of his work which was to a considerable extent generated in collaboration with Lindon. It is perhaps not so much sexual exploitation as literary exploitation. This sheds light on the 'shamelessness' with which he describes all these sexual affairs. Whereas critics have remarked on this bold and new way of depicting everything sexual in Morocco, it is due to the French language and to Lindon's assistance and perspective that such an image of Morocco is generated.[125] This is also corroborated by the fact that the narrator is ashamed to tell his father the truth about the subject matter and that in Morocco this type of story would shock the readership. This sexual explicitness in the depiction of Morocco is attributable to Lindon, homosexual and literary circles, which not only perpetuate the orientalist view but also, to a certain extent, use the narrative to make a point about child sexuality. The episodes and the subject matter have been arranged by Lindon, and Sollers, to suit their agenda.

This discussion has shown that the narrators in Rachid O.'s childhood writings defy conventions associated with boyhood in Morocco and invent a different masculinity in which the female is not repudiated. I also argue that, to some extent, the narrators' affairs with older men enable the adolescent to secure a safe space in which he can explore his sexuality and

[123] *EE*, p. 144.
[124] *CQR*, p. 88.
[125] See Hayes, p. 497.

emotions which the environment would not allow. I also show that critical dismay about narratives from North Africa in which a narrator for the first time shamelessly relates his homosexual experiences needs to be put in perspective. The narratives have been proposed, and appropriated by French homosexual and intellectual circles which steered and welcomed such subject matter in order to respond to debates and to other autofictional and autobiographical works on childhood sexuality and abuse which were published and discussed in France in the 1990s.

Growing into a Queer Moroccan Writer: Abdellah Taïa's *Mon Maroc*, *L'armée du salut*, and *Une mélancolie arabe*

Taïa's childhood narratives show many points of convergence with those of Rachid O.. Like Rachid O., Taïa describes a different masculinity, one imbued with feminine components which, according to the norms of traditional Moroccan masculinity, should be disavowed. However, whilst this queer masculinity emerges quite naturally in Rachid O.'s case, the development of Taïa's non-normative masculinity is accompanied by misunderstanding and disquiet for his narrators. Whereas Rachid O.'s writings voice more discreet concern regarding homophobia in Morocco, Taïa's writings denounce the suffering incumbent upon living out a non-conforming sexuality. Furthermore, like Rachid O.'s narrators, Taïa's 'grow sideways' in the sense that it is through older lovers that the narrators acquire cultural education and can name and explore their sexuality. This discovery and ability to name their sexuality reflects Kahan's discussion of western models of sexuality being exported to the semi-periphery and empowering sexual minorities beyond the West.[126] However, unlike Rachid O.'s, Taïa's childhood writings did not emerge through collaboration with a French journalist or with a French writer, at least not to the extent that Rachid O.'s have.[127] On the contrary, by writing in the tradition of Choukri or Bowles whom he claims as his literary fathers, Taïa establishes himself as an independent writer, writing from and about Morocco, independently of France. This intrinsic Moroccan characteristic of his writings is also evinced by Taïa's approach to the notion of *hchouma*, or shame. It is important to note here that Taïa's narrators, like Rachid O.'s, have a slightly more complex understanding of what we would call shame. It certainly encompasses our notion of shame but also the notion of modesty and

[126] Kahan, p. 333.

[127] Yet Taïa's first book, *Mon Maroc*, prefaced by René de Ceccatty, still illustrates a certain dependence North African writers feel vis-à-vis established French literary figures. See also *Maroc 1900-1960: Un certain regard*, which emerged in collaboration between Frédéric Mitterrand, the French Minister of Culture from 2009 to 2012, and Abdellah Taïa (Arles: Actes Sud, 2017).

shyness. As noted by Leila Abu, relationships in the Arab/Muslim world, especially when age difference or sexual difference is involved, are tainted by honour and modesty. From this perspective, revealing sexual matters is not only shameful, but also immodest and indecent.[128] If we have seen that Rachid O. depicts all matters sexual in a rather candid way, most probably due to his cooperation with Lindon and other French intellectuals who are keen to orientalize Morocco, Taïa's early writings refrain from talking openly about sexual desire and sexual matters. It is indirectly alluded to or hinted at in his early writings. It is only from subsequent works such as *L'armée du salut* and *Une mélancolie arabe* that the narrators shed culturally induced notions of decency and begin openly to talk about all matters sexual. The struggle Taïa's narrators experience when openly asserting their non-conforming sexual orientation is also reflected in Taïa's autofictional project. By reading Taïa's *L'armée du salut* and *Une mélancolie arabe* in the light of Serge Doubrovsky's theory on autofiction, according to which the fictionalizing of the self comes into play when this self is at odds with reality, it will be seen that autofiction enables Taïa to assert his non-conforming sexuality in an environment which does not recognize homosexuality.

Fathoming One's Past: *Mon Maroc*

Mon Maroc was published by Séguier in 2000 and can be regarded as initiating discussion of many themes which will play out in Taïa's later writings. It comprises twenty-five *récits* in the first-person which all evoke a particular memory of the narrator's childhood or early adolescence. Most of the episodes are set in Salé or Rabat, except the last few which play out in Europe. Asked about the significance of *Mon Maroc* for himself as a writer, Taïa answered that it was written in haste on his arrival in Paris in order that he not forget his childhood

[128] See Lila Abhu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 105-17.

years which were fundamental to him.[129] In the *récits* the narrator re-visits episodes which were particularly telling and formative for his later life and marked him intellectually or emotionally. One central motif to *Mon Maroc* is the narrator's still-hesitant challenge to normative masculinity in Morocco. The narrator remains in the sphere of women and retains elements traditionally linked in Moroccan society to the feminine sphere.[130] Throughout his childhood writings, the narrator not only denounces these rites, and certainly the notion of masculinity which he is supposed to embody, but he also offers different models of masculinity. By securing a space for tenderness and vulnerability in men, he challenges this model of patriarchal masculinity which, according to Dialmy, characterizes itself through toughness, or, expressed differently, he subverts, like Butler, the paradigm of compulsory or 'melancholic' identification with other men.[131] Furthermore, the narrator overturns the expectations traditionally placed upon a man by speaking openly about his feelings and his love for other men. This challenging of normative masculinity throughout *Mon Maroc* is accompanied by another concern of the narrator's. By mentioning the importance of Mohamed Choukri and Paul Bowles and their influence on his writing and understanding of Moroccan culture, he places himself in the tradition of important Moroccan writers whose project, to a certain extent, he continues, namely, to depict a transgressive sexuality.[132] If throughout his childhood writings Taïa asserts himself as a queer writer, and consequently is often exposed to shame and rejection, he rehabilitates himself before his Moroccan or French reading public by acknowledging his filiation with well-known canonical Moroccan writers.

[129] Interview conducted with Taïa in July, 2018, in Paris. For more on this, see Panizzon, 'La vraie liberté n'existe nulle part'.
[130] Abdessamad Dialmy, *Critique de la masculinité au Maroc* (Rabat: Saad Warzazi, 2009), pp. 31-33.
[131] Dialmy, p. 43; Butler, 'Melancholy Gender/ Refused Identification'.
[132] See Paul Bowles, *The Sheltering Sky*, Choukri, *Le pain nu*.

Whilst Taïa established his independence much earlier than Rachid O., *Mon Maroc* is still prefaced by the literary critic René de Ceccatty, implying that in order to enter the French literary market, the obvious route is to be chaperoned onto the literary scene by a French journalist. Whereas Taïa was later keen to distance himself from this practice, he was still very indebted to the literary scene in France at the time.[133] Whilst there is no overtly racist or colonial attitude in de Ceccatty's words, one cannot dismiss the slightly superior tone with which the latter introduces the Moroccan writer in his preface. It is only thanks to his personal assistant who was endeared by the young Taïa's insistence, and the latter's knowledge of de Ceccatty's articles and books, that de Ceccatty finally receives the 'jeune Marocain'.[134] Taïa, according to Ceccatty, 'qui aime tant que son prénom soit celui du plus grand amour de Jean Genet', nevertheless needed France and French culture in order to exist.[135] This complicity with France and French culture, which could not be denied Taïa at the beginning of his career, was radically challenged in his later writings.

The preoccupation with literature and masculinity already figures in the first *récit* entitled 'Une année à la Bibliothèque générale' which begins with 'La première année de ma vie, je l'ai passée dans une bibliothèque'.[136] On some days his father, who worked as an official at the library in Rabat, would take him in his arms because 'il souhaitait m'habituer à l'odeur des livres, des vieux livres'.[137] If he had not visited the library, his aunt, Massaouda, 'la soeur très libérée de mon père',[138] would recount legends and tales featuring djinns and supernatural

[133] See articles published by the French newspaper at the beginning of his career, such as 'Abdellah Taïa, l'amour qui foudroie' by *Le Monde* in 2008, https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2008/05/15/abdellah-taia-l-amour-qui-foudroie_1045176_3260.html, see also http://evene.lefigaro.fr/celebre/biographie/abdellah-taia-30053.php, [accessed 12 December 2019]. See also Panizzon, 'La vraie liberté n'existe nulle part'.
[134] *MM*, p. 9.
[135] *MM*, p. 12.
[136] *MM*, p. 13.
[137] *MM*, p. 16.
[138] *MM,* p. 15.

creatures all emerging from Moroccan culture ('Les contes de Massaouda ont bercé mon enfance, m'ont nourri autant que le lait de M'Barka'.)[139] Thus the narrator posits on the one hand literary and scholastic culture and on the other Moroccan folktales as a foundational experience. Unlike Rachid O., whose writerly identity emerged in collaboration with French men, Taïa's writerly and artistic identity must be seen in the light of these formative experiences.

'Une année à la Bibliothèque générale', however, also discusses the stakes at play for the narrator as a man in a household composed mainly of women. Thanks to the birth of his second son, the father, despised by his brother and the people of his native village for having fathered daughters, can stand up in front of his relatives now: 'Mais maintenant j'en ai deux, oui, deux grands garçons; je peux revenir au bled fier, je peux aller au bled réclamer ma part des récoltes annuelles.'[140] Young Abdellah feels the pressure which is put on him ('On attendait beaucoup de moi'),[141] and feels that he cannot live up to his family's expectations. He falls ill, requires special attention, and taps into his parents' financial resources. Resistance to male acculturation is vividly rendered in 'Ma circoncision', the second episode of *Mon Maroc*. Rather than the derealization of the world of women which the festive circumcision should emphasize, and entering the world of men, the narrator-protagonist describes this event as revelry concerning women first and foremost. The narrator-protagonist recalls how his mother, sisters, and aunts would adorn themselves with festive clothes, tattoo themselves, and accompany the actual circumcision with ululation.[142] A special place in his description is attributed to his mother who was treated, as he writes, like a young bride, an

[139] *MM*, p. 16.
[140] *MM*, p. 15.
[141] *MM*, p. 16.
[142] *MM*, p. 21.

idea which the narrator would gladly embrace.[143] Once circumcised, the young boy, on his mother's lap, is congratulated by all the guests present. By contrast, the activities involving men, the presence of his father, the young man's access to the male collective, are never addressed. The moment devoted to the men's reading of the Quran is dismissed as 'pas la partie la plus excitante',[144] and the walk to the hammam with the other men is characterized thus, 'aucun souvenir concernant cet épisode, pas même de moi'.[145] This rejection of everything related to masculinity and proximity to the sphere of women is explicitly addressed in the aftermath of the circumcision. After a short description of a circumcision which went smoothly ('je suis devenu homme facilement'),[146] the narrator pauses:

> Homme! Aussi facilement? […] Quand je me réveillai l'après-midi, j'avais mal, très mal. Non, devenir homme n'est pas si facile que ça. Je me trompais. Plus tard, ce sera encore plus dur. Le soir, je ne pus participer à la fête de femmes, plus élégantes que jamais, habillées de kaftans ou bien de takchitas, maquillées avec outrance, trop parfumées. Je ne pouvais même pas bouger. Ça sert à quoi d'être homme? [147]

As the question mark suggests, the narrator does not see any sense in this male acculturation since, first, it involves pain, something which forebodes the disquiet the narrator will experience throughout childhood and adolescence and, second, since he is required to leave the female sphere. According to Butler's concept of 'refused identification', the narrator-protagonist here mourns this feminine past ('je ne pouvais plus participer à la fête des femmes', 'Je ne pouvais même pas bouger'), and will displace his lost love for women onto other female figures with whom he will identify and from which his desire for men will naturally grow.[148]

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[143] Ibid.
[144] *MM*, p. 22.
[145] Ibid.
[146] *MM*, p. 23.
[147] *MM*, p. 24.
[148] See Butler, 'Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification', pp. 134-9.

Throughout *Mon Maroc*, the narrator subtly either challenges ideologies concerning male and female gender, or looks for different, in his culture unintelligible masculine and feminine models, in which he can ground his own non-normative desires and his own self. The episodes 'L'accompagnateur' and 'D'un corps à l'autre' demonstrate the narrator's wish to break the rigid gender ideology pertaining to the behaviour of men and women in Moroccan culture. In 'L'accompagnateur' he denounces the performance Moroccan men give in order to fulfil the standards of North African masculinity, echoing Butler's notion of gender performance as established in 'melancholic identification'.[149] Furthermore, he overturns the roles ascribed to women by showing that, through his sisters, he has acquired freedom and independence. Khadjia would take him, without asking permission, to the beach outside Salé and, thanks to Fatima, who would date a boy and whom he would accompany to her trysts, he could, rather than watching over her, have a love affair by proxy.[150] Thanks to his sisters who would explore the streets and life outside home, he experiences sexuality himself.

If he is at the beginning reluctant to go to the men's hammam, baulking at a performance of masculinity he finds boring ('franchement, que faire en compagnie des hommes, des pères de famille? Ils jouent trop aux hommes justement, exhibant soi-disant leur virilité'),[151] he later discovers femininity in them:

> Après, j'étais obligé de fréquenter celui des hommes où je fus surpris de découvrir ces derniers sous un nouveau jour: fragiles, sensibles, beaux et prêts à toutes les expériences: une tendresse infinie passe entre les corps, entre les peaux aux odeurs fortes et enivrantes. On se frôle, on se touche. De la sensualité pure. En quittant le hammam des femmes, je me suis petit à petit rapproché des hommes chez qui j'ai découvert une grande part féminine, qu'ils essaient de masquer avec plus ou moins de succès. La mienne est plus visible, j'en ai besoin pour vivre.[152]

[149] Ibid.
[150] *MM*, pp. 34-5.
[151] *MM*, p. 38.
[152] Ibid.

The narrator-protagonist unearths this 'feminine' sensibility in the other men which they were supposed to abandon. He unmasks a different masculinity in his culture, one which reveals an 'bouquet onirique' according to Bouhdiba.[153] He pluralizes masculine subjectivity, as it were, resisting the monolithic ideology according to which all identification with feminine figures must be suppressed in order for the masculine to exist.

Likewise, in 'D'un corps à l'autre', in which he remembers a girl in the hammam reserved for men, Abdellah challenges ideologies and taboos concerning masculinity and femininity in Morocco. What culture requires to be repressed and separated in the process of masculinization, and, concomitantly, in spatial politics (male versus female hammam), is transgressed here by a girl. Seeing her in the male hammam, the narrator recalls:

> Je regardais et regardais encore. Et tout d'un coup, je me suis retrouvé par je ne sais quelle magie dans un autre hammam, plein à craquer, trop bruyant, dans un autre corps, petit, trop petit; je jouais à m'accrocher à ma mère, à ma sœur… à demi nues. Comment, moi aussi j'allais dans un autre hammam que celui qui m'était originellement destiné! Comment, moi, garçon, futur mâle plein de poils, pouvais-je accéder à ce harem sans eunuques, y avoir ma place, et ne choquer personne?
>
> J'ai compris alors que les femmes étaient beaucoup plus tolérantes que les hommes, beaucoup plus libres. J'ai saisi le message et, en sortant du hammam ce soir-là, sans me laver […], j'ai souri à la petite fille de six ans au corps nu et beau en murmurant entre les lèvres: "merci "!

The girl prompts Abdellah to recall that as a young boy has also transgressed the taboos, so to speak, by accompanying his mother to the female hammam. Women, then, for Abdellah, are much more tolerant and accepting in that they allow boys to accompany them into the hammam and, by extension, masculinity, elements in a space reserved for the feminine. This episode is crucial for Abdellah in that, as a young boy, he attempts to brave the gender and sexual divide which reigns supreme in his culture, and which is corroborated by theorists on sexuality such as Bouhdiba. His project agrees with queer theorists such as Butler or Edelman

[153] Bouhdiba, p. 209.

who also think about the tenuous and constructed nature of gender and sexuality.[154] To my question about whether he was animated by a desire to violate the rigid binary of masculine and feminine ideology, Taïa replied:

> Le transgenre traverse tout ce que j'ai écrit, cette idée que nous sommes traversés par des mélanges, le féminin et le masculin, sans qu'on en soit conscient. Quand tu passes ta vie avec six sœurs qui dorment à côté de toi, quand tu partages tout, je dirais même ce chaos et ce bordel, c'est pour moi la vie même.[155]

The proximity of his sisters informs a gender identity composed of feminine and masculine elements. Here, 'transgender' is not to be understood as a gender other to one's, but as an intermingling of masculine and feminine gender and sex. This commingling ('chaos') of masculinity and femininity is echoed in the title 'D'un corps à l'autre' in which the narrating persona freely swaps bodies with the girl.

Resistance to male acculturation and the expectations placed upon him by society is also depicted in the récit 'Notre radio'. Here, the narrator describes how he would listen to the radio surrounded by all the women of his family. However, his father would interrupt the radio as soon as the word 'love' was pronounced:

> Dire "je t'aime" est difficile. Prononcer cette phrase en présence du père par exemple, c'est l'impensable chez moi. *Hchouma*, la honte. Malheureusement, elle revenait assez souvent dans ces séries radiophoniques. C'était le signal: on devait se disperser, aller dormir et imaginer la suite, essayer du moins.[156]

The narrator complains that the culture does not allow him to use the term 'love', which is vetoed by patriarchy. He would find tenderness in the women's sphere to which he would retire. In this episode the narrator also timidly comes across men who live out their non-

[154]Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York; London: Routledge, 1999), Edelman, 'Seeing Things, Representation, The Scene of Surveillance, and the Spectacle of Gay Male Sex', in *Homographesis*.
[155] Panizzon, p. 198.
[156] *MM*, p. 28.

conforming desires, figures who live an alternative lifestyle outside marriage and family. However, he talks of 'ambiguité', never mentioning explicitly their desire for men. Next to his sisters, these figures function as models he can look up to and identify with. Amongst the singers, he recalls Bouchaieb El-Bidaoui who would, according to the narrator, dress up as a woman, and Houcine Slaoui who would have a young boy as a lover and would sing of love to his man.[157] This experience is formative for the young Abdellah in that he finds models rooted in his own culture who openly sing about love, subject matter normally considered taboo or too private to talk about in his culture. Throughout his novels, Taïa's narrators struggle to express and talk about love in a discursive and cultural space which does not allow them to do so.

The narrator also mentions literary models which marked his childhood and early adolescence and influenced his later work. Amongst these is his discovery of Choukri's *Le Pain nu*, censored at the time in Morocco.[158] Struck by the honest depiction of Choukri's life ('Un auteur qui s'inspire de sa vie pour écrire.'),[159] the narrator-protagonist writes:

> Ce roman m'a littéralement frappé. Marqué. Blessé. Peut-être changé. Il m'habite depuis ce jour-là. Je pense beaucoup à lui. Il m'a nourri. Il m'a vu naître littérairement.[160]

It may be Choukri's straightforward depiction of all matters sexual, the violent scenes on the streets of Tangier, and illustrations of the world of the poor that had such an impact on the narrator-protagonist who is still reluctant to convey sexual violence in his writing here. Later

[157] *MM,* p. 26.
[158] See Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, p. 315.
[159] *MM*, p. 93.
[160] *MM*, p. 94.

in adolescence, the narrator-protagonist describes how he encountered Choukri three times, the last in the form of a picture on a wall which, to his mind, is a sign of good luck.[161]

With *Mon Maroc*, in a timid, barely spoken way, Taïa lays the foundations for the self. 'His Morocco' is composed of episodes during which he remembers ambiguous masculine figures who might well prefer the company of boys than that of women, and women who take their liberty and do not care about society's judgement. These memories also encompass encounters with literary figures in which tradition the narrator will write and transgress the norms and taboos so prevalent in his society, one tyrannized by the notion of *pudeur*. Indeed, in *Mon Maroc* the narrator broaches all sexual matters and alludes obliquely to his burgeoning homosexuality. This changes, however, in his later childhood writings. Already in *Mon Maroc* the narrator creates a specific image of himself in an autofictional mode, a self which will grow outside the norms of Moroccan society and, more importantly, a self which is influenced by Moroccan – and western – literary culture. Through its deliberate choice of episodes, collected as *récits* which compose *Mon Maroc*, the narrator, rather than just retracing his childhood, creates a certain image of himself. Thus he reflects the autofictional project defined by Philippe Gasparini which, 'ne retrace pas une vie entière dans l'ordre chronologique, mais se limite à certaines séquences'.[162] In *L'armée du salut* and *Une mélancolie arabe*, the narrator returns to his childhood. However, more so than in *Mon Maroc*, he composes these two novels, which he calls 'romans', in such a way as to reveal his queer sexuality, at first timidly, then in *Une mélancolie arabe* more outspokenly. Taïa's autofictional writings in *L'armée du salut* and *Une mélancolie arabe*, I suggest, illustrate that the 'I' can exist only on paper. Furthermore, his obsessive return to childhood shows that this period was overwhelmingly formative for him.

[161] *MM*, p. 96.
[162] Philippe Gasparini*, Autofiction, Une aventure du langage* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), p. 194.

'Mon histoire, désormais, j'allais l'écrire seul': Taïa's Textual Self in *L'armée du salut,* and *Une mélancolie arabe*

If we have seen that in *Mon Maroc* Taïa was reluctant to write about sexuality, he divests himself of *pudeur* in *L'armée du salut* and *Une mélancolie arabe* and more or less straightforwardly depicts his non-conforming desire. More so than in *Mon Maroc, L'armée du salut* and *Une mélancolie arabe* strategically create a narrative of childhood in order to shed light on Taïa's becoming a queer Moroccan writer. I would like to compare the two novels with the theory of autofiction, established first by Doubrovsky and developed by Gasparini. According to Doubrovsky, autofiction distinguishes itself from autobiography in that the former indicates a greater awareness of the deliberate arrangements of the episodes of one's life so as to convey a specific image of the self.[163] For Doubrovsky:

> On est à la fois dans un récit où les faits et les événements sont strictement réels, […], mais, bien entendu, tout est fiction. Les strates de souvenirs sont choisies en fonction du livre qui sera écrit. Dans une vie, il n'y a pas six parties très nettes qui s'enchaînent les unes aux autres. La journée est une journée textuelle, non une journée réelle.[164]

Autofiction can always only be fictional in the sense that as soon as one starts reconstructing one's life, a fictional image of the self is created. Drawing upon Doubrovsky, Gasparini provides a very precise theory of autofiction. A piece of writing, according to Gasparini, is autofictional when the narrator's name is eponymous with the author's ('l'identité onomastique de l'auteur et du héros-narrateur'), when the subtitle is 'roman', when the chronology of events is re-arranged ('la reconfiguration du temps linéaire'), and there is an urge to reveal the truth about oneself ('la pulsion de se "révéler dans sa vérité"').[165] In fact, in

[163] Philippe Vilain, *Défense de Narcisse* (Paris: Grasset, 2005), p. 191.
[164] Vilain, p. 208.
[165] Philippe Gasparini*, Autofiction, Une aventure du langage* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), p. 209. Gasparini also mentions other characteristics intrinsically linked to the autofictional genre which I omit here since they are not relevant

both *L'armée du salut* and *Une mélancolie arabe*, the narrator reorganizes the episodes in such a way as to reveal his non-conforming sexuality and his budding writerly identity. In *L'armée du salut* he recalls his parents' sexuality from which eventually his sexuality and desire for his brother emerges. In *Une mélancolie arabe* he remembers being nearly raped by a gang of neighbourhood boys and the misunderstanding of different concepts around masculinity, episodes which lead him to assert and live out his non-conforming desire, first and foremost, on paper.

In his article 'L'Autofiction comme en(je)u politique dans l'œuvre d'Abdellah Taïa', Arnaud Genon thematizes the narrators' resistance to be part of the collective and the friction which arises in writing about a self and non-conforming desires in a society which privileges the collective.[166] Genon also emphasizes the importance of autofiction as a means by which the narrators reveal their queer identity: 'L'identité se (re)construit de manière significative dans l'espace littéraire, débarrassé du poids archaïque des discours religieux et traditionnels'.[167] If Genon's observation is certainly correct, I would take it as a starting point to show how autofiction has a more vital function than simply revealing Taïa's narrators' non-conforming sexuality. If Genon has shown that it is only thanks to the auto-fiction that Taïa can construct his self, I would like to illustrate that Taïa's writing reflects Doubrovsky's thoughts on autofiction in that Taïa's self, like Doubrovsky's self, can only exist on paper. In other words, Taïa's self can only survive as a fictionalized self in a society in which non-conforming sexuality is not recognized. Taïa's autofictional writings echo Doubrovsky's thoughts on autofiction as means of asserting a self in an environment which does not acknowledge this

to Taïa. Gasparini's statement on autofiction quoted in the main body can, of course, also be applied to autobiography.

[166] Arnaud Genon, 'L'Autofiction comme en(je)u politique dans l'œuvre d'Abdellah Taïa', in *Lisières de l'autofiction, enjeux géographiques, artistiques et politiques, Colloque de Cerisy* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2012), pp. 235-57 (p. 248).

[167] Ibid.

particular self.[168] The theorist remarks: 'D'avoir été ravalé à la condition de "sous-homme" (*Untermensch*) a sans doute exacerbé le besoin d'affirmation de soi par la suite, notamment dans l'écriture.'[169] Thus autofiction is also about affirming oneself in an environment which does not allow this self to exist or, in the words of the journalist Marc Weitzmann, a way of, 'dire, ou tenter de dire, ce qui ne peut être dit: soi-même, comme étant le monde, et ce dernier vu comme expérience intransmissible, inconnaissable.'[170] Regarding Taïa, autofiction turns out to be crucial for him in that the world he evolves in as a child is similarly 'inconnaissable' in the sense that it does not recognize, or even worse, tries to annihilate his self due to his sexual orientation.

L'armée du salut

Published in 2006 by Seuil with the sub-title *roman*, *L'armée du salut* is a highly structured novel featuring a narrator-protagonist, Abdellah, who recounts his life in the first-person. It consists of three parts. In the first, Abdellah recalls his childhood in his parents' house which was imbued with a sexual atmosphere, in the second part he recounts his burgeoning love for his brother Abdelkébir during a sojourn in Tangier, and in the third he remembers his unhappy love story with a western intellectual.

Through the arrangement of episodes in *L'armée du salut*, Taïa depicts his becoming a queer Moroccan writer and the start of a fraught relationship with the West. In fact, by revealing his parents' sexual life in the opening pages, the narrator prepares the reader for the revelation of his own sexuality which, however, still occurs in great secrecy. Furthermore, he posits

[168] Doubrovsky escaped death during the Nazi occupation of Paris. For more, see Vilain, pp. 194-98.
[169] Vilain, p. 188.
[170] Marc Weitzmann, 'L'hypothèse de soi', *Page des libraires, juin-juillet-août 1998*, in Vilain, p. 173.

Tangier as an important site where his love for his elder brother and later a Frenchman is awakened and where his desire to write is stimulated. Also, by positing Tangier as a space in which both the literary and the erotic are stimulated, Taïa places his early literary project in the tradition of other writers for whom Tangier is inspirational, claiming to be part of a particular Moroccan literary heritage.

The narrator's bolder depiction of sexual matters, probably influenced by Choukri but also by his reading of Rachid O.'s narratives on childhood, is conveyed in the first section in which the narrator depicts the sexual atmosphere at his parents' house during his childhood.[171] The narrator transgresses the taboos of his society in that he reveals the secrets of his parents' bedroom as well as the tarnished reputation of his mother and his father's dishonour. Thus Abdellah would often imagine himself collaborating in his parents' sexuality, visualizing a primal scene:

> Mon imagination s'aventurait facilement et avec une certaine excitation sur ce terrain torride et légèrement incestueux. J'étais dans le lit avec mes parents. Mon père dans ma mère. Le sexe dur et grand (il ne pouvait être que grand!) de mon père pénétrant le vagin énorme de ma mère. J'entendais leurs bruits, leur souffle. Au début, je ne voyais rien, tout était noir, mais à la fin j'étais à leurs côtés, regardant de près ces deux corps que je connaissais bien et pas si bien en même temps, prêt à leur donner un coup de main, excité, heureux et haletant avec eux.[172]

It could be argued that the narrator describes exactly the Freudian stage in which the young boy identifies with both parents, before sexual identification sets in.[173] In this scene, Abdellah establishes the origins of his sexuality in which he will identify with both the male and the female, something we also witness in *Mon Maroc*. This scene also challenges the cultural notion of secrecy which surrounds intimate life and sexuality. The father would often accuse his wife of having cheated on him with her cousin Saleh. His mother, M'Barka, would start

[171] In the interview I conducted with Taïa in Paris in July 2018, Taïa claimed to know Rachid O.'s work by heart.
[172] *AS*, p. 14.
[173] Butler, p. 135.

shouting and reveal her story to the neighbourhood. The narrator here overturns the assumption of secrecy in Moroccan culture related to all intimate matters, doubtlessly in preparation for his own revelation of love for his brother.

The second part of *L'armée du salut* is devoted entirely to Abdelkébir, Abdellah's brother, for whom the narrator not only feels love but also physical desire, which is also closely linked to the literary. This nexus between the literary and the sexual is borne out in Choukri's *Le Pain nu*, which the young boy finds amongst his brother's underwear.[174] It is apparently through his brother and, by extension, Choukri, that the young boy will discover literature, sexuality and, more importantly, the ability to speak straightforwardly about it without feeling any shame:

> *Le Pain nu* de Mohamed Choukri, qui m'a révélé à la littérature, c'est lui. Qui d'autre chez nous, sinon Abdelkébir, aurait pu acheter un livre pareil et, parce qu'il était interdit à l'époque, lui enlever sa couverture et le cacher, sous sa bibliothèque, au milieu de ses slips tachés de sperme? [175]

In the tradition to which Choukri belongs, the young Abdellah will explore this matrix of desire, literature, and sexuality when he embarks on a journey with Abdelkébir to Tangier. Unlike Choukri, however, the narrator is still inhibited by his shame when he sets about on writing out his desire for his own brother in his diary.

In a diary which he calls a 'Journal intime. Vraiment intime.', [176] the narrator inscribes his love and physical desire for his older brother which possesses him during their stay in Tangier. The sight of his brother's naked posterior causes a mélange of lust and shame in him that he cannot really explain. Later that day, on the beach when he sees his brother again in

[174] *AS,* p. 37.
[175] *AS*, p. 36-7.
[176] *AS*, p. 41.

his swimming trunks, he writes of how excited he became by this sight. However, like Rachid's experience with his uncle, he cannot name his burgeoning love and sees himself as a victim of confused feelings, echoing Stockton's notion of the ghostly 'gay' child who is unfamiliar and ignorant of his erotic object choice, unable to shed light on his nascent desire.[177]

Witnessing this unfamiliar sexual attraction for his elder brother prompts the narrator to write in his journal, 'Ce que j'écris dans ce journal me fait peur. Et si Abdelkébir le lisait?'.[178] Writing of this inexplicable sexual desire elicits shame and anxiety in the narrator. It is the first time Abdellah sets out on paper his non-conforming desire which is repudiated in his society and unknown to the narrator himself. The reader witnesses something no one else is supposed to know, and something the narrator is reluctant to avow and is afraid of ('Ce que j'écris dans ce journal me fait peur.'). At the moment in which Abdellah writes his desire for his brother, he creates a textual self which cannot exist in real life. Thus Abdellah's diary can be seen as a *mise en abîme* for his autofictional project. In a similar vein, the narrating personae Taïa creates throughout his autofictions are also selves which can only exist on paper since, owing their sexual orientation, they are ostracized by society. In many respects, Abdellah's situation in *L'armée du salut* echoes Weitzmann' observation on autofictional writings, namely, 'Dire, ou tenter de dire, ce qui ne peut être dit: soi-même, comme étant le monde, et ce dernier vu comme expérience intransmissible, inconnaissable.'[179] In other words, Abdellah and, by extension, Taïa create an autofictional character which exists in a world which is untranslatable and incommunicable. For the narrator in Tangier, the world does not provide the structure and discursive space through which he can express himself. It is an

[177] Stockton, p. 3.
[178] *AS,* p. 50.
[179] Vilain, P. 173.

anxiety-inducing world, as his words 'cela me fait peur' bear out. Abdellah Taïa's self in his childhood narratives will always be displaced, unrecognized in a world, 'intransmissible', 'inconnaissable', failing to provide him with a secure space from which he can speak and incarnate his love.

It is not by chance that Addellah's awakening love for his brother occurs in Tangier, a location which has inspired countless writers to write about queer relationships, as seen in the preceding chapter. As in *Mon Maroc*, the narrator of *L'armée du salut* places himself in the tradition of writers such as Choukri and others who have written of same-sex love. In Tangier he can voice his feelings for his brother. But unlike the enchantment Tangier generates in the narrator-protagonist of *Mon Maroc*, here Tangier appears dangerous, reflecting the risky unknown love Abdellah experiences for his brother. It is indeed a city which awakens passion, albeit dangerous ones.

Indeed, in Tangier his love for Abdelkébir will remain unrequited. The narrator has to realize that his brother has fallen for a woman and remains unaware of the young boy's effort to get his attention. Abdellah becomes aware of this on an evening during which they all listen to *Fatet Gabena*, a song by Abdel Hamim about a love triangle between the singer, another man, and a girl.[180] Abdellah realizes that Abdelkébir identifies with the singer who eventually gains the girl's attention whilst he has nobody to identify with. At that moment, he knows that his culture will never provide him with models with which he can identify. Taïa's worry, linked to his awareness that he will never become a man like his brother who will eventually marry, echoes Stockton's notion of the 'gay' child whose worries are especially acute since he can foresee no future raison d'être for feeling this way.[181] In fact, at the end of the journey to

[180] *AS,* pp. 66-7.
[181] Stockton, pp. 3-5.

