

Queering Migration: Fragmented (Post)colonial Subjectivities in 21st-Century Middle Eastern and North African Literature

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University of Pittsburgh, 2023

As a space of encounter and exchange, the Mediterranean is a complex region due to its diverse histories, peoples, and cultures. As a decolonial period that brought forth the autonomy of North African and Levantine nations from French colonial rule, the second half of the 20th-century produced fragmented subjects, who, in the 21st-century, must navigate (post)colonial spaces that complicate subjectivities, including race, gender, and sexuality. This dissertation is a critical study of 21st-century Francophone Mediterranean literature that argues for an assemblage process that allows for the recognition of migration amongst subjectivities, leaving space for the construction of subjecthood through the process of movement – a form of resistance against Western normativity.

Queer, as embodiment and a field of study, is used differently in this dissertation than conventional queer studies approaches. I demonstrate how one can *queer* queer studies and the term itself to consider how it is situated outside and inhabited by queer Arab and Maghrebi subjects who are not white Euro-Americans. Furthermore, my engagement with literary texts opens avenues for the continued development of queer theory – discourses marginalized within larger national rhetorics. This engagement with pre- and postcolonial history reshapes, epistemologically, distinct subjectivities and national cultures as one encounters their memory and their predecessors – a synthesis of both the past and the present.

The dissertation's corpus includes Bahaa Trabelsi's *Une vie à trois* (2000), Nina Bouraoui's *Garçon manqué* (2000) and *Mes mauvaises pensées* (2005), Rachid O.'s *Ce qui reste* (2003), Abdellah Taïa's *Le rouge du tarbouche* (2004) and *Une mélancolie arabe* (2008), Tahir

Ben Jelloun's *Au pays* (2009), Amin Maalouf's *Les désorientés* (2012) and Hicham Tahir's *Les ruelles des pieds nus* (2015), Riad Sattouf's graphic novel *L'Arabe du futur* (2014) and Nabil Wakim's essay, "L'Arabe pour tous" (2020). I expand upon the study of migration-related subjectivity and propose a framework that considers displacement and movement as contributing to developing subjectivities. These texts depict geographical and (meta)physical movement such as (im)migration, self-exile and intra-city travel. I examine the relationship between France and its former colonies, protectorates, and mandates to understand how *queer* subjects navigate their complex subjectivities and identities in motion.

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Preface

This dissertation is the product of several years of hard work, dedication, collaboration, and innovation, which would not have been possible without the generous support of the Department of French and Italian Languages and Literatures at the University of Pittsburgh.

I do not have enough words to thank my two co-directors, Dr. Todd Reeser and Dr. John Walsh who have helped me immensely with turning this project from a series of critical thoughts into a tangible product. Their support, patience, kindness, and attentiveness has helped turn me into the scholar that I am today, and for that, I am forever indebted to them. I would also like to thank Dr. Chloé Hogg who, in many ways, served as an additional director to this dissertation as she was always willing to read and discuss anything I sent her way. A special thanks to my other committee members Dr. David Tenorio and Dr. Mehammed Mack who assisted me especially with the earlier developments of the dissertation and pushed me to think through what kinds of interventions this project would have.

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1.0 Introduction: Approaching a Queer Mediterranean

Omar has not only experienced war and political persecution but also faced discrimination as part of the LGBTIQ community. And on top of that, Omar left his/her home country. But what does it mean for a queer person when they turn away from the values and norms of their place of birth and immerse themselves in the (supposedly) liberal world of a European metropolis like Berlin? What does a queer person lose and gain in the process?
–Souad Abbas, “A Queer Refugee in Neukölln: Gender and Sexuality Between Homs and Berlin”

Omar, the subject of the above epigraph, is at a crossroads as they attempt to make sense of *queer*, much like this dissertation. Subjects coming from the Arab World—which for the purposes of this dissertation concerns the Maghreb and the Levant – who move from their respective home regions towards the Global North are met with differing conceptualizations of non-normative subjectivities and identities. As Omar moves from Syria to Germany, they are met with a series of complex questions that puts tension on their lived reality as a transnational, transgressive subject. Being a transnational subject presumes an embodiment that is in flux – avoiding static understandings of subjectivities and identities. As Souad Abbas asks, “what does it mean for a queer person when they turn away from the values and the norms of their place of birth and immerse themselves in the (supposedly) liberal world of a European metropolis like Berlin?” This question that Abbas proposes signals the apparent disorientation that queer Arab subjects face once they are in motion and ultimately settle into their new “home.”