Tangier, having come to terms with the fact that his brother will marry a woman, Taïa writes, 'C'est par où, le noir du monde?', conveying his loneliness and uncertain future.[182]

Whilst his brother follows societal norms, Abdellah, like Rachid O., finds role models and love with older men. On the beach in Tangier, he is approached by a French/Moroccan man who invites him to the cinema and with whom Abdellah engages briefly in a consensual affair.[183] Later, the adolescent will encounter Jean, an academic who visits Morocco and with whom Abdellah begins a tumultuous relationship. Rather than merely motivated by mutual sexual attraction, the young Abdellah is attracted to this man for his education and culture while the man is attracted to Abdellah for his cinematic knowledge. However problematically illustrated, considering the racial components and financial differences which taint this relationship, Abdellah describes it as formative in that, like Rachid's relationships with older French men in *L'enfant ébloui*, it allows him to name and understand this love and experience it in a more or less safe environment. Whilst Abdellah's relationship with Jean reflects Kahan's concept of the sexual world system according to which the homo/hetero binary is exported through European homosexual men or women outside Europe, the relationship for Abdellah somehow remains informed by his own culture in that the tradition of Sufi discipleship is implicated in their relationship.[184] Abdellah calls Jean 'mon maître', their relationship 'une entente réelle, complicité intellectuelle', and says at one point, 'J'étais ravi d'avoir un homme pour moi, qui s'intéressait à moi, qui me sortait momentanément de mon milieu populaire, un homme occidental, cultivé, quelque part un homme rêve'.[185] Thanks to

[182] *AS*, p. 68.
[183] *AS*, p. 59.
[184] Kahan, p. 332. See Scott Kugle, 'Dancing with Khusro, Gender Ambiguities and Poetic Performance in a Delhi Darga' in which Kugle discusses how relationships between Sufi masters and disciples can be informed by eroticism. In *Rethinking Islamic Studies, from Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism,* Carl W. Ernst, Richard Martin, eds (Columbia, CA: University of South Carolina Press, 2012), pp. 246-65.
[185] *AS*, p. 83.

Jean, Abdellah acquires the cultural knowledge which paves the way to a European life. In Abdellah's words, Jean 'serait pour toujours le premier, l'initiateur, le maître, qu'il faut un jour dépasser'. [186] Abdellah's relationship with Jean bears out Stockton's theory of 'growing sideways' as 'a person's experience or ideas, their motives or their motions' which 'pertain at any age, bringing "adult" and "children" into lateral contact of surprising sorts'.[187] This is crucial for Abdellah's relationship with Jean. He cannot really explain his feelings for his brother in a cultural surrounding which cannot fulfil him. With Jean, it is not so much about domination or sexual exploitation, but more about fruitful lateral contact.

L'armée du salut echoes Doubrovsky's remarks on autofiction which, 'ne retrace pas une vie entière, dans l'ordre chronologique, mais se limite à certaines séquences'.[188] Taïa creates and matches sequences in such a way so as to reveal, shyly, his sexual identity. However, through the *mise en abîme* in his diary the narrator also emphasizes the fictional character of his self which can only exist in fictive space in an environment which does not tolerate its existence. *L'armée du salut* also illustrates the importance of western men in assisting the narrator to overcome the disquiet his sexuality causes in Morocco. As we see in *Mon Maroc*, writing and western culture are already crucial themes in Taïa's childhood narratives in that they enable him to shun the hostile Moroccan environment.

Une mélancolie arabe

Published in 2008 with the subtitle *roman*, *Une mélancolie arabe* recounts in four parts the life of a boy and later adolescent called Abdellah. Unlike *L'armée du salut*, the narrator here

[186] *AS,* p. 152.
[187] Stockton, p. 11.
[188] Gasparini, p. 193.

is more concerned to reveal the suffering induced in Moroccan society by his non-conforming sexuality. In 'Je me souviens', the narrator recalls how he was nearly raped by a gang of boys. In 'J'y vais' the narrator recounts his unrequited love for a Frenchman, in 'Fuir' he writes about his escape to Cairo, and in 'Ecrire' he tells of his relationship with the Algerian Slimane. *Une mélancolie arabe* thematizes the narrator's love for men within a culture which does not provide the discursive space to express it. The narrator's defeat and simultaneous resistance to a culture in which same-sex love is not recognized is reflected in the narrative form. In each of the first three parts, 'Je me souviens', 'J'y vais', and 'Fuir', the narrator nearly passes away and then is resurrected. In 'Je me souviens' the narrator is almost electrocuted, in 'J'y vais' he nearly dies in the airplane, and in the last part, 'Fuir', he faints in Cairo and is saved by a Jewish woman. Furthermore, in *Une mélancolie arabe* the narrator reconstructs his life in such a way as to contrast his own queer masculinity with conservative Moroccan views on masculinity.[189] As in *L'armée du salut*, the narrator in *Une mélancolie arabe* emphasizes writing and the autofictional space to facilitate escape from a hostile, not to say deadly, environment for the narrator.

'Je me souviens' illustrates how the normative Moroccan notion of masculinity comes into conflict with the alternative masculine model embodied by Abdellah. Abdellah's refusal to identify with normative models of masculinity, and his retention of what Butler would call

[189] For more on masculinity in *Une mélancolie arabe*, see Sophie Catherine Smith, 'Être ce qui ne se dit pas: Negotiating a Gay Identity in Abdellah Taïa's Une Mélancolie arabe', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 15 (2012), 35-51. See also Claudia Gronemann, 'Le mâle/mal de la mélancolie: homoérotisme et masculinité inadaptée chez Abdellah Taïa', in *Masculinités maghrébines, Nouvelles perspectives sur la culture, la littérature et le cinéma*, Claudia Gronemann, Michael Gebhard, eds (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018), pp. 173-94. Gronemann also uses Butler's concept of melancholic identification in order to explain Abdellah's masculinity in *Une mélancolie arabe* and connects Taïa's melancholia with that of Butler's. However, it seems to me inaccurate to draw parallels between Butler's understanding of melancholia, which is informed by Freud's concept established in his 'Mourning and Melancholia', and Taïa's, as Taïa uses it in *Une mélancolie arabe* in a much broader sense. Furthermore, despite the title *Une mélancolie arabe*, Taïa does not melancholically identify with men, otherwise he would be a heterosexual, according to Butler.

'feminine' desire for men leads to incomprehension. In episodes in which Abdellah recounts his attempted rape by boys from his neighbourhood, he contrasts his queer masculinity with normative masculinity which also asserts itself in the Moroccan context through specific roles in sexual intercourse.[190] Abdellah, however, resists such debasement and proposes an alternative masculinity, unknown in his culture, one which seeks an egalitarian loving relationship between men.

In 'Je me souviens' the narrator as a boy comes across three other boys who would like to play sexual games with him. He agrees, hoping that he can explore physical and emotional love with them:

> Ce qu'il me proposait m'allait très bien. Jouer au sexe avec lui, surtout avec lui, pour tuer l'après-midi et sa folie était une proposition qui ne se refusait pas. Dans ma tête je voyais même déjà ce que nous allions faire, inventer. Se dénuder. Se découvrir. Se toucher. Moi petit. Lui grand. Sa barbe qui pique. Mes fesses excitantes. Se donner l'un à l'autre. Jouer. Oublier de jouer. On n'est plus des enfants. On fait le sexe pour de vrai. Profond. […] Je rêvais. Je rêvais les yeux ouverts. Je rêvais les yeux aveuglés par le soleil impitoyable. J'étais heureux.[191]

However, the game soon takes on more dramatic proportions. The leader of the group, Chouaïb, starts to debase the young boy to assert his own virility. The episode contrasts different ideas about masculinity: whereas Chouaïb has a very narrow understanding of masculinity which manifests itself in a penetrative role, and does not conceive of a different way to live out his virility, Abdellah creates a possibly new and wider cultural understanding of masculinity by exhibiting his feelings for Chouaïb and searching for proximity. However, his culture does not provide him with a discursive and safe space to live out this masculinity:

> Il disait lentement: "J'aime ton cul…J'aime ton cul, Leïla!" […] J'ai voulu un moment lui donner mon vrai prénom, lui dire que j'étais un garçon, un homme comme lui…Lui dire qu'il me plaisait et qu'il n'y avait pas besoin de violence entre

[190] See Dialmy and Rebucini.
[191] Abdellah Taïa, *Une mélancolie arabe* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), p. 16. Henceforth referred to as: *MA*.

> nous, que je me donnerais à lui heureux si seulement il arrêtait de me féminiser…Je n'étais ni Leïla, ni sa sœur, ni sa mère. J'étais Abdellah.[192]

Here, according to a narrow, and for him dangerous, understanding of masculinity, Abdellah seeks to assert a different masculinity. In his view, he retains his masculine identity even if he loves men. However, lacking support he eventually submits to Choauïb and his friends who try to rape him and then attempts suicide. It is only after he has been saved by his father that Abdellah realizes for a brief moment that a different form of masculinity is possible, ('Une tendresse infinie. Un abandon total. Un homme qui a oublié d'être un homme. Il pleurait et ses larmes inondaient mon tee-shirt.').[193]

This misunderstanding concerning masculinity and love is also reflected in the language. With a string of reflexive verbs, 'se dénuder', 'se découvrir', 'se toucher', the narrator reveals his wish for mutual love and shared eroticism between himself and Chouaïb.[194] Metaphors, most probably taken from popular films the narrator is keen to watch, reveal his love for Chouaïb ('Des histoires secrètes. Des mots d'été chauds. [...] Le feu. Le sang. La glace.').[195] Chouaïb, on the other hand, uses transitive verbs ('Donne tes fesses') which debase or feminize the young boy, emphasizing the distance he puts between himself and Abdellah and his wish for the boy to submit to his authority.[196] In the streets, after the episode with Chouaïb, Abdellah shouts in front of Chouaïb's house 'je t'aime'.[197] The narrator points out that it is the first time he pronounces these words in Arabic, thus transgressing the cultural codes which prohibit him

[192] *MA*, p. 21.
[193] *MA*, p. 32.
[194] *MA,* p. 16.
[195] *MA*, p. 21.
[196] *MA*, p. 24.
[197] *MA*, p. 31.

from uttering these words. As in the episode 'Notre radio' in *Mon Maroc* or in *L'armée du salut*, the narrator realizes that he must construct himself differently.

As in *L'armée du salut*, writing provides a secure space in which Abdellah can create and express a self which loves what he is not supposed to love:

> J'allais décoller, voler, écrire autre chose, aimer au grand jour, dire mon amour, être ce qui ne se dit pas, n'existe pas. […] Je prenais une autre direction. Vers une vie nouvelle, intérieure, secrète. […]
>
> Mon histoire, désormais, j'allais l'écrire seul, en silence, loin du groupe, loin du mauvais œil. Protégé par mon père tendre et ma mère un peu sorcière. [198]

It is the page, as it were, which provides a secure space where he can live out his love for other men without being feminized or ostracized by the group. The importance of writing his story and writing his self is also suggested at the very beginning of the novel. Indeed, the chapter starts by illustrating how, after he nearly passed away, Abdellah tried to memorize the incident and the significance of the incident for him. He will 'dire ce qui ne se dit pas' on paper, his love for Chouaïb and his invention of an alternative life: 'Je suis sur mon petit lit. J'essaie de remplir les pages de mon journal intime. Un futur livre. Je me concentre.'[199] In his intimate book he can write down his memories and his self. This re-affirmation of his existence through writing is induced by Abdellah's unintelligible and unwanted sexuality in the environment in which he grows up. Like Doubrovsky, but in a different context, he has been debased to the 'condition de "sous-homme"', which in turn has 'exacerbé le besoin d'affirmation de soi par la suite, notamment dans l'écriture'.[200]

[198] *MA,* p. 33.
[199] *MA,* p. 10.
[200] Vilain, p. 188.

My discussion argues that autofiction for Taïa is vital in that it is a literary form which enables him to convey the self in a world and a society in which this self is not supposed to exist. Echoing theorists on autofiction, Taïa in a similar vein attempts to write about himself in a world which is 'inconnaissable'.[201] This is perhaps also the reason why, from *Mon Maroc* to *Une mélancolie arabe*, Taïa returns obsessively to his childhood. The only way to assert his self in a culture in which love for other men is not supposed to exist is to return obsessively to formative years in which his self was created. Childhood, which stands at the very centre of Taïa's autofictional project emerges for Taïa, to use Doubrovsky's term, as a 'temps traumatique'. In Doubrovsky's words, 'Le ressassement est le sentiment existentiel de toute personne qui écrit sur elle-même et sur sa vie, il passe et repasse par les points centraux où s'est tissée la trame de l'identité d'un sujet'.[202] If the writer is not supposed to exist, it is through his textual self that he can assert himself.

Conclusion

Reading Rachid O.'s and Taïa's childhood narrative in conjunction with Butler's theory of 'refused identification' and against Bouhdiba's ideologically inflected theories of normative boyhood shows how both authors unsettle conventional views of masculinity. They celebrate the femininity in their masculinity and do not refrain from changing gender. Rather than identifying in melancholic fashion with father figures, they identify with female figures from whom their desire for men emerges. Their proximity to the female sphere and their reluctance to enter the male sphere is linked to complications for the narrators in a society in which the division between the male and female spheres is emphasized. We have seen that gay men

[201] Vilain, p. 173.
[202] Vilain, p. 191.

from the West allow the narrators to live out their sexuality and name it, a process which I have compared to Stockton's notion of 'growing sideways'.

If Rachid O. and Taïa have often been celebrated by critics as the first Moroccan writers to depict their homosexual love, this chapter has shed more subtle light on this claim.[203] We have seen that Rachid O.'s writings were influenced by those French writers and homosexual intellectual circles committed to challenging French discourses on childhood sexuality which were prevalent at the time. The narrating 'I' which reveals his queer love is not totally reliable in that sense and cannot be taken as a reliable witness depicting Morocco as a hospitable space for homosexuals. It is a fiction which conveys an image of a pre-mature, sexual child written, as I show, in the orientalist tradition. Taïa's writings, on the other hand, illustrate that the narrators undergo a struggle to shed their notion of *pudeur* and to depict their queer desire. The narrators arrange the episodes in such a way that their sexuality is increasingly visible. Owing to a lack of freedom to live out their sexual orientation in Morocco, Rachid O.'s and Taïa's later writings discuss extensively queer Muslim experiences in the diaspora in which their protagonists find freedom to re-invent relationships and challenge ideologies concerning gender and sexuality. Simultaneously, Rachid O.'s and Taïa's diasporic subjects are also informed by local, Moroccan concepts of gender, family religion. The next chapter will examine the role of the diaspora in Rachid O.'s and Taïa's work and assess to what extent their protagonists can carve out a space in the West which allows them to live out their queer Muslim selves.

[203] See Hayes and Hédi Abdel-Jaouad.

Chapter 3

Queer Muslim Diaspora in Abdellah Taïa's *Le rouge du tarbouche, Une mélancolie arabe* and *Infidèles* and Rachid O.'s *Plusieurs vies* and *Ce qui reste*

> J'ai choisi l'exil, j'ai laissé ma famille à Salé. À Paris, j'en ai trouvé une autre, un peu spéciale: je communique avec elle toujours en silence en regardant par ma fenêtre.
>
> Abdellah Taïa, *Le rouge du tarbouche*
>
> Je n'ai pas arrêté de penser à lui tout le voyage […]. Il est de l'autre côté de l'océan, et moi je suis seul perdu dans la foule parisienne: comment pourrait-il me sentir ?
>
> Rachid O., *Ce qui reste*

Introduction

My last chapter discussed the disquiet that the protagonists experienced on account of their sexual orientation which is not recognised in Morocco, as well as the ensuing importance of relationships with western gay men and the discovery of western culture. We have seen that the West embodies in Rachid O.'s and Taïa's imagination a place of freedom, of cherished culture, and a place where they can realize their desire to become a writer. An important part of Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's works, then, is devoted to the narrators' experiences in the West, such as Taïa's *Le rouge du tarbouche, Une mélancolie arabe* and *Infidèles,* and Rachid O.'s *Plusieurs vies* and *Ce qui reste*. The aim of this chapter is to assess to what extent the West figures as a place of freedom and progress in contrast to the stifling forces at home. Through a queer diasporic studies approach, I would like to shed light on Rachid O.'s and Taïa's experiences in the West and on the vexed question of 'home' for displaced queer subjects. As has been observed by queer diasporic theorists, diasporic subjects are never

entirely uprooted and free-floating, but always informed by their own and diasporic culture.[1] Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's protagonists have to negotiate different cultures and conflicting ideologies around gender, family, sexuality, and religion.

As Gayatri Gopinath observes, traditionally, diasporic discourses are informed by a backward glance towards pure origins, the nation and the homeland, frozen in an idyllic moment outside history.[2] However, with the advent of Black British cultural studies in the 1980s and 1990s, especially with the work of Stuart Hall, diaspora is seen as a place where, on the contrary, notions of impurity are foregrounded and identities re-invented.[3] In his seminal article 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', Stuart Hall notes:

> The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of "identity" which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.[4]

For Hall, the diaspora is far from being an impoverished imitation of the homeland, but a place where identities are constantly mobile and re-created. The diaspora becomes a site conducive to de-essentializing ethnic and religious purity and in which, instead, hybridity, mobility, and impurity are foregrounded. As a privileged space from which to challenge ethnic, religious purity, and heteronormative sexualities, the diaspora is of crucial importance to Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa whose sexual orientation is outlawed in Morocco and barely reconcilable with the Muslim faith. As will be seen, in both writers' work the diaspora

[1] David L. Eng, 'Out Here and Over There: Queerness and Diaspora in Asian American Studies', *Social Text* (1997), 31-52; Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Martin F. Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
[2] Gopinath, p. 4.
[3] Gopinath, p. 5.
[4] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, Jana Evans Braziel; Anita Mannur, eds (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 233-46 (p. 244).

becomes a site where they can negotiate ethnic, religious, and sexual identities and invent new forms of being.

For Gayatri Gopinath, queer diaspora is a methodology from which to understand how on the one hand local and nationalist gender and sexual ideologies – one could add local religious ideologies – are unsettled, and, on the other, how processes of globalization such as LGBTQ politics are challenged.[5] Drawing upon Hall's observation about the impurity and 'inauthenticity' of identities in the diaspora, the term 'queer' works to uncouple sexual ideologies and heteronormative reproductive logic from nationalist discourse and, I would add, dislodges religious and ethnic purity.[6] Linking queer to the diaspora, then, sheds light on desires, practices, and subjectivities which are 'non-existent' and difficult to imagine within conventional diasporic discourses in nationalist imaginaries.[7] In the words of Gopinath: 'A consideration of queerness, in other words, becomes a way to challenge nationalist ideologies by restoring the impure, inauthentic, nonreproductive potential of the notion of the diaspora.'[8] On the other hand, queerness also needs the notion of diaspora in order to destabilise global and totalitarian western tendencies often intrinsically linked to the term 'queer'.[9] Linking diaspora to queerness challenges the globalization of gay or lesbian subjectivity and those narratives of progress wherein backward concepts of sexualities are judged against modern and progressive European and American models, narratives which have also been critiqued by theorists on transnational sexuality, as we have seen in the introduction to this study.[10]

[5] Gopinath, p. 11.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid. See also Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, eds, 'Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality', and Elizabeth A. Povinelli, George Chauncey, eds, 'Thinking Sexuality Transnationally: An Introduction'.

In fact, Taïa's and Rachid O.'s narrators' and protagonists' practices and subjectivities in the diaspora question nationalistic discourses on patriarchy, Islam, and heteronormative reproductive logic on the one hand, and on the other are far from reflecting or resembling universalized 'gay' identity conceived within a Eurocentric gay imaginary. Echoing Hall's reflection on the diaspora, for Taïa's and Rachid O.'s protagonists, the diaspora becomes a site in which different practices and new forms of beings are re-invented and recreated. For Taïa, Cairo and Paris emerge as spaces where his narrators can reconcile their Muslim faith with their sexuality and invent what I would call a queer Muslim episteme. It is only in diasporic sites such as Cairo and Paris that Taïa's protagonists can secure a queer space of belonging in which they can ground their sexuality within Arab/Muslim culture and Islam and write about and express queer Muslim love. Furthermore, by re-appropriating and altering local Moroccan concepts of gender and sexuality within their same-sex relations they are not embodying a western gay identity. Whilst Taïa's protagonists re-invent concepts around same-sex love, Rachid O.'s diasporic narrators are informed by local Moroccan concepts related to a politically invisible and fluid sexuality. His protagonists' practices around same-sex eroticism in the diaspora thus challenge modern epistemologies of visibility, revelation, and sexual subjectivity. Furthermore, it is from the diaspora that the narrators critique the notion of *hchouma,* the modesty related to all matters sexual and its hypocrisy when it comes to sexuality and relationships. It is also from the diaspora that the narrators challenge implicit heteronormative reproductive logic and invent queer forms of reproduction. However, to conceive of the diaspora as a place of freedom for Rachid O.'s and Taïa's protagonists would be erroneous in that the margin of freedom the protagonists enjoy is delimited by conservative forces at home.

Diasporic gay Muslim subject and diasporic gay Muslim identity has been examined by Momin Rahman.[11] It is important to emphasize the existence of gay Muslims, according to Rahman, in order to refute the cultural opposition thesis in which homosexuality does not exist in the Arab/Muslim world and gay men can never be Muslims.[12] Stating the existence of queer Muslims challenges the notion of 'gay identity' as western, or as the only way of understanding homosexuality.[13] Queer Muslims who live in the West deny claims that Muslim can never be western or gay or that gays can never be Muslims and, furthermore, challenge the 'egalitarian' model of gay identity that forms the basis of the rights discourse by drawing upon and negotiating their own religious and ethnic culture within LGBTQ culture.[14] Rahman recommends looking at the intersections that mark the gay Muslim subject and that undermine the equation of universal identities with monolithic cultures. He writes:

> I suggest that gay Muslims are similarly located inside/out because they are at an intersectional location in full measure, challenging both the category of Muslim (which is itself subordinately located along national identity, ethnic and often class hierarchies) and the category of gay (again, located subordinately in the "heterosexual matrix"). [15]

For Rahman, gay Muslims queer dominant identity narratives. He observes:

> […] gay Muslims can be understood as *queer* subjects who are negotiating their ontological deferment from "coherent" dominant identities, not able to easily live within specified categories and engaged in constant negotiations of their lived experiences at the intersection of identity.[16]

Queer, for Rahman, challenges the ontological security of identity categories and indicates their incompleteness. Whilst I will not make use of Rahman's definition of queer, but rather use the term for its most simple definition, referring to an array of dissident and non-

[11] Momin Rahman, 'Queer as Intersectionality: Theorizing Gay Muslim Identities', *Sociology*, 44 (2010), 944-61. In this article, Rahman also studies queer Muslims in Muslim majority cultures, but for our purposes the diaspora is more relevant here.
[12] Rahman, p. 948.
[13] Rahman, p. 950.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Rahman, p. 952.
[16] Rahman, p. 353.

heteronormative practices and desires which are incommensurate with the categories of 'gay' and 'lesbian', Rahman's observation is important since it makes us aware of the various intersections gay Muslims occupy. Often perceived as non-Muslims on account of their sexual orientation by other Muslims, gay Muslims are excluded, or in fact racialized and sexualized by western gay men. I would like to build on Rahman's observation and examine then how Taïa's and Rachid O.'s protagonists re-negotiate these dominant identity categories and ideologies.

Abdellah Taïa's and Rachid O.'s diasporic subjects are oppressed by ideological systems and categories, such as Islam, patriarchy, heteronormative reproductive logic, and western notions of gay identity. From Rahman's perspective, they challenge ideologies and the ontological security of, say, Muslim identity or the western gay identity. As we will see, for example in Taïa's *Une mélancolie arabe*, two North African male protagonists re-invent their life together which does not emulate a gay couple as it is currently envisaged in the western imaginary. Rather, local patriarchal structures are much embedded in the re-conception of same-sex love. Rachid O.'s protagonists are still indebted to a more local concept of homosexuality which challenges the visibility inherent in the western gay imaginary. Rather than stating that the narrators 'queer' ontologically secure identity categories, the question becomes how protagonists negotiate between hegemonic Arab/Moroccan and western sexual and gender ideologies, or between the Muslim and Christian religions to which they are exposed in the diasporic space.

In his *L'invention du quotidien* de Certeau is interested in the tactics of the individual in a given field of action or under a given set of circumstances. Drawing on Foucault's theories around the insidious forms of control which informs our daily life, de Certeau observes that

individuals use tactics in order to resist systems of power which are imposed on them.[17] This resistance might be imperceptible, but they inform our daily actions. De Certeau examines the tactics of individuals in everyday life and how they turn oppressive structures to their advantage. These 'ways of doing' or 'making do with it' create a certain play in a certain field the individual or user occupies. [18] For example, de Certeau writes:

> Ainsi, les manières d' "habiter" (une maison, ou une langue) propres à sa Kabylie natale, le Maghrébin à Paris ou à Roubaix les insinue *dans* le système que lui impose la construction d'une HLM ou du français. Il les surimpose et, par cette combinaison, il se crée un espace de jeu pour des *manières d'utiliser* l'ordre contraignant du lieu ou de la langue. Sans sortir de la place où il lui faut bien vivre et qui lui dicte une loi, il y instaure de la *pluralité* et de la créativité. Par un art de l'entre-deux, il en tire des effets imprévus. Ces opérations d'emploi – ou, plutôt, de réemploi – se multiplient avec l'extension des phénomènes d'acculturation, c'est-à-dire avec les déplacements qui substituent des manières ou "méthodes" de transiter à l'identification par le lieu.[19]

The Kabyle does not here assimilate utterly to the imposed order of the stronger, which would mean inhabiting a flat the way a native Parisian would or speaking the French language like a native Parisian, but superimposes on the given structure his own structure, pluralizing it, creating some play in it, with some unknown future effect ('des effets imprévus'). Crucially, for de Certeau, tactical use of a given order – which increases with acculturation, displacement, and migration – denies the utility of identity. In other words, rather than adapting to an ideology or a place by adopting that identity, it is a matter of destabilizing identity, de-essentializing as it were, a phenomenon which recalls the protagonists' way of inhabiting the diaspora in Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's work.

Expanding his observations to other spheres of life, de Certeau examines how individuals 'make do' in general with an imposed order or space through their usages and tactics. He

[17] Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire*, Luce Giard, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 71.
[18] De Certeau, p. 50-2.
[19] De Certeau, p. 51-2.

considers how legends presuppose a system outside of our daily lives or reality with its oppressive structures.[20] In legends, moves and tactics are recounted as to how obstacles are to be overcome. They supply an inventory and repertory of combinations of how relationships of power can be reversed and how the unfortunate win.[21] It is then a protest against the established order and a weapon of the weak against the strong. Legends offer a repository of tactics for future use. In the end, as de Certeau observes, it becomes a battle between the weak and the strong.[22] De Certeau turns then to the crucial distinction between strategies and tactics. A strategy is a place delimited on its own and from which relations with the exterior world can be managed. It is a method through which a subject with will and power manages threats coming from the exterior world, for example, a bank or business adopts a strategy to attract customers, to overcome a looming financial crisis and so on.[23] Tactics, on the other hand, are the strategies of the weak. Tactics are manoeuvres within the enemy's field of vision, they operate always in the space of the Other. As opposed to long-term strategies, thinking tactically takes advantage of opportunities.[24]

I suggest that, in their negotiation of opposing and competing oppressive ideologies, Rachid O's and Taïa's protagonists rather pluralize, de-essentialize, and even subvert rigid ideas around sexual or Muslim identity or ideologies concerning Islam or the family. They echo de Certeau's observation on the everyday practice of citizens who resort to tactics in order to accommodate their own desires and needs in oppressive, pre-structured systems, here western identarian politics and religious ideologies. Echoing de Certeau's example of the Kabylian experience in Paris, they transform systems from within, erode them in order to pluralize

[20] De Certeau, pp. 42-3.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] De Certeau, p. 60.
[24] De Certeau, p. 62.

them. They negotiate Christian/western culture, Muslim faith, urban space which does not accommodate their needs as homosexual migrants. They must, within all these oppressive structures from which they cannot escape – like de Certeau's inhabitants of Pernambuco – 'make do' with them.

Rather than adapting to local politics and ideologies around sexuality and gay identity, Taïa's protagonists reconcile their Muslim practices with their sexuality, and, most importantly, create new, pioneering ways of inhabiting Islam as queer individuals. Cairo and Paris become sites where they can reconcile their homosexuality with their Muslim faith. They turn these locations into 'new homes' where they can live and write as queer Muslims. Like Taïa's, Rachid O.'s protagonists invent new ways of dwelling in Parisian urban spaces. Rather than embodying western models around homosexuality, their sexuality is informed by Moroccan concepts of shame and honour. However, it is the diaspora that emboldens protagonists to criticize their home and it is from there that they relocate queerness within their childhood memories, thus turning home of their childhood memories into a new queer home.

Comparing Rachid O.'s and Taïa's consideration of home with Anne-Marie Fortier's analysis of the role of home and queerness in her article '"Coming home", Queer Migrations and Multiple Evocations of Home' is fruitful here.[25] Like Hall, Gopinath, and Manalansan, Fortier also considers the diaspora to be a site where identities and multiple areas of belonging are re-negotiated and re-created and she reconsiders in this light the notions of home and belonging.[26] She notes:

> Rather than accepting "home" as a given, I question how it is differently represented and evoked within narratives of queer migrations, starting with those that establish

[25] Anne-Marie Fortier, '"Coming home", Queer Migrations and Multiple Evocations of Home', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4 (2001), 405-24.
[26] Fortier, p. 406.

> a commonality between queer and diaspora on the basis of their shared experience of estrangement from "home".[27]

As for Gopinath, for Fortier queer challenges heteronormative discourses and the naturalization of gender as they figure so often in narratives of origins, and she reflects on how home can be appropriated differently in queer narratives. I would like to mention two of her points which are apposite for our purposes. The first point relates to the idea of home as destiny rather than origins.[28] In other words, what does it mean to speak of home when the homeland is a site of traumatic origin? As we have seen in our discussion of transnational sexualities and as has been noted by Fortier as well, many narratives of queer migration establish a close link between the idea of 'moving out' and 'coming out'.[29] In these narrations, the homeland, such as the nation or the heterosexual family, is seen as traumatic and a homophobic place. David Eng, for example, talks about 'traumatic displacement from a lost heterosexual "origin"', and queer migrations are seen as a movement towards a new site called home.[30] This is also thematized by Alan Sinfield who observes that most of us are born into heterosexual families and that gays and lesbians have to move away from these sites into the culture of minority communities. In his words, 'home is the place you get to, not the place you came from'.[31] Owing to the heterosexual culture reproduced in childhood, home – the originary site – thus figures as a site of trauma and impossible return and memory. Often in queer narratives, then, home is conceived of as a desirable destination and the journey towards this 'home' destination described as unambiguous. Having faced a backward

[27] Fortier, p. 407.
[28] Fortier, pp. 408-12.
[29] Ibid. See also Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, eds, 'Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality', and Elizabeth A. Povinelli, George Chauncey, eds, 'Thinking Sexuality Transnationally: An Introduction'.
[30] David L. Eng, 'Out Here and Over There: Queerness and Diaspora in Asian American Studies', p. 32.
[31] Alain Sinfield, 'Diaspora and Hybridity: Queer Identity and the Ethnicity Model', in *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews*, Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed. (New York; London: Routledge: 2000), pp. 95-114 (p. 110).

sexuality, the queer subject embraces this new sexuality and simultaneously the new culture. Fortier's idea of destination as 'home' is certainly apposite to Taïa and to a certain extent to Rachid O..

Especially in the case of Taïa we see in works such as *Infidèles* the protagonists flee a country where patriarchy is prevalent and which oppresses different forms of sexuality and gender minorities. Whereas Paris will, to a certain extent, provide Rachid O.'s and Taïa's narrators a feeling of home, Cairo especially gives Taïa's narrators the ontological security his protagonists otherwise could not have. It is in Cairo, a third space between Morocco and France, outside that transnational space informed by neo-colonial dominance, that his protagonists ground their queer desire in their own Arab/Muslim culture. What my discussion will emphasize, then, is that idea of destination as a new home. However, what I will also illustrate is that Taïa's narratives challenge the above-mentioned theorists' claim that non-western queer subjects find freedom and fulfilment in the West's LGBTQ community. Taïa's protagonists re-create their own 'home', fusing western and Moroccan culture and critically re-assess notions of freedom in western LGBTQ politics as my next chapter will show. Fortier's second point which examines how childhood memories can relocate queerness within home is apposite for Rachid O.'s thoughts on his birthplace.[32] Fortier speculates whether there is a way of thinking of home as a site which is already imbued with memories of queerness and which challenges familiar narratives that justify naturalized gender differences.[33] The situating of queer memories in childhood recalls Rachid O.'s narrators who, inspired by encounters with gay men, attempt in turn to justify their queerness by changing their homes into a 'queer' home.

[32] Fortier, 416-19.
[33] Ibid.

Diaspora, 'Coming Home', and the Queer Muslim Episteme in Abdellah Taïa's *Le rouge du tarbouche, Une mélancolie arabe* and *Infidèles*

Taïa's protagonists move between national locations, such as Salé, Paris and Cairo, and thus negotiate different cultures, religions, and concepts around gender and sexual ideology. Rather than assimilating to local identities and ideologies, they re-write static notions of identity and ideology and reconfigure the notion of home. For example, addressing the subject of his homosexuality, gay identity, and Islam, Taïa observes:

> Je suis totalement musulman et je crois en Allah. […] Certaines personnes – ne connaissant rien sur l'Islam – me disent : "Mais musulman comme toi, homosexuel, cela ne va pas contre ta religion ?" Comme si tout le monde devait suivre les mêmes règles appliquées partout et liées à la foi musulmane. Ce serait absurde de dire à un gay musulman: "L'Islam est contre ton orientation, donc tu n'es pas musulman."[34]

Like Rahman's gay Muslim men, Taïa combines both, Muslim and non-traditional sexual orientation. Taïa's observation highlights that it is not because he adheres to a homosexual identity that he has to leave his Muslim faith behind. I would suggest that the protagonists in their negotiation of opposing and competing concepts rather pluralize, de-essentialize, and even subvert rigid ideas around sexual identity and ideology, here Islam. They echo de Certeau's observation on the everyday practice of citizens who resort to tactics in order to accommodate their own desire and needs in oppressive, pre-structured systems, here identitarian concepts and ideologies. They negotiate Christian/western culture, Muslim faith, and gay identity, or must, in de Certeau's terminology, 'make do' with them.[35] They create new, pioneering ways of inhabiting Islam as queer individuals, or embodying a gay identity whilst retaining their Muslim faith, or dwelling in Paris, while retaining their Muslim practices.

[34] Panizzon, 'La vraie liberté n'existe nulle part'.
[35] De Certeau, p. 35.

In his book *Queer Maghrebi French* Provencher observes that Taïa draws upon saintly figures who play the role of rebels. Provencher dubs these figures, such as Jean Genet or Marilyn Monroe, Queer Maghrebi Saints.[36] Whilst Taïa undoubtedly re-appropriates western cultural symbols, Provencher's analysis remains western-centric in that he neglects all references to Arab/Muslim culture and to Islam which have equal if not more significance. Through the optic of de Certeau's thought on the tactics and practices of the individual within oppressive systems and ideologies, in our case Islam or western culture, I show how Taïa subverts, re-uses and tactically invents new forms of being within the oppressive system of Islam in order to create new spaces of queer belonging. Especially in his later work, rather than rooting his sexuality within western culture, Taïa is animated by grounding his queer sexuality in his own Muslim culture and Islamic faith. Rather than, as Provencher elaborates, creating global queer figures, Taïa roots his queerness in Islam, and is perhaps in this undertaking quite close to Sénac who in a similar vein invented new religious filiation in order to root his queerness in the Christian, Muslim and Jewish faith.[37] Furthermore, in his article, '"Dieu et le sexe. Le pur et l'impur" : Concilier l'Islam et l'homosexualité chez Rachid O. et Abdellah Taïa', Gibson Ncube remarks, based on his reading of *Une mélancolie arabe*, that Taïa cannot conceive of how his sexuality could be reconciled with Islam ('Abdellah crée une distance entre lui et sa religion').[38] Taïa's and his protagonists' existence, however, is informed by what Ncube calls 'une mémoire spirituelle', religious images which inform his memory and his daily life.[39] I contend, however, that *Une mélancolie arabe* and *Infidèles* are pioneering in the sense that

[36] Provencher, *Queer Maghrebi French, Coming Out À l'Orientale*. See pp. 170-80.
[37] See also Denis Provencher, '"Je suis terroriste, pédé et le fils de Marilyn Monroe"; Cinematic Stars and Transfiliation in Abdellah Taïa's *Infidèles*', in *Paris and the Marginalized Author*, Valérie K. Orlando; Pamela A. Pears, eds (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2019), pp. 153-65.
[38] Gibson Ncube,'"Dieu et le sexe. Le pur et l'impur" : concilier l'Islam et l'homosexualité chez Rachid O. et Abdellah Taïa', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 16 (2013), 455-77 (p. 467).
[39] Ncube, p. 470.

they re-think new ways for women, queer subjects and social pariahs to inhabit Islam and Islamic culture.

The diaspora thus becomes a site in the work of Taïa that enables him to reinvent ways of inhabiting his culture and his religion as a queer Muslim subject. Furthermore, my reading of *Une mélancolie arabe* will suggest that it is also in the diaspora that Taïa feels empowered to write about queer Muslim love. If we have seen in the preceding chapter that Taïa, in his childhood writings, declines to name his love for men or evinces a strong tendency to create a fiction around his queer self and his love for men, it is in the diaspora that he feels confident to write about his relationships with men. However, to see the diaspora as a site of freedom would be misleading in the sense that his imagined subjectivities and forms of couplings are in tension with nationalist and conservative forces at home. Taïa's practices induced by the diasporic site as a place of freedom are more than once caught up in conservative ideologies from his home country and thus reflect Gopinath's idea of the diasporic always being in tension with ideologies at home.[40] The diaspora, for Taïa, becomes a fraught site, one that empowers him to invent a queer Muslim existence whilst always being in the shadow of conservative forces at home.

The ambiguous function of the diaspora in Taïa's work is somewhat reflected in his vexed notion of home. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, Morocco and its heterosexual society is presented as a site of trauma, of impossible return for the narrator. However, instead of finding a home among the modern LGBTQ communities in the western capitals, Taïa celebrates Cairo as the true home of social pariahs and queer people. This celebration of Cairo and Egypt as a new queer home inscribes itself in Taïa's project to create a queer Muslim

[40] Gopinath, p. 11.

episteme and offer an alternative to transnational relations between France and Morocco, relations which, specifically regarding discourses around sexuality and sexual identity politics, are very much under western, neo-colonial influence. I use the word episteme because Taïa draws on and creates a knowledge about homosexuality in Arab/Muslim culture and Islam in order to embed in turn his sexuality in Muslim culture.

By situating 'home' in this third space, outside France or Morocco, Taïa grounds his queerness in his own culture, and offers an alternative to the widespread western ideologies around for example gay identity. However, as my discussion will show, Taïa's new Cairene 'home' is also illusionary, in that it is grounded in Egyptian cinematic culture and industry. Taïa's project then is to re-invent alternative ways of being queer in the transnational space between France, Morocco, and Egypt. Challenging static identities, he offers pioneering new ways of inhabiting different spaces and seemingly opposing categories, as Rahman has shown.[41] He points towards a new modernity, decentring the prominence of patriarchal culture at home but also western minority politics. At the same time, these new forms of beings are fragile constructs, caught up in conservative or nationalist discourses or subject to illusion.

A Queer Muslim in the French Metropole: Tactics and Practices in *Le rouge du tarbouche*

Published in 2010, *Le rouge du tarbouche* is a short story collection around a first-person narrator's diasporic experience in Paris. Simultaneously exposed to western and Moroccan culture, Christian religion and Islam, the narrator manipulates these different scripts, renegotiates references and oppressive systems in order to accommodate his own way of living. In the same vein as de Certeau's discussion of the peasants in Pernambuco or the

[41] Rahman, 'Queer as Intersectionality: Theorizing Gay Muslim Identities'.

Kabylian in Paris, the protagonist defies these constraining systems and subverts them in order to accommodate his own queer desires.[42] Furthermore, the vantage point of the diaspora emboldens the narrator to re-negotiate Islamic culture and the Islamic faith in order to imagine an alternative system of belief which includes his sexuality.

The eponymous short story 'Le rouge du tarbouche' exposes the tactics used by the narrator to survive as a queer Moroccan in the anonymity of Paris. It illustrates the protagonist's use – and subversion – of Moroccan culture and western urban space. The protagonist not only transforms the anonymity of the French metropole into a familiar place by suffusing it with Moroccan culture, but also subverts heteronormative elements of his own culture in order to meet a lover in Paris. Hence there is a cautious attempt on his part to create a space of freedom to live out his sexual orientation rooted in his own culture. On Christmas Eve, the narrator is supposed to meet another man, half-French, half-Egyptian, for a drink. In order for the other to recognize him at the métro exit, he decides to wear a *tarbouche*, a hat introduced to North Africa by soldiers of the Ottoman army, nowadays worn by Moroccan men mainly during religious rituals.[43] The narrator, who re-negotiates the use of an object normally reserved for men and the military in order to go on a date with another man, is pleased with this tactic: 'De l'audace tout d'un coup. Un vrai sentiment de liberté, et de folie. "Je ne suis pas au Maroc, à Salé. Je m'en fous de ce qu'on dira".'[44] He later writes: 'J'étais une fantaisie, et cela me rendait heureux, un original, et cela me surprenait de moi. J'avais osé….'[45] It is his life in Paris and the distance it gives him which emboldens him to subvert the traditional use of the tarbouche and to re-invent it. This feeling of freedom, however, is deflated by the approach of an old North African man. After having thoroughly inspected the protagonist's

[42] De Certeau, p. 34.
[43] Abdellah Taïa, *Le rouge du tarbouche* (Paris: Séguier, 2004), p. 78. Henceforth referred to as : RT.
[44] *RT,* p. 76.
[45] Ibid.

hat, the old man concludes that his tarbouche is a fake.[46] The narrator complains: 'Tout au long de ce dialogue il désirait m'intimider, affirmer sa supériorité, ses connaissances, s'immiscer dans mon intimité et détruire en quelques secondes les traces d'un bonheur certain'.[47] The narrator's transformation of Moroccan culture and experience of freedom in the diaspora is debased by conservative forces from home, a theme I will develop in my discussion of *Infidèles*. The narrator nevertheless succeeds in meeting with the Franco-Egyptian man in a café in order to daydream about the Nile, 'parler et rêver autour du Nil', transforming the urban space decorated with Christmas decorations into an oasis of queer love grounded in Arab/Muslim culture. [48]

The transformation of western cultural references and spaces in order to recall Morocco amid the anonymity of Paris motivates another story, 'Voyeur à la rue de Clignancourt'. Feeling oppressed by the bustling anonymity of Paris ('sans interruption des voitures au bruit assourdissant') the narrator begins to peruse the building opposite to his.[49] He is inspired by Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rear Window*, in which James Stewart and Grace Kelly follow events in the neighbouring building from Stewart's window. At that moment the narrator re-appropriates Hitchcock, turning him into a Moroccan ('Quand mon cerveau vient à penser à ce cinéaste gros, qui aurait été superbe dans une djellaba fassiya blanche […]').[50] When he looks out of the window, he suddenly hears Arabic and perceives a man praying to Allah:

> J'avais devant moi un instant précieux durant lequel un musulman était en contact avec Dieu, il louait Dieu, Le priait, se prosternait et se relevait inlassablement pour Lui. […] Il priait avec ferveur et sa voix traversait la pièce où il était, puis la rue, et entrait jusqu'à chez moi m'apportant avec elle la paix. Et j'étais de plus en plus dans la paix, entouré de paix. […] Des images lointaines, presque oubliées, remontaient…Mon Maroc! [51]

[46] *RT,* p. 78.
[47] *RT,* pp. 78-9.
[48] *RT,* p. 79.
[49] *RT,* p. 68.
[50] *RT,* p. 67.
[51] *RT,* pp. 69-70.

The man leaves his imprint on the flat in Paris and dwells in it as he would in Morocco. He opens his window in order to overcome the distance between himself and God, introducing a moment of sacredness in the otherwise anonymous city space. In time, the narrator becomes acquainted with the family and would particularly be impressed by the son's dancing: 'Il finissait toujours ces séances par une sorte de danse à la fois moderne, européenne et en même temps marocaine, plus exactement berbère de la région de Sousse.'[52] The story illustrates these multiple cultural layers resulting from superimposing one culture or cultural habit on the other. In the same way as Taïa endows Hitchcock with Muslim characteristics, he also re-appropriates the plot of *Rear Window*. It changes from that performed by James Stewart and Grace Kelly into one performed by a Moroccan family living in Paris. The Moroccan family itself transforms this flat and urban space into a passing moment of Moroccan culture. They introduce plurality within, perhaps best epitomized by the son who combines elements of modern dance with a local dance from the region of Sousse. Thanks to this western film, the protagonist can connect with other Moroccan people who in a similar way 'make do' with the western culture and introduce plurality into singularity.

So far, both examples have shown how a first-person narrator uses tactics in order to survive in the anonymity of Paris as a queer Muslim. The narrators subvert either Moroccan cultural traditions in order to live out their sexuality, or pluralize the customary way of inhabiting western culture or western urban spaces. This tactical use of cultural references in order to accommodate their desire is also at the centre of the story 'Une nuit avec Amr'. It distinguishes itself from the other two in that the first-person narrator has a different reading

[52] *RT*, 71.

of Islam. He resorts to a more liberal interpretation of Islam, to the Sufi tradition which leaves more space to accommodate non-conforming desires.

In 'Une nuit avec Amr' the narrator is disquieted after a difficult phone call with his French lover and feels dispossessed of his Moroccan roots.[53] He imagines an amorous dialogue with a young Egyptian man called Amr whom he has not encountered personally but who features on a black-and-white photograph on his bedside table. In the narrator's imagination, the young man has gone through similar childhood tribulations as himself, namely misunderstandings and discrimination due to his ambiguous gendered nature.[54] Unlike the narrator, however, Amr joins a community of young men in Cairo who are pampered by older men.

> Il rejoignit un groupe de garçons comme lui. Ils se comprenaient, s'aimaient, ils s'aidaient à vivre. Il y avait Samir, Salim, Sobhi, Sarim, Tamer et Essam. Une bande qui vivait en liberté loin du conformisme. Des odalisques modernes passant la majorité de leurs journées à faire les chats. Chacun d'eux avait un homme plus ou moins âgé, la quarantaine. Ils étaient entretenus et cela ne les gênait guère.[55]

As Lagrange notes, same-sex practice among older and younger men, implicated in relations of pedagogy, alliance and patronage, occurred in daily life.[56] In the narrator's imagination, Amr lives the life in Cairo that the narrator himself was deprived of. He re-appropriates the topos of homoeroticism of Arab/Muslim civilization in order to root his desire in his own culture. This contrasts to the torments and sense of being uprooted he experiences in Paris

[53] *RT,* pp. 89-90.
[54] *RT*, pp. 93-4.
[55] *RT*, p. 94.
[56] Frédéric Lagrange, 'Homosexuality in Arabic Literature', p. 171. Furthermore, studying the formation of gender in Iranian modernity, Najmabadi argues that heteroerotic love in Iranian modernity was rooted in male homoerotic Sufi love in Qajar Iran (1789 to 1925) and earlier. For Sufi mystics, love and physical desire were associated with beauty and could be induced by a young woman as well as by a young man. Paradise, according to the Quran, is indeed populated by young female virgins (hur), and young beardless men (ghilman). As Najmabadi notes, if scholars are uncertain whether sexual functions are contributed to the ghilman in the Quran, Arabic and Persian literature, certainly in the 19th century, bestows these young men with eroticism. Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 11-19.

with his French lover. Furthermore, in the narrator's imagination, his love for Amr is also linked to beauty, reminiscent of a Sufi practice:

> J'imagine qu'on peut facilement fondre pour lui. Il est beau, beau avec chaleur sans fadeur, avec sincérité, avec la lumière de la nuit étoilée. Être avec lui, l'avoir pour soi, ne serait-ce qu'un petit moment, on devrait lui être reconnaissant: la beauté doit être toujours bonheur, source de bonheur.[57]

In pre-modern Islamic literature, love and beauty are not gender-dependent terms and male homoeroticism was often considered superior to female beauty and heterosexuality.[58] Desire, often sexually unfulfilled, could display itself in the practice of gazing. As Jim Waver remarks, the practice of gazing was directed towards young males in that, for some Muslim mystics, the beauty of the adolescent boy was a testimony to the beauty of God. Looking at adolescent beauty was a form of spiritual exercise.[59] Within this tormented night, the narrator glimpses spirituality thanks to Amr's beauty and grounds his desire in the practices of his own culture ('La beauté doit être toujours bonheur, source de bonheur'). Thanks to Amr, he can, in his imagination, visit Cairo and saunter along the Nile, a third space outside France and Morocco.

Writing Queer Love in *Une mélancolie arabe*

The diaspora as a space in which cultural legacies at home can be re-imagined and conservative forces shunned, is also thematized in Taïa's later work such as *Une mélancolie arabe*, published in 2008. Whereas in *Le rouge du tarbouche* the narrator negotiates tactically his Moroccan identity and his sexuality, he is in *Une mélancolie arabe* concerned to thematize same-sex relationships to other North African men in the diaspora and their connection to

[57] *RT*, p. 91.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Jim Waver, 'Vision and Passion; The Symbolism of Male Love in Islamic Mystical Literature', in *Islamic Homosexualities : Culture, History, and Literature,* ed. by Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1997), pp 107-31 (p. 108).

writing. It is in the diaspora that the narrator is able to chronicle his love for other men and declare his queer love. However, we have already seen in *Le rouge du tarbouche* that at moments the narrator's freedom in the diaspora is caught up in conservative forces at home. In a similar vein, his love for other men and the gesture of writing about that love is overtaken by incomprehension due to patriarchal and conservative views on love and relationships and what remains is an unrequited or perhaps more precisely disjointed form of love. *Une mélancolie arabe* also illustrates the narrator's concern to reconcile his sexuality with his Muslim background and Islam. This interest is accompanied by finding a new 'home', a place which offers him security amid the context of exile and migration. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the first part of *Une mélancolie arabe* evoked home as a traumatic place imbued with homophobic violence. However, Taïa complicates the paradigm of gay and lesbian subjects fleeing home in order to 'come out' in a western city twice in *Une mélancolie arabe*.[60] First, Paris enables him to live out his queerness but it is in Cairo, outside neo-colonial power dynamics between Morocco and France that the protagonist will experience a feeling of ontological security. Second, this feeling of 'home' is complicated by the fact that it is also illusionary in the sense that it is only via Egyptian films that he can root his queer desire into Arab culture. It is first and foremost in Egypt as the capital of film production in the Arab/Muslim world that Taïa grounds his queer Muslim love, thus cherishing illusion more than reality.[61]

The last part of *Une mélancolie arabe* is entitled 'Ecrire'. In it Abdellah remembers the relationship he had with Slimane, an Algerian, in Paris, a relationship which was closely interlinked with writing. In fact, Abdellah remembers how they would both write down their

[60] See Fortier, '"Coming home", Queer migrations and Multiple Evocations of Home', and Eng, 'Out Here and Over There: Queerness and Diaspora in Asian American Studies'.
[61] On Cairo and Egypt as the capital of Arabic cinematic production, see Andrew Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World!: Media, Arts, and Lifestyle* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005).

love on paper and trace, as it were, their daily life together ('Des mots, des mots écrits à deux, l'Algérien et moi. Le récit de notre amour écrit jour après jour, l'un à côté de l'autre.').[62] However, upon their separation Slimane took the diaries with himself, sending three months after their breakup to Abdellah only the extracts in which Abdellah would describe his admiration for Slimane. Abdellah remarks: 'Je ne pouvais pas m'empêcher de voir dans le geste de Slimane une volonté de censure. Enlever dans ce livre ce qui ne lui plaisait pas.'[63] As throughout *Une mélancolie arabe*, here Abdellah's love is not requited and he turns into the weakened amorous subject. In this last part, 'Ecrire', the torturous love affair Abdellah experiences with Slimane is astutely rendered by the narrative form. The reader is left with some extracts from the diary ('journal intime') in which Abdellah expresses the love he felt for Slimane. As we see in the discussion of *L'armée du salut*, diaries lend themselves to conveying the inner life of the writer. This immediacy and spontaneity, reflecting the subjectivity of love, is also illustrated in Abdellah's entries. Abdellah describes how he stalks Slimane, identifies with him ('Je suis Slimane'.), and retraces his life ('Slimane est né le 11 août 1964 à Biskra. Il est lion. Comme moi.'),[64] thus betraying his feelings. However, since the reader lacks Slimane's entries and his version of his love for Abdellah, Abdellah is rendered the weaker subject who pines after the lover who has left him.

The authenticity of this love for Slimane is emphasized by Abdellah who is keen to explain how he found the fragments Slimane sent him and what other proofs of their love he found together with the scraps of paper ('Il n'y avait pas que des mots dans l'enveloppe. En plus de quelques feuilles jaunes arrachées […], j'y ai trouvé quatre autres choses. Un bout de papier […]. Un bonbon Délice […]. La note d'un hôtel. Deux entrées de cinéma […].').[65] By

[62] *MA*, p. 113.
[63] *MA*, p. 124.
[64] *MA*, p. 120.
[65] *MA*, p. 114.

emphasizing the authenticity of these diary entries, Abdellah seemingly wants to prove the authenticity of their past love which seems to be made fragile by the absence of Slimane's written testimony.

In order to convey a more truthful image of this relationship, Taïa adds to the documents sent by Slimane a written testimony of the events they experienced together. In fact, according to Abdellah's description, there were brief moments in this relationship in which the freedom of the diaspora afforded them the possibility of re-inventing Islam, but also re-inventing the western egalitarian model of same-sex love, and to ground it in their own culture. However, increasingly, the life-style outside given structures was overshadowed by Slimane's conservatism. Yet at some moments they could transform the given structures and ideologies to their own advantage, as observed by de Certeau in his discussion of the tactics. They introduced a certain playfulness and freedom within these constraints. In the same way that they inhabited the flat in Paris and transformed it into their own space, they re-invested same-sex love with their own cultural elements from the Arabic/Muslim tradition.

The narrator recalls how Slimane would enter the flat every day with the utterance '*Labass*, Sidi Abdellah?'.[66] The narrator would kneel down, take off Slimane's shoes, and wash his feet with a bucket they bought at a shop near Strasbourg Saint-Denis.[67] It is then a matter of transforming behavioural patterns usually related to heterosexual Muslim couples and transposing them onto homosexual couples. It is also a matter of re-inventing the use of objects – here a bucket – in order to adapt them to their own use. Furthermore, so as to ground their love and physical attraction for each other in their own culture, they leaf through the

[66] *MA*, p. 128.
[67] Ibid.

Anthologie de la poésie arabe.[68] In the same way, they try to free Arabic words referring to non-conforming sexuality in Moroccan Arabic from negative connotations in order to live their sexuality without shame ('Dans mon oreille, c'étaient des poèmes, dans mon coeur un philtre d'amour et dans mon bas-ventre l'image de ton corps, de ton corps épais et nu.').[69] Shunning the mosques and daily prayers due to their queer relationship ('Notre lien était sacrilège aux yeux de l'islam. Tu n'arrivais pas à te débarraser de ce sentiment.'), they resort to the Christian Church of Ste. Bernard in order to re-invent their faith there. The protagonist says 'j'avais besoin de croire':

> Les églises, ce n'était pas pour nous à l'origine, cela ne représentait rien dans notre mémoire spirituelle. Rien ne nous attachait à elles et, pourtant, nous y sommes retournés plusieurs fois et nous avons fini par y découvrir une nouvelle spiritualité. Nous l'avons inventée ensemble, cette religion, cette foi, cette chapelle, ce coin sombre et lumineux, ce temps en dehors du temps. Ce christianisme non loin de Barbès.[70]

What is tentatively exposed here is of crucial importance in *Infidèles.* They use different references and different sites and spaces in order to invent a religion which accepts their queerness. It does not matter whether it is a version of Islam or Christianity suffused with the spirit of Barbès ('ce christianisme non loin de Barbès'), what matters is that they can use a framework, subvert it to carve out a space for desire which is forbidden in their religion. The different usages of western and Christian culture are also somewhat reflected in the language and echo de Certeau's theory of the use of language by the speaker ('les locuteurs, dans la langue où ils glissent les messages de leur langue natale et, par l'accent, par des "tours" propres, etc., leur propre histoire').[71] Reminiscing about their time together, Abdellah writes: 'Tu croyais aux mêmes choses que moi. Les saints. Les djinns. La sorcellerie. La superstition.

[68] *MA*, p. 131.
[69] *MA,* p. 133.
[70] *MA,* p. 134.
[71] De Certeau, pp. 49-50.

Les encens. Le *jaoui*, la *chabba*, le *harmal*, le f*asoukh*, tu savais ce que c'était'. [72] He infuses the language with words and images from his own culture, pluralizing it and wrestling it from ideas around purity. *Une mélancolie arabe* illustrates the different ways in which the narrator subverts and re-invents ossified structures and practices. He breaks rigid gender ideologies related to heterosexual couples, makes a space for queer culture in Arab/Muslim culture, and re-appropriates a Christian church and the French language. As de Certeau notes, rather than ossifying into identities, migration and acculturation pluralize pre-given structures and invent new, so far unknown, ways of being and cohabitation.[73]

However, in the narrator's and Slimane's attempt to build a relationship outside North Africa with its rigid gender norms, conservative elements hinder him from investing in and re-inventing Muslim homosexual love. Old behavioural patterns creep in which imprison the narrator: 'Je suis devenu une femme arabe soumise pour toi. Chaque jour, je devais finir tout ce que j'avais à faire avant ton retour vers 17 heures et tout préparer pour ton confort.'[74] Slimane's conservative frame of mind impedes the narrator's re-invention of their amorous life away from home. Their re-invention of gender structures in order to ground their queer love is somewhat thwarted by the conservatism thought he had left behind. This is also reflected in the form. Rather than having both Abdellah's and Slimane's version of their love story which would reflect their egalitarian relationship, the reader is left with Abdellah's diaries and letters, thus reflecting the unequal power-balance in their relationship.

Perhaps it is during the narrator's visit to Cairo that he feels for the first time a kind of security. Being one of the main religious centres for Muslims, and a cultural hub in the

[72] *MA*, p. 130.
[73] De Certeau, p. 51-2.
[74] *MA*, p. 130.

Arab/Muslim world, Cairo allows the protagonist to root his queer desire in his own religion and culture. As the site per se of cinematic production in the Arab/Muslim world in the mid-20th century, with its countless cinemas, Cairo stimulates the narrator to, on the one hand, project his desires onto the screen and on the other to fictionalize himself, a tendency we saw in the first chapter. This suggests that his invention of queer home is as much an illusion as real. This oscillation between illusion and reality is exemplified by the very reason the narrator visits Cairo. He accompanies the young director Karim, who intends to make a film about his father and his country – Egypt – neither of which he has ever known.[75] Karim's capturing in a documentary the roots of his family and himself occur in a way parallel to the narrator's discovery of his roots. Whilst Karim re-discovers the hotel where his parents met for the first time – situated at the foot of the pyramids in Giza, the very cradle of Egypt – the narrator in a parallel move rediscovers though Karim his own cultural roots. In Cairo he can for the first time articulate and experience his non-conforming sexuality within Arab/Muslim culture. It is in the cinema, whilst seeing Arabic films and film stars, and fleetingly engaging in sexual experiences with another man, that he experiences a feeling of home. Watching the films, the narrator reflects:

> Mon rêve de toujours. Le cinéma par la peau. La transgression naturelle. Les corps dans l'intensité sexuelle. Des va-et-vient entre la salle immense avec orchestre et balcon et les toilettes. Un film. Deux films. Des stars. Adil Imam. Yousra. Nour Cherif. Leïla Eloui. Et la langue arabe comme lieu d'origine, espace réel, mental, pour oser se redéfinir, dire tout, révéler tout et, un jour, écrire tout. Même l'amour interdit. L'écrire avec un nouveau nom. Un nom digne. Un poème.[76]

The cinema in Cairo provides a space in which he can define and articulate his love for men in his original language. This is corroborated by the fact that thanks to Karim's filming of his father's life, the narrator's father (and with him, his origins) also comes to life again. Having

[75] *MA*, p. 65.
[76] *MA*, p.110.

saved the narrator from electrocution in his childhood, the narrator remembers: 'Mon père à moi, mon sauveur, l'homme qui m'avait ramené à la vie après mon électrocution, était là, lui aussi. Mort en 1996. Toujours vivant. Pour la première fois au Caire.'[77] It is in Cairo, thanks to Karim's films, that his ancestry, and by extension, his own self and culture resurrect. Cairo, as a 'home' place, oscillates between the real and the unreal, fiction and non-fiction, reminiscent of 'home' in Rachid O.'s *Ce qui reste,* in which reality is also interwoven with fiction, as I will show. My discussion of *Le rouge du tarbouche* and *Une mélancolie arabe* has shown how the diaspora becomes a place where traditional cultural scripts can be re-invented. I have also shown that Taïa is increasingly concerned to find a place, a 'home', in which he can root his queer love in his own culture and in his own religion. If this has been tentatively articulated in *Le rouge du tarbouche* and in *Une mélancolie arabe*, it will be firmly stated in *Infidèles*. Also, both works illustrate that the freedom of the diaspora is always caught up by conservative and nationalist forces, a tension which continues to be pronounced in *Infidèles.*

Towards a Queer Muslim Episteme in Abdellah Taïa's *Infidèles*

The diaspora as a site conducive to the re-invention of a queer Muslim episteme stands at the centre of Taïa's novel *Infidèles*, published in 2012. The novel, perhaps more than any of his previous works, contrasts Morocco, depicted as a country in which women and minorities are oppressed and as an intolerant place ossified in patriarchal structures under the reign of Hassan II, with diasporic sites such as Cairo and Brussels functioning as fertile places for reinvention and subversion of existing ideologies. Drawing again upon de Certeau's observation of the tactics used by the oppressed in their everyday life, we will see that, thanks

[77] *MA,* 74.

to the freedom the diaspora affords, the protagonists re-play the scripts and ideologies available to them in order to find interstices and spaces of freedom in oppressive, pre-structured systems and ideologies, here first and foremost Islam. *Infidèles* is pioneering in the sense that the author offers a reading and a way to reconcile his faith with his sexuality. It accurately ties in with Hall's point that diasporic sites contribute to production and transformation of identities.[78]

Set in Morocco in the 1970s, *Infidèles* recounts the story of Slima – an anagram of Islam – a prostitute-mother ('la pute mère'), and her son Jallal, whose name is reminiscent of the Sufist Jalal al-din Rumi. The novel is divided into four sections. The first, entitled 'Des soldats', recounts Slima's and Jallal's lives as pariahs in Hay Salam in Salé against the backdrop of Morocco's war against the Polisario Front, an organization aiming at ending the presence of Morocco in the western Sahara. When they befriend an American soldier, the Moroccan secret service accuses the mother of collaborating with the Polisario Front and put her in prison, where she is subjected to torture and sexual abuse. In the second part, 'Par amour', Slima manages to smuggle her son out of the country and to entrust him to a woman in Cairo, where she herself will flee once released from prison in Morocco. In Cairo she meets a rich Belgian businessman and Muslim convert called Mouad, with whom she will travel to Mecca where she eventually dies. In the third section, with the eponymous title 'Infidèles', Jallal moves from Cairo to Belgium where he meets Mahmoud, another Belgian converted to Islam, with whom he travels back to Morocco in order to carry out a suicide bombing in Casablanca. In the last section, 'Dieu', they both find their way to Paradise where Marilyn Monroe, now goddess, functions as the guard.

[78] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora'.

In contrast to *Le rouge du tarbouche* and *Une mélancolie arabe*, in which Taïa attempted to combine his sexuality with Islam, Taïa here re-invents Islam in order to create a religion of acceptance and love. Sociologists and theologians have questioned whether a possible reconciliation between Islam and homosexuality is possible. In the chapter 'On being homosexual and Muslim: conflict and challenges', the sociologist Asifa Siraj, for example, interviews several Muslims who identify as homosexual, focusing specifically upon the relationship between their gay and Muslim identities.[79] Most of the candidates felt compelled, by avowing their preference for the same sex, to negate their Muslim identity. They felt that adherence to the Muslim faith meant believing in a theological system with practices which condemned and stigmatized certain sexual acts.[80] Few, however, managed to rebuild their Muslim identity by re-thinking their relationship with God. Rather than adhering to religiously informed attitudes concerning the importance of heteronormativity and procreation, they created a more intimate and personal relationship with God, emphasizing the concepts of love, compassion, and mercy – characteristics closely associated with God which will also characterize God in *Infidèles*.[81] In their understanding, echoed in Taïa's work, Islam's prohibition of homosexuality emerges not from a sacred decree but arises naturally from norms and values. In their view, God, in his love, accepts people the way they are.[82] However, those surveyed often commented that Islam lacks a theological discourse that would enable them to delineate a position for themselves within the Quran or the Hadiths. Some groups and organizations would thus challenge the Quran and its interpretation in order to foster wider legitimacy for their sexuality. Thus they would, in particular, challenge the traditional interpretation of the parable of the prophet Lut, according to which homosexuality

[79] Asifa Siraj, 'On Being Homosexual and Muslim: Conflicts and Challenge', in *Islamic Masculinities*, Ouzgane Lahouche, ed. (London: Zed Books, 2006), pp. 202-216 (pp. 204-209)
[80] Siraj, p. 205.
[81] Siraj, p. 206.
[82] Ibid.

is condemned because of the male rape committed by the people in Sodom.[83] According to their reading of the passage in the Quran, however, people in Sodom were killed not only for their sexual relationships with men but for their inhospitable nature.[84] Thus gay- and lesbian-friendly interpreters of the Quran often make the point that the Quran and the Hadiths have been exclusively read by heterosexual males, thus creating a hegemonic heterosexual context from which to interpret Islam.[85] This view of Islam being used by politicians in order to establish a system of oppression against women and sexual minorities is also shared by Abdellah Taïa who remarked in 'La vraie liberté n'existe nulle part':

> En fait, quand on me pose la question de savoir s'il faut concilier la foi musulmane avec l'homosexualité, au fond, la question ne se pose même pas pour moi. […] Elle se pose par rapport à des personnes qui, à un certain moment, se donnent le pouvoir parce qu'elles estiment incarner, à un moment donné, ce qu'est l'autorité de l'Islam: donc ramener les gens sur le droit chemin. […] des gens qui utilisent un pouvoir religieux pour vous l'imposer et pour vous restreindre. Et cela, en fin de compte, est une histoire de pouvoir, de politique.[86]

Like Siraj's respondents, Taïa identifies an official reading of Islam that enables politicians to gain power over people. As my discussion of *Le rouge du tarbouche* and *Une mélancolie arabe* has shown, Taïa is also concerned to create a more intimate and liberal version of Islam in which there is a place for sexual minorities and social pariahs.

In *Infidèles* Taïa certainly inscribes himself into a tradition that conceives of God as an all-merciful figure who acts first and foremost out of love. However, he takes this even further by

[83] Siraj, p. 207.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid. In the chapter 'The Social Construction of Religious Realities by Queer Muslims', Christopher Grant Kelly similarly notes the impossibility of most Muslims to combine their faith with their sexuality. At best, they only achieve a very personal, intimate relationship with God outside official Islamic scholarly doctrine and practice. God, in their view, becomes a personal God. Like Siraj and Rahman, Grant Kelly notes that queer Muslims often do not see the possibility of combining their Muslim identity with the homosexual identity. In a similar vein to Rahman, Grant Kelly also argues that within the gay community they cannot be Muslim and within the Muslim community they cannot be gay. See Christopher Grant Kelly, 'The Social Construction of Religious Realities by Queer Muslims', in *Islam and Homosexuality*, Samar Habib, ed., II (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), pp. 223-45 (pp. 224-25).
[86] Panizzon, 'La vraie liberté n'existe nulle part', p. 205.

creating a God and a religion which includes and protects sexual minorities and social pariahs. Rather than looking for inconsistencies in the orthodox exegeses of the Quran, as discussed above, he radically subverts the holy text or adapts it so that queer desires are accommodated and included. Through this subversion, he consciously challenges the heterosexual and patriarchal reading of the Quran, God, and religion institutions. As already seen, he inscribes himself in the tradition of Jean Sénac who as a queer outsider similarly denounced religious institutions and, more importantly, also grounded his sexuality in a re-invented Islam.

Although not set in the diaspora, 'Des soldats' describes how Slima, Jallal, and Saâdia, Slima's step-mother, forge some space of queer belonging in a Morocco ossified by official doctrines and patriarchal ideologies. The re-invention of a life outside patriarchy is foregrounded through the story of Saâdia, who survives thanks to her skills as what one would today call a sex therapist ('introductrice').[87] Being solicited during the wedding night to help the newly weds to fulfil their duties, she would, once her advice has been acted upon, be rejected by society and treated as a prostitute ('Ils te donneront de l'argent, te souriront, et, dès que tu seras partie, ils te maudiront.').[88] In a system which stresses the importance of gender roles and the chastity of women on the wedding night, she would be perceived as an outcast. In her eyes, however, she is very conscious of the hypocrisy of the society and conscious of her role of maintaining that hypocrisy and balance in a society which insists on veiling everything sexual ('Les hommes ne savent rien. Les femmes ont peur. On fait tout pour les garder ainsi. Soumises. Peureuses. Bien comme il faut.').[89] Like other protagonists throughout Taïa's work, Saâdia resorts to tactics in order to maintain her equilibrium and strength against the oppressive structures which envelop her.

[87] Abdellah Taïa, *Infidèles* (Paris: Seuil, 2012), p. 43.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.