This project brings together a corpus consisting of nine novels, a graphic novel, and an essay all written by Maghrebi and Levantine authors of French expression. I take on this assortment of genres and texts for a few reasons, which include but are not limited to (1) demonstrating the utility of literature when discussing (im)migrant narratives, (2) presenting diversity of thought and expression coming from within the Maghreb and the Levant at the site of encounter with France

and (3) engaging with *queer* narratives embodied by subjects who originate from the Global South or have at least some connection to the non-Western world. These texts weave together narratives in motion that move beyond traditional histories of migration that are bidirectional and seek to reclaim specific identities. As narratives in motion, the works in my corpus assemble discourses that add to the ever changing socio-cultural and political landscape of the Mediterranean, especially the large-scale humanitarian crises of the last decade. My literary analyses take an interdisciplinary approach to queer theory and LGBQ studies, concentrating on subjects as they encounter conceptualizations of gender, sexuality, race, language, religion, and citizenship – contributing to current scholarship in queer theory, migration studies, masculinities, postcolonial studies, and Middle Eastern and North African studies.¹

These assemblages mentioned above, are, in part, due to the Mediterranean's long history and its geographic position which connects Europe, North Africa, and Western Asia – leading to waves of migration that have further linked these regions. To add further nuance to the Mediterranean's historical, cultural, and intellectual variety even further, my approach to gender and sexuality complicates the region's continued (re)construction, which has consequently impacted its inhabitants. A consequence of this vastness and the overall breadth of the Mediterranean has been that the various countries that make up the region have typically been studied individually with limited engagement with their shared positionality along the Mediterranean. This dissertation takes both the Maghreb and the Levant into account to think through a larger and varied construction of *queer* subjects and their positionality within migration

¹ I opt for the use of LGBQ rather than LGBTQ to reference the lack of trans* subjects within my texts and within the dissertation – not as an act of trans* erasure.

studies. Due to the diverse histories of these nations despite their close proximities, I analyze the linkage of complex and shared pasts that permits the construction of discourses and subjectivities, which is to say, an assemblage of voices that have created the Mediterranean as a site of exchange and epistemological and ontological interchange.

In this dissertation, I argue for a critical analysis of 21st-century texts to navigate our current (post)colonial period marked by a complicated, shared history with hexagonal France and the larger Global North, which continue to marginalize subjects who do not maintain positions within normative, French national rhetoric. In the context of France or *L'Hexagone* as the nation is sometimes referred to, French President Emmanuel Macron has faced criticism for his ambition to deploy assimilationist tactics towards (im)migrants – Muslim (im)migrants specifically. With the estimated largest population of Muslims in Western Europe, with around six million in total, the French government continues its imperial mission camouflaged by the pretext of colorblindness and *laïcité* – blatantly marginalizing and *queering* one of the nation's largest ethno-religious groups.² I link transnational, cultural, and political exchanges through what I call “phenomenological migratory subjectivities” – a term suggesting that the texts in my corpus *queer* Western subjectivities by way of (meta)physical migration and at the same time *queer* the Maghreb and the Levant as these regions encounter discourse “from below” or what Lucien Febvre would

² See AP News article on “Why France Sparks Such Anger in the Muslim World”:
<https://apnews.com/article/boycotts-paris-middle-east-western-europe-france-441e4e480ac4151987eb0d289bf3dc12>

call “l’histoire vue d’en bas,” which I will revisit in the third chapter.³ I connect the conceptualization of history “from below” to “(meta)physical” to refer to transgressive subjects and their engagement with their subjectivities as they encounter shifting spaces and temporalities.

Through connecting narratives of transgression to migrant histories from below or what could otherwise be considered othered or abject discourses, I propose a *queering* of (meta)physical migration to suggest that the subjectivities studied are constantly changing. Whether one is aware of the process or not, these subjectivities are influenced by and through interactions with the environment, people, media, affects and any form of stimuli observed directly or indirectly by individuals. The articles in *Transforming Subjectivities: Studies in Human Malleability in Contemporary Times* examine the transformation and malleability of subjectivities, especially at the site of government and state intervention. In the introduction, Cecilia Hansen Löffstrand and Kerstin Jacobsson make the observation that:

Our time is characterized by a desire to be unique, while we are simultaneously all dependent on the vocabularies made available to us by contemporary discourses, by which we come to understand ourselves through our efforts to attain self-knowledge and self-improvement. Clearly, our subjectivity is not only a private matter, but also a target for intervention by authorities of all kinds.⁴

The theorization of “uniqueness” as well as the fact that subjectivity formation is not a “private” affair opens space to discuss the various “interactions” that I mention above.

³ Lucien Febvre, “Albert Mathiez: un tempérament, une éducation,” *Annales d’histoire économique et sociale* 4, no. 18 (1932): 573–76, <https://doi.org/10.3406/ahess.1932.1357>.

⁴ Cecilia Hansen Löffstrand and Kerstin Jacobsson, eds., *Transforming Subjectivities: Studies in Human Malleability in Contemporary Times*, Routledge Studies in the Sociology of Work, Professions and Organisations (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, 2023), 1.

Although *Transforming Subjectivities* is generally invested in questions of government intervention at the site of subjectivity construction, the aspect of interactions is of particular importance to this project. As subjects engage or interact with their immediate and not-so-immediate surroundings, their worldview shifts and with it, the perception of themselves. The corpus that I employ signals these various shifts as they relate to individual and or collective representations of gender identity, national identity, sexual orientation, and masculinity. For example, Abdellah Taïa's *Une mélancolie arabe* (2008) depicts the author's journey from Salé, the city he is from in Morocco, to Paris, his final destination. This journey that traverses North Africa and ultimately ends in Western Europe sets up the novel's longing, i.e., melancholic construction of Arab identity and subjecthood. Taïa's novel serves as but one example of the movement-based process that I discuss in this dissertation. The (meta)physicality of migration, which is to say, the continuous changes that occur at borders, produces a more enlarged view of the Mediterranean than what has traditionally been presented. Martin Manalansan's understanding of migration and mobility in relation to diasporic Filipino queer subjects greatly informs my conceptualization of migration and movement. In *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*, Manalansan underscores how "[i]mmigrant queers of color in particular demonstrate how mobility is not only about the actual physical traversing of national boundaries but also about the traffic of status and hierarchies *within* and across such boundaries."⁵ I deploy this shift away from the physical as I invoke Mediterranean subjects in order to avoid the homogenization of such diverse individuals and cultural histories.

⁵ Martin F. Manalansan IV, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 9.

Taking an expansive view of the Mediterranean, Edwige Talbayev's *The Transcontinental Maghreb: Francophone Literatures Across the Maghreb* conceives of the Mediterranean as a hybrid space "revealing the multidirectional crossing of ideas, styles, religions, and thinkers that mapped out the ancient and medieval Mediterranean as a space of exchange and cross-pollination."⁶ Talbayev's contention that the Mediterranean is a hybrid space responds to the varying ideological and historical accounts of the past that did not consider the Maghreb as a part of the Mediterranean. In fact, Talbayev seeks to remedy this problem by "marking the Maghreb with the seal of the sea."⁷ She makes a compelling case for a reconfiguration of the *Mare Nostrum* – a term that translates to "our sea" in Classical Latin and in its contemporary use refers to the diversity of Mediterranean cultures and the economic and social exchanges that occur between Mediterranean nations. Moreover, Talbayev points to the disregard of the intertwined origins of the Mediterranean, which has

fractured the space of the sea into two supposedly incommensurable spaces and civilizational models: the northern Mediterranean, European and predominantly Christian, the object of Europe's exoticist imagination now reactivated in the lure of low-cost mass-tourism; and the southern shore, purportedly mired in Islam, backward cultural traditionalism, and gender oppression and, in the post-Arab Spring context, reluctant to implement democracy.⁸

Like Talbayev, I aim to restore the place of the Maghreb in Mediterranean studies through an analysis of transnational literary discourse. However, I opt for a transnational approach rather than a transcontinental approach as the latter emphasizes a fixation on borders. To this end, this

⁶ Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, *The Transcontinental Maghreb: Francophone Literature across the Mediterranean* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

dissertation approaches borders as liminal, non-fixed spaces that are in flux and arbitrary due to their situatedness in models of social constructivism. Accordingly, the placement of borders on modern maps are often ahistorical, with sociopolitical goals in mind to undermine nations and position some as superior and others as inferior.⁹

As a region, the Mediterranean reaches back and forth between the Global North and the Global South, creating cultural and intellectual assemblages that I study in this dissertation. The Mediterranean, sometimes referred to as the Mediterranean Basin, the Mediterranean Region, or *Mediterranea*, is a place of immense cultural history and diversity as Patricia M.E. Lorcin and Todd Shepard point out:

The Mediterranean is associated with many images: the seat of Western civilization, the domain of the crusaders, a site of Islamic learning and culture, the playground of corsairs and slavers, a locus of exoticism and sexual fantasy, a space of exchanges, migrations, and invented or reinvented identities and ... an imperial sea.¹⁰

As one thinks of the Mediterranean and a region “associated with many images,” I signal that one should think of *queer* through a plural lens, as well.

1.1 Queer as a Crossroads

When one thinks of queer studies, gender and sexuality studies, or masculinity studies, neither the Maghreb nor the Levant necessarily come to mind.¹¹ Nor does any African or Arab

⁹ See Jeremy W. Crampton, “Maps as Social Constructions: Power, Communication and Visualization,” in *Progress in Human Geography* (2001): 235–52.

¹⁰ Patricia M. E. Lorcin and Todd Shepard, *French Mediterraneans: Transnational and Imperial Histories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 2.