Memories of her ancestry and legends around female figures guide her through the existing order which turns her into a pariah. She recalls her Berber ancestry which has been suppressed by Moroccan official history and politics and she hopes that these ancestors will also guide her step-daughter, Slima, through life ('Le berbère. Perdu. Oublié. Négligé. Écrasé. Caché. Mais toujours vrai.').[90] Furthermore, she traces her ancestry back to Kahina, the Berber queen who resisted the Arab conquest of North Africa and whose culture has been erased by the dominant Arab/Muslim culture:

> Il n'y a qu'elle, qu'Elle de vraie. La grande femme. La Berbère. La guerrière qui a combattu les Arabes, il y a des siècles, quand ils ont commencé à nous envahir, à nous obliger à changer de peau. Elle était la femme courage. La maligne. L'obstination. La liberté. La fierté. […] Inspire-toi d'elle, de ses gestes, de sa fidélité à elle-même, à son corps, à son instinct. A son sexe.[91]

Having endured the hardship of working outside the practices and customs imposed by Islam, the Berber language and the Berber queen Kahena bestow her with victory and righteousness amid injustice. Rejected, but at the same time hailed, revealing the hypocrisy of a society which keeps women and their sexuality at bay, the queen Kahena, in Saâdia's imagination, embodies freedom, in this instance freedom over her sexuality and over her body, something the women Saâdia works for do not have. Reflecting de Certeau's observation about the tactical use of legends, Saâdia re-appropriates the goddess in order to rehabilitate herself and her feminine identity within the oppressive, misogynistic structure of Moroccan society.[92] If for Saâdia Kahena functions as an example, the re-invented figure of Marilyn Monroe in *River of No Return* functions as an example for her stepdaughter Slima and her son. In a

[90] *Infidèles*, p. 41.
[91] *Infidèles*, p. 48.
[92] See, for further discussion of La Kahina, for example Jane Hiddleston's 'Rewriting the Past: Literature and History' in *Writing after Postcolonialism: Francophone North African Literature in Transition* which briefly discusses Kahina's role as an inspired female leader and Berber resistant.
(London; New York : Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 68-92 (pp. 84-85).

society ridden with hypocrisy, in which the Imam takes advantage of her services, whilst not hesitating to condemn her life, Marilyn Monroe, who in a similar vein was exploited by Hollywood patriarchy, whilst nevertheless achieving fame through her talent, serves as a guiding figure.[93]

The diaspora as a site of freedom caught up by conservative forces is then highlighted in the second and third chapter. It is Cairo and then Brussels that empowers the protagonists to re-invent their lives and religion beyond the patriarchal structures propagated in the Morocco of Hassan II. In both chapters the protagonists interrogate the heterosexual and patriarchal interpretation of Islam and thus continue Saâdia's project of re-negotiating conservative religion in order to find a space of queer belonging. The chapter 'Par amour', an allusion to Slima's Belgian lover who converted to Islam out of love for her, contrasts Slima's experiences in prison to her second life in Cairo where she re-invents an alternative religion. This explicit coupling of Islam with patriarchy is demonstrated during the episode in which Slima is tortured for treachery by Hassan II's sergeants, because of her alleged links to the Polisario Front. Slima remembers how, throughout her ill-treatment, the muezzin would call for prayer which would incite her torturers to find other methods to double her pain ('Un muezzin se met soudain à appeler à la prière. Je pense immédiatement à mes tortionnaires, que ces appels vers Dieu excitaient encore plus, qui leur donnaient comme un encouragement pour me violer encore plus fort.').[94] These memories surface later in Cairo and are close, it seems, to Taïa's own memories who, as we have seen in *Une mélancolie arabe*, underwent similar ill-treatment by his male neighbours.[95]

[93] *Infidèles*, pp. 70-4.
[94] *Infidèles*, p. 110.
[95] *MA*, p. 28.

If Morocco has become for Slima the site of hetero-patriarchal trauma, a place to which she can no longer return, Cairo becomes a site which provides her enough freedom – through its fusion of Arab/Muslim and western culture – to re-invent herself. Cairo's liberal spirit is highlighted at the beginning of the chapter in which heteronormative and patriarchal structures are questioned in a lively discussion at the hairdresser's. Debating the skills of Samira Saïd and Aziz Jalal, two Moroccan female singers of important reputation in the Arab/Muslim world and who made their careers outside Morocco, the hairdresser objects to Aziz Jalal's decision to give up her career to marry a Saudi businessman who prohibits her from performing in public and forces her to put on the veil.[96] Furthermore, the treacherous rumours surrounding Samira Saïd's life, who, apparently, made a career thanks to countless lovers from Saudi Arabia, is attributed by Slima to Morocco's tendency to slander women who make successful careers.[97] What is perhaps most important is that both singers re-invented themselves outside Morocco and therefore function as role models for Slima. They have a similar function as La Kahina and Marilyn Monroe in that they embody, in Slima's eyes, independence achieved outside patriarchal structures. Listening to one of Saïd's songs, the narrator remarks: 'Elle prononçait les mots comme s'ils étaient des coups de canon. Elle réinventait l'arabe, la façon de dire les mots arabes, égyptiens, de les chanter.'[98]

Samira Saïd's bold re-invention of Arabic is echoed in Slima's re-negotation of religion. Having married her Belgian lover Mouad in Cairo and converted him to Islam, she conceives of the necessity of reinventing Islam and create an approach to God outside orthodox and conservative practices. Convincing Mouad about the need to find a belief, she asserts:

> Nous apprendrons à aimer Dieu, Mouad, à Le redécouvrir en nous. Pour cela, je n'ai que les mots arabes, les préceptes musulmans. Nous allons les utiliser. Mais nous ne nous laisserons pas enfermer dedans. […] Nous sommes musulmans comme les

[96] *Infidèles*, pp. 79-85.
[97] *Infidèles*, p. 84.
[98] *Infidèles*, p. 88.

> autres sans être tout à fait comme les autres. Il n'y a que toi et moi qui les savons. Nous réinventerons cette religion. Nous nous en servirons pour questionner notre rapport au monde, aux autres. À Dieu, encore et encore.[99]

As we have seen, it is less a matter of inventing a global religion or global figures, as Provencher observers, but rather using available Islamic precepts and Arab words from which to re-invent the doctrines and faith to make it more inclusive.[100] It recalls de Certeau's observation of the usages by the weak of oppressive structures in order to forge a space of inclusiveness. Authoritative usage does not allow for play in the doctrine, whereas Slima precisely subverts these ('pas nous enfermer dedans') in order to rebuild her faith anew. She does so by using popular western culture, finding inspiration through Marilyn Monroe, but also by re-reading the Quran. It will be her son Jallal, however, who will accomplish this mission by re-inventing, despite his homosexuality, a new relationship with Allah, and by using available scripts in order to change it and make it accommodating to queer subjects.

From the vantage point of the diaspora in Cairo, Slima can, like the singers Aziz Jalal and Samira Saïd, re-creates her beliefs. Like the two singers, she renews her life in Cairo and, furthermore, reads the Quran afresh:

> Le Maroc? C'est quoi, le Maroc? Un pays? Une idée? Un sentiment? […] J'ai quitté ce pays, j'ai quitté ce monde. J'ai quitté aussi la langue de ce pays, son arabe, la manière dont on dit les mots arabes là-bas. […] J'ai le droit de tout reconstruire. Repartir de zéro. Maintenant: 1988. Ici, chez vous. Vous me comprenez? Vous m'accordez ce droit? Le Caire n'est pas qu'à vous, les Egyptiens. Cette ville est aussi à moi. A tous les Arabes sans racines. Je la choisis. [101]

It is in Cairo that Slima finds the determination to detach herself from her place of origin, from her home, as it were, and start her life afresh. Morocco, the Darija, its way of speaking

[99] *Infidèles*, p. 121.
[100] Provencher, '"Je suis terroriste, pédé et le fils de Marilyn Monroe"; Cinematic Stars and Transfiliation in Abdellah Taïa's *Infidèles*'.
[101] *Infidèles*, pp. 83-4.

Arabic, are linked to too many traumatic memories for her, linked to patriarchy and the reign of Hassan II, and recall thus the place of no return as has been illustrated by Fortier.[102] As seen already in *Une mélancolie arabe*, Cairo allows Slima to not only re-invent her religion and find a family outside normativity, composed of saints and actresses, but also to find some roots and create a new home.

The re-negotiation of Islamic faith from the site of the diaspora also drives the chapter 'Infidèles'. The title already suggests the protagonists' disaffection from traditional practices of Islam. However, rather than creating global religion or global identity, Taïa articulates most clearly a queer Muslim faith. References to Islam abound. First, the protagonists emphasize the peaceful side of Islam, moving away from patriarchal and dogmatic beliefs, in order to conceive of Allah as an all-loving figure, inclusive of social pariahs and queer subjects. Second, Taïa links this concept of Allah to a more liberal interpretation of Islam, such as that practised by Sufi mystics. Finally, the protagonists radically transforms episodes, such as from the life of Mohammed, in order to invent a queer friendly version of it. Within this oppressive structure, they find ways and 'make do' with this creation in order to accommodate their own queer desire.

The chapter 'Infidèles' begins with the Arabic script from the Quran, with the ninety-nine names of Allah, thus already emphasizing the loving, inclusive character of Allah which contrasts starkly with the exclusionary vision of conservative interpreters of Islam. This charitable, loving strand of Islam is in turn also embodied by Jallal who takes care of Mahmoud who is ill in the hospital in Brussels and with whom he falls in love. It is then the terminally ill Mahmoud who initiates Jallal on a new journey of love embedded in the Muslim

[102] Fortier, '"Coming home", Queer Migrations and Multiple Evocations of Home'.

faith. He re-invents Mohammed's night journey in order for them to achieve the divine ('On montera le cheval ailé mythique, le Bouraq, comme le prophète Mohamed. Il nous y emmènera.').[103] By listening to Mahmoud's re-invention of the motif of night-journey, Jallal understands that Mahmoud invites him into a new form of sacredness, outside the dogma of received interpretation ('J'ai compris qu'il m'initiait à sa langue intérieure, à sa façon d'utiliser les mots, de les attacher les uns aux autres, de les réinventer, de les prononcer avec un souffle nouveau.').[104] Jallal discovers a new side of Islam, namely the charitable, loving dimension.

The poet and mystic Djalal al-Din Rumi, whom others conceive of as 'trop libres, trop blasphématoires', functions as their patron and guides them in their love.[105] Thanks to Mahmoud in Brussels and to the mystic poet al-Din Rumi, Jallal experiences a new way of believing in God:

> Djalal al-Din Rumi sera notre témoin. Le témoin de notre rencontre. […] La foi peut revenir. L'islam, comme pour ma mère à la fin de sa vie, pouvait être autre chose que des interdictions de penser, d'exister, de s'affranchir. L'islam, Mahmoud et moi nous l'avons petit à petit réinventé. Nous y avons connu l'amour. L'Amour. À notre petite échelle, nous l'avons fait avancer. [106]

Thanks to the Sufist, they re-invent love in a more progressive and inclusive way. It is thanks to the more liberal version of Sufism that they can cast aside prohibitions and restrictions. Owing to the confluences of the diaspora, of Mahmoud (at the outset a Belgian who later converted into Islam) and of Sufism, all elements alien to conservative Islamic orthodoxy, they re-appropriate Islam.

[103] *Infidèles*, p. 147.
[104] *Infidèles*, p. 146.
[105] *Infidèles,* p. 149.
[106] Ibid.

This re-invention of love and, one could say, the re-invention of a queer friendly Islam, born in the diaspora, is then transported back to Casablanca. For reasons at first unclear to Jallal, Mahmoud, as it turns out, having been radicalized, plans to carry out a suicide bombing in Casablanca. Questioning this mission of Islam, Jallal nevertheless follows Mahmoud in order to avenge his mother but also, through this extreme act, to offer his country a different version of Islam ('L'islam libre, ouvert, n'existait plus. L'amour y était inconnu, étranger, désespéré. C'était cela notre mission: donner à voir l'amour. Par la mort. Par un acte extrême.').[107]

It is not by coincidence that they prepare themselves before the suicide bombing and celebrate their last night of love in Hassan II's mosque in Casablanca ('Son odeur était étrange, glaciale, froide, terrifiante.').[108] Thanks to repetition of the ninety-nine names of Allah and of rituals they invent they fill the space with love. Inspired by Al-Roumi, they both begin to spin until they achieve a state of trance in which the feminine and the masculine no longer exist ('La voix de Mahmoud est revenue. Elle était en transe. Douce, violente. Féminine. Masculine.').[109] They fill for a moment Hassan II's mosque, emblem of patriarchy and an authoritarian regime, with a love beyond convention and beyond dogmatic readings. Jallal's final words in front of the crowd before he is blown up neatly conjoins his queerness with Islam: 'Nous ne somme pas des pédés…Nous sommes des frères…Deux frères dans l'Amour…Dieu est avec nous…'.[110] Rejecting the pejorative term 'pédés', calling themselves brothers united in love, they find death while reclaiming Allah for themselves. In this moment they offer a more liberal version of Islam by embedding it in practices handed down by Sufism.

[107] *Infidèles*, p. 158.
[108] Ibid.
[109] *Infidèles*, p. 162.
[110] *Infidèles*, p. 170.

As Dialmy and others have remarked, Sufists conceive of different, more liberal ways to attain the divine.[111] The passage in question reflects one such Sufi practice discussed by Dialmy in which more conservative notions of the body as a means for procreation are relinquished. In order to attain the divine, the body turns into a 'consumed' body ('corps consumé'), which no longer is subjected to the gender divide but in its transcendence of the terrestrial reflects the divine.[112] Furthermore, by discarding negative connotations of homosexuality but on the contrary by embedding it within the divine, Taïa also draws on Sufist practices which would not always be opposed to same-sex love as a means to attain God. As Dialmy notes, however, Sufi religion has often been silenced by fundamentalist and conservative vision of Islam which conceive only of one way to be a devout Muslim.[113] Especially when it comes to the body and sexuality, according to conservative vision, as we have also seen with Bouhdiba, the body is gendered in order to procreate. Taïa's vision is thus not solely invented, but inscribes itself in more liberal version of Islam. He draws on and resuscitates these liberal practices in order to carve out a space for his queer love in Islam.[114]

Le rouge du tarbouche, *Une mélancolie arabe* and *Infidèles* reveal the importance of the diaspora in Taïa's work. Paris, Cairo and Brussels enable his protagonists to re-invent Arab/Muslim culture and Islam in order to accommodate their queerness. Furthermore, my discussion has shown that it is also in the diaspora that his protagonist are empowered to write about queer love. However, the protagonists' re-negotiation of more liberal forms of life is nevertheless made fragile by conservative forces at home which either haunt these lives

[111] Abdessamad Dialmy, *Le féminisme au Maroc* (Rabat : Toubkal, 2008). See also Frédéric Lagrange 'Homosexuality in Arabic Literature', in *Imagined Masculinities, Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*; Jim Waver, Waver 'Vision and Passion; The Symbolism of Male Love in Islamic Mystical Literature', in *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*.
[112] Dialmy, p. 259.
[113] Dialmy, p. 274.
[114] See also Ludovic Mohamed Zahed's work in which he reconciles his homosexuality with Islam, for example in *Le Coran et la chair* (Paris: Max Milo, 2012).

through memory or take on presence in the diasporic sites. Home, the site of origins, can never be left behind, and taints Taïa's diasporic experiences, an aspect which is also emphasized in Rachid O.'s diasporic adventures.

Diaspora and Queer Home in Rachid O.'s *Plusieurs vies* and *Ce qui reste*

Rachid O.'s diasporic experiences are no less complex than Taïa's. Whereas Taïa's protagonists in the diaspora write about their queer love and can ground their queer desire in Muslim faith, Rachid O.'s protagonists recreate new forms of couplings and a 'new' home in the diaspora. However, as in Taïa's work, Rachid O.'s protagonists do not leave local forms of sexuality behind in order to embrace the visibility inherent in western gay identity. In the same way as Taïa's protagonists have to find tactics to accommodate their need to ground their sexuality in Muslim faith, Rachid O.'s protagonists have to find their ways amongst oppressive systems in order to live out desires which do not fit easily into western sexual minority politics with its championing of visibility. Rachid O.'s protagonists transform the oppressive structures of urban space in order to live out their sexual desire which cannot easily be categorized, fluctuating between homosexuality and homosociality. This fluctuating desire for other men, now outspoken, now shamefully silenced, recalls Ross Chambers' concept of loiterly subjectivity in his discussion of the sexual cruiser to which I will return.[115] However, from the distance of the Parisian diaspora, the narrator is emboldened to exert a subtle critique of the silence and hypocrisy which surrounds all intimate matters at home. Coming into contact with western urban sites that grant freedom and secure spaces to the LGBTQ community leads the narrator to question more familiar concepts of shame and

[115] Ross Chambers, *Loiterature* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

silence surrounding all matters sexual at home. Furthermore, consonant with Fortier's theory of re-locating queerness at home, the narrator projects queer roots in his family.[116]

Furthermore, if we have seen in the preceding chapter that Rachid O. has been framed by French intellectual figures, he frees himself of that influence here and will recreate his identity as a writer. In fact, in *Ce qui reste*, published in 2003, the narrator no longer emphasizes sexual affairs of his protagonists, nor does he dwell on childhood sexuality. The way the protagonists live out their sexuality in the diaspora is still very indebted to notions around silence and shame which define intimacy at home in Morocco. The narrator in fact opposes visibility of gay sexuality with a more discrete notion of eroticism as he is used to from home and which recalls the last episode in *L'enfant ébloui* in which the narrator is ashamed of telling his father the truth about the subject matter of the book. His rather direct, naïve style, furthermore, has given way to more complex, self-reflective writing, echoing the subject-matter in which he reflects on the fluctuation of his desire.

I would like to return to de Certeau and his theory of the tactics the individual employs in a given, pre-structured, or oppressive system in order to shed light on the narrator's practices in *Plusieurs vies* and *Ce qui reste.* Whereas in the chapter 'Cultures populaires' de Certeau is interested in the popular usage of culture and religion by the people, de Certeau examines in his chapter 'Marches dans la ville' the tactics of the city-dweller in urban space. De Certeau contrasts what he calls the 'concept-city' (that built and conceived of by architects, politicians, and other decision-makers) to the practices of the city-dweller.[117] For de Certeau, the 'concept-city' is founded upon ideologized, urbanist discourse. The city is an 'espace

[116] Fortier, '"Coming home", Queer migrations and Multiple Evocations of Home'.
[117] De Certeau, p. 143.

propre' which represses all the physical and mental elements which would have a polluting, compromising effect on the urban space and impede the functioning of the citizen's life.[118] This 'espace propre' always transforms and disciplines the polluting or disturbing elements and integrates them into the urban space so as to control it.[119]

According to de Certeau, the city-dweller produces and superimposes singular practices on this urban network of surveillance. These city-dwelling practices – which de Certeau calls 'pratiques étrangères' – always escape the totalizing, disciplinary gaze of the city authorities.[120] On this disciplinary urban space, the city-dweller superimposes 'une ville *transhumante*, ou métaphorique, [qui] s'insinue ainsi dans le texte clair de la ville planifiée et lisible'.[121] This 'migratory' and metaphoric city is constituted by the infinite movements and trajectories of the city-dweller, in other words, the walking practices which transform the city into a metaphor. The city-dweller, motivated by his own desires, always transgresses the determined routes available to him by following different, new, or prohibited ones.[122] Efforts to police the city and space are then tactically renegotiated, subverted by the walking practices of the city-dweller.[123] The city, for de Certeau, is built in the end by an infinite number of footsteps and trajectories of the walker and turns into a 'non-lieu' or a 'lieu-rêvé' constituted by the footsteps of its dwellers.[124]

The tactics adopted by the urban-dweller to avoid any disciplinary urban constraints elucidate the narrators' practices in western urban space in *Plusieurs vies* and *Ce qui reste*. Banished on

[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] De Certeau, p. 142.
[121] Ibid.
[122] De Certeau, p. 149.
[123] Ibid.
[124] De Certeau, pp. 156-8.

the one hand by homophobia inherent in the Arab/Muslim community and on the other by 'Muslim phobia' widespread in the French gay community, not really fitting into either of the two categories, the narrators' footsteps lead them outside predetermined routes, outside sites such as the gay ghettos or North African communities. Thus the narrators constantly have to subvert and renegotiate available routes in order to avoid sites and places informed by ideologies regarding gender roles, sexuality, or ethnicity. Rather, they appropriate the urban space in order to live out their more fluctuating concept of desire.

Cruising the city in *Plusieurs vies*

Published in 1996, *Plusieurs vies* illustrates how the narrator shuns pre-established routes and urban sites that do not account for his status as a migrant. Mulhouse's urban space, for example, where the narrator dwells for a short while, does not allow him to create alternative trajectories outside the authorized establishments. Wandering across the city, the narrator turns in circles ('J'arrive, en ville, je tournais partout et presque dans le même endroit dans le centre-ville, essayant de repérer un café.'),[125] incapable of finding a bar where he can meet other homosexuals. When he finally inquires about a bar, the man directs him towards one patronized by Arab men ('Je ne voyais que des Arabes.').[126] When he reveals in front of the Arab men quite candidly his sexual orientation, the narrator has to cope with homophobic comments and misunderstandings.[127]

The narrator's struggle to escape ideologized places in the city is also thematized in his first visit to Paris. The narrator experiences at first hand the extent to which the city is organized in

[125] *PV*, p. 103.
[126] Ibid.
[127] *PV*, p. 104.

order to accommodate the needs of its white, French citizenry and how it excludes migrants or people from France's colonies. When, after the disappearance of his wallet in a hotel room, the narrator complains to the manager, she blames him due to his Arab background. The narrator experiences similar ostracization in the ghettoized gay community. As the narrator remarks, the places are aimed at the white homosexual community, not leaving any place for a migrant with a different notion of sexuality:

> J'étais dans une boîte où je ne correspondais à rien, ne ressemblais à personne. Je regardais autour de moi et les gens me regardaient et j'ai compris que mes habits n'étaient pas comme les leurs, chemise et pantalon repassés alors qu'eux avaient des jeans déchirés, des cheveux colorés, des cheveux longs ou rasés. J'ai passé la nuit à tourner, j'ai essayé plusieurs fois de me mettre sur la piste, physiquement je ne bougeais absolument pas comme eux. [128]

Dressed differently, moving differently, the narrator is visibly not at ease with the community in this nightclub. On a different occasion he comments on the heavy body and the emphasis on the exterior which for him are quite unusual ('Des mecs très musclés, je ne sais pas, j'avais trouvé que l'image masculine prenait des proportions bizarres avec des mecs body-buildés dont les pectoraux ressemblaient à des seins. Un étalage de viande.').[129]

If institutions such as gay nightclubs or touristic places give the narrator a feeling of ostracization, there are other places, off the beaten track, which the narrator can transform into urban niches that allow him to connect with other men and live out his sexuality without being forced to adhere to the fashion and norms of the gay community:

> La chose qui m'avait le plus touché, c'étaient les laveries automatiques, dans la rue. […] J'adorais ça, les silhouettes des gens qui étaient là, les jeunes, les clients. C'étaient tous des célibataires. […] Pour moi, je ne sais pas, j'avais vu une nouvelle partie de Paris. Au lieu de répondre aux gens que j'avais vu je ne sais quel musée, quelle expo ou quel monument, ça m'amusait de répondre ça, que j'avais vu les laveries et que pour moi c'était un Paris. […] Les gens me regardaient avec ma

[128] *PV*, p. 107.
[129] *PV,* p. 113.

> chemise à la main, il y avait quelques personnes, c'étaient tous des mecs. J'ai compris qu'ils étaient pédés.[130]

Rather than patronizing the gay ghetto or following pre-established routes for tourists, the narrator stops by public laundries which permit him to encounter other men. Echoing de Certeau's observation about the different usages the city-dweller makes of the pre-given urban structure, the laundries are transformed by the narrator and by other men into cruising sites.[131] They turn them into ambiguous sites whose function is no longer clearly established, fluctuating between cruising grounds and public laundries, defying disciplinary order. Unlike the gay ghetto, public laundries are an inclusive space in which ethnic background, religion, and sexual preferences no longer count, something conveyed through the image of the intermingling of the narrator's and the random man's clothes ('[…] ça m'a plu, de voir ma chemise avec ses culottes et le reste, dans le même linge.').[132]

Challenging the Closet, 'Loiterature' and Loiterly Subjectivity in *Ce qui reste*

As in *Plusieurs vies*, the narrator's footsteps in *Ce qui reste* are motivated by a desire to find other men with whom he can connect on grounds of sexual orientation. *Ce qui reste* juxtaposes the narrator's stay in Rabat in the bosom of his family with his experiences in Paris and Rome. As suggested by the title, *Ce qui reste,* perhaps best translated as 'what's left', alludes to the residues of Rachid O.'s childhood memories in his adult life in the West. *Ce qui reste* contrasts silence and 'non-dit' which informs privacy and above all sexuality with the narrator's experiences in the western diaspora which are marked by encounters fuelled by erotic desire. In Paris and Rome the narrator cruises public spaces and parks in order to come

[130] *PV*, p. 111-12.
[131] De Certeau, p. 142.
[132] *PV*, p. 112.

into contact with men who, like himself, do not adhere to the visibility of gay identity but whose sexual orientation cannot easily be categorized, fluctuating between homosexuality and homosociality. Coming into contact with these men allows him also to exert a subtle critique of the concepts of sexuality at home. I define homosociality in line with Sedgwick who connects it to erotic desire. In her words, 'to draw the "homosocial" back into the orbit of "desire", of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual'.[133] Homosociality, for Sedgwick, designs friendship which can encompass the erotic, but does not necessarily need to. Furthermore, with *Ce qui reste*, Rachid O. frees himself from the influence of Mathieu Lindon and finds his own style and identity as a writer. Like Taïa in *Une mélancolie arabe* who links his writing about queer love to the diasporic experience, Rachid O. in a similar vein conjoins writing and diasporic experience.

The narrator's experiences in the diaspora are framed by his stay in Rabat with his family. The narrator's family's perception of sexuality in Rabat is not constructed along the axis of the closet, but rather around notions of shame and honour. In other words, the idea of 'coming out' – the outspoken confession of sexual orientation based on the closet binary which has established itself as a paradigm in the western world – is not important to the narrator and his family. His sexual orientation might be known or assumed by his surroundings. However, as long as notions of family honour and modesty ('pudeur') are respected, the narrator's sexual orientation does not really matter. Talking about one's sexual experiences not only tarnishes the family honour but is also considered shameful and thus should be silenced.

[133] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, NY: Columbia UP, 1985), pp. 1-2.

The narrator, for example, suspects his father of having had a relationship with his uncle, who in reality is a very close friend of the family. The passage in question shows how the narrator, influenced by the western closet paradigm and the will to know, stumbles upon his father's reluctance to speak, informed as he his by notions of silence concerning individual desires. In the end, the passage illustrates how the narrator's respect for the father outweighs his will to know. Keen on knowing more about his father's relationship with the uncle, the narrator asks the father to write more about it:

> Je n'ai jamais reçu un mot de toi!
>
> Je serais ridicule. […] m'étaler sur une lettre, de quoi ça aurait l'air? C'est là l'impudeur.
>
> Essaie, papa c'est important pour moi!
>
> Ça sera un exercice pitoyable, à essayer d'arracher à la main les pierres au fond d'une source. […] J'étais un homme inconstant.
>
> Raconte alors !
>
> […] Pas maintenant, ne te fâche pas, je ne vois pas comment te l'écrire ou te le raconter autrement: c'est une histoire merveilleuse, avec une présence humaine que je ne connais qu'avec toi.[134]

The son's will to know contrasts here with the father's silence conveyed through the metaphor of secrets lying buried under the stones in a spring. Blurring the clarity of the spring would tarnish the father's and family's honour. All that the narrator learns is that the father was a fickle man and that at some point in his life he had the opportunity to have a 'histoire merveilleuse' with a human being. For the father, shame lies not in revealing whether or not he had at some point in his life an affair with his male friend. The closet paradigm of being out or not has no importance at all for the father and is probably even unknown to him. Rather, shame consists in revealing too much about oneself, about one's individuality, and of course about one's sexuality, recalling the chapter on childhood writings. *Impudeur* consists in revealing one's personal secret, whether orally or written. Moroccan cultural norms

[134] Rachid O., *Ce qui reste* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), *p*. 85-6. Henceforth referred to as: *CQR*.

prohibit the father from doing this. This is then also immediately understood by the son who blames himself for being too curious: 'Mais quelle réponse j'attends? et sous quelle forme? […] Je dois avoir quelque chose dans la tête depuis que je fréquente les Français, comme une sorte de maladie qui ne ma va pas […].'[135]. Driven by the will to know about his father's past and sexual orientation, this curiosity is conceived of by the narrator as a sort of illness. Rather than insisting, the son respects his father's silence as is required of the younger generation ('son silence est sacré et auréolé de pudeur') and blames himself for having been too curious.[136]

Sexuality or, better, one's sexual life and sexual orientation in Morocco remains private and is not to be revealed. At the same time, same-sex relationships are not a secret, it might co-exist with one's heterosexual orientation. This shows that there are parallel models to the western-centred closet paradigm, which also challenge the idea of western gay identity as modern whereas all other forms are backward. Marlon B. Ross puts it this way:

> The "coming out" or closet paradigm has been such a compelling way of fixing homosexual identification exactly because it enables this powerful narrative of progress, not only in terms of the psychosexual development of an individual and the sociopolitical birth and growth of a legitimate sexual minority group, but also more fundamentally as a doorway marking the threshold between up-to-date fashions of sexuality and all the outmoded, anachronistic others.[137]

The sexual model in Morocco is far from backward. Rather, it is a parallel model which complicates Rachid O.'s experiences in the West. In the West the narrator is looking for a similar model of sexuality in which same-sex desire co-exists with heterosexual desire. Simultaneously, encounters with people who live out their desire exclusively for men generate in the narrator the desire to re-invent a queer past and root his desire for men in a queer

[135] *CQR*, p. 87.
[136] *CQR,* p. 88.
[137] Ross, p. 163.

lineage back home. Furthermore, coming into contact with people who live out their sexuality without it being informed by notions around shame and honour leads the narrator to critique this model and the notion of shame in general. From the diaspora, the narrator not only re-invents a queer past but also critiques his country in which everything related to matters intimate needs to be hidden, whatever the sexual orientation.

Queer desire informed by shame and secrecy stands also very much at the centre of the protagonist's diasporic experiences in the West. When the narrator encounters Nouâmane in Paris, another Moroccan man, he is reminded of his own life and his own conception of sexuality. Having spent a childhood marked by poverty in Morocco, Nouâmane encountered a Frenchman named Pierre with whom he lived during his adolescence. Thanks to Pierre, he was able to live the life he wanted, had no financial difficulties, and became fluent in French.[138] He nevertheless decided to marry Faïda with whom he went on honeymoon to Paris. Remembering Pierre once in Paris, he leaves Faïda in order to meet him, ending up at the métro station where he sees the narrator.[139] Rather than meeting Pierre, he follows the narrator. When Nouâmane finishes his story, he says: 'Voilà, moi, je suis comme ça. Et toi'?[140], whereupon the narrator answers: 'On n'est pas très différents.'[141]

The attraction between the two men during this encounter remains ambiguous. Whilst Nouâmane has had relationships with men in the past, he seems at that moment to look for comfort ('envie de me cacher contre un torse')[142]. The narrator, on the other hand, has

[138] *CQR,* p. 39.
[139] *CQR*, p. 52.
[140] *CQR*, p. 41.
[141] Ibid.
[142] *CQR*, p. 36.

physical desire for Nouâmane which he hides out of shame. Although he admits that he finds him attractive ('je l'ai trouvé séduisant'), [143] the narrator remarks:

> Je voulais aussi, dans mon lit, qu'il ne se passe rien, qu'il n'éprouve rien, parce que je tiens de mon père et mon oncle une sensibilité renfermée et je m'émeus de tout ce qui échappe à mes habitudes, même si mon regard s'incline timidement devant la vision d'un être que ma familiarité aimerait habiller, c'est décousu et incompréhensible, comme cette nuit sans lien, sans fil évident.[144]

The timidity and shame concerning matters sexual which he inherited from his father and uncle prevents him from pursuing matters further. The narrator might have visions, perhaps erotic ones, which he then quickly covers up ('que ma familiarité aimerait habiller'). Oscillating between eroticism, shame and familiarity, the encounter with Nouâmane becomes incomprehensible and unclear, like that blurry night.

Yet during that night with Nouâmane the narrator is enabled to exert critique around the notion of privacy in Morocco. As Nouâmane tells the narrator his life story, he pauses, asking the narrator whether he reveals too much about himself: 'Tu trouves que je n'ai pas la moindre retenue, que je manque de pudeur, qu'il ne faut jamais tout raconter?'[145] This turns out to be an opportunity to criticize the notion of *pudeur*, or indeed *hchouma*, which governs intimate matters in Morocco:

> "Elle est où, la pudeur, à ton avis?" me demande Nouâmane.
>
> Je n'arrivais pas à répondre, comme s'il fallait en prendre le temps, mais le temps je sais que j'en ai une perception déformée. J'ai d'abord hésité, puis: "Je ne sais pas, mais je crois qu'elle n'est pas là où je pensais."
>
> "Te parler de ma vie et de ma sexualité, c'est pour moi une manière de faire de la pudeur une hypocrisie."[146]

[143] *CQR*, p. 41.
[144] *CQR*, p. 43.
[145] *CQR,* p. 45.
[146] *CQR,* p. 50.

Thanks to his encounter with Nouâmane in Paris and to the latter's revelation of his relationship with Pierre and Faïda the narrator's ideas around sexuality and shame are re-vamped. He becomes aware that a deluded idea of 'pudeur' has been instilled in him ('perception déformée') which during the course of Nouâmane's life story is re-assessed. To equate silencing one's sexuality with good manners, according to Nouâmane and the narrator, amounts to hypocrisy.[147]

It is thus in the diaspora that Moroccan cultural perception of sexuality can be challenged. Through his encounter with Nouâmane, the narrator learns to put his desire into words and to formulate them independently. He challenges the model in Morocco but simultaneously complicates the closet paradigm in that the narrator is not 'out' in the conventional sense. Rather, his desire for men fluctuates between friendship and eroticism, and remains informed by notions of modesty and shame. To say then, as Alessandro Badin remarks of Rachid O. that 'these are not yet openly homosexual desires, but they speak the same language of friendship' is not entirely correct, I would contend, in that it is not a matter of Rachid O.'s protagonists eventually embodying western, 'modern' homosexual identity, but rather that Rachid O.' protagonists sexuality is informed by cultural components such as shame and secrecy which stands in opposition to the visibility as championed by western LGBTQ politics.[148] Rather, they allow different desires co-exist and supersede each other. However, the diasporic experience pushes him to put his sexual desire into words and to question the notion of silence that characterises eroticism in his country.

[147] For a similar critique, see Leïla Slimani's recent book: *Sexe et mensonge; La vie sexuelle au Maroc*. (Paris: Les Arènes, 2017).
[148] Alessandro Badin, 'Between Men : Homosocial Desire and the Dynamics of Masculinity in the Novels of Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 20 (2016), 111-20 (p. 118).