¹¹ This exclusion does not include the writings of queer, white, European, and American men who wrote about their or their acquaintances’ sexual exploits in the Arab world. Oscar Wilde, André

nation – except for, perhaps, South Africa, considering the country’s wave of constitutional changes that coincided with the establishment of queer theory as an academic discipline in the United States.¹² Gibson Ncube calls for a divergent field of queer studies that stems from the African continent, which is grounded in a queer of color critique that prioritizes the cacophony of voices coming from within rather than outside.¹³ Ncube’s point of contention with African queer studies is the hegemonic position of South Africa in the field and that “the way forward for African queer studies lies in transcontinental and inter-regional dialogue that will allow for a fuller and all-inclusive imagining and thinking through non-conforming sexual and gender experiences in Africa.”¹⁴ This dissertation pushes for the inclusion of Maghrebi subjects in the conversation on

Gide, William Burroughs, Paul Bowles, and David Herbert are just some of the novelists who wrote autofictional and or autobiographical orientalist texts about their time in the Maghreb, principally in Morocco, a hub for “sex tourism” in the early to mid-20th-century.

¹² Gibson Ncube, “Renegotiating the Marginality of the Maghreb in Queer African Studies,” *College Literature* 45, no. 4 (2018): 623.

¹³ Roderick Ferguson coined the concept of “queer of color critique” in *Aberrations in Black*, in which he argues for a framework that “interrogates social formation at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and class, with particular interest in how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices.” Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, Critical American Studies Series (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 149.

¹⁴ Ncube, “Renegotiating the Marginality of the Maghreb in Queer African Studies”: 623.

African queer studies, which, in turn, also advocates for Arab subjects to be included in queer discourse that is not regressive or seeks to homogenize this group of individuals.

As mentioned above, the question of inclusivity in terms of engaging with queer subjects and discourse has increased in the past decades. The establishment of queer of color critique functioned as a method to welcome diversity and inclusivity. Rooted in Black feminism, queer of color critique operates as a form of resistance that allows for non-normative subjects and narratives to subvert national cultures and enter dominant discourse without compromising their identity. One is not or should not be obliged to participate in dominant, Western, queer thought or embodiment to exist within or outside of the Global South as queer. Through queer of color critique, scholars such as Taiwo Osinubi, Kirk Fiereck, Neville Hoad, and Danai Mupotsa have worked to disassociate the relationship between queer theory and queer identity from Western thought and scholarship. Their disassociation of “queer” from white, Euro-American epistemology opens other avenues for what it means “to be queer” or “to queer” something or someone. In a recently released anthology, *This Arab is Queer*, Elias Jahshan assembles eighteen Arab writers from eleven nations in the Arab world. Jahshan signals a two-part problem:

Many of these restrictions [same-sex interactions] stem from inherited European colonial laws that were informed by a Christian understanding of morality. When the West talks about homophobia in the Arab world or among global diasporic communities, the focus is on how Islam or traditional Arab attitudes are at the root of hostility toward LGBTQ+ Arabs, which is an essentialist and simplistic approach. On the flipside, patriarchal norms are deeply embedded in Arab culture and is an important reason for the rampant discrimination, criminalisation and deep cultural stigma of (sic) queer people.¹⁵

¹⁵ Elias Jahshan, ed., *This Arab Is Queer: An Anthology by LGBTQ+ Arab Writers* (London: Saqi Books, 2022), 8.

Jahshan points out that anti-queer sentiments are connected to the colonial past but also continue to flourish due to patriarchy and heteronormativity.

Jahshan signals a perceived “coloniality of power” as he thinks through the inheritance of colonial laws and practices that stem from religious practices, mainly Christian. The coloniality of power is a term I borrow from Peruvian scholar, Anibal Quijano, who explains how “[t]he intellectual conceptualization of the process of modernity produced a perspective of knowledge and a mode of producing knowledge that gives a very tight account of the character of the global model of power: colonial/modern, capitalist and Eurocentered.”¹⁶ The assemblage of essays in Jahshan’s anthology, like this dissertation, argues against the orientalist attempt to encapsulate queer Arab identities. Jahshan does rightfully point out that homophobia does not only stem from colonial rule, although it does play a large role, but that it is also a byproduct of patriarchal norms that have defined what it means to be a subject within the confines of national borders and to an extent, international borders.

This Arab is Queer informs queer of color critique through its decolonial critique of hegemonic understandings and representations of queer embodiment. Narratives such as this text are emblematic of the importance of sharing texts written by queer individuals in spaces where queer identities are especially precarious. Beyond the transmission of precarious and transgressive stories, they are important for those writing the stories and for their actualization of their queer identities. As Beirut-based writer and actor Dima Mikhayel Matta shares in their chapter:

These are stories that I rarely tell. These are stories I keep close to my person. Not in my pocket. No, closer. I keep them on my chest the way my grandma kept money under the strap of her bra. They are unspoken because of the fear that what is spoken might be spoken

¹⁶ Anibal Quijano and Michael Ennis, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,”

Nepantla: Views from South 1, no. 3 (2000): 549.

into being. But this is how storytelling works. I have to share this story so that you can stand in it with me.¹⁷

Matta's contention that these stories must be shared, despite the fear of confronting what has been true all along, i.e., queer embodiment and existence, so that others can "stand in it with me," marks the significance of stories like theirs. Jahshan's collection of text is an assemblage of traveling queer narratives much like the corpus I have compiled in this dissertation. In a goal similar to Jahshan, this compilation was done with the purpose not only of providing a space for the productive encounter with queer subjects, but also of interacting with differing queer narratives that do not presume a static or rigid definition of "queer." Furthermore, the assemblage of texts provides the necessary contextualization needed to redefine or at least resituate queer outside of the West.

Queer and the act of *queering* are essential terms to this project – in a firm sense, to be "queer" refers to an engagement in or with non-normative sexual practices, identities and or desires, i.e., same-sex attraction.¹⁸ I diverge from traditional notions of *queer* and queer theory, which rely upon the poststructuralist critique of heterosexuality to disassociate sexual orientation from "normal." I navigate influential texts within the canon of queer theory as I pursue an innovative understanding of *queer* and the act of *queering*. I propose a renewed conceptualization of queer theory that is not entrenched in same-sex desires or practices, but instead in the various

¹⁷ Ibid., 45.

¹⁸ See for instance Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. (New York: New York University Press, 1997); David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); Teresa De Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

ways that individuals undergo the process of marginalization. Moreover, my definition and conceptualization of *queer* is centered on the presence of non-normativity that is not dependent upon presumed non-heterosexuality. Within my corpus, there are, of course, instances of same-sex desires and attractions, but I have also included texts that are more ambivalent and not blatantly queer, in the traditional sense. More expansively, I propose a working definition of *queer* that goes beyond the confines of sexuality and incorporates various subjectivities.¹⁹

Since the reappropriation of the term *queer* in the early 1990s as a response to anti-gay violence, the concept has taken on many meanings. Undeniably, *queer* is often used to refer to someone or something that is non-normative and subordinates social norms – as Hannah McCann puts it, “... the persistently repeated idea of queer theory as “indefinable” works as its own form of definition.”²⁰ Still, there is potential to move beyond this denotation to approach *queer* from different perspectives that situate the term in other historical and geographical contexts to avoid further marginalizing subjects outside of the Global North. In his influential article on the history of sexuality, Michael Hames-García states how modern sexuality:

Emerge[d] in the eighteenth or nineteenth century alongside the emergence of industrial capitalism, liberalism, and the nation-state. By contrast, for scholars studying race and sexuality modern sexuality emerge[d] alongside the violence of European colonialism and indigenous resistance in the sixteenth century, the transatlantic slave trade in the seventeenth century, the imperialist wars and expansion of Europe and its former settler

¹⁹ See for more innovative takes on queer theory that consider race: Eng et al., “What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now?,” *Social Text* 23, no. 3-4 (2005): 1-17; José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and The Performance of Politics*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

²⁰ Hannah McCann, *Queer Theory Now: From Foundations to Futures* (London: Red Globe Press, 2020), 1-2.

colonies in the Americas, southern Africa, and the Pacific in the nineteenth century, and the waves of postcolonial independence in the twentieth century.²¹

Hames-García points out the need for a critical interpretation of *queer* that considers the intersections or assemblages produced by applying *queer* to non-Western subjects. Using “queer” outside of hegemonic, Western discourse permits an understanding of the multiple evocations of queer that do not merely transpose dominant rhetoric onto subjects existing outside of the Global North. One may ask why it is important that “queer” exist outside of a Western context considering all queer subjects are inherently transgressive, therefore creating a universal experience. Furthermore, one may even ask what is the importance of delineating queer subjects based upon their geographic position or point of origin? These two questions sit at the site of disruption of queer theory that escapes the universalization and essentialization of queer embodiment that stems from dominant, Western, and euro-centric discourse.

Furthering the debate on queer discourse, Joseph Massad also rejects the universalizing approach to queer studies that essentializes queer identities, embodiments, and experiences. Massad points out that “it is the discourse of the Gay International that produces homosexuals, as well as gays and lesbians, where they do not exist, and represses same sex-desires and practices that refuse to be assimilated into its sexual epistemology.”²² His use of the term “Gay International” relates to, in his case, Western, white-dominated organizations such as the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), the Human Rights Watch (HRW), and other

²¹ Michael Hames-García, “Queer Theory Revisited,” in *Gay Latino Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 42, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822393856-003>.

²² Joseph Massad, “Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 2 (2002): 363. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-14-2-361>.

organizations that are involved in reductionist, orientalist activism as they seek to “liberate” non-Western subjects. The purpose of reestablishing and rethinking epistemologies of sexualities and masculinities allows for an interrogation of lost discourses that have found themselves in flux temporally as lost history is uncovered. My reading of literary texts opens avenues for the continued establishment of queer theory that takes shape through the lost discourses that I mention above – discourses that have been marginalized within larger national rhetorics. This link between pre- and postcolonial history reshapes, epistemologically, distinct subjectivities and national cultures as one encounters their memory and that of their predecessors – a synthesis of both the past and the present.