I would like to turn to Ross Chambers' notion of 'loiterature' and 'loiterly' subjectivity in order to shed more light on Rachid O.'s diasporic narrator in *Ce qui reste*. In *Loiterature*, Ross Chambers establishes a link between urban space, cruising, and fragmented identity, or what he calls 'loiterly' subjectivity.[149] Examining gay narratives produced before the sexual revolution in the early 1970s, Chambers remarks that the sexual cruiser 'poaches' on urban space in order to build his subculture, marginalized as he is by the community of the established.[150]At that time the existence of a gay community and identity did not exist as a communitarian phenomenon and was forced to exist on the social fringes.[151] The cruiser's subculture is not informed by the non-negotiable double bind of the closet, that is, the social relations the cruiser is exposed to are always uncertain and ambiguous. The cruiser does not adhere to the gay community with its exclusive emphasis on sexual orientation, visibility, political consciousness and so on. He may identify as homosexual, as gay, or bisexual, or as straight with a fleeting desire for a homosexual relationship. As Chambers notes, cruising mobilizes relations between men ranging from homosociality to homosexuality.[152] For Chambers: 'The cruiser's identity is ambiguous in that it coexists with any number of "straight" identities – respectable middle-class man, college kid or whatever – under cover of which the cruiser's presence in the streets is legitimated.'[153] The cruiser is never purely defined by his sexual orientation, nor by his status, for example, of a middle-class straight father, nor by his ethnicity or religion, such as a Muslim. Perhaps only driven by desire, the cruiser acts as a collector, always driven to find one more 'item'.[154] Cruisers live on the social fringes of society and do not fit any identity category. They roam the cities, leading lives on

[149] Chambers, pp. 56-81.
[150] Chambers, p. 252. In his chapter on Barthes' *Incidents,* 'Pointless Stories, Storyless Points', Chambers returns briefly to cruising narratives.
[151] Chambers, p. 76.
[152] Chambers, p. 252.
[153] Chambers, p. 253.
[154] Chambers, p. 77.

the liminality between society and social fringes, that is, they are institutionalized and simultaneously not. 'Loiterly' subjectivity, for Chambers, is not really coming together, or, in his words, 'ça ne se dessine pas'.[155]

By analysing Rachid O.'s protagonists through Chambers' model of 'loiterly' subjectivity, I do not wish to impart the impression that I conceive of the narrator's cruising experiences in the West as pre-modern, a waiting-to-become-visible, fully fledged gay man, as it were. As my previous discussion on the vexed notion of the closet shows, Rachid O.'s protagonists' are very much guided by notions of shame and discretion when it comes to experiencing and living out one's sexuality. However, in their cruising the fringes of society, 'poaching' on the city space and inventing different routes and accumulating one encounter after the other, Rachid O.'s protagonists in *Ce qui reste* defy any coherence and disciplinary order.[156] Unlike Taïa's characters who achieve some unity by combining their sexuality with Islam and Arab/Muslim culture, Rachid O.'s protagonists remain fragmented and do not cohere. Migrating to France for financial or amorous reasons, leading precarious lives as social outcasts, being prone to different, competing desires, ranging from the homosocial to the homosexual, they defy any disciplinary order or identity category, perhaps similar to Rahman's concept of the queer Muslim.[157] They transform the urban space, like de Certeau's walker, in this migratory 'ville transhumante', outside the pre-established, disciplinary order laid out by the city administration.[158] They migrate across different geographical and urban spaces, perhaps motivated, first and foremost, to find people with whom they can connect on grounds of sexual affiliation, but also on grounds of their defiance of any disciplinary order. As we have seen, Nouâmane drifts across different countries, desires and people, epitomizing

[155] Chambers, p. 56.
[156] Chambers, p. 252.
[157] Rahman, 'Queer as Intersectionality: Theorizing Gay Muslim Identities'.
[158] De Certeau, p. 142.

his life with the words: 'C'est affreux d'être ballotté comme je suis.'[159] Youri's life in a similar way lacks direction. Migrating to Italy, cruising parks and public toilets, being married yet having affairs with men, Youri's life lacks any coherence. The narrator identifies Youri's life as 'vies fluides'[160] and to a certain extent, this 'vie fluide' is quite similar to his. He is aesthetically drawn to Youri ('je viens souvent voir ce garçon en me tenant loin'),[161] but rather than wanting sex he would like to write down Youri's life story on paper. Nouâmane and Youri provide a model for the narrator in which he can recognize himself. Their chaotic lifestyle – they spend the day loitering, cruising, having difficulty making ends meet – very much resembles his own. Rachid's cruising is driven not only by the desire for fleeting erotic encounters. He also needs people with whom he can connect and find material for his writing. Their existence on the fringes of society reminds him of his own, but at the same time it is also material he can use in a book. As he says of his encounter with Nouâmane: 'Nous sommes restés près d'un quart d'heure sans bouger, moi toujours debout, mais déjà assez pénétré par ses mots.'[162] Rather than a collector of men, Rachid thus becomes a collector of stories.

Chambers coins the term 'loiterature*'* to designate literature which takes 'time out' to explore the unknown.[163] In 'loiterature' the narrative does not aim at anything in particular, there is no sense of structure, line of argument, nor resolution. 'Loiterature*'* rather explores the by-ways, it consists in losing itself in the pleasures of errantry.[164] In its structure, *Ce qui reste* resonates with 'loiterature' in how it loosely accumulates one episode after another, without a particular purpose. Instead of narrative progression, the structure reflects the aimless roaming and

[159] *CQR*, p. 30.
[160] *CQR*, p. 60.
[161] *CQR*, p. 59.
[162] *CQR,* p. 32.
[163] Chambers, p. 31.
[164] Ibid.

discoveries the narrator makes during his stay in Paris and Rome ('Qu'est-ce que je fais là? À espérer quoi? Aller vers tous, j'ai l'impression de ne faire que ça à longueur de temps.').[165] The structure of *Ce qui* reste is driven by the narrator's desire to find yet another man who echoes his fluid sexuality and about whom he can write. Because his work is driven by desire, there is no end to it and one story follows the next. After having met Nouâmane, the narrator is lucid: 'Je sais déjà que ça va recommencer'.[166] In this deliberate rejection of narrative structure, the narrator resists shedding light on and structuring his sexuality.

If we have seen that the diaspora for Taïa is conducive for writing about same-sex love and inventing new forms of coupling, the diaspora empowers Rachid O. to write down his erotic experiences. This also allows him to wrestle himself free, I would suggest, from the influence of French intellectual circles. Allusions to Mathieu Lindon and other French intellectuals have disappeared from the text as well as the narrator's pandering to orientalist stereotypes, as we have seen in his early writings. In *Ce qui reste* Rachid O. turns out to be a writer who reflects on the tensions which arise between Moroccan and western concepts of sexuality. His reflection on home and on Morocco, as my last part on *Ce qui reste* will show, are increasingly informed by western sexual models he encounters in the diaspora. Unlike Taïa for whom Morocco functions as a traumatic place of no return, Morocco, for Rachid O., emerges as a place around which he invents queer childhood memories and a queer ancestral history.

Relocating Queerness in Morocco

[165] *CQR,* p. 42.
[166] *CQR*, p. 54.

While observing Youri and his clients, the narrator is stimulated to invent a queer past in Morocco, and re-imagines his ancestry and family to be queer. It is in Rome that the narrator can finally describe his uncle's sexual orientation and imaginatively shed light on his father's relationship with his uncle. Youri and his clients' openly experienced sexuality stimulates the narrator to dismiss any notions of modesty and shame and to re-assess sexuality in Morocco.

While waiting for Youri and the client to finish, the narrator succumbs to 'visions flamboyantes de mon enfance', during which he imagines his uncle cruising parks and motorways in Morocco in the same way as the narrator cruises Rome.[167] Inspired by the vision of Youri, he conjures up a queer intimacy at home which normally should remain secret and which Youri and his client's behaviour inspire him to do. He remembers, for example, how he would spend an afternoon with his uncle trying on newly purchased clothes and dancing to music. The secrecy of this behaviour is interrupted by his elder brother who would check on his younger brother. The narrator regrets his uncle having opened the door and letting the brother in. Pondering on the fact that his father would have taken their side against his brother, he reflects however: 'Mais peut-être que si ma mère était vivante, elle aurait eu des larmes et des cris qui appellent les griffons pour m'emporter et me dévorer dans ces cas-là, qui sait ? Mon oncle n'aurait pas dû ouvrir la porte, peu importe qui venait […].'[168] The vision of Youri with the client reminds the narrator of his own secret queer activity with his uncle. Furthermore, he creates a queer lineage beyond conventional gendered reproduction, in which his mother is lacking. His mother having passed away in early childhood, the narrator grew up between his uncle and his father.

[167] *CQR*, p. 60.
[168] *CQR*, p. 62-3.

In fact, still waiting for Youri to appear with his client, the narrator goes on to ponder that there is a physical resemblance between his uncle, his father, and himself ('Je sens ses traits sur mon visage'.).[169] While reminiscing and fantasizing around his father's possible relationship with his uncle, the narrator fantasizes about his possible queer origins as he hears a creak in the bushes:

> J'ai entendu le crissement du bois et immédiatement j'ai fantasmé et imaginé une immense pièce à partouzes. [….] Et puis il y avait moi, je me suis vu vivre ça. Dans cet immense tas de vice, j'étais aussi armé de ma propre perversité. On me murmurait des mots qui ne voulaient rien dire, pour m'échauffer, j'avançais au hasard, en plein dedans et en pleine tristesse. Heureusement, j'ai presque tout fait à l'envers.[170]

In his reflections on fantasy and sexuality, Freud attributes considerable importance to primal (or original) fantasies (Urphantasien), of 'inherited memory traces' which provide important support for individual fantasies.[171] Dealing with case studies in which sounds activate sexual fantasies in patients, Freud identifies a close link between aural perception and original fantasies. The sound, which the psychoanalyst construes rather vaguely as the noise the parents make when awakening the child, or as the noise the child is afraid to make while listening to his parents, indicates the primal scene, which is the starting point for all ulterior constructions of fantasy.[172] Freud grants such importance to aurality for two reasons. On the one hand, the noise (which is awaited at night) demands of the subject who hears it an answer or a reaction, that is, it triggers fantasies in the subject.[173] On the other, aural perception calls forth, 'the history or the legends of parents, grandparents and the ancestors: the family *sounds* or *sayings*, this spoken or secret discourse, going on prior to the subject's arrival, within

[169] *CQR*, p. 63.
[170] *CQR,* p. 64.
[171] Jean Laplanche; Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality', in *Formations of Fantasy*, Victor Burgin, James Donald, Cora Kaplan, eds (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 5-34 (p. 16).
[172] Laplanche and Pontalis, p. 18.
[173] Ibid.

which he must find his way'.[174] For Freud, sounds, muttered words, overheard conversations, prior to the subject's coming into the world, disclose retroactively (*nachträglich*) secrets around origins. On this note, Laplanche and Pontalis write:

> Like myths, they claim to provide a representation of, and a solution to, the major enigmas which confront the child. Whatever appears to the subject as something needing an explanation or theory, is dramatized as a moment of emergence, the beginning of a history. [175]

Thus, for Freud, and for Laplanche and Pontalis, rather than simply relating to the parental scene, fantasies of origins relate more broadly, and reach further back into the family history, explaining the origin of the subject himself. Fantasies of origins can relate to the origin of sexuality in the subject, to seduction, to the individual's origin and so on.

This fantasy which plays out for the narrator while he follows and witnesses Youri and his client's rendezvous can be construed as inventing a queer myth around the narrator's past. Throughout the episode between Youri and his client, the narrator is reminded of his uncle and his father. As he says at one point : 'Vous avez vu que depuis le début du livre je me raccroche à chuchoter une histoire d'un amour très triste (et si mon père disait que je l'ai inventée?)',[176] a story which he is not sure whether his father invented or not. Furthermore, he imagines his uncle suffering from unrequited love for his father. I suggest that the sound produced by Youri and his client triggers in the narrator sexual images which in turn explain his queer roots. This fantasized erotic scene calls forth a primal scene which explains the narrator's queer desire and which roots it in a queer past in a household in which there are strong erotic bonds between men and in which female figures are absent. Through the prism

[174] Laplanche and Pontalis, p. 19.
[175] Ibid.
[176] *CQR*, p. 90.

of this fantasy, the narrator imagines himself being part of this incestuous relationship between his father and his uncle. The words he hears 'on me murmurait des mots qui ne voulaient rien dire, pour m'échauffer, j'avançais au hasard',[177] could very well be the words his father never really said or to which his uncle only briefly alluded or alluded to without developing.[178] In fact, as I show in the chapter 'Refused Identification, "Growing Sideways", and Autofiction', the narrator entertains an almost incestuous relationship with his uncle and also with his father. In his fantasies while waiting for Youri and his client to finish their business, he pays amorous tribute to his father: 'Je trouve que toi et moi sommes à envier. Un homme comme lui. J'ai arrêté de l'imaginer dans toutes sortes de remplaçants, dans les hommes que je rencontrais.'[179] The uncle turns into a competitor who seeks, like the narrator, his father's love. What the narrator looks for in other men is the image of his father. This erotic fantasy also alludes to the narrator's participation in erotic games with his father and his uncle. He represents himself participating in such games, or, in the words of Laplanche and Pontalis:

> He [the subject] appears caught up himself in the sequence of images. He forms no representation of the desired object, but is himself represented as participating in the scene although, in the earliest forms of fantasy, he cannot be assigned any fixed place in it'.[180]

The narrator is exposed to a much more open way than in Morocco of living out one's sexual orientation in Paris and in Rome. Informed by local concepts of sexuality, in the western cities he avoids the urban LGBTQ communities and their sites but rather looks for places where he can find men who like himself have competing desires and a more fluid concept of sexuality, avoiding the closet paradigm in which one is either closeted or 'out'. Like de Certeau's city walker, he has to re-adapt the urban space in order to live out this desire. However, confronted

[177] *CQR,* p. 64.
[178] *CQR,* p. 86.
[179] *CQR*, p. 76.
[180] Laplanche and Pontalis, p. 26.

with men who speak of or display their sexual life leads him on the one hand to critique the concept of honour, modesty, and shame which governs intimacy at home, and on the other to re-locate queerness at home.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Rachid O.'s and Taïa's diasporic experiences are critical in more than one sense. Amongst oppressive and dominant ideologies both writers re-invent new ways of couplings and of desire, re-conciling seemingly opposed ideological systems. Both challenge the widely rehearsed narrative of 'gay subjects' fleeing patriarchal home in order to 'come out' in the West. Taïa's relationships with other North African men may well be informed by the egalitarian western gay model; however, this model is then infused by a gender dynamic reminiscent of his own culture. Furthermore, he combines what is often seen as antagonistic in identity discourses around gay and Muslim identity, namely his homosexuality (to use a western term) with his Muslim faith and creates a queer Muslim episteme. Rachid O.'s sexuality is informed by notions of shame and secrecy to which he at first adheres only later to challenge once in contact with western gay men. Furthermore, the diaspora is also critical for both authors in that it empowers them to write about a form of love which is criminalized at home, and to wrestle themselves free from any influence, be it at home or from French intellectual circles. Yet Rachid O. and Taïa's diasporic writings also thematize their fraught relationship with home. The freedom of the diaspora is caught up by conservative forces, by memories of home which inform their experiences and thwart their attempts to break free from a traumatic or at least problematic past.

If this chapter has examined how the narrators cope with dominant ideologies and oppressive systems, it has not studied the influence of colonial and racist discourses which feature

importantly in Rachid O.'s and Taïa's work, especially in their discussion of relationships with men from the West. In the next chapter I will show how ethnic and sexual differences come to the fore in the western diaspora and contextualize them in a broader discussion around policies of ethnic and sexual minorities in France.

Chapter 4

From the 'garçon du bled' to 'Tintin's Dog': Sexualization and Racialization in the French Fifth Republic in Rachid O.'s *Analphabètes* and Abdellah Taïa's *Un pays pour mourir* and *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé*

> Mais je venais de découvrir également que le couple n'est pas une cellule isolée, une oasis de fraîcheur et d'oubli au milieu du monde ; le monde entier au contraire était dans le couple. Or, pour mes malheureux héros, le monde était celui de la colonisation ; et si je voulais comprendre l'échec de leur aventure, celle d'un couple mixte en colonie, il me fallait comprendre le colonisateur et le colonisé, et peut-être même toute la relation et la situation coloniales.
>
> Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé, portrait du colonisateur*

Introduction

In the chapter 'On Vacation with Gide and Barthes' in *Alcibiades at the Door: Gay Discourses in French Literature*, Lawrence R. Schehr focuses on the Gidean term *libération*, which figures importantly in *L'Immoraliste* and *Si le grain ne meurt*. Schehr argues that the whole of *L'immoraliste* and key passages in *Si le grain ne meurt* construct a discourse of liberation based on an inequality in the relationship between subjects; the freedom to be homosexual always comes at the expense of someone else's freedom, be it the narrator's wife in *L'immoraliste* or the North African boys in *Si le grain ne meurt*.[1] He writes: 'For the white man to be free, and in this case, for him to be a free homosexual white man, it is at the

[1] Lawrence R. Schehr, *Alcibiades at the Door: Gay Discourses in French Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995) p. 116.

expense of the freedom of the other […].'[2] As Schehr reveals, whilst Gide strives to abjure colonialism and imperialist discourses, these discourses are nevertheless present in the writer's description of the moments of liberation he experiences because of North African adolescents. Gide's liberation is always based on the very Eurocentric structure of the dominance of white male heterosexuality in that the author can only experience freedom if he subjects the North African male to dominance and submission that has been imposed on European women and homosexual men by the straight European male.[3] As Schehr shows, in his act of liberation, Gide maintains his superiority by subjecting the North African to the 'noble savage' archetype. Gidean liberation, therefore, is based on a model of Otherness which denies subjectivity to the Other, which presumes the Other to be:

> secondary, radically other, and able to be dominated at the same time. The system is wrapped in an ideal of freedom in which the smiling welcome of the "natural" African is considered, if it is considered at all, as his natural state, and not as a part of a dialectic of proxemics, seductions, and exchange with the white men from Europe.[4]

For Gide, North Africans are not worthy of study, they are denied interaction and remain mute, aesthetic, timeless objects, in contrast with the progressing European in European history. In an article 'Not Really Prostitution: The Political Economy of Sexual Tourism in Gide's *Si le grain ne meurt*' Judith Still sheds more subtle light on the economics of exchanges between the narrator and North African men. Pausing at Saïd's observation that the Arabs have no significance in *L'immoraliste* without the European observer, Still wonders regarding the desire of the North African boys 'what if?'.[5] She looks at key episodes in *Si le grain ne meurt* and, unlike Schehr, uncovers moments in Gide's text in which North African men and women (Ali, Mohammed, Athman ben Salah, and the Oulad Naïl) are active

[2] Schehr, p. 121.
[3] Schehr, p. 119.
[4] Schehr, p. 125.
[5] Judith Still, 'Not Really Prostitution: The Political Economy of Sexual Tourism in Gide's *Si le grain ne meurt*', *French Studie*s, 54 (2000), 17-34 (p. 22).

participants in the economics of desire and art. Without denying the colonial exploitation, sexual, material, or creative, at play in Gide's and friends' encounters with North Africans, Still also raises the possibility of conceiving of these young men and women not only as prostitutes but as subjects desiring friendship and transforming their own and the colonizers' lives into art.[6]

This chapter will investigate how, a hundred years later, Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa depict Maghrebi men in their relationships with white French men. Are the power structures between white and Maghrebi men still unbalanced, marked by colonialism and the imposition of imperialist discourse? In the age of sexual liberation, indeed, of western European countries priding themselves on the integration of homosexuals in society, do white gay men still seek Maghrebi men for sexual and personal release and freedom? To what extent are Maghrebi men granted agency in these relationships with white men? If the novels and short stories studied in the previous chapter, such as *Le rouge du tarbouche*, *Une mélancolie arabe,* and *Ce qui reste,* depict France as a place where the protagonists enjoy limited freedom, this image of France is complicated in the more recent novels of Rachid O. and Taïa. Rachid O.'s *Analphabètes* (2013), and Taïa's *Un pays pour mourir* (2015) and *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé* (2017) reveal neo-colonial power structures which inform Morocco's relations with France and taint Moroccan men's liaisons with French men. In previous chapters I show how both authors nevertheless at times participate in the French, or western, orientalist fantasy created around Morocco – Paul Bowles was an important figure for Taïa at the beginning of his writing career. In the books discussed here, both authors lay bare the insidious racism which informs the social reality of Moroccan men in France, thus echoing other aspects of transnational sexuality, as discussed by Grewal and Kaplan, namely those which bring to light

[6] Ibid, p. 31-34.

racial inequalities which inform western identity politics.[7] By looking first at Rachid O's *Analphabètes*, I will focus upon the relationships between Moroccan and French characters in Morocco, specifically examining their consequences for Moroccan men, and then turn to Abdellah Taïa's two novels in order to study how the politics around sexual and ethnic minorities in France crystallize in the relationships between Maghrebi men and their French partners.

Although in the epigraph, taken from the introduction from *Portrait du colonisé, portrait du colonisateur*, Albert Memmi refers to a non-homosexual couple formed by a Tunisian narrator and his French spouse in his novel *Agar*,[8] in which both are victims of self-destructive violence unleashed by cultural difference, we will see that, in a similar vein, same-sex couples involving French and Moroccan men cannot break free from postcolonial constraints and are condemned due to unequal power-relations. Like Memmi's couple in *Agar* the relationship between French and Moroccan men discussed in Rachid O.'s and Taïa's novels are often doomed to follow a pre-determined destiny. However, neither in *Agar* nor in *Portrait du colonisé, portrait du colonisateur* (1957) does Memmi address other kinds of encounter in which the interracial couple is not separated by such history and colonial violence as doom the relationship to failure. Yet this cohabitation informed by history between the colonizer and the colonized can also be modified in that the historical friction can keep the relationship alive and new forms of solidarity emerge.

[7] See Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, eds, 'Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality'.
[8] Albert Memmi, *Agar* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

Mireille Rosello's concept of performative encounters or 'encontre' as discussed in her book *France and the Maghreb: Performative Encounters*[9] (*Encontres méditerranéennes*)[10] will be important here. Studying encounters between France and the Maghreb in literature, philosophy, and films, Rosello argues that some encounters, which she calls performative, have the potential to counteract the violence that often characterised the history between France and North Africa. Tracing back briefly the semantic development between 'rencontre' and 'encontre', Rosello remarks how 'encontre' – today only existent in the word 'à l'encontre de' (of an idea or subject) – denotes friction, in opposition to 'rencontre' with its more positive connotations.[11] Thinking of the Mediterranean encounters as 'encontre' allows the creation of a new space, the 'France-Maghreb', and concomitantly of new subjects liberated from pre-existing subject-positions informed by historical violence, whilst at the same time preserving the notion of friction inherent in these new encounters. Rosello remarks:

> Une encontre serait ce moment exceptionnel où, malgré le conflit, malgré la violence qui règne et impose ses règles, un protocole inconnu, inouï, vient se substituer à ce script. L'encontre serait cet événement multidimensionnel qui voit naître, au même instant, trois éléments indissociables l'un de l'autre : une parole et un contrat d'échange émergent qui vont modifier les sujets en présence ou plus précisément vont les faire apparaître en tant que partenaire de l'encontre. Positionnement subjectivant, langue et protocole : les trois aspects surgiraient au même moment, sans que l'un dépende du choix préalable des autres. En d'autres termes, il n'y a pas de sujets de l'encontre avant l'encontre.[12]

Performative encounters are those frail moments in which historical violence, mistrust, and difference are overcome by the invention or performance of a new protocol of cohabitation. These unique moments of exchange are multidimensional in that the unknown protocol of the encounter which emerges is intrinsically linked to a new language and new subject-positions. In other words, performative encounters require that the protagonists abandon their

[9] Mireille Rosello, *France and the Maghreb: Performative Encounters* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005).
[10] *Encontres méditerranéennes: Littératures et cultures France-Maghreb* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2006).
[11] Rosello, *Encontres méditerranéennes*, pp. 13-14.
[12] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

comfortable positions and overcome the pre-written protocol informed by historical violence or stereotypical subject-positions, in order to create a new language, a new script of encounter and new subject-positions. The constant friction generated by the violent historical background keeps the relationship alive and enables both parties to perform a different kind of encounter within this nexus of historical violence, mistrust, and cultural and linguistic difference.

Yet often, the weight of history, religion, or linguistic difference bears so heavily on the protagonists that their encounters do play out according to pre-written scripts, a process which in turn impedes the creation of a new scenario which would overcome this violence.[13] In order to elucidate this, Rosello provides the example of a member of the French military who comes across a *fellagha* (Algerian rebel) in 1957, in order to argue that their positions, functions and connotations predetermine the encounter which most probably would have ended up violently. Turning to contemporary France, Rosello wonders why today, when two French citizens meet, a man and a woman, the woman would, for example, still be referred to by the man as a Muslim wearing a hijab, whereas the man, who might be a Breton, would not refer to himself as a Christian wearing (or not) a small crucifix.[14] Due to the asymmetry in the description, due also to 'petrified historical narratives that impose stereotypical subject-positions', Rosello concludes that an encounter between the two will happen according to an already pre-written script.[15]

In *France and the Maghreb: Performative Encounters,* however, in which she studies Djebar's fiction, for example, Rosello argues that Djebar invents new Franco-Algerian female

[13] Rosello, *France and the Maghreb: Performative Encounters*, p 1.
[14] Ibid., p. 6.
[15] Ibid.

friendships, or Franco-Algerian couples, who forge unexpected alliances which no protocol of cohabitation nor theory of hybridity can explain or stabilize. Tensions between the couples are never resolved and each party has to invent new tactics in order for the alliances to survive.[16] Turning to linguistic encounters, Rosello looks at contemporary writers of Maghrebi origin such as the Moroccan-Dutch author Fouad Laroui who, rather than grieving over the loss of native languages such as Arabic or Berber, or commenting on the violence done to the North African subject forced to write in French, 'humorously theorizes' the North African writers' tendency to intermingle Arabic, Berber, and French words in their fictions.[17]

Throughout *Queer Maghrebi French* Provencher makes use of Rosello's concept of performative encounter in order to denote queer Maghrebi writers', artists' and performers' tendency to intermingle sacred and secular scripts, words from both Arabic and French cultures and languages, and literary and oral tradition, in order to create a new hybrid language, which Provencher terms a 'flexible accumulation of language'.[18] Thus, according to Provencher, one example of a performative encounter is the narrators 'massacre' of the French names through their Arabic pronunciation, or, in other words, the combination of Moroccan sacred language with secular French.[19] Whereas Provencher focuses more on the creation of a new language generated through the performative encounters, which he conceives of as a script of survival and resilience for queer diasporic speakers, I would like to make use of Rosello's concept in this chapter in order to shed light on the encounters happening between the Maghrebi and French men in order to see what extent the encounters described in the contemporary novels between French and Moroccan men today allow the elision of difference and facilitation of change. My interpretation will go beyond analysis of

[16] Rosello, *France and the Maghreb: Performative Encounters*, pp. 19-20.
[17] Rosello, *France and the Maghreb: Performative Encounters*, p. 21.
[18] Provencher, *Queer Maghrebi French*, p. 2.
[19] Ibid.

the linguistic aspect in that I will argue that in some cases, through the performative encounter, new subject-positions and new identities will emerge.

Through the lens of Rosello's concept of the performative encounter, it will be seen that the encounters between French and Maghrebi men in Rachid O.'s *Analphabètes* and Taïa's *Un pays pour mourir* and *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé* often occur according to pre-written scripts informed by religious violence, colonial history, or French stereotypes concerning Arab/Muslim sexualities. In *Analphabètes,* the Maghrebi-French couples are unable to overcome the rifts which mark the cultural and historical difference of attitude between France and the Maghreb towards masculinity. The weight of Islam and its condemnation of 'deviant' sexuality on the one hand, together with the French men's characterization of the Arab man as the 'primitive' Other, nurtures rigid subject positions which thwart any attempt to invent a new way of cohabitating.[20]

Turning to *Un pays pour mourir* and *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé,* we see that the Maghrebi men in these novels find it difficult to break free of mediatized and politicized positions regarding the Arab man in the French Republic at the turn of the 21st century. Influenced by contemporary, neo-imperialist policies circulating around the Arab man's sexuality, some French men use the Arab as a white screen on which to project his sexual fantasies. Moroccans, by contrast, are denied such power and are unable to accommodate their own sexual desire rooted in Arab/Muslim culture in their relationships with French men. In rare instances, however, the encounter between Moroccan and French men brings about

[20] See Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*, (p. 16) in which he shows in the introduction that in fact, miscomprehension on both sides connected to long-standing traditions of homoeroticism and homophobia have helped to construct the 'East' and the 'West'. The cultural and political resonances of these traditions persist the present moment.

change, overwriting past historical violence with new modes of existence, echoing Rosello's concept of performative encounter.

The solidification of subject-position is also echoed in conflicting views on different models and concept of sexuality. In the chapter on Taïa's and Rachid O.'s childhood writings, we find that the western gay identity provides the narrator-protagonists with the possibility of naming and living out desire otherwise repressed in their own culture. In the chapter on their diasporic experiences I showed how the protagonists combine local forms of sexuality with western modes and confidently forge, at least in Taïa's case, what I call a queer Muslim episteme. These more positive conceptualizations of transnational sexuality give way here to a more pessimistic perception of the transnational. In fact, as we saw with Massad and Kahan, the dynamic of western models of homosexuality being rejected, or to some extent appropriated, is reflected in these works, especially in *Analphabètes*.[21] Old stereotypes concerning male homosexuality on both sides of the Mediterranean are resurfacing, as illustrated with Mrabet and Choukri in the first chapter. It will also be seen that, as noted by Kahan, and discussed in more detail by Grewal and Kaplan, sexual politics in France is still very much dependent upon the periphery and semi-periphery, in this case Morocco, from which it attempts to distinguish itself in the name of modernity and progress.[22]

Islamists, Illiteracy, and Postcolonial Violence: Encounters in *Analphabètes*

Published in 2013, *Analphabètes*, in a similar vein to *Ce qui reste*, consists of a loose accumulation of stories the narrator, Rachid, recalls from his childhood, picks up in the streets, or which acquaintances relate. The reader, however, gradually becomes aware that

[21] Benjamin Kahan, 'Conjectures on the Sexual World-System'. See also Massad, *Desiring Arabs.*
[22] See Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, eds, 'Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality'.

these stories are all interconnected via recurrent themes, namely the violence which informs encounters between Moroccan and French men, homophobia in Morocco linked to lack of education ('analphabètes'),[23] and the oppression of women in Morocco. These loosely interrelated stories all foreshadow one episode, namely the story of the loss of the narrator's friend Gérard who was killed by his Moroccan lover. The loose structure of *Analphabètes*, then, is deceptive in that all the stories foretell this tragic climax, while also reflecting on the narrator's loss of his father.

Furthermore, the flow of the narration is further retarded by frequent auto-reflective moments during which the narrator ponders his activity and the function of a writer and story-teller. He traces his talent for telling stories back to his grandfather who used to relate stories to his family. More than a writer, the narrator conceives of himself as a story- teller.[24] This reluctance, as it were, to see himself as a writer, is further alluded to by frequent allusions throughout the text to his Parisian friends who force him to put his stories on paper rather than simply telling them to his friends over the phone.[25] It is as if the writer, Rachid O., has still not completely detached himself from his Parisian friends who write the stories down for him. Whereas in *Ce qui reste* he found his independence as a writer, in *Analphabète*s, it seems, he is once more dependent upon his Parisian literary friends and lacks confidence in his writerly talent. Hence *Analphabètes* can be conceived of as a fragile construct made up of reflections on the role of the writer and of stories which thematize homophobia, violence in the encounters between French and Moroccan men, and the woman's role in contemporary Moroccan society.

[23] Rachid O., *Analphabètes* (Paris : Gallimard, 2013), p. 117.
[24] *Analphabètes*, p. 17.
[25] *Analphabètes*, p. 54.

In *Analphabètes* it is as if Rachid, the eponymous narrator, nostalgically looks back at a time when Morocco was a place where Europeans could seek a type of personal and sexual release unavailable in their home countries.[26] However, since the novel is set in the present and depicts contemporary relationships between Moroccan and French men, this nostalgia gives way to violence. The Moroccans' economic inferiority, their Muslim faith and their different concept of masculinity clash with the French tendency to fetishize the Arab man into an erotic plaything, thus maintaining the cultural and historical rift between the protagonists and thwarting any attempt to invent a new way of communication. Furthermore, as I will show, the violence that has marked the history between France and the Maghreb, in which sex between men became a meaningful way to think about power and politics, coalesces in encounters between the protagonists in the novel. This means that meaningful exchanges between the men in *Analphabètes* are suppressed and, by contrast, old paradigms of postcolonial violence, which have informed exchanges between France and the Maghreb are rekindled.

Whilst our discussion of *Analphabètes* will show that the French men's cultural and economic superiority certainly plays an important role in the Moroccan's attraction to French men, the condemnation of 'deviant' sexuality by Islamic scripture and the political connotations linked to the act of sodomy in the French North African context portend a certain degree of alienation for Moroccan men. Here, I would like to provide briefly some background information about the signification of sodomy in Morocco and Moroccan French relation in the post-colonial era since they are informing the protagonists' actions in *Analphabètes*.

[26] See towards the end of the book where the narrator regrets the Moroccans' homophobic temper which stands in stark contrast to their beauty and openness. *Analphabètes,* pp. 116-20.

As we have seen in the introduction to this study, with the spread of the Gay International policy in Arab/Muslim countries a counter-discourse has started to play out.[27] Especially in the 1980s and 90s when the Gay International gained momentum, Arab/Muslim countries and Islamists reacted to this phenomenon with stronger calls to criminalize and medicalize 'deviance' and 'sodomy', and punish its practitioners.[28] Non-conforming sexual behaviour was transformed into a disease and a crime by Islamists, denounced for being foreign to Arab/Muslim society, stemming from the West (or Iran), and would, it was believed, eventually lead to national decline.[29] A range of literary works including popular books appeared which invoked the theological and medical implications of sexual diseases, such as 'Abd al-Rahman Wasil's *The Sexual and Romantic Problems of Young People under the Gaze of Islamic Shari'ah* in 1984,[30] or in 1999 al-Khatib al-'Adnani's *Adultery/Fornication and Deviance in Arab History*, and Muntasir Mazhar's *The Forbidden Pleasure: Sodomy and Sapphism in Arab History*.[31] They described the decline of the family, the spread of venereal disease, the danger of contamination by 'deviance', and the fall of the nation. They examined the psychological profile of 'deviants', describing how criminological exams were conducted to ascertain the crimes.[32] With respect to Morocco, Vermeren notes how during Hassan II's reign Wahhabism of Saudi origin and Sunni Islam spread in Morocco and gradually dominated the cultural, ideological, and religious landscape.[33] Hassan II saw this as a way of undermining the influence of the Marxist left, but with the attacks in New York in 2001, in Madrid in 2004, and in Casablanca in 2003, Morocco's power base became aware of the threat fundamentalism posed.[34] In fact, in 2002 the authorities discovered that more than half

[27] Massad, pp. 160-61, and p. 174.
[28] Massad, p. 246.
[29] Massad, p. 250.
[30] Massad, p. 204.
[31] Massad, pp. 256-57.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Vermeren, *Histoire du Maroc depuis l'indépendance*, (Paris: Découverte: 2010), p. 103.
[34] Ibid.

of the Moroccan places of worship were in the hands of Wahhabi preachers.[35] Thus, given the spread of Wahhabism in Morocco, it is almost certain that the population came into contact with the discourses of sexual non-conforming behaviour propagated by the Islamists. Coming from a culture which heavily condemns homosexuality and attributes it to the influence and degeneracy of the West, it is nearly impossible to accept one's desire for the same sex, and, furthermore, accept French gay men's advances. Moroccan men's bodies who have homosexual contact with French gay men, seen from their perspective, turn into a 'deviant', medicalized body.