The meeting of pre- and postcolonial history at the site of queer theory brings up the notion of decolonial queer theory, which seeks to depart from white Euro-American understandings of the field. Godfried Asante and Jenna N. Hanchey argue that “when put together, queer (post)colonial studies can unveil the subjugated knowledges of those whom modernity engages through the violent silencing of their voices.”²³ The silencing of voices, which occurs through the normalizing of white, Euro-American thought can be disrupted through decolonial queer theory and queer of color critique, which I reference earlier in this introduction. Queer, as the disruption of heteronormativity, must constantly be undone to resist the term’s situatedness amongst Western subjects and populations, which I do in this project as I locate the term within the Maghreb and the Levant.

²³ Godfried Asante and Jenna N. Hanchey, “Decolonizing Queer Modernities: The Case for Queer (Post)Colonial Studies in Critical/Cultural Communication,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 18, no. 2 (2021): 212–20.

In 2005, ““Queer” Masculinities” was published in *Men and Masculinities* to approach critical masculinities scholarship and ascertain innovative ways to separate masculinity from the biological essentialism that conceives of masculinity as belonging to those with XY chromosomes, which is to say, cisgender males. The essentialization of gender and sexual identities upholds the notion that a person’s gender directly represents their sex assigned at birth. This deterministic model relies on gender expression being classified as either masculine or feminine with no room for other forms of gender expression, such as androgynous or intersex.²⁴ The deconstruction of this deterministic model that relies heavily on heteronormativity is at the core of this dissertation’s arguments. Just as one can argue for the separation of masculinity from manhood, one should also keep other deterministic models in mind. In terms of culture, Asante and Hanchey are correct to point out that there has been a propensity to attribute homophobia and anti-queer violence to African nations.²⁵ This trope presumes Western advancement and progressivism while simultaneously subordinating nations outside of the West – automatically relegating them to the role of regressive and “backwards.” Jasbir Puar has pointed out how human rights organizations in the Global North are partly to blame for this issue considering how such organizations approach “queer issues” as related only to one’s sexual orientation without much regard for their race, social

²⁴ Intersex can be split into four distinct categories: “46, XX intersex,” “46, XY intersex,” “true gonadal intersex,” and “[c]omplex or undetermined intersex.”

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001669.htm>

²⁵Asante and Hanchey, “Decolonizing Queer Modernities,” 215.

class, nationality, and other factors that impact one's embodiment.²⁶ Literature as a medium allows for the circulation of texts – fictional, non-fictional, autobiographical and or autofictional – with the potential to evade hegemonic, Western discourse via exchanges of knowledge that occurs when one interacts with texts.

As I turn to the process of writing and literary production, the meeting of melancholia with the processes of writing, imagination and memory allows for continued interactions with history, knowledge, and culture through the various individuals represented in the text. As a medium, literature has an arguably higher potential for the transmission of narratives as the material and technological constraints of a novel or essay are not as large as, say, a film. Furthermore, written works convey emotions and affects in different ways since the reader is responsible for reproducing an image, if possible, mentally. This meeting of writing and memory, in turn, has the potential to reconfigure and reconstruct subjectivities as they are reassessed. Sara Ahmed theorizes queer phenomenology as she examines what it means for our bodies to be situated in a particular space and time, thus orienting and positioning subjects toward surfaces, such as borders and bodies.²⁷ For Ahmed, “[o]rientations are about how we begin, how we proceed from here.”²⁸ As one approaches specific surfaces or objects, they are oriented toward or in opposition to specific subjectivities – orientation, in this dissertation, extends Ahmed's groundbreaking work by assembling the notions of sexuality, gender, and race as they come into contact with different

²⁶ Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, 10th ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

²⁷ Sara Ahmed, “Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology,” *GLQ* 12, no. 4 (2006): 542-74. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2006-002>.

²⁸ Ahmed, “Orientations,” 545.

spaces. I argue that the assemblage process allows for the recognition of migration amongst these subjectivities, leaving space for subjecthood construction through the process of movement, which is ultimately a form of resistance. What is being resisted are normalizing approaches that construct a singular national rhetoric that does not account for the varied, interconnected discourses that inform national histories.

To interrogate narratives of resistance, I use William Spurlin's reading of Edward Saïd's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and Paul Bandia's work on translocation and migration, which examines strategies of resistance and agency that allow for the ability to negotiate or reconcile with the "tensions and contradictions in the overlapping spaces of culture."²⁹ These tensions and contradictions allow for the fragmentation of the self, expressed through a concept that I call the "fragmented 'je.'"³⁰ Nina Bouraoui's *Garçon manqué* (2000) is emblematic of the fragmentation that I have just discussed – especially as the novel's protagonist encounters her split French/Algerian identity as well as her relationship with masculinity and femininity. The "fragmented 'je'" explains how subjectivities are always being interrogated and complicated as

²⁹ William Spurlin, "Contested Borders: Cultural Translation and Queer Politics in Contemporary Francophone Writing from the Maghreb," *Research in African Literatures* vol. 47, no. 2 (2016): 106. doi:[10.2979/reseafrilite.47.2.07](https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.47.2.07).; For more on Paul Bandia's discussion of translocation, see section twenty: "Translocation: Translation, Migration, and the Relocation of Cultures" in Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter, eds., *A Companion to Translation Studies*. Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture Ser. (Hoboken: John Wiley, 2014): 273-284.

³⁰ I opt for the use of "je" rather than "I" to serve as a marker of my working with Francophone texts, but this term could also be conceived of as the "fragmented 'I.'"

they exist in different linguistic, ethnic, temporal, and cultural dimensions. These three dimensions are further complicated as subjects move between (meta)physical borders, thus (re)shaping subjectivities as individuals move between various spaces. As I work to extend the notion of (meta)physical migration, I aim to *queer* it, suggesting that subjectivities are constantly changing, whether one is aware of this process or not, and that subjectivities are influenced by and through interactions with nature, people, media, and any form of stimuli that is observed either directly or indirectly by individuals.

Transnational discourses that traverse the Mediterranean from the Maghreb, the Levant, and France, complicate notions of citizenship, race, gender, and sexuality, at the site of the crossing of (meta)physical borders. Discourse, in Foucauldian terms, signifies the construction of epistemologies entrenched in a socio-historical context. “Transnational” or “transnationalism” are concepts in postcolonial discourse that highlight the significance of cross-cultural and multicultural exchange. Movement between and across cultures produce “hybrid anxieties,” which allow subjects to possess a multifaceted sense of selfhood, fragmenting their various subjectivities. The notion of “hybrid anxieties,” as articulated by gender studies scholar C.L. Quinan in their postcolonial study *Hybrid Anxieties: Queering the French-Algerian War and Its Postcolonial Legacies* (2020), emphasizes the importance of considering *queer* desires to deconstruct past, present, and future narratives both during and after the French-Algerian War while simultaneously interrogating the rise of hegemonic masculinity as a direct consequence of the war. My conceptualization of “hybrid anxieties” draws upon Quinan’s important observations by linking them to German philosopher Edmund Husserl’s concept of the “paradox of subjectivity,” which

refers to “being a subject for the world and simultaneously being an object in the world.”³¹ The paradox of subjectivity allows individuals to resist binaries and disrupt normative identity constructs placed upon them, as in the case of Arabs and North Africans, two groups that have been homogenized mainly as they encounter the Western gaze and socio-historical narratives that label them as overwhelmingly heterosexual, pious, uncivilized, and anti-gay.

1.2 Overview of the Study

Through literary analysis of the selected texts within my corpus, I seek to contribute to the fields of Francophone studies, queer theory, gender and sexuality studies, masculinity studies, Middle Eastern and North African studies, and migration studies by expanding upon the notion of subjectivity as it relates to migration and proposing a framework that considers the acts of displacement and movement as contributing factors in the development of subjectivities. This project works specifically with literature (including novels, an essay, and a graphic novel) due to its ability to be more expansive than a film, for instance, which must conform to time and content constraints. Additionally, “[l]iterature, and particularly narratives of migration, exile, diaspora and self-displacement, offer new opportunities for understanding the political and social agency of migrant subjects.”³² Martina Censi’s assertion that literature, as a medium, affords displaced individuals’ space for their voices to be heard serves as another reason for this study’s reliance on literary works. Furthering my decision to concentrate on literary works, I agree with Jopi Nyman

³¹ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 178.

³² Martina Censi, ed., *The Migrant in Arab Literature: Displacement, Self-Discovery and Nostalgia* (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2021), 2.

who writes in *Home, Identity, and Mobility in Contemporary Diasporic Fiction* that “focusing on stories of mobility and identity construction, diasporic writing delves into the globalized world of transnationalisms, hybridity, and mobile identities.”³³ As this dissertation discusses methods to *queer* migration, it entrenches itself in transnational and decolonial discourse that seeks to circumvent essentialist approaches to migration studies as well as queer studies. This study investigates eleven literary works which consist of fictional, autofictional and or autobiographical works of migration dating from 2000 to 2020. I choose to study 21st-century works that can better depict the current lived realities of diasporic subjects than, say, texts from previous time periods. This is not to say that this dissertation’s corpus does not confront the historical past of the Mediterranean, but its principal focus is chiefly rooted in contemporary discourse from the past two decades.³⁴

³³ Jopi Nyman, *Home, Identity, and Mobility in Contemporary Diasporic Fiction* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 10.