Turning to French North African relations, we can see that the act of sodomy gained specific connotations in the wake of the decolonization, especially of Algeria. In his recently published book *Sex, France & Arab Men, 1962-1979*, historian Todd Shepard shows how during the withdrawal of the French from Algeria, the act of sodomy was used by Algerian nationalists but also by the far-right in France to account for imperialist invasion, expulsion, or shame caused by victory, defeat or revenge. Drawing upon long-standing orientalist stereotypes around Arab men's bisexuality, the far-right press in France published reports of soldiers from the FLN having raped French soldiers while the French were withdrawing from Algeria in 1962.[36] In 1961, tracts circulated in Algiers that presented sodomy as a metaphor for French moral weakness and failed masculinity. Characterized with the often used pun 'La raie publique', with 'raie' standing for 'raie des fesses', a metaphor for the French Republic, these tracts depicted a large number of erect male sexes, some identified as Ahmed Ben Bella, the future president of Algeria, Hassan II, Morocco's king, or Habib Bourguiba, the future president of Tunisia, sodomizing the French leader, Charles De Gaulle.[37] This rhetoric was

[35] Ibid.
[36] Todd Shepard, *Sex, France & Arab Men, 1962-1979* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), pp. 200-201.
[37] Shepard, p. 202.

then taken up by the French far-right which deplored the fact that, through the weakness of De Gaulle and French Prime Minister Michel Debré, France had turned into a country of feminized males. The work of Isma'il Waliy al-Din (*Hammam al-Malatili* [*The Malatili Bathhouse*], 1970) deployed sodomy to introduce new ways of thinking about power and human relations. The image of the Arab man raping a white colonial man stood for the first time as an act of revenge.[38]

In this context the French expression 'L'arabe au sexe-couteau' gained significance. Quoting from a long letter in *Libération* published in 1977, which started by saying that the Arab suffered the reputation of having a sexual organ which cut like a knife, Shepard shows how long-standing tropes of sexuality and brutality linked to the Arab man were foregrounded in France and in the French imaginary.[39] Thus, the Franco-Greek philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis remarked in that period there was a knife between between France and the Maghreb, an image corroborated, for example, by Albert Camus's *L'Étranger* in which Meursault draws his pistol to murder 'the Arab', whose phallic knife blade glints in the sun, thereby summing up the relationship between France and the Maghreb in terms of murder, violence, and sexuality.[40]

As Mrabet's and Choukri's writings evince, feelings of resentment against the former colonizing power made themselves felt also in Morocco, resentments which are echoed in *Analphabètes*. As *Analphabètes* makes clear, relationships between men also use the motif of sodomy to convey feelings of revenge. This brief background of the historical and political context is important to understand the tensions at play in the relationships in *Analphabètes.*

[38] Shepard, pp. 209-10.
[39] Shepard, p. 196.
[40] Shepard, p. 197.

The assimilation of Islamists' discourse on 'deviant' sexuality, next to the image of the 'Arabe au sexe-couteau', which crystallizes the violence between France and the Maghreb, triggers the failure and tragic outcome of encounters between French men and Moroccans. The sexual act between the Moroccan and French men in *Analphabètes* becomes a nexus of violence and revenge, with the 'sexe-couteau' in between. The protagonist cannot overcome the violence which has tainted French and Moroccan relationships for centuries, let alone invent a new script and way of different cohabitation. Unlike Rosello's performative encounters the script is already pre-written and old paradigms of colonial violence re-surface.

This pre-written script resulting in violence and ostracization is also induced by different and antagonistic ways of understanding sexuality in *Analphabètes*. The complicated nexus of fantasy, domination, and rejection which characterizes Bowles' and Mrabet's relationship and informs Mrabet's writings is very much at play in the relationship between Assel and the Frenchman. The Frenchman's attitude towards Assel reflects Bowles' towards Arab men as discussed by Coury.[41] For the Frenchman, having sex with Assel promises the loss of the self, reflecting orientalist attitudes of disorientation when engaging with the 'East'.[42] For Assel, homosexuality is an identity and a term unknown to him. By contrast, he embodies the model discussed by Rebucini in which sexuality is linked to the notion of honour.[43] In fact, we will see that, for Assel, sexuality and the sexual act are always linked to honour and wider notions of procreation and family. A significant aspect is afforded the role of the woman in this.

[41] Ralph M. Coury, 'The persistence and rehabilitation of Orientalism'.
[42] For a discussion of western imaginations of Arab men's sexuality, especially as it relates to pornography, see Mahawatte, Royce, 'Loving the Other: Arab-Male Fetish Pornography and the Dark Continent of Masculinity', in *More Dirty Looks: Gender, Pornography and Power*, Pamela Gibson, ed. (London : British Film Institute, 2004). See also Kadji Amin, *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History,* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017). For more on homosex and the loss of the self, see Leo Bersani's discussion, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', *October*, 43 (1987), 197-222.
[43] Rebucini, 'Masculinités hégémoniques et "sexualités" entre hommes au Maroc'.

Feeling degraded by his sexual encounter with the Frenchman, it is Assel's sister who must re-establish the family honour according to old patriarchal patterns.

The Moroccan reaction to the emergence of the topic of sexuality and its concomitant medicalization in the Arab/Muslim world can be seen in the episode in *Analphabètes* when Rachid meets the taxi driver. The taxi driver tells Rachid that the adolescent Bouchta, whom he occasionally frequents, is profoundly confused by the narrator's writings about homosexuality and would be eager to know the meaning of those writings ('que tu écris des histoires sur les pédés et, ce pauvre garçon, ça le turlupine de savoir ce que tu racontes').[44] This confusion is also evinced in the taxi driver's confession to Rachid about his desire for both men and women. He asks Rachid: 'Alors, dis-moi, tu dois penser et analyser comme psychologue, comment je dois faire avec ma foutue libido ?'[45] Seemingly, Rachid's writings, alongside the influence of western sexual policy in which western categories of homosexual and heterosexual are important, lead the taxi-driver to question his own libido, to medicalize it ('analyser comme psychologue'), whereas before the adventure of western sexual policy in the Arab world such behaviour was considered to be unproblematic. Furthermore, it seems that the taxi driver internalised Islamist discourse on sexual 'deviance', pretending that it comes from the West, in that he calls sex between men 'baiser à l'occidentale'.[46] As discussed by Kahan, local concepts of sexuality enter in conflict with the western binary system of homosexual and sexuality. Rachid O.'s writings promote, it seems, the hetero/homo binary system in the semi-periphery, to take up Kahan's terms.[47]

[44] *Analphabètes*, p. 53.
[45] Ibid.
[46] *Analphabètes*, p. 52.
[47] Kahan, p. 333.

If we turn now to Assel's encounter with the Frenchman in *Analphabètes*, we can see that it is hijacked by postcolonial violence, which impedes any attempt by the protagonist to invent an imaginative way out of that past history. The shifting power balance and the violence which marked the relationship between France and the Maghreb are symbolized in the sexual act between Assel and the Frenchman. If, however, Assel emerges victorious from this encounter with the Frenchman, he will – having assimilated the Islamists' discourse on sexual 'deviancy' – feel ostracized from Moroccan society in the aftermath of this encounter. The violence Assel sustains is then projected onto women whom he controls, a process which reflects then Fanon's thoughts on colonial and postcolonial violence turning against its own people, here the weakest one in the social hierarchy.[48]

While staying in a small hotel near Jemaa el Fna in Marrakesh, Rachid, the narrator, comes across Assel, a young man who is looking for his sister who has fled her home. The first things Rachid notices about Assel are his good looks and a huge knife which protrudes from Assel's bag.[49] Rachid learns that Assel is from the Rif[50] and that according to his father's wish he renounced higher education since university in Morocco was, according to his father, 'une fabrique de ratés'.[51] Instead, he wrote short stories in which young men would become terrorists as soon as they obtained their high school degree.[52] He earns his living by working clandestinely in cannabis plantations and has become addicted to the drug.

[48] Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*.
[49] *Analphabètes*, p. 28.
[50] According to the historian Michel Abitbol, the Rif in Morocco is one of the poorest regions in the country, having been abandoned after independence. The main sources of income are emigration or clandestine plantations of cannabis. Michel Abitbol, *Histoire du Maroc* (Paris : Perrin, 2014), p. 696.
[51] *Analphabètes*, p. 39.
[52] *Analphabètes*, p. 40.

Before the French confiscated the family's properties, Assel's father's family led a lavish lifestyle, with servants in a palace in Tetouan.[53] His father, who is bedridden most of the time awaiting his death, would pass his days harbouring feelings of revenge against the French, resentments that Assel, his son, apparently shares.[54] The backdrop to Assel's hurt pride, therefore, is his father's pride and masculinity which have been shattered by colonial violence (his father has been lying ill since the French confiscated the family riches). If his father and Assel try somehow to re-establish honour, they can only do it with respect to the daughter of the house (i.e. Assel's sister) who has fled the family home. Aimlessly wandering through life, Assel hopes to acquire some stability by meeting with the Frenchman. ('Les gens érudits, je les aime, ils te montrent le chemin et te définissent la vie qui souvent est pleine d'ennuis pour les ignorants comme moi […]').[55] The evening he spends with the Frenchman soon gives rise to a sexual relationship which shifts into violence when Assel ties the Frenchman to his bed.

The Frenchman's superiority, bearing traces of imperialist discourses, clashes with Assel's desire for revenge. Whilst agreeing on the time of their meeting, the Frenchman warns Assel not to behave in an uncultured manner and to be on time for dinner, thus emphasizing a difference between the uneducated Moroccan and the civilized French ('Parce que c'est sauvage, être ponctuel n'est pas votre fort, mes petits Marocains!').[56] Assel defies the Frenchman by replying that he will be on time, like a Christian ('comme un chrétien'),[57] implicitly marking a difference between the Muslim and the Christian.

[53] *Analphabètes*, p. 38.
[54] Ibid.
[55] *Analphabètes*, p. 60.
[56] *Analphabètes*, p. 61.
[57] Ibid.

The Frenchman's desire for Assel is clearly informed by stereotypes about the Arab man's unbridled sexuality and lust for revenge which circulated in France at the time of decolonization and in its aftermath, as Shepard shows. The Frenchman begs Assel to play the dominant part in their sexual relationship and to consider seeking revenge his people against the colonizers ('venge-toi sur moi et sois l'Arabe fier qui venge ses frères'). By imposing a clearly established protocol of encounter, whereby Assel has to perform the Arab man, the Frenchman deprives both of the opportunity to find a new way of communicating, as Rosello's performative encounters would demand. However, in this scenario Assel ends up playing his part perhaps too well insofar as the Frenchman is physically abused. Overcome by anger when he realizes how disparagingly the Frenchman treats his Moroccan servants, he brutally slaps the man's face and brutalizes him during the sexual act:

> J'ai mis la main sur lui, je l'ai dominé, tabassé, j'ai craché sur lui, je l'ai insulté, mais je n'étais pas mieux que lui sous l'alcool, et lui il ne se débarrassera pas de sa dépendance à n'être qu'un cul à bousiller. […] Je l'ai attaché totalement nu, laissé là, impossible pour lui de bouger ou de se détacher. Il sera découvert dans cet état par ses employés ce matin, c'est ça que je voulais. J'ai aussi écrit un mot très gros que j'ai laissé à mon tour sur son front. […] 'Pardon, et merci de me servir.' C'est ça que j'ai écrit, dit-il en riant.[58]

Whereas throughout French colonial rule the North Africans were physically exploited as labour while, through the imposition of violence and warfare, kept dependent upon France, the power balance is here reversed in that the Frenchman is kept, through Assel's brutalization, physically dependent upon a North African, as the words and the image ('il ne se débarassera pas de sa dépendance à n'être qu'un cul à bousiller') demonstrate. The Frenchman's body's turns out to reflect the North African bodies that have been abused by the French for centuries. Furthermore, Assel's brutality could also be interpreted as revenge for the deterioration of his father's body, which occurred after the French confiscated the family riches. The words 'pardon, et merci pour me servir' which are addressed to the Frenchman's

[58] *Analphabètes*, p. 67.

Moroccan servants may also be interpreted as addressed to Assel himself. Whereas one common view was that older Frenchmen would travel to Morocco to be served by young Arab boys, here it is the Frenchman who provides sexual services to Assel. Colonial and sexual violence perpetrated by the French in Morocco is reversed here. Furthermore, by tying the Frenchman to the bed it is as if Assel turned him into a martyr.[59]

Whilst fetishized by the Frenchman, the image of 'L'Arabe au sexe-couteau' – embodied by Assel and his male organ together with his knife – dominates their physical encounter. Sodomy, as we have seen with Shepard, functions here as an act of revenge.[60] Furthermore, the colonial violence haunting Assel on the one hand, and the Frenchman with his fetishization of Assel on the other, create a counter-violence which forestalls any attempt to create common ground. Their subject-positions, to use Rosello's term, may well change in that the Frenchman embodies the subaltern whereas Assel holds power. But ultimately, the relational roles remain in tact; they are merely reversed. As Rosello remarks:

> But just as peace cannot be the only goal or evidence of a performative encounter, performative encounters cannot be equated with confrontation either. The type of revolutionary violence advocated by Frantz Fanon is not a form of performative encounter. Whether we agree or not that his project was the only viable way out of colonization of Algeria, his script is based on a counterviolence which inverts the course of history but does not modify the relationship between individuals and communities.[61]

[59] Studying the political and societal transformation that sexual minorities underwent in France in the context of France's decolonization and the ensuing sexual revolution, Florence Tamagne remarks of French homosexuals : 'Objectivés pour leur puissance sexuelle, les hommes noirs et arabes sont aussi recherchés par haine de soi, désir d'être utilisé et rabaissé.' It could also be argued that the Frenchman in *Analphabètes*, who exploits Assel in order to reinstate patriarchal violence in order to live out his feeling of inferiority and self-hatred induced by patriarchal violence at home, ties in with Tamagne's observation. Being rejected in France, the homosexual Frenchman has interiorized the self-hatred which he can live out thanks to available men in Morocco. Assel is only one of countless interchangeable men who enable him to exteriorize feelings of inferiority, as the collection of phalli in his living room evince. I will come back to the image and discourses around the 'Arab man' in France during decolonization and in the aftermath of the sexual revolution when discussing Taïa. Florence Tamagne, 'Mutations homosexuelles', in *Histoire de la virilité*, ed. by Alain Corbin and others (Paris: Seuil, 2011), p. 383.

[60] For further literature on the theme of revenge in homosexual relations in the context of France and North Africa today, see e.g., Frédéric Mitterand, *La mauvaise vie* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2005), or Edouard Louis, *Histoire de la violence* (Paris: Seuil, 2016).

[61] Rosello, *France and the Maghreb: Performative Encounters*, p. 8.

Assel's confrontation, which might, to a lesser extent, be read as a revolt against the Frenchman's exploitation, does not lead both of them to invent a new form of cohabitation.

Whereas Assel takes advantage of this encounter to avenge himself and his country for the violence induced by colonialism, he nevertheless remains deeply troubled ('Assel est là en face de moi, il me regarde avec surprise, comme pris dans un processus dont il ne parvient pas à s'extraire, et essaie difficilement de me parler.')[62] In Assel's eyes sodomy is a sin which only God can forgive and which has a detrimental effect on his masculinity. Assel is very well aware that he has committed a crime ('J'ai frôlé la prison')[63] and relating the episode to Rachid he is afraid of aggravating his sin before God ('Dieu tout-puissant, je ne fais qu'aggraver mon cas devant Dieu en racontant, crois-moi, je n'y prends aucun plaisir mais j'ai l'impression que je porte des tonnes de péchés').[64] Deeply affected by his action, he says:

> Le choix de coucher avec un homme est vraiment minable, de toute façon. La prochaine femme que je baiserai, crois-moi, elle va morfler. Je serai sur elle comme un vautour et je ne la lâcherai pas avant de me sentir le roi du monde.[65]

Having engaged in a sexual relationship with the Frenchman, Assel can only re-establish his honour by sleeping with a woman until he feels that he is the 'roi du monde'. The episode between the Frenchman and Assel thus complicates Kahan's theory of sexual world systems, or at least discusses unintentional consequences caused by the spread of the homo/hetero binary system, consequences which have also been left out in Massad's discussion of western sexuality harming local forms of same-sex sexuality.[66] In a context in which sexuality is intrinsically linked to honour and shame, here the victims turn out to be women. Postcolonial

[62] *Analphabètes*, p. 50.
[63] *Analphabètes*, p. 61.
[64] *Analphabètes*, p. 60.
[65] *Analphabètes*, p. 62.
[66] Benjamin Kahan, 'Conjectures on the Sexual World-System', see Massad, *Desiring Arabs*.

violence turns itself against the weakest in the Arab/Muslim social hierarchy, here the women who are to be married and through whom men can establish or re-establish their dignity, a practice also seen in Mrabet's writings.

The mechanism to re-establish the honour through the woman is also played out at the end of the story in which Assel's sleeping with the Frenchman is minimized in contrast to his concern about his sister's virginity. However, thanks to the narrator, towards the end of the episode Assel, seems to re-assess his opinion of the importance of the issue of his sister's virginity in the light of his own actions. Assel's loss of honour can be mitigated, he thinks, by re-establishing his family's honour; to do so he must find his sister and reassure himself that she is still a virgin. The first thing Assel sets out to do when he finds her in Marrakech is to ask a doctor to establish her virginity. When the narrator objects that this might not be the most important issue, since they have finally found each other which is worth much more, Assel replies, 'On dirait que tu vis sur une autre planète. L'honneur d'une famille, c'est la fille vierge.'[67] Yet at the end Assel admits, 'Tu vois, ce n'est pas évident pour moi de te dire ça. Pendant tout ce temps, personne n'a réussi à toucher à ma sœur et c'est moi, en une nuit, qui perds ma virginité.'[68] The narrator is shocked by Assel's need to re-establish the family honour, which he calls 'un besoin hideux, sans tolérance, un besoin obsédant'.[69] This episode re-evaluates the power balance between family members and their respective positions within it. If tradition requires that the honour of a family is enacted, first and foremost, through the women's virginity, this episode casts doubt on this stipulation. In fact, I argue in my first chapter on Rachid O.'s childhood writings, analysing specifically *L'enfant ébloui*, that the narrator conveys an image of Morocco as a place in which men enjoy a certain freedom

[67] *Analphabètes*, p. 69.
[68] *Analphabètes*, p. 72.
[69] *Analphabètes*, p. 71.

concerning their sexual life whereas women's sexuality is still controlled. There is a shift in perspective in *Analphabètes* in that Assel seems to cast doubt on traditional gender roles. Assel seems to begin to understand that his family may as well have lost its honour through his behaviour. He has been queered and is queer, in the sense that he has non-conforming desires, owing to the episode with the Frenchman, whereas his sister, who has left home, has experienced some sort of empowerment. Not only has she decided to leave the family without asking anyone for permission, but also gained control over her sexual life. More so than *L'enfant ébloui* and *Plusieurs vies*, *Analphabètes* depicts a Moroccan society in transition in so far as ossified views on sexuality per se are being undermined under the influence of the West. In the light of this same-sex experience, or in western terms 'homosexual' experience, notions around female and male honour are re-assessed.

Whilst he listens to Assel's story, the narrator is also reminded of another story linked to honour and violence which occurred in Marrakech:

> Ce garçon, Assel, que j'étais en train d'écouter, ne faisait finalement que me rappeler que je me trouvais à Marrakech pour une raison bien précise, et si proche étrangement de ses histoires: son voyage pour retrouver sa sœur, son couteau, son Français, le sexe, sa répulsion à l'égard de l'homosexualité et de cette ville.[70]

For the narrator, Marrakech is intrinsically linked to the story of Slimane and Gérard which also features elements of sex, a knife, a Frenchman, and a Moroccan. Assel's story helps Rachid to write Slimane and Gérard's story down, a task he had found difficult since it was linked to too many painful memories for the narrator. Slimane's and Gérard's story ends with Slimane stabbing Gérard to death, since Slimane was under pressure from Islamists and his family. Despite having lived for some time together, Slimane becomes assailed by anxieties and self-doubt, induced by homophobic attacks at work and by his family. At work, Slimane

[70] *Analphabètes*, p. 63.

receives anonymous phone calls accusing him of sin and asking him whether he believed in God, whereas his family wants him to marry and raise a family. Increasingly ostracized, he stabs Gérard to death while asking him for forgiveness, deploring, 'Je suis malade et Gérard ne m'a pas aidé.'[71] Slimane has seemingly assimilated Islamist ideas of sexual 'deviance' as an incurable illness. Anguished and lost, he makes Gérard, his lover, atone for having been ostracized from his society.

Analphabètes ends with Rachid standing in front of the prison, intending to visit Slimane. While he is not allowed in, he sees a prisoner who, rumour has it, killed his wife and children and who shouts while being abducted by the guards, 'Oh, mon Dieu, je n'ai pas tué! On m'a tué!'[72] The ending sheds retrospective light on Slimane who, in the eyes of Moroccan society, is now considered to be a murderer, whereas for the narrator it is Moroccan society that has destroyed him through its intolerance.

As Rachid listened to Assel's story of how he used violence against the Frenchman, he knows that he has an important topic for his book ('Avec son histoire et cette nuit qu'il venait de me raconter […], je me suis dit que je tenais là peut-être mon livre.').[73] One of Rachid O.'s aim in *Analphabètes* is to reveal Moroccan homophobia which he puts down to the illiteracy of its citizens ('Pauvres homosexuels, pauvre livre vain qui n'ébranlera pas un gouvernement puissant, pauvre grand pays d'analphabètes.').[74] The book is not only about the 'analphabétisme' of Moroccans who, due to government corruption, have not been able to go to school, but also about an inability or 'illiteracy' to read feelings ('Je souhaitais faire un livre qui parle d'analphabétisme à plusieurs niveaux, y compris l'analphabétisme des

[71] *Analphabètes*, p. 114.
[72] *Analphabètes*, p. 120.
[73] *Analphabètes*, p. 67.
[74] *Analphabètes*, p. 117.

sentiments qui a sa part dans le destin de Slimane et Gérard.'). Alongside the lack of feeling in the intimate relationship between Slimane and Gérard, which led to murder, *Analphabètes* also denounces Moroccan society's lack of understanding of homosexual love. As humble as he may be, the narrator hopes that, through his literacy and literary production, he might perhaps change the language and tone of homosexual relationships and relationships between Frenchmen and Moroccans.

If in Rachid O.'s writings we find encounters between Moroccans and French men informed by post-colonial violence, or different concepts around masculinity and sexuality, and which often lead to violent revenge, his writings also depict a society in transition. This is intrinsically linked to the narrator's and French propagation of the western homo/hetero binary system which should lead, in the narrator's view, to more understanding of sexual minorities in his society. However, this expansion of the western model unsettles more local forms in that it challenges the notion of honour intrinsically linked to male and female sexuality. If we turn to Taïa's novels, we see that encounters mobilized anxieties in France's white gay community at the turn of the twenty-first century. Yet despite male Moroccan exposure to imperialist and colonial discourses by white French men, some encounters turn out to be 'performative' in that they bring about change or new forms of cohabitation for Moroccan-French couples.

Debunking the French Republic: the Other in Abdellah Taïa's *Un pays pour mourir* and *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé*

Unlike Rachid O.'s *Analphabètes,* in which encounters between Maghrebi and French men occur in Morocco, Taïa's *Un pays pour mourir* and *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé* situates relationships between French and Moroccan men in France's metropole, thus laying bare the

tensions inherent in changes the French Republic underwent at the turn of the twenty-first century. Taïa not only reveals the underlying racism in France's white gay community, but also French political debates around equality between the sexes, sexualities, and races in the context of the country's integration of sexual minorities. In both novels, Taïa denounces a hypocrisy intrinsically linked to contemporary French sexual politics. While priding itself on its progressiveness by welcoming and integrating sexual and ethnic minorities, France is still informed by neo-imperialistic policies in that the integration of sexual minorities – the French white gay community – occurs at the expense of the ethnic Other.

I would like to discuss two different novels by Taïa, *Un pays pour mourir*, published in 2015, and the most recent *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé*, published in 2017, which shed light, each in its way, on the importance of the racialization and sexualization of the ethnic Other in the French gay community. I would like to argue that, with Aziz in *Un pays pour mourir,* Taïa reveals white Frenchmen's need to hyper-masculinize and hyper-sexualize the ethnic Other in order to conform to a homonormative lifestyle, a term I will return to. *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé*, on the other hand, shows that, in order to belong to the gay community, Ahmed, Emmanuel's Moroccan lover, is forced to deny his own ethnic background in order to be part of Emmanuel's family and the Parisian community. The process Ahmed undergoes in this assimilation echoes France's colonial policy, to which Ahmed also explicitly refers.

In contrast to Gide's discussion of his own liberation which occurs, according to Schehr, at the expense of a mute Maghrebi male, these novels show that Frenchmen are no longer in need of liberation, but that the Maghrebi functions as a channel for sexual energies and phantasies prohibited by the homonormative model. The focus has shifted. It is less about white gay men's liberation and more about helping the white gay community integrate itself

into the French republican model at the turn of the twenty-first century. The Maghrebi voice, however, remains mute. In the novels, the Moroccan men cannot break free of the discourses on sexuality and race which remain conditioned by past French imperialist policy. Thus, they cannot invent new modes of co-habitation with the white gay man or bring about change in France's white gay community. I would like to contrast these impossible encounters to 'performative encounters' in *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé*. In *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé* it is only through the encounter with Vincent, a Frenchman, that a new mode of co-habitation, a new language, emerges which will have a lasting effect on both men. These performative encounters point perhaps to a future, a new mode of cohabitation between the two cultures – a mutual appropriation and transformation of the other's culture – which, however, still remains rare. Before turning to the novels, I would like to provide more background information on the history of homosexuality in France in the second half of the 20th century than I have done in the introduction of this study in order to make sense of the terms 'homonormativity' and 'sexual democracy', which in turn enable us to understand the issues at stake in Taïa's novels.

Whereas the French homosexual community in the 1970s and 1980s aimed at gaining recognition and advocated sexual freedom – a struggle that successfully ended in the establishment of a ghettoized nightlife aimed at a market of homosexual clients in the Marais – the AIDS crisis from the early 1980s put a stop to this, at times, promiscuous lifestyle.[75] With the high death toll the AIDS crisis brought about in the French gay community, but also, as we will see, with greater legal protections and acceptance within France, this sometimes libertine lifestyle in the homosexual community gave way to a more moderate way of living.

[75] Frédéric Martel, *Le rose et le noir, les homosexuels en France depuis 1968* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), pp. 665 -69. See in particular his discussion of the FHAR ('Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire') movement.

Increasingly, homosexuals wanted to live as stable couples and gain rights equal to their heterosexual counterparts.[76] On 13 October 1999 the French Parliament voted for a contractual form of civil union, known as the PACS (*Pacte civil de solidarité*), in order to offer legal status to same-sex couples. Fourteen years later, on 18 May 2013, same-sex marriage in France became legalized. Increasingly, those gay men who conceived of homosexuality as one of the last spaces in which sexuality and transient forms of coupling could be explored, belonged to a minority.[77] In the 1990s the majority of gay men in France sought a more conservative lifestyle involving a stable partner, perhaps less outlandish visibility yet at the same time acquiring the same rights as their heterosexual counterparts.

This shift in the gay community, from inhabiting a marginal position and defending an alternative lifestyle to assimilation, is a trend Lisa Duggan observes in the U.S context as well. Analysing the policy of the International Gay Forum (IGF) in 1999, a gay movement which defended a socially more or less conservative agenda situated between the far right conservative and the progressive sexual politics of the left, Duggan coins the term 'homonormative' in that the IGF and its neoliberal policy promotes a normalizing and conservative sexual policy, which might best be compared to heterosexual coupling.

> It is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.[78]

Whereas sexual minorities were formerly oppressed and contested, in their fight for recognition and state power they were at the turn of the 21st century increasingly integrated

[76] Martel, p. 541.
[77] Martel, p. 609.
[78] Lisa Duggan, 'The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism', in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, Russ Castronovo; Dana D. Nelson, eds (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 175-194 (p. 179).

into U.S. society. Gay people's right to privacy, equality with their heterosexual counterparts, access to a new 'gay market' echoed, in many ways, according the Duggan, the heteronormative lifestyle. Furthermore, queer scholars have also remarked on the existing tension between the recent integration of sexual minorities and the exclusion of ethnic minorities, or the racialization, sexualization and fetishization of the latter, a tension I wish to examine in the French context.[79]

Sociologist Frédéric Martel argues that, following the introduction of the PACS, the process of giving legal status to sexual minorities accelerated the modernization of the French nation. Martel writes that France's integration of sexual minorities propelled the process of opening the country up to the Other in general:

> En s'inscrivant dans cette voie [être 'comme les autres parmi les autres'], on favorise la modernisation de la société française afin qu'elle soit plus hospitalière à 'l'autre' et plus protectrice des individus, de leurs ressemblances comme de leurs différences. L'intégration, la banalisation, la normalisation, l'indifférence: ces mots, plus ou moins bien choisis d'ailleurs, ne suscitent pas toujours un grand enthousiasme. Ils n'incitent guère à la mobilisation, surtout comparés à ceux, plus jouissifs, de subversion, de marginalité, d'identité ou de communauté. Mais ils correspondent pourtant à un projet essentiel pour les homosexuels français, plus modeste, certes, mais non moins urgent : être comme les autres sur un pied d'égalité, trouver une place dans la société. Et une place confortable.[80]

Thus, given the newly acquired rights of homosexuals, the image of the French Republic became more progressive in that it ceased to be inhospitable to difference. Furthermore, if homosexual relationships and lifestyles were formerly confined to secrecy, or to an extravagant and promiscuous lifestyle, as with the PACS, and, one could argue, given the law on same-sex marriage, gays and lesbians acquired new rights and were completely integrated

[79] See, for example, Jasbir Puar's influential book *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), in which she examines the integration of certain queer subjects into the nation-state to the detriment of a population of 'orientalized', terrorist bodies in the post-9/11 US context.
[80] Martel, p. 676.

as 'citoyens' of the French Republic. Commenting on this shift in the image of the French Republic, Martel goes on to write:

> Et si certains [homosexuels] avaient la conviction d'être exclus, percevaient des phénomènes d'incitation à l'autodépréciation, constataient ou éprouvaient un 'déni de citoyenneté', l'ensemble de la société devait comprendre ce malaise et tenter d'y mettre fin. Le pacs [and one could say same-sex marriage] a ouvert cette possibilité. Car il n'était plus question pour ses promoteurs de se contenter d'une République idéalisée et abstraite. […] A la veille de l'an 2000, la gauche choisit alors une législation volontariste qui assure aux homosexuels non pas seulement la tolérance – dans une République crispée et hermétique aux différences – mais des droits. Le pacs marque symboliquement une non-différence, non pas une indifférence (simple tolérance), mais une reconnaissance indifférenciée (égale à celle des couples hétérosexuels non mariés). Du coup, l'adoption du pacs est à situer dans la lignée des grandes lois de modernisation de la République – le droit de vote des femmes, l'IVG,[81] la suppression de la peine de mort: il restera l'un des textes clés de la législature, et l'un des grands débats de société depuis la Seconde Guerre Mondiale […] Au fond, le pacs est une bonne illustration de ce que doit être un 'universalisme concret' *à la française*, très différent finalement de l''universalisme abstrait' que défendent les républicains les plus rigides. Il met un terme – définitif? provisoire? nous verrons – à une logique républicaine excluante, elle aussi constitutive de l'histoire de la France.[82]

I am quoting this text at length because this image of the progressive Republican model is precisely criticized by Taïa in his writings. In other words, what Taïa contests in the texts I will discuss is this policy of inclusion of sexual minorities which occurs to the detriment of the racialized Other. The paradigms have shifted: the French Republic's progress towards modernity occurs to the detriment of the ethnic Other. To talk about the end of the *République crispée et hermétique*, and perhaps the subtler model of the *universalisme à la française* in contrast to a *universalisme abstrait,* is perhaps premature, especially because of the hurdles faced by the ethnic Other when they seek to access equal status in the white gay community (hurdles Taïa's texts expose). In a similar vein, to say that the PACS (and the 'Mariage pour tous') puts an end to an exclusionary Republican logic which has been constitutive of French

[81] IVG is the acronym for *Interruption volontaire de grossesse* which was liberalized by the Veil Law in 1975.
[82] Martel, p. 679. In 2008 same-sex marriage had not yet been legalized in France, but the dynamic of the text is clear; it is about French progress and modernity.

history might be true for the white homosexual minority, but not for the homosexual ethnic Other.

In order to shed further light on the tension between sexual and ethnic minorities in France, I would like to look at the sociologist Eric Fassin's observations about ongoing debates in France around sexuality and race. Through his coinage of the dynamic concept of 'sexual democracy' ('la démocratie sexuelle'), Fassin illustrates how issues around sexuality and gender are increasingly an object of debate in western countries, specifically in France. Thus questions regarding gender, sexuality, and sex are no longer sacred, transcendental norms, but – like for example, educational and taxation issues – subject to political debate, including lobbying from right-wing and left-wing parties.[83] As evident in the name, sexual democracy in France revolves more around equality of sexes than of races ('Il n'est ici pas question d'égalité entre les races ni entre les classes: l'égalité républicaine, c'est devenu l'égalité entre les sexes.')[84] and, one could add, between sexualities since the PACS and the same-sex marriage law was adopted. As Fassin remarks, there is a barely hidden imperialism inherent in the concept of sexual democracy. He writes:

> Si 'nous' sommes définis par la démocratie, et d'abord dans sa dimension sexuelle, 'eux' se définissent en miroir, comme l'envers sombre de nos lumières. Les 'autres' de nos sociétés, barbares, menaçant la civilisation démocratique, apparaissent donc logiquement comme polygames, violents voire violeurs, prisonniers d'une culture où ils emprisonnent leurs femmes, entre voile imposé, mariages forcés et mutilations génitales subies.[85]

In the French Republican model, in which the adoption of the law on same-sex marriage and the equality and liberty of homosexuals and women were finally codified, sexual politics, in the context of anti-immigration law, is often racialized. The Other, from an African or Muslim

[83] Eric Fassin, 'La démocratie sexuelle et le conflit des civilisations', *Multitudes*, 26 (2006), 123- 31 (pp. 125-26).
[84] Fassin, p. 127.
[85] Fassin, p. 126.

background, is earmarked as patriarchal or victim of patriarchy or homophobia, characteristics the Other will have to abandon if he or she wants to become a French citizen. In the article 'Homosexuels des villes, homophobes des banlieues' Fassin discusses, for example, the debates in the French media in 2009 which were triggered by the two books, namely Franck Chaumont's *Homo-ghetto* and Brahim Naït-Balk's *Un homo dans la cité*, both depicting growing up as a homosexual in the Parisian banlieue and exposure to homophobia.[86] Whilst the French journalists utilized the authors' denunciation of homophobia and the importance of hyper-virility in the French banlieues in order to mark a clear line between the enlightened, progressive French citizen in the city center and the 'banlieusards' of a different ethnic origin, mostly Arabs and Blacks, their branding of Muslim/Arabs as homophobic was enhanced in the same year by the Arab/Muslim football club Bebel Créteil's refusal to play a match against the club Paris Foot Gay.[87] As a consequence of this refusal there was a tendency in the media to criticize Arab Muslims as backward and as patriarchal, whose values stand in stark opposition to France's stated creed of equality between sexes and sexualities. Furthermore, and most importantly for our purposes, there was and still is a tendency in some of the French media and amongst the public to sexualize Arab/Muslim masculinities.[88]

In a similar vein, in his recently published book *Sexagon*, Mehammed Amadeus Mack shows how the sexualization of national inclusion and exclusion functions to deprive those who had

[86] Franck Chaumont, *Homo-ghetto : gays et lesbiennes dans les cités : les clandestins de la République*, Brahim Naït-Balk, *Un homo dans la cité: La descente aux enfers puis la libération d'un homosexuel de culturel maghrébine*.
[87] Eric Fassin, 'Homosexuels des villes, homophobes des banlieues', *Métropolitiques* (2010) <http://www.metropolitiques.eu/Homosexuels-des-villes-homophobes.html> [accessed 22 May 2018].
[88] Fassin's analysis in the article 'Homosexuels des villes, homophobes des banlieues' encompasses not only France. He also discusses the case of the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn who openly claimed to have had affairs with Moroccan boys while rejecting Islam, and who was eventually killed. Meanwhile, Maxime Cervulle's and Nick Rees-Roberts' book *Homo exoticus, race, classe et critique queer* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010) explores the French gay community's tendency to hyper-sexualize Arab men in pornography and visual representation. Concomitantly, they show that French tolerance of homosexuality coincides with rejection of figures such as the veiled woman or the male immigrant.

already become French of their Frenchness.[89] The sexualization, which becomes apparent in a number of controversies discussed in France, such as polygamous marriage practices, rape and sexual violence in the multi-ethnic banlieues, clandestine homo- and bi-sexuality, arranged marriages and so on, allow, Mack argues, anti-immigrant and conservative forces to keep the threat of Arab, African, and Islamic difference in view.[90] This was especially acute in the early 2000s, which witnessed media interventions associating sexual intolerance with specific ethnicities and religions. According to Mack, it was during 'this historical juncture' that the 'hexagon becomes the sexagon'.[91]

Fassin in turn wonders whether sexual democracy and its civilizing mission – France as the country in which equal rights pertain between men, women and other sexual minorities, and where Muslim women and Muslim homosexuals are protected from violence at 'home' – echo the civilizing mission inherent in French imperialist politics during colonial times. As Fassin remarks, in the French colony polygamy and forced marriage were considered an obstacle to assimilation by the French Empire, especially in Algeria.[92]

Taïa's writings reflect the dynamics of these debates, not least in their indictment of the 'progressive' Republican model, which, he reveals, continues to owe a great deal to its neo-imperialistic policy; for the characters in his novels it is difficult to break free of the images of the hyper-virile, 'savage' Other which lingers on in the imaginary of the white French gay community in its wish for assimilation to a homonormative life-style. As we will see, the

[89] Mehammed Amadeus Mack, *Sexagon*, *Muslims, France and the Sexualization of National Culture* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2017), p. 10. See also Mehammed Mack, 'Untranslatable Desire: Interethnic Relationships in Franco–Arab Literature', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 15 (2014), 321-43. Analyzing Taïa's *Le rouge du tarbouche*, Mack argues in this article that Arab interlocutors have changed from available and servile to difficult and resentful.
[90] Mack, p. 11.
[91] Mack, p. 10.
[92] Fassin, 'La démocratie sexuelle et le conflit des civilisations', p. 129.

protagonists, in their hyper-masculinization and hyper-sexualization, are either Othered and ostracized by the white, homonormative gay community, or they have to efface their own cultural background in order to belong to the civilized French nation. If we have seen in *Analphabètes* how the Frenchman attributes to Assel traits consonant with an orientalist imaginary, such as unbridled sexuality and hyper-virility, the French gay community also confers these characteristics onto Moroccan men in Taïa's works. If in Rachid O.'s and Taïa's early writings the western homosexual model gives rise to the narrator's sense of security and allows them to name their desire, here the narrators shed critical light on this model, revealing how these models build themselves in contrast to other sexualities in the semi-peripheral or peripheral zone.[93] The production of French gay identity, as Taïa's novels illustrate, is very dependent upon former interaction with other sexualities from the periphery, here Morocco, or in fact the French banlieue.

Un pays pour mourir

Un pays pour mourir depicts the lives of Aziz, Motjaba, and Zahira, three North African immigrants in Paris. Zahira, a Moroccan prostitute, shelters Motjaba who has fled from Iran where he was persecuted for his political views, his activism, and his love for men. Aziz is an escort from Algeria who frequents the white gay Parisian bourgeoisie and is about to embark on a sex change. The novel is divided into three parts, each composed of first-person narratives which offer a glimpse into the protagonists' intimate lives. In the first two parts, entitled 'Paris, juin 2010' and 'Paris, août 2010', we follow Zahira, Aziz, and Motjaba in Paris. The last, entitled 'Indochine, Saigon, juin 1954', takes the reader back into the era as France's colonial empire declined. Here we follow the life of Zineb, a Moroccan prostitute,

[93] Kahan, p. 332.

who serves the French army. In these first-person narratives, Taïa astutely interweaves the lives of the protagonists with past events in order to illustrate French colonial and neo-colonial exploitation. Reflected in Zahira's life and family story, we realize the nefarious influence France's past and present has had, or still has, on colonial or post-colonial subjects. Zahira ends up being killed by the Moroccan man she is supposed to marry and whom she supports thanks to the money paid her by French clients. Acquired thanks to the transaction of money and sex in France, Zahira's independence clashes here with notions of honour and masculinity in Morocco. Furthermore, we hear that Zahira's aunt, Zineb, was already exploited by French colonial forces during the time of the protectorate and then sold to Indochina to serve the French army in Saigon. Thus by creating a web of different voices and interrelated stories, we come to appreciate that Zahira's, Aziz's, and Mojtaba's trajectories are strongly imbricated with France's colonial past. In these flashbacks into Morocco's colonial past and French colonial policies, Taïa also sheds light on the sexualization and racialization the protagonists experience in contemporary France. In *Un pays pour mourir*, the optimism which marked *Le rouge du tarbouche* and also to a certain extent *Infidèles* in its bold creation of queer a Muslim episteme has gone. The sexual and racial violence the protagonists are exposed to in the metropole thwarts to a great extent tactical re-inventions with which the protagonists in Taïa's previous novels have coped with oppressing ideologies.

I am interested in the figure of Aziz in whom debates around race and sexuality in France crystallize. During one of their meetings, Aziz, almost in a comic vein, tells his friend Zahira about the clients he entertains, especially a gay couple, Jean-Jacques and Pierre, both Parisian intellectuals originating from the Vosges, who teach at the ENS. Apart from invigorating their sexual life by sharing the couple's bed and providing them with sexual services ('Il n'y a que

comme ça qu'ils jouissent.'),[94] he cooks Maghrebi food for them ('Je leur ai cuisiné des tas de couscous et de tagines.'),[95] and takes them to the hammam where he gives them massages. In an outspoken way, Aziz enumerates the passive sexual positions both men like whereas he, in their eyes, embodies 'la virilité incarnée'.[96] The young prostitute concludes that it is only thanks to him that the two men are still together ('Tu le sais, ce vieux couple français trop parisien, qui a totalement oublié le coin perdu dans les Vosges d'où il vient, ne tient plus que grâce à moi.').[97]

Jean-Jacques and Pierre, and others ('Certains d'entre eux ont des maisons à la campagne ou au bord de la mer.')[98] need the young Algerian prostitute so that they can live out a licentious sexuality no longer possible if they want to live according to the homonormative model and belong to the French Republic. In their race for assimilation, to be a good homosexual citizen firmly anchored in the French Republic, Jean-Jacques, Pierre and others need the racialized, orientalized Other who offers them the possibility of outwardly being a couple despite the fact that their attraction for each other has seemingly vanished and that they can no longer enjoy a vibrant sexual relationship ('Tous les fantasmes qu'ils avaient dans leur pauvre tête de clients coincés, je les ai réalisés.').[99] In public, they can be a homonormative couple, but behind closed doors we learn that their relationship can only be sustained due to Aziz's services. Whilst they pride themselves of France's progessiveness, of the importance of human rights, of the freedom they enjoy as citizens of the French Republic, they need Aziz at night for their

[94] Abdellah Taïa, *Un pays pour mourir* (Paris : Seuil, 2015), p. 36. Henceforth referred to as *PPM*.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] *PPM*, p. 39.
[99] *PPM*, p. 35.

fantasies to be fulfilled (‘Le jour, ils se gargarisent de mots trop grands pour dire la liberté dont ils jouissent. Et la nuit ils viennent se cacher avec moi et mes copines brésiliennes.’).[100]

In other words, he provides a release for their sexual energy in order that they might live according to the homonormative model. As Taïa’s words illustrate : ‘Ils sont nombreux ceux qui se trouvent dans le même cas. C’est notre destin: payer par notre corps pour l’avenir des autres.’[101] The racialized Other on whom French people project licentious sexuality and whom French men use in order to fulfil sexual desires can provide them with a sexual life they no longer dare live out. At the same time, Aziz is aware that he has no place and will never have a place as a citizen of the French Republic. Enumerating all the clients who enjoy his services, he states at the end:

> Ça leur sert à quoi toutes ces lois si elles ne les empêchent pas de reproduire le même monde, beau de l’extérieur et, au fond, tellement coincé. À la limite je veux bien croire que leur Jeanne d’Arc s’est réellement battue pour la liberté et que leurs ancêtres ont inventé les droits de l’homme. En 1789. Mais, au bout du compte, qu’est-ce qu’on trouve ici, à Paris, au cœur du cœur de la France? De la bourgeoisie bien étriquée, trop fière de sa culture et toujours bien contente d’elle-même.[102]

Frequenting the intellectual circles and well-established citizens of Paris, Aziz denounces their hypocrisy when they pride themselves on the belief in human rights and inclusiveness (embodied by the female figure of Jeanne d’Arc) invented in France. Despite the existence of the French law according to which every French citizen is equal, be they from a different ethnic background, belonging to a sexual minority, and so on, the ethnic Other faces insurmountable hurdles if he wants to access French society at the heart of Paris. Alongside these official laws there are hidden laws, as this episode illustrates, which racialize and

[100] *PPM*, p. 39.
[101] *PPM*, p. 170.
[102] *PPM*, p. 39-40.

ostracize the Other in order for the French bourgeoisie to exist, something which is clearly established by Taïa's (and Fassin's) text.

Strikingly, Aziz's speech is interspersed with images conveying the hard, thankless nature of his work ('Je me cassais le dos à force d'être penchée toutes les nuits, courbée durant des heures, dans le froid glacial de la porte Dauphine.')[103], while alluding to his sexually active position amongst effeminate white French gay males. It can be said, then, that Taïa's text shows this dynamic, revealed by Fassin in his research on sexual and ethnic minorities in France, whereby France's white gay community exists thanks to the sexual labour of the migrants and citizens from its ex-colonies.

The division between the racially active and the passive white partner in Aziz's speech bears traces of the famous FHAR ('Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire') manifesto, published in 1971 during the struggle for equality (which itself echoed the manifesto on abortion published a few months earlier), and in which Arab men are the embodiment of virile masculinity.[104] Indeed, as we have seen, Shepard shows how in the wake of the Algerian War of Independence, several images and phantasms circulated in France about Arab masculinity, which were instrumentalized by the far right or the far left. Studying specifically the context of the '68 unrests in Paris and the ensuing sexual revolution in France, Shepard shows that the image of the hyper virile Arab man with his uncontrolled, uncivilized sexuality was appropriated by the FHAR in order to unsettle notions of white patriarchy. In particular, the FHAR were influenced by the masculine image which circulated in anti-imperialist and Algerian nationalist circles which conceived of the Algerian as victorious, healthy men

[103] *PPM*, p. 35.
[104] Shepard, p. 217.

triumphing over the French colonialists, depicted in turn as weak and greedy for healthy masculinity, which led them to torture the Arab male body.[105]

Published in 1971, the FHAR manifesto stated: 'Nous sommes plus de 343 salopes. Nous nous sommes fait enculer par des Arabes. Nous en sommes fiers et nous recommencerons.'[106] This famous quotation was followed by one from Jean Genet : 'Peut-être que si je n'étais jamais allé au lit avec des Algériens, je n'aurais pu approuver le FLN. J'aurais probablement été de leur bord, de toute façon, mais c'est l'homosexualité qui m'a fait réaliser que les Algériens n'étaient pas différents des autres hommes'.[107] One purpose of the manifesto was to dispel the cliché of old Europeans who take advantage of young Arabs and exult in sex between Arab immigrants, particularly Algerians, and French homosexual men. Another purpose of the manifesto was to shock bourgeois morality and to establish connections between two oppressed minorities, the 'racially' and the 'sexually' different. However, the racial division of the sexual positions tended to amalgamate sexual passivity and whiteness, and assigned to Arab partners active positions which bolstered stereotypes of Arab manhood which are still present in Aziz's self-depiction. Despite the proximity the FHAR wished to establish with Arab men, the Arab man is reduced in this manifesto to pure corporality. Already in the FHAR manifesto the Arab man becomes an expression of French white homosexual subjectivity.

In his self-fashioning, Aziz purposefully takes on the role of performing excessive, undomesticated masculinity. He embodies the working migrant class in contrast to the white, domesticated passive French men to whom he provides sexual services. However, in contrast

[105] Ibid.
[106] Martel, p, 41.
[107] Ibid.

to the FHAR movement, there is no longer complicity between the white gay man and the Arab man, but, as we have seen, distancing exists in order for the white gay man to belong to the French Republic. However, the eroticization of hard-working Arab masculinity is still present.

In a crude and outspoken manner, Aziz almost prides himself on his sex which helps to sustain him among those white Parisian whom he describes with disparaging synecdoches ('ce monde de chiens enragés', 'de trous de cul à jamais assoiffés'),[108] while enumerating the humiliating positions he had to assume while working at night. Furthermore, he understands that his attractiveness relies mostly upon being a undomesticated man from Algeria:

> Je venais d'arriver à Paris. Je me prostituais habillé en garçon arabe un peu sauvage de là-bas, d'Algérie. C'est ce qu'ils aimaient, les clients, que je sente le bled, la sauvagerie du bled, comme ils aimaient dire.[109]

In contrast to recreational, intellectual, domestic whiteness, Aziz understands that there is erotic potential in the precarious position of the Algerian prostitute. Accompanying the eroticization of his ethnic difference – that of a hypersexual Arab man – there is also the eroticization of the social class, that of a migrant worker. If the French economy thrived during the colonial era and homosexual men could free themselves thanks to the Arab body, nothing has changed: the Arab body and the labour provided by it supports and emerges as the receptacle of white sexual subjectivity. In contrast to the colonial period, the 'colonized' are now brought home and the power relations, as Fassin and Abellah Taïa illustrate, are played out there.

[108] *PPM*, p. 34.
[109] *PPM*, p. 49.

Thus, unlike in Gide's time, in which homosexuality was criminalized at home and homosexuals sought freedom in North Africa, the Arab body does provide sexual liberation and freedom from a homonormative lifestyle at home. Some Parisian white gay men need the Other in order to maintain and at the same time escape a homonormative life. For the French Republican model to exist with its integration of sexual minorities, it needs to racialize the Other and endow him with the qualities of backwardness and unbridled sexuality.

Celui qui est digne d'être aimé : Ahmed and Emmanuel

Taïa's *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé* traces in epistolary form the life of a 40-year old Moroccan man, Ahmed, who lives in Paris. The reader learns in Ahmed's farewell letter to Emmanuel that he left Morocco as an adolescent in order to follow Emmanuel, a French scholar, with whom he was passionately in love at the time and with whom he settles down in Paris. This relationship is juxtaposed to another, between Ahmed and Vincent; the latter writes a letter to Ahmed in which he states his desire to reconnect with Ahmed. These two letters are framed by Ahmed's writing to his mother who lives in Morocco and in which he explains to her his life as a homosexual in Paris, and by a letter from Lahbib, a childhood friend from Morocco, in which he recounts his frustrated love affair with a French diplomat in Rabat.

Taïa points out in several interviews that *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé* is influenced by *Les lettres portugaises*, an epistolary novel now commonly attributed to Gabriel de Guilleragues.[110] *Les lettres portugaises* was published in 1669 in France and consist of five letters written by a Portuguese nun to a French officer who deserted her. The letters are

[110] See, for example, https://lebudelarue.com/rencontre-avec-abdellah-taia-1re-partie/, or https://www.franceinter.fr/emissions/chasse-croise/chasse-croise-15-juillet-2017, [accessed 14.07.2020].

emotional complaints in which the nun revives her feelings for her lover.[111] With *Les lettres portugaises*, the genre of the epistolary novel established itself as a form and the letter as a privileged site of passionate expression.[112]

The letters written by Ahmed to his mother and to Emmanuel, by Vincent to Emmanuel, and by Lahbib to Ahmed, draw upon *Les lettres portugaises* in that in each letter the writer depicts his love or past love for his lover. As in *Une mélancolie arabe*, the act of writing out their loving emotions enables the protagonists to reconstruct their love story in order to make a comprehensible, unbroken narrative of their past romance. As Laurent Versini observes, as a genre the epistolary novel distinguishes itself through its direct, unmediated style.[113] In Versini's words : 'Les lettres sont écrites dans la chaleur même du sujet ou de l'événement qui les occasionnera, avec le style même de celui qui les écrit dans la détresse'.[114] Thoughts are written down as they come, without any effort to control their logic or the structure of the sentence and the emotions are rendered in an unmediated and direct manner.

By rendering the characters' past and present love experience in epistolary form in *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé,* Taïa aims to do several things simultaneously. Taïa has his characters reconstruct their experiences from their own subjective point-of-view. This unmediated, subjective apprehension of events is all the more important in that one of the purposes of *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé* is to give voice to the Arab man or lover who has been muted by French writers or depicted in an orientalist style, depriving them of any individuality. In

[111] Joe Bray, *The epistolary novel: representation of consciousness* (London/New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 29.
[112] Bray, p. 30.
[113] Laurent Versini, *Le roman épistolaire* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1979), p. 50.
[114] Versini, p. 55.

these highly subjective apprehensions of the world and of the relationship, mediated through the epistolary genre, Taïa counterbalances the orientalist passages in Gide's *Si le grain ne meurt* in which the Arab subject is depicted as mute. However, this rendering of the Arabs' subjective experience can only play out in a French literary framework, that is, *Les lettres portugaises*. As seen throughout the dissertation, French literary culture on the one hand frees protagonists in Taïa's works, yet on the other imprisons them.

In his relationship with Emmanuel, Ahmed experiences the dynamic of France's sexual and racial policies first hand. The barely concealed imperialist discourse inherent in France's policy around sexual minorities juxtaposes France's progressiveness regarding the equality of sexualities with the ethnic Other; this is reflected in Emmanuel's and his family's attitude towards Ahmed and his Muslim background. In the eyes of Emmanuel and his family, Ahmed is saved from a 'barbaric' background and thanks to France's progressiveness he can now live out his sexual orientation freely. In his letter to Emmanuel, Ahmed blames Emmanuel for having had a neo-colonizing influence on him ('Pourtant, tu n'as eu aucun scrupule à reproduire sur moi, dans mon corps, dans mon cœur, tout ce que la France refuse de voir: du néo-colonialisme.')[115]

When Ahmed blames Emmanuel for having transformed him into a 'petit pédé parisien bien comme il faut',[116] he implies, amongst other things, that this gay identity, which privileges sexual orientation as the essence of the self, has alienated him from his own culture, in which the notions of sexuality have no impact on self and identity. Upon his encounter with Emmanuel on a beach in Salé near the mausoleum of Sidi ben Acher, Ahmed was seemingly

[115] Abdellah Taïa, *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé* (Paris: Seuil, 2017), p. 104. Henceforth referred to as *CDA*.
[116] *CDA*, p. 89.

less troubled by the notion of sexuality. For Ahmed, unlike Emmanuel, this encounter and the moment of seduction were linked to the sacred and magic. He was aware of the chance he had to meet a Frenchman who eventually would save him from his poverty. He would put his lucky encounter down to the presence of Allah who seemed well inclined towards him.[117] When during sex Ahmed felt the heat of Emmanuel's body, he was convinced that well-meaning djinns were on his side.[118] In Ahmed's thinking, having the power to bring Emmanuel to orgasm, represents his ability to subject Emmanuel to his own desire ('Ma sorcellerie avait marché. Tu étais à moi. Maintenant et plus tard. Tu repartirais à Paris et tu reviendrais.')[119]

Despite his awareness that engaging in an erotic relationship with a man is a transgression in his religion, Ahmed believes his union with Emmanuel to be imbued with the sacred. The very moment was blessed by Allah, who showed him the way to leave poverty behind, and by the saint Sidi ben Acher, the saint of madness and exuberant sexuality. Ahmed writes:

> Cette première fois, dans ce lieu tellement sacré, m'a attaché définitivement à toi. C'était une grande transgression. Mais à ce moment-là, dans tes bras, je n'avais pas peur. Je me sentais encore plus musulman que jamais.[120]

Well aware that Muslim faith does not condone his sexuality, Ahmed needed to invent, at this moment, his own religion, his own faith which will allow him to live out his sexuality. He was aware of the danger, perhaps madness, of his sexuality, yet blessed by Sidi ben Acher and by Allah, he sanctions himself to embrace it fully.

[117] *CDA*, p. 87.
[118] *CDA*, p. 91.
[119] *CDA*, p. 91.
[120] *CDA*, p. 89.

Thus, for Ahmed, sexuality is not accompanied by guilt or shame, but by sacred blessing. Watching Emmanuel's erection, he remarks:

> Je me dis que c'est peut-être ça l'amour, être dans l'intimité de l'amour: avoir la possibilité de trouver beau ce que les autres jugent laid, indécent […] Oui, c'était ça l'amour pour de vrai. Dehors. Nus ou presque. Entourés de tombes musulmanes bienveillantes. A quelques mètres seulement du saint Sidi ben Acher, là où on enchaînait les fous pour protéger le monde de leur fureur contagieuse, de leurs visions noires et de leur sexualité débordante, impardonnable.[121]

For Ahmed, love resonates with the Quranic tradition in which spiritual and physical love evidences the presence of Allah. His concept of the sexual closely interlinked with the spiritual ties in with Abdelwahab Bouhdiba's study on sexuality. Bouhdiba remarks:

> L'amour est un mime de l'acte créateur de Dieu. Aussi le Coran abonde-t-il en versets décrivant la genèse de la vie fondée sur la copulation et sur l'amour physique. […] Non seulement l'œuvre de chair est licite, conforme à la volonté de Dieu, et à l'ordre du monde, mais elle est le signe même de la puissance divine. Elle est le miracle renouvelé et permanent. Aussi est-elle à la fois source de vie et somme de contradictions.[122]

These moments of intense love in which the sacred buttresses the sexual, something we have seen in the previous chapter, vanish once the young boy is back in Paris. Unbridled sexuality in a natural setting is no longer welcome in Paris. When Ahmed attempts to talk to Emmanuel about his sexual experiences with his best friend Lahbib while roaming the streets and the beaches, Emmanuel loses interest. Ahmed writes:

> Là-bas, tu voulais tout entendre de mes aventures enfantines, sexuelles, avec lui. Ici, à Paris, Lahbib a fini par ne plus représenter qu'un passé que tu m'incitais non pas à oublier mais à ne plus toujours prendre en considération. 'Encore tes histoires de pauvres! Tu devrais te concentrer sur autre chose…Tu es à Paris…Tu es arrivé…'.[123]

In Emmanuel's eyes, uninhibited sexuality is linked to primitive culture, in contrast to the civilized life they lead in Paris. Whereas Emmanuel was seemingly interested in Ahmed's

[121] *CDA*, p. 90.
[122] Abdelwahab Bouhdiba*, La sexualité en Islam*, pp. 16-17.
[123] *CDA*, p. 99.

first sexual experiences with Lahbib in Morocco, in that they belonged to orientalist stereotypes of adolescents having sex – something prohibited in France – he has lost interest in this in Paris. Ahmed's 'childish' stories belong to a folkloric past seemingly out of place here ('Et plus jamais ce passé, désormais folklorique à tes yeux, n'est revenu entre nous.')[124] Making it as a Moroccan boy in Paris means entering into civilization and leaving the sexual behind. As the cultural critic and art historian Kobena Mercer writes:

> Imperialism justified itself by claiming that it had a civilizing mission – to lead the base and ignoble savages and 'inferior races' into culture and godliness. The person of the savage was developed as the Other of civilization and one of the first 'proofs' of this otherness was the nakedness of the savage, the visibility of sex. This led Europeans to assume that the savage possessed an open, frank, uninhibited 'sexuality' – unlike the sexuality of the European which was considered to be fettered by the weight of civilization.[125]

In order to be part of Emmanuel's family and Paris, Ahmed has to deny his attitude towards sexuality and conceal it. In order to enter Parisian society, Ahmed has to leave his inferior, 'savage' culture behind and cease to talk about the 'savage', open, frank, and uninhibited sexuality he was able to explore with Lahbib. From Emmanuel's point of view, Ahmed should be grateful that he has been saved from the uncivilized and given the possibility of entering the world of the civilized. Like Jean-Jacques and Pierre in *Un pays pour mourir* Emmanuel seemingly has adapted to a homonormative life-style. He is interested in the 'uncivilised' side of Ahmed's nature only to a certain extent and does not allow this interest to intrude into civilised society.

This integration into France, embodied by Emmanuel and his family, which occurs at the expense of the 'uncivilized', ethnic Other, is vividly described by Ahmed elsewhere. He

[124] *CDA*, p.100.
[125] Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien, 'Race, Sexual Politics and Black Masculinity: A Dossier', in *Male Order : Unwrapping Masculinity*, Rowena Chapman; Jonathan Rutherford, eds (London : Lawrence & Wishart, 1988), pp. 97- 164 (p.106).

becomes aware of Emmanuel's and his family's attitude towards the ethnic Other, their wish to erase every trace of a different ethnic background, when he meets Emmanuel's sister and her Tunisian husband Jamal. Ahmed is shocked when he learns that Emmanuel's sister and Jamal have named their two daughters Jeanne and Marguerite, two names which remind him of Jeanne Moreau and Marguerite Duras, and at the same time efface every trace of their father's Tunisian culture.[126] For Ahmed, this process is 'une nouvelle étape dans l'effacement programmé'[127] and he remarks: 'Non seulement il faut s'intégrer de force dans la société française, mais si, en plus, on réussirait à faire oublier notre peau, notre origine, ça serait parfait.'[128] Integration into Emmanuel's family and into French society in general happens only at the cost of giving up one's own ethnic difference.

This cultural compromise – linked to France's sexual politics – is also clearly alluded to at the moment when Ahmed attempts to establish a connection with Jamal so as to talk about their common past and Arab culture. However, Ahmed becomes aware that Jamal has completely denied his past and has become assimilated by France. Furthermore, Jamal remarks to Ahmed: 'Heureusement que tu as rencontré Emmanuel. Il t'a sauvé, c'est sûr…Les homos, là-bas, on les…tu sais…On les tue….'[129] Whereupon Ahmed reflects: 'Là-bas…Des gens de là-bas…Des sauvages, voilà ce que nous sommes, Jamal et moi. Sauvés par toi et ta famille. Je devrais être reconnaissant. Je devrais être gentil. Bien élevé.'[130]

Himself a Tunisian, Jamal has paradoxically turned into the mouthpiece of France's sexual politics. France opens itself up to the sexually different and to sexual minorities, integrates

[126] *CDA*, p. 105.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] *CDA*, p. 106.
[130] Ibid.

them and allows them to live out their sexuality at the hands of the ethnic Other. In other words, being a homosexual and at the same time standing up for one's Maghrebi identity is impossible. In order to belong to Emmanuel's family and to the French Republic in general, Ahmed has to deny his Arab past or at least dismiss it as barbaric and Other.

As Ahmed writes in his letter to Emmanuel, he was, at the time of their relationship, not aware of the systematic effacement of his Moroccan cultural background. Thus at the beginning, when Ahmed's name caused awkwardness amongst Emmanuel's Parisian friends and family, both Emmanuel and Ahmed decided to change Ahmed into Hamidou. However, Hamidou still bore too much resemblance to Arab culture, and so they decided to name him Midou, which was reminiscent, as both realized, to Tintin's dog Milou. At the time Ahmed used to laugh about this comparison; now, however, he has realized that he has turned into a docile, faithful servant over whom Emmanuel could have complete mastery and whom Emmanuel could mould according to his wishes. Not only was his new name an allusion to French culture (or more correctly, to Belgian culture – another former colonizing nation), but also to the notion of a servile dog.

In his letter to Emmanuel Ahmed blames his French lover not only for the systematic effacement of his background but, concomitantly, of his personality and human qualities. According to Ahmed, Emmanuel had no interest in Ahmed, the Moroccan boy, but rather in a young, handsome, cultivated Arab man he could display to his friends and family. Ahmed becomes aware of his interchangeability, his objectification, when he realizes that Emmanuel is already courting another, younger Arab boy who, like himself at the time, is about to begin university. Ahmed writes: 'Je ne suis qu'un objet qui pourrait être remplacé facilement par un autre. Un jeune Arabe très cultivé grâce à toi qui pourrait du jour au lendemain être jeté et

échangé contre un autre jeune Arabe.'[131] In fact, Ahmed knows that Kamal, '[qui] sera là pour te satisfaire', is waiting in line.[132]

The letter Ahmed writes to Emmanuel on the morning he leaves him affords the space to reconstruct the past relationship. The content of the letter oscillates between intense attraction and love Ahmed felt for Emmanuel and frustration over the latter's coldness and attempts to objectify him. Short sentences ending with exclamation marks ('L'odeur de la France! J'ai de la chance! J'ai de la chance!')[133] bear witness to this outpouring of love and enthusiasm he felt for Emmanuel at the time of their encounter. The immediacy and spontaneity of emotions contrasts with the persona he had to adopt while with Emmanuel. These feelings, which he expresses frankly in his letter, echo, as it were, his individuality which he had to abandon in order to live up to Emmanuel's expectations. To the hypocrisy and coldness of the Parisian setting, he replies with love and anger:

> Avec les années, tout cela est sorti de ta tête, Emmanuel, sorti de ton cœur. Pas moi. Pas moi. Comme tu le vois, treize ans plus tard j'y suis encore, moi, dans cette première fois. Dans ces images pauvres. Dans cette magie involontaire […]. Tu es loin de ton image.[134]

Given the genre of the letter, Taïa empowers those Arab boys with feelings they are deprived of in orientalist writings. The epistolary form finds them voicing their emotions and asserting a subjectivity which they were denied. This is also the case in the final letter in *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé* in which Lahbib voices his love for the French diplomat who treats him despicably.

[131] *CDA*, pp.106-7.
[132] *CDA*, p. 108.
[133] *CDA,* p. 88.
[134] *CDA,* p. 89.

Whilst the historical context in which Emmanuel's and Ahmed's relationship plays out is no longer colonial, their behavioural pattern, as Ahmed remarks, is conditioned by colonial ideology. Not only Emmanuel's assertion of his cultural superiority, but Ahmed's continuous effacement of his own cultural background and concomitantly his assimilation by the French culture reminds him of the life-style of the colonized, as described by Memmi in *Portrait du colonisé, Portrait du colonisateur*. At one point, Ahmed says in the letter: 'Avec le temps, j'ai fini par comprendre que j'étais non seulement un assisté mais également, à plusieurs titres, un colonisé.'[135]

In the chapter 'Portrait du colonisé' Memmi first draws a portrait of the colonized as seen through the eyes of the colonizers ('Portrait mythique du colonisé'), then describes the situation of the colonized in the colonies ('Situation du colonisé') in order to look finally at the reactions of the colonized to their situation ('Les deux réponses du colonisé'). As Memmi remarks in 'Portrait mythique du colonisé', for the colonizer, the personality of the colonized is of little interest. Rather, the colonized shall exist in order to satisfy the needs and wishes of the colonizer. In this process, the colonized becomes commodifed. Memmi writes about the colonized: 'Il n'est sûrement plus un *alter ego* du colonisateur. C'est à peine encore un être humain. Il tend rapidement vers l'objet. A la limite, ambition suprême du colonisateur, il devrait ne plus exister qu'en fonction des besoins du colonisateur […].'[136] Linked to this dehumanization is the colonizer's tendency to address the colonized in the plurale tantum, in anonymous collectivity ('dans le collectif anonyme').[137]

[135] *CDA*, p. 101.
[136] Memmi, p. 105.
[137] Memmi, p. 104.

This tendency to objectify, to anonymize, comes to the fore in Emmanuel's attitude to Ahmed. The gesture of changing his name ('on l'a arrangé, coupé, massacré')[138], of giving him the same name as Tintin's dog, testifies to Emmanuel's tendency to objectify, perhaps paradoxically even, in the process of civilizing Ahmed, of debasing and animalizing him. Furthermore, along with Kamal, another Arab boy who will replace Ahmed, Ahmed belongs to a collective of interchangeable Arab boys at Emmanuel's beck and call.

Subjected to the policy of the colonizers, the colonized have, according to Memmi, two options, namely assimilation or self-affirmation. With respect to assimilation, the colonized adapts to the colonizer and assimilates his or her values to the extent that they deny their own subjectivity. Ahmed is aware that he has transformed himself into another person ('À cause de toi je suis devenu un autre. Je ne suis plus moi aujourd'hui.')[139] He has begun to forget his own language and starts speaking in a different tongue ('A 30 ans, je ne parle même plus l'arabe comme avant. Au téléphone, mes sœurs rient de moi.').[140] Furthermore, he has adapted to such an extent to Emmanuel that he has denied his independent subjectivity: 'Ma vie entière est une construction d'Emmanuel. […] Je m'habille comme toi. Selon les codes bourgeois chic hérités de ta famille.'[141] Ahmed's behaviour is strongly reminiscent of Memmi's description of the behavioural pattern of the colonized who, out of admiration for the colonizer's values and in his denial of himself, mimics the colonizer ('Au nom de ce qu'il souhaite devenir, il s'acharne à s'appauvrir, à s'arracher de lui-même.').[142]

[138] *CDA*, p. 103.
[139] *CDA*, p. 93.
[140] Ibid.
[141] CDA, p. 102.
[142] Memmi, p. 137.

Concerning self-affirmation, Memmi remarks that due to the negative self-image the colonized constructs, whilst projecting all good qualities onto the colonizer, the colonized has now to build his new identity, his self-affirmation, through these negative self-images ('Cette négativité, devenant un élément essentiel de sa reprise de soi et de son combat, il va l'affirmer, la glorifier jusqu'à l'absolu. Non seulement il accepte ses rides et ses plaies, mais il va les proclamer belles.')[143]

A similar process can also be observed in Ahmed. Whereas he seemingly shared Emmanuel's and the French people's attitude towards Morocco's inherent homophobia, he now tries to understand his own family's and Moroccan attitudes towards homosexuality. Furthermore, he distances himself from this western attitude which conceives of sexuality as the primary characteristic of one's identity. He writes to Emmanuel:

> Je ne veux plus être cet intellectuel dont on a rêvé ensemble quand tu es revenu me voir le lendemain sur la plage populaire de Salé. J'ai trouvé un autre travail. Un autre projet. Une autre langue. Je reviens à ma première solitude, où, je l'espère, je pourrai me réconcilier avec mon premier monde. Ma mère dure, sans Hamid, mon père. Mes sœurs trahies par la vie. Je vais aller vers elles et, même si elles s'obstinent à refuser de parler de mon homosexualité, je les forcerai à créer un lien nouveau. Je veux parler avec elles d'elles et de moi. Je ne veux pas que tout tourne autour de mon homosexualité. Car, je l'ai enfin compris, l'amour ne se vit pas uniquement avec les gens qui partagent exactement toutes nos opinions, tous nos choix. Je croyais avoir raison sur tout. Je me trompais. Jamais je n'ai essayé de me mettre dans la peau de mes sœurs. De les regarder et les comprendre. Aujourd'hui, alors que je te quitte, je me sens capable de penser le monde à partir des yeux de ma mère, de mes sœurs. Un peu tard, je leur donne enfin le droit de ne pas être tout à fait d'accord avec moi et j'accepte qu'elles me disent encore des mots durs. C'est à partir de ces mots que je vais rétablir la connexion avec elles.[144]

In this letter Ahmed realizes that the imposition of this western idea of gay identity means deprivation of freedom and, as we have seen, objectification. With his acculturation in France,

[143] Memmi, p. 152.
[144] *CDA*, pp. 109-10.

the European notion of sexuality that privileges sexuality as the essence of the self, the innermost core of one's personality, has been imposed on him. Thus, as Mercer comments,

> it comes as no surprise to see the development of a particular stereotype of a gay man whose consciousness contains nothing else but sexuality, who is perpetually troubled by his sexual desires and who is always looking for the truth of his identity in his sex,[145]

a stereotype from which Ahmed now wishes to distances himself ('Je ne veux pas que tout tourne autour de mon homosexualité'). Whilst he wished to turn into a Parisian white gay man, he despised his sister and his family – but also Emmanuel's family servant Halima, who used to shed tears because of his non-traditional sexual orientation, and who, according to him, conceived of his sexual orientation as 'deviant' and as an illness ('Je croyais avoir raison sur tout'.). Whilst, as we have seen, Emmanuel thinks that France has saved Ahmed from a homophobic country, Ahmed, by liberating himself from Emmanuel and French culture, articulates a need to overturn this negative self-image he has shared with Emmanuel about his country and family, and begins at least to understand his family's attitude towards same-sex love. His attitude recalls Memmi's words : 'Du coup, exactement à l'inverse de l'accusation colonialiste, le colonisé, sa culture, son pays, tout ce qui lui appartient, tout ce qui le représente, deviennent *parfaite positivité.*'[146] Rather than despising his country's homophobic attitude, he attempts to understand it and reconnect with his family on this basis. The harsh words they used have now to be accepted, even transformed into something to be respected.

Ahmed's self-affirmation also expresses itself through a certain solidarity with the other Moroccan boys. Thus, in his description of his encounter of Emmanuel, Ahmed clearly draws on Gide's *Si le grain ne meurt*. The relationship in this latter novel can indeed be said to shed

[145] Mercer, p. 106.
[146] Memmi, p. 152.

light on that between the French writer and Ahmed a century later. The gesture Ahmed makes in order to draw Emmanuel to the floor is described in the following terms: 'J'ai pris ta main et avec force je t'ai entraîné […],'[147] which resonates with Gide's text, 'Mais, saisissant la main qu'il me tendait, je le fis rouler à terre.'[148], with the difference that Ahmed has here the self-agency. More, perhaps, than integrating this image of the premature Maghrebi adolescent, Taïa's project expresses his solidarity with the adolescent and gives him a voice.

Furthermore, in his farewell letter to Emmanuel, Ahmed remembers a presentation he gave at the University of Rabat about the significance of Gide's encounter with adolescents from the Maghreb. While he was approaching this topic from a Gidean perspective, he remarks now in his letter:

> L'émancipation sexuelle d'André Gide, je l'avais vécue à l'époque comme si elle avait été la mienne. Mon identification mystique, littéraire et sexuelle était la preuve de mon intelligence. […] Plus tard je me suis rendu compte que j'avais fait un oubli impardonnable. Tragique. J'avais traité le garçon arabe offert à André Gide en ne parlant pratiquement pas de lui. […] j'avais tué à Rabat une énième fois le garçon qui devrait être le véritable héros de cette histoire. J'aurais dû lui servir de voix, d'avocat, d'ami, de frère lointain.[149]

Taïa's enterprise in *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé* can be interpreted in terms of defending the point of view of those Maghrebis who are victimized by French tourists. Through the letter, Taïa appropriates Gide's experience from Ahmed's point of view, recalling the Algerian boy given to him by Oscar Wilde on their trip to Algiers. With Memmi's theory we have seen that Taïa, through Ahmed, not only depicts the Moroccan boy's assimilation, but also their self-affirmation. It is as if Taïa had written a coda to *Si le grain ne meurt* with Ahmed's self-affirmation at its centre. Through the perspective of Ahmed, Taïa distances himself from the stereotyped images imposed on Maghrebi men and through acts of self-affirmation tries to return to his own cultural values.

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[147] *CDA*, p. 87.
[148] André Gide, *Si le grain ne meurt*, (Paris : Gallimard, 1995), p. 299.
[149] *CDA*, p. 118.

Celui qui est digne d'être aimé: Ahmed and Vincent

I would like to close this chapter by turning to Vincent's letter to Ahmed in *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé*. If we have seen that encounters between French and Moroccan men were marked by the colonial history shared by France and the Maghreb, or, again, by contemporary sexual and racial political views in France, this encounter will have a lasting effect on both, in that Vincent and Ahmed will leave their comfortable subject-positions behind. To reiterate Assia Djebar's words, Vincent and Ahmed will no longer be 'victimes en proie à l'Histoire, cette vieille tragédienne hantée par des rôles en putréfaction',[150] but they will invent a new protocol of encounter with the potential to trigger a new language and new subject-positions.[151]

In his letter to Ahmed, Vincent explains to him that, despite the fact that Ahmed did not appear at their second meeting at the café *La Vielleuse* in Belleville, he would now like to reconnect with him, remembering how intense their feelings were for each other at the time of their encounter. In his letter to Ahmed, Vincent mentions *Les lettres portugaises.* He identifies with the Portuguese nun who writes of her unrequited love ('Tu savais dans quel malheur tu me jetais puisque tu connaissais si bien *Les lettres portugaises*').[152] Like Ahmed's letter to Emmanuel, the letter's language and style is imbued with emotions of love, reflecting Vincent's feelings for his former lover. The letter becomes a channel for Vincent's unmediated emotions and functions to seduce Ahmed: 'Cette lettre est pour te séduire de nouveau.'[153] At the end of the letter, emotions take over from reflection, as echoed by the

[150] Rosello, *France and the Maghreb : Performative Encounters*, p. 15.
[151] Rosello, *Encontres Méditerranéennes*, pp. 15-16.
[152] *CDA*, p. 52.
[153] *CDA*, p. 75.

interrupted syntax ('je n'ai plus la force d'écrire…Cela ne sert plus rien d'écrire…Viens…Ahmed…Viens…'.).[154] As in Ahmed's letter to Emmanuel, the epistolary form allows Taïa to convey love which animated the protagonists in *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé* in its unmediated form.

When Vincent met Ahmed in the metro, he was mainly drawn by Ahmed's difference which drew him to follow him.

> Je ne me demandais pas si cela avait du sens, ou pas, de suivre un inconnu, un émigré, un Arabe, un musulman. Je voyais clairement que tu étais aussi tout cela, ces mots, ces adjectifs, et je suis tombé amoureux de toi aussi vite parce que tu étais tout cela.[155]

Despite the fact that he was attracted by Ahmed's otherness, as a Muslim and émigré, he will realize during the encounter that his own position, that of a French citizen seemingly rooted in France, will be shaken by Ahmed and that he will unwittingly be reminded of his own roots in Morocco.

Ahmed and Vincent's encounter ties in with Rosello's concept of performative encounter in that during this moment they both create a French-Moroccan space in which they invent a new language and a new protocol, outside historical violence, yet at the same time maintaining their respective cultural differences. In the hotel room which Vincent books in order to spend some intimate time with Ahmed, he hears Ahmed asking him to join him in the bathroom: 'Je prends un bain…Viens…*Ajji*….'[156] Vincent, who has just come back from a journey to Morocco, remembers that he was overcome by an intense desire to get closer to

[154] *CDA*, p. 78.
[155] *CDA*, p. 48.
[156] *CDA,* p. 65.

Ahmed and to answer in Arabic. More than an intellectual desire, he feels that his body is overcome by an urge to answer in Arabic:

> *Ajji*. J'avais entendu ce mot arabe à plusieurs reprises durant mon voyage au Maroc, sans le comprendre. À présent, je le vivais, ce mot, avec toi, par toi. Et tout, dans mon corps, voulait répondre non pas en français mais en arabe.[157]

Vincent leaves the comfortable position on his bed in order to join Ahmed in the bathroom, and when he tries to pronounce these words some kind of babble comes out ('sans complètement réussir').[158] As Rosello remarks, the language of performative encounters is not always successful as fully-fledged language. Sometimes it can just be 'whispered terms of endearments or screams […] or a few sentences stuttered in another idiom'.[159] Vincent's attempt to formulate words in Arabic signifies this fragile moment during which he leaves his comfortable position as a Frenchman in order to embody a new position, a new identity, a hybrid one.

Once in the bathroom, in front of Ahmed, he then succeeds in speaking in Arabic and leaves his French identity behind. Vincent remembers:

> Tu as prononcé '*Ana*' et tu t'es désigné du doigt. Et ne disant '*enta*' tu m'as désigné du doigt, moi. '*Enta*' c'était moi. Tu. Toi. '*Ana enta'*: je…Tu…Toi.. J'ai cessé de me masturber et j'ai pris un peu de temps pour bien déchiffrer le message. Tu l'as répété: '*Ana enta*'. Tu as continué à te masturber tout en le répétant. Tu me regardais et tu n'avais absolument pas honte. *Ana enta*. *Ana enta*. *Ana enta*. Soudain, c'était clair. Je suis toi.[160]

Vincent leaves his Frenchness behind and Ahmed his Moroccan identity ('Je suis toi'). When Vincent finally succeeds in answering with the same word and prides himself on this he realizes that he is now able to speak the language of his forefathers: 'Je parlais arabe. La

[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Rosello, p. 17.
[160] *CDA*, p. 66.

langue de mon père, qu'il nous avait toujours cachée. Et j'allais d'un moment à l'autre jouir, exploser de jouissance, dans cette langue d'origine.'[161]

The encounter with Ahmed forces Vincent to leave his old subject-position behind, that of a Frenchman interested first and foremost in Ahmed's difference – Muslim/Arab man, and immigrant. Through his babbles, Vincent is initiated into a new world, a new culture, where he retrieves the Moroccan past he has not been aware of in his life : 'Et tu savais me conduire jusqu'à ce monde où je n'étais plus moi, où je ne parlais plus la langue du présent mais celle d'un passé jusque-là inintéressant.'[162]

By pronouncing 'ana' and 'enta' in Arabic, Vincent performs a new identity, a hybrid identity between the Arabic and French world. Furthermore, another identity is revealed, that of his Moroccan past. He suddenly recalls his father's Jewish-Moroccan roots which he had neglected. He is initiated, by speaking to Ahmed, through bodily proximity to Ahmed, into his father's past. Whereas Vincent identified as a Frenchman before, he is reminded through his body of his Moroccan roots ('Et tout, dans mon corps, voulait répondre non pas en français mais en arabe').[163] As we have seen, Rosello remarks that through the performative encounters a new body emerges as part of the new, self.[164]

Having an erotic relationship with Ahmed occasions Vincent's new Moroccan identity and his new past: 'Je fondais pour toi et je savais que c'était avec toi que j'allais partager tout cela. Ce passé juif qui remontait. Ce voyage au Maroc. Cette terre de mon père heureuse, malheureuse,

[161] *CDA*, p. 67.
[162] Ibid.
[163] *CDA*, p. 65.
[164] Rosello, p. 5.

violente, mythifiée.'[165] The language he finds with Ahmed, on an erotic but also a linguistic level, shows that the two, or perhaps three cultures, the Arab/Muslim, Jewish, and Christian, separated through history by violence, have been united in Vincent's babbles in Arabic. Vincent comes to embody a new subject-position, similar to that of the singer Zahhra el-Fassiya, a Moroccan-Jewish performer who created a bridge between the two cultures.[166]

Whilst the transformation occurs more profoundly in Vincent's case, the encounter with the Frenchman also seems to have some effect on Ahmed who leaves the comfortable subject-position of the Maghreb man and runs a risk in openly displaying his love for another man. When they follow each other in the metro station, Ahmed opens up his coat in order to welcome Vincent's body in front of the other passengers and they embrace.[167] When they sit together in a café in Clichy, full of Arab men, Ahmed is not afraid of openly displaying his love for Vincent by taking his hands in his own.[168]

This physical and linguistic performance between Ahmed and Vincent allows both, and perhaps especially Ahmed, to fully live out their sexuality beyond the prohibitive norms of Islam. The invention of this situation, in which Arabic, French, and Jewish elements coalesce and which transcend cultural difference, is a new framework which accommodates Ahmed's sexuality without prejudice and judgement.

Thus, unlike the other encounters I have analysed, Vincent, and to a lesser extent, Ahmed are transformed and let themselves transform each other. Most importantly, they transcend the usual scenarios of encounters between gay French and Moroccans, which, as we have seen,

[165] *CDA*, p. 74
[166] Ibid.
[167] *CDA*, p. 59.
[168] *CDA*, p. 54.

are marked by a history of colonial and sexual exploitation, exoticization, and Othering. Through their encounter (the 'rencontre'), a 'encontre' comes into being, a chaotic, ambiguous happening during which cultures intermingle, new languages emerge and old, subject-positions are left behind.

Conclusion

In my discussion of relationships between Moroccan and French men I have shown, using *Analphabètes,* that Moroccan men who bear an Arab/Muslim heritage and its concomitant medicalization of homosexuality, emerge as lost and anguished subjects when they come into contact with white gay French men. Conversely, in Taïa's writings Moroccan men function as a channel for white gay sexual energies and fantasies. In their wish to become assimilated by the French Republic, white gay men ostracize the ethnic Other and project 'prohibited', according to their homonormative life-style, 'unwelcome' sexual fantasies onto the Other. Thus, unlike in Gide's writings, Moroccan men are no longer a means of liberation, but rather a support to assist white gay men to become integrated into the French Republican model. As Taïa's writings show, Moroccan men, caught up in imperialist and colonial discourses, have no choice but to either perform an orientalist stereotype of Arab masculinity or deny their cultural background in order to be accepted by French men. French gay identity, then, legitimizes itself thanks to peripheral sexualities which it simultaneously draws upon and from which it distinguishes itself.[169]

Through their discussion of same-sex relationships between Moroccan and French men, Taïa's and Rachid O.'s late works shed critical light on France's relationship with Morocco.

[169] See Kahan, p. 332.

France as a place of freedom has given way to one which racializes and sexualizes Moroccan men. In these works, both writers are increasingly concerned to discuss social realities and unearth inequalities. Rachid O.'s *Analphabètes* discusses homophobia in Morocco and issues arising from the reproduction of the homo/hetero binary system. In a similar vein, Taïa reveals homosexuality in France at the turn of the twenty-first century to be interdependent upon semi-peripheral sexualities. There are, however, also glimpses of hope in both writers' works. Rachid O. unsettles rigid notions around honour concerning the woman within the family structure and describes a more complex situation due to men's queer relationships with western men. There are rare instances in Taïa in which Maghrebi and French men re-invent the mode of their encounters and transgress the rigid subject-positions (the progressive European as opposed to the backward Maghrebi, for example) dictated by the history of France and the Maghreb.

Conclusion

In her introduction to *Islamicate Sexualities,* Valerie Traub observes that regarding sexuality the East and the West are currently in a state of political crisis. She paraphrases Bradley Epps who asserts that, as important as it is to challenge Foucault's historical division between a repressive, juridical West and a sexually polymorphous East, we need to be careful about inverting this binary when speaking of a polysexual, permissive West and a repressive East.[1] These binary constructions are often politically motivated fantasies which do not testify to a more intricate reality.[2]

By way of conclusion, I would like to briefly look at some articles and reviews on Abdellah Taïa or by Taïa himself in Moroccan and western media in order to compare the media discourse with Epp's observation.[3] I confine my study mainly to the period between 2008 and 2012 and slightly beyond, since at that time Taïa acquired national and international notoriety upon the publication of *L'armée du salut* (2006) and *Une mélancolie arabe* (2008). My research in Moroccan media for reviews of Rachid O.'s writings yielded very few results, probably due to the fact that the writer wishes to remain as anonymous as possible in order to protect his family.[4] There are some brief news items acknowledging that the writer received the Prix Mamounia for *Analphabètes*. In *Le Monde*, however, there are reviews of *L'enfant ébloui* (1995) and *Plusieurs vies* (1996) from around this period. Written by de Ceccatty and

[1] Bradley Epps, 'The Fetish of Fluidity', in *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis*, Tim Dean; Christopher Lane, eds (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), in *Islamicate Sexualities, Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*.
[2] Valerie Traub, 'The Past Is a Foreign Country?', in *Islamicate Sexualities, Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, pp. 17-18.
[3] Due to his secrecy, there is barely any discussion of Rachid O.'s work in western and eastern media. I will confine myself here, therefore, to Abdellah Taïa.
[4] In the interview conducted with Rachid O. in June in Paris, Rachid O. re-affirmed to me that he wished to protect his family a much as he could and therefore would keep a low-profile in Moroccan media.

the journalist Jean-Noël Pancrazi, these reviews stress the naïveté and sensuality which imbues Rachid O.'s writings, corroborating the idea that Rachid O.'s works respond to a western need to perpetuate an orientalist image of Morocco. In a review entitled 'Découverte sensuelle' (1995), Pancrazi highlights the 'élan d'une sensualité précoce' in *L'enfant ébloui* and the narrator's need to be dazzled by the French language and French lovers.[5] The tone is similar in an article by de Ceccatty under the title 'L'enfance mise à nu'. Here, the journalist compares Christine Angot's experience of sexual abuse by her father with that of Joël Arès who depicts in a similar vein his incestuous relationship with his father and draws vague comparisons with Rachid O.'s works.[6] By stressing the child's naïveté and 'early' sexuality, the reviewers, it seems, endorse the image of Morocco as a place of polymorphous sexuality and its inhabitants (children) open to sexual experiences.

Turning to reviews of Taïa in western media, we see that, in fact, as Epp observes, the binary between the sexually permissive East and the repressive West has shifted to a progressive West as opposed to a restrictive East. In an article entitled 'A Boy to be Sacrificed, Growing up gay in an unyielding culture', published in the *New York Times* on 24 March 2012, just after *An Arab Melancholia* appeared for the first time in English,[7] Taïa briefly recounts his life. In the main, he relates traumatic events from his childhood and early adolescence, such as his objectification as a girl by boys and men of his neighbourhood and the attempted rapes by men he endured. Towards the end of the article, Taïa relates that he wishes for the young

[5] See https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1995/03/31/decouverte-sensuelle_3863193_1819218.html, [accessed 29.01.2020].
[6] https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1998/05/08/l-enfance-a-nu_3647541_1819218.html, [accessed 29.01.2020].
[7] *An Arab Melancholia* appeared on 12 March 2012 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

Abdellah to, 'never forget the trauma he and every Arab homosexual like him suffered'.[8] He concludes:

> Now, over a year after the Arab Spring began, we must again remember homosexuals. Arabs have finally become aware that they have to invent a new, free Arab individual, without the support of their megalomaniacal leaders. Arab homosexuals are also taking part in this revolution, whether they live in Egypt, Iraq or Morocco. They, too, are part of this desperately needed process of political and individual liberation. And the world must support and protect them.[9]

There are terms in this passage, such as 'new', 'free', 'process of political and individual liberation', which strike me as key and which I have tried throughout this study to analyse critically, not only in the transnational context of Morocco and France but also via Rachid O.'s and Taïa's writings. Taïa sees Arab homosexuals, and Arabs in general, as being oppressed by their leaders and calls on all Arab homosexuals, with the help of the outside world, to bring about individual liberation. This tone is also present in a later article in the *Times* written by journalist Aida Alami and published in 2014 under the title 'Muslim, Gay, and Making No Apologies'.[10] Alami quotes Taïa, saying that he cannot live in Morocco due to his homosexuality and that he particularly enjoyed Egyptian films because women were unveiled and consumed alcohol, two behaviours which apparently gave him hope.[11] Alami concludes by stating that 'he was one of the few Moroccan authors to denounce the oppressive policies of the kingdom and to strongly back the Feb. 20 movement that led protests in Morocco in 2011 demanding democratic reforms'.[12] Reading these articles, one cannot miss the political bias in their portrayal of Morocco; Morocco emerges as a country in which individual rights are denied, homosexuals oppressed, women veiled and forbidden to

[8] https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/opinion/sunday/a-boy-to-be-sacrificed.html?searchResultPosition=4, [accessed 29.01.2020].
[9] https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/opinion/sunday/a-boy-to-be-sacrificed.html?searchResultPosition=4, [accessed 29.01.2020].
[10] https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/12/world/middleeast/abdellah-taia-makes-his-directorial-debut.html?searchResultPosition=3, [accessed 29.01.2020].
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

drink alcohol. Neither article explicitly mention the West. However, considering that gay liberation movements emerged in and have spread from the West and that the *New York Times* is the mouthpiece of the U.S. conservative liberal world view, the message appears to be that the western world shall save the Arabic homosexual from homophobia at home. These articles reflect Massad's definition of the Gay International, in which native informants identified by the West or in the western diaspora who have already adopted the hetero/homo binary model urge the West to save the 'woman' and the 'gays and lesbians'. The uncritical use of terms such as 'gay', 'homosexuality', 'individual freedom' confirm the West's appropriation of Taïa's sexual orientation and its suffusion by human rights discourse.

If we look at the articles and reviews in *Le Monde* which appeared around the same time, we see that the implication of a Moroccan citizen deprived of individual freedom, or sexual rights, is also present here. However, there is too, perhaps more so than in the *New York Times*, a more differentiated approach to the place of the homosexual and Taïa's mission in the Arab/Muslim world. Thus in an article entitled 'Abdellah Taïa, le vertige de la liberté', which appeared in 2010, Catherine Simon recounts how Taïa had begun to write in French, explains the significance of Morocco for Taïa, mentions the ties he has with his family, his culture, and acknowledges the importance of Choukri for the writer.[13] However, she nevertheless concludes that Taïa feels protected (*protégé*) by France and grateful to have found his way into French culture and to write in such a language ('Venu en France et à la langue française par amour pour le cinéma, Abdellah Taïa devrait être comblé.').[14] In an article entitled 'La voix étouffée de l'homo oriental', Simon offers an overview of Arabic literary classics which mention homosexuality. The article, despite its very telling title, does,

[13] https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2010/09/22/abdellah-taia-le-vertige-de-la-liberte_1414511_3260.html, [accessed 29.01.2020].
[14] Ibid.

however, mention the changes Arabic underwent by introducing (*mithli)* into classical Arabic vocabulary and quotes scholars from the Middle East, thereby trying to approach homosexuality in Arabic literature from a more objective point of view.[15]

Following the attack on the offices of Charlie Hebdo on 7 January 2015, Taïa was twice invited by *Le Monde* to give his opinion about the events. In the article 'Les Musulmans doivent être courageux et se regarder en face', Taïa blames the French colonial power and also the fraught process of integration for North African migrants in France.[16] However, in his view it seems more appropriate to blame Islam as a stifling religion which cuts short notions of individual freedom. He conceives of the laws and prohibitions propagated by Islam as daily terrorism and pleads in the end for a more liberal notion of Islam.[17] In the article 'La terreur au coeur d'une famille', Taïa tells of his nephew who was converted to Islam and blames Islam and Morocco's lack of an effective education policy for this.[18] These two articles nevertheless have a tendency to earmark Islam as a backward religion, elements the writer has abandoned in order to become a 'good French' citizen. To a certain extent, Taïa here becomes the mouthpiece of views widespread in western conservative nationalist circles which depict Arab/Muslim culture and Islam as not only backward regarding sexual rights, but also at the root of terrorism in Europe and the U.S..

I would like here to examine a few articles and reviews of Taïa's works in the francophone Moroccan press. In a famous article published in the progressive Moroccan francophone

[15] https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2011/12/08/la-voix-etouffee-de-l-homo-oriental_1614676_3260.html, [accessed 01.02.2020].
[16] https://www.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2015/01/19/abdellah-taia-les-musulmans-doivent-etre-courageux-et-se-regarder-nus_4558668_3476.html, [accessed 01.02.2020].
[17] Ibid.
[18] https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2015/09/09/la-terreur-au-c-ur-d-une-famille-marocaine-par-abdellah-taia_4556350_3260.html, [accessed 01.02.2020].

newspaper *Tel Quel* in June 2007 entitled 'Abdellah Taïa, homosexuel envers et contre tout' by Karim Boukhari, the journalist details the controversies Taïa's writings and media appearances have sparked in Morocco, especially amongst conservatives and members of the Islamist party.[19] According to Boukhari, *Al Massae*, the most widely read Arabophone daily in Morocco, incited readers to set fire to Taïa while *Attajdid*, the Arabophone newspaper representing the Islamist Justice and Development Party, stated publicly that homosexuals were unwelcome. The short phrases Boukhari quotes from Taïa's opponents convey a sense of homosexuality being conflated with the West and foreign to Islam and Arab/Muslim societies ('Il a accepté de donner son c… pour se faire connaître' ; 'Il se prostitue pour plaire à l'Occident' ; 'Il nuit à l'image du Maroc et de l'islam' ; 'Si nous étions réellement en terre d'islam, on le lapiderait').[20] There is also a sense of Taïa being reduced to his sexual orientation and using his sexuality as a selling point to please the West. During a conversation with Boukhari, a member of the Justice and Development Party stated, however, that the writer, due to his relatively small success in Morocco, does not represent a real danger for the country, thus censorship was not yet necessary.[21]

Reviews of Taïa in the Moroccan daily *Aujourd'hui le Maroc* convey well the differing points of view regarding Taïa as a person and as a writer. A review published in 2008 by the writer and academic Mokhtar Chaoui entitled 'Littérature: Les défaillances littéraires du dernier roman d'Abdellah Taïa', which appeared following publication of *Une mélancolie arabe*, accuses the writer of centring his writing on his sexuality.[22] The article is telling in that it is outrightly homophobic without ever mentioning the writer's sexual orientation. Thus, for

[19] https://www.bladi.net/abdellah-taia-homosexuel.html, [accessed 01.02.2020].
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] http://aujourdhui.ma/societe/litterature-les-defaillances-litteraires-du-dernier-roman-de-taia-56219, [accessed 01.02.2020].

example, Chaoui urges Taïa to let himself be inspired by Jean Giono or André Gide, remarking in brackets that 'M. Taïa saura pourquoi j'ai choisi ces noms',[23] and ends with a base homophobic allusion. However, following publication of his edited book *Lettres à un jeune Marocain*, *Aujourd'hui le Maroc* published an interview with Taïa in which the author stresses the importance of respecting individual rights and the importance of listening to the young in Morocco in whom the future of the country lies.[24] The short article 'Post-scriptum: Abdellah Taïa, l'authentique', by the journalist Ahmed Ghayet and published in 2010, re-establishes Taïa's reputation. Widely criticized for emphasizing sexuality in his writings, Taïa is defended by Ahmed Ghayet as a talented writer with a complex, multi-layered personality. The journalist urges readers to move beyond the label of 'jeune écrivain gay'.[25]*Aujourd'hui le Maroc*, then, takes Taïa and his writings seriously and is concerned to bring him and the topic of homosexuality to public awareness.

The concern to defend Taïa's writings is also conveyed in the francophone newspapers *Le Temps* and *Le Site Info.* The article 'Manifestations hostiles contre l'écrivain homosexuel Abdellah Taïa à El-Jadida', which appeared in *Le Temps* in 2012, describes an episode during which students boycotted a study day in the Faculty of Languages and Literature at the University of Jadida, chanting slogans such as 'Il s'agit d'introduire un système sioniste au sein de l'université marocaine', and 'Les grands perdants seront nos enfants qui sont l'avenir de notre pays. Voilà pourquoi nous devons défendre notre identité, nos enfants et notre

[23] Ibid.
[24] http://aujourdhui.ma/culture/abdellah-taia-ce-livre-est-un-cri-de-coeur-il-faut-liberer-les-voix-des-marocains-66616, [accessed 01.02.2020]. *Lettres à un jeune marocain*, ed. by Abdellah Taïa (Paris: Seuil, 2017).
[25] http://aujourdhui.ma/chroniques/post-scriptum-abdellah-taia-lauthentique-74170, [accessed 01.02.2020].

religion.'[26] Homosexuality is thus conflated with Zionism, betrayal, and an uncertain future.[27] The journalist wonders why the Moroccan media was silent about this event and praises Taïa's courage in facing outright hostility. The article 'L'Armée du salut: L'homosexualité au Maroc projetée à la Mostra de Venise', which appeared in 2013 in the same paper, speculates as to why Taïa's film (later shown in Morocco, but never distributed) can only be screened in the West. The article stresses that the subject matter was, first and foremost, inspired by the Moroccan reality and by Taïa's own experiences in Morocco. In it, Taïa confirms that he was careful to convey Moroccan reality as precisely as he could in this film.[28] The article also emphasizes the tension which can arise when asserting one's non-conforming desires in a society inimical to individualism. In a review devoted to Taïa's *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé* in the newspaper *Le Site Info,* the journalist praises Taïa for his courage and for providing role models for those in Morocco who do not always feel 'digne d'être aimé', owing to their sexual orientation.[29]

This brief overview confirms Traub's observation that we need to be careful when drawing precipitate conclusions about sexual politics in the East and in the West. Returning to the western media, we continue to see a tendency to rehearse long-standing stereotypes of a sexually permissive East. Literary critics such as de Ceccatty and Pancrazi stress the sensuality which imbues Rachid O.'s writings and which betray a sexually permissive atmosphere in Morocco. This is in contrast to those western journalists who emphasize the

[26] https://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/11041/manifestations-hostiles-contre-l-ecrivain-homosexuel.html, [accessed 01.02.2020].
[27] There is a tendency to accuse Israel, perceived by some Arabs/Muslims as the enemy per se, of threatening Arabs and Muslims by, for example, spreading homosexuality in the Middle East, thus thwarting procreation. Israel, unlike most Arab/Muslim countries, has become in recent years open to sexual minorities.
[28] https://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/19405/l-armee-salut-l-homosexualite-maroc-projetee.html, [accessed 01.02.2020].
[29] https://www.lesiteinfo.com/cultures/dernier-roman-dabdellah-taia-signe-desenchantement-combat/, [accessed 01.02.2020].

repression of individual rights in the Arab/Muslim world, the freedom of women and of sexual minorities. For these critics, the West embodies the role of 'liberator' of women and sexual minorities, an image which in part underwrote the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11, as was publicly announced by Laura Bush, wife of then-U.S. President George Bush Jr. In a nutshell, the West, in the form of literary critics, uses the 'East' to make a point about its own sexual politics.

Turning to the Moroccan media, we have seen that there are indeed voices there which denounce homosexuality as 'western', or for simply not being part of their culture, and accuse the writer of selling himself to the West. There is, however, also a large tendency to challenge these conservative voices, to bring the theme of homosexuality and individual freedom to public attention and to urge the public to change its views on sexual minorities. That sexual politics and, concomitantly, its visibility comes primarily from the West should not be denied. As Boone notes, men and women are subjects whose desires and self-identification are always in the process of change.[30] However, as Taïa stresses in the article 'L'Armée du salut: L'homosexualité au Maroc projetée à la Mostra de Venise', he drew, first and foremost, on Moroccan reality and on his experience of growing up as sexually different in Rabat.

Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's works are situated in this nexus of 'eastern' and 'western' sexual politics. Their connections to Moroccan and French models of desire, sexuality, and coupling is indeed fraught but also creative and at times revolutionary. I argue that French models of egalitarian relationships enable protagonists to name their desire and to engage in forms of coupling unknown in their culture. Furthermore, the diasporic position these writers

[30] Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*, p. 31.

have experienced enables them to enjoy the latitude to write about topics unsaid in their own culture and to divest themselves of notions such as shame which are rooted in their own Arab/Muslim culture. However, exile also allows the writers, especially in later works, to critically assess the West's freedom and its 'civilizing' mission. They unearth older colonial histories entrenched in French sexual politics and reveal the volatile situation in France regarding sexual and racial minorities. Abdellah Taïa and Rachid O. also overturn some journalistic assertions in Moroccan media that homosexuality belongs only in the West and that their writings revolve exclusively around their sexuality. I argue that both discuss and re-invent local forms of same-sex desire by re-appropriating pre-Islamic sources or more liberal versions of Islam, or projecting queer desire onto their families. Rachid O.'s and Taïa's encounters with the West empower them to invent new forms of masculinity, hybrid models of homosexual coupling, and root their desire in Islam. I confine myself to analysing the writings of Taïa and Rachid O. here. An expanded version of this study might have examined Taïa's filmic oeuvre, and see how it enables the author to create a fictional space from which to visualize same-sex desire. Other points of interest include analysing how the Arab Spring has changed their writings, especially Taïa's political writings around these events. But I have primarily sought to understand how Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa write about a form of desire in a transnational context fraught with history, politics, and religion and their contribution to established models of same-sex desire which have been primarily theorized in the West.

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