³⁴ These last two decades have also seen a wave of Middle Eastern and North African pro-LGBTQIA+ organizations such as “Helem” (2001), “Kif-Kif” (2002), “Majal” (2006), and “Rainbow Street” (2014). There has also been a surge in Arab LGBTQIA+ media such as “MyKali Magazine” (2007), “The Queer Arabs” podcast (2018) and “JINS” podcast (2020) as well as an Instagram account dedicated to sharing Queer Arab history and pop culture called “Takweer,” which was created in 2019 by Marwan Kaabour, a graphic designer. These are just a few examples of the many organizations and creative projects that have appeared within the past decade to highlight queer Arab identities from across the Arab world – ranging from the Maghreb to the Middle East.

Migration studies as a discipline has largely focused on issues of human and civil rights. Scholars such as Eithne Luibhéid, Martin Manalansan IV, Bobby Benedicto, and others have elucidated issues that queer migrants face as they encounter the twofold “issue” of being both queer and an (im)migrant.³⁵ These scholars’ works are primarily based in sociological, ethnographic and communication studies as they focus on issues of human rights, language, cultural criticism, and queer theory. This dissertation is invested in the issue of human rights and takes a literary and cultural studies approach to investigate different facets of the issues that queer, non-normative (im)migrants face as elucidated by Luibhéid, Manalansan and Benedicto. The question of human rights with regards to literary and cultural studies is important in that it adds to the current discourse surrounding (im)migrants, particularly queer (im)migrants who may potentially face marginalization for their immigration status as well as their non-normative identities. A project such as this one is important as a complement to sociological and anthropological studies as it works to understand, and ultimately solve key issues that impact larger, more vast, transnational queer communities. Furthermore, this study also focuses on the fictional and autofictional discursive constructs in the development of queer subjectivities via migration, which is lacking in terms of robust study to investigate problems surrounding masculinity and migration.

³⁵ See for instance Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Martin F. Manalansan IV and Augusto Espiritu, *Filipino Studies: Palimpsests of Nation and Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2016); Bobby Benedicto, *Under Bright Lights Gay Manila and the Global Scene* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

1.3 Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into four chapters, each discussing a different facet of gendered subjecthood construction. I consider four aspects: (1) masculinity in motion, which seeks to understand how masculinity is (re)formed through crossing borders (2) the notion of self-exile and what it means to construct a sense of self when one actively chooses to evade specific milieus (3) the question of women and their unique perspectives to masculinity and migration (4) the act of return to analyze how subjects (re)interpret their subjectivities and positions as citizens and or inhabitants.

Chapter I, “*Queering Masculinity: Establishing Epistemologies of Mediterranean North African Masculinities and Sexualities*,” studies depictions of masculinity in three novels of self-exile – Rachid O.’s *Ce qui reste* (2003) and Abdellah Taïa’s *Le rouge du tarbouche* (2004) and *Une mélancolie arabe* (2008). Considered by some to be the first Moroccan of French expression to write openly about his homosexuality, Rachid O. serves in many ways as an influential figure within the growing canon of North African literature that addresses issues of sexuality, gender, and society.³⁶ In this chapter, I argue that O. and Taïa, through a process of self-exploration and discovery *queer* masculinity to form plural masculinities that do not center themselves on Western epistemologies that gesture towards masculinity as the opposite of femininity. Notably, both novelists challenge conceptualizations of masculinity and sexuality through bilateral relations with national cultures and traditions. Furthermore, these texts engage with movement in novel and

³⁶ This title is usually given to Taïa due to his increased social presence over O., and his public declaration of his sexuality in a 2007 interview with the Moroccan magazine *TelQuel* where he appeared on the cover of their January issue.

appealing ways, O. moving from Morocco to Switzerland and Taïa from Morocco to France by way of Egypt – both in situations of self-exile while simultaneously navigating their sexuality and subjectivities.

Chapter II, “Narratives of Belonging: Masculinity and Disorientation,” interrogates accounts of (self)exile, belonging and how they are informed by rejection and displacement in three texts – Nabil Wakim’s essay entitled “L’Arabe pour tous” (2020), Amin Maalouf’s novel *Les désorientés* (2012), and Riad Sattouf’s *bande dessinée, L’Arabe du futur: vol 1* (2015). This chapter and these three works signal this dissertation’s move from the Maghreb to the Levant. Parts of the Levant region were also once subjected to French colonial rule and are still connected to France through language, culture, and socio-political and economic exchange. This chapter aims to complicate questions of subjectivity and belonging as they are *queered* in these three works that move between the Levant, North Africa, and France. This critical attention to *queering* informs this chapter’s analysis of race, citizenship, religion, and language as critical textual moments actively depicting movement between markers associated with each concept. I argue here that the *queering* of race, gender, and citizenship provides space to destabilize fixed conceptions of social constructions as they are not inert and work to inform understandings of belonging and what it means to function as a member of society. The destabilization of fixed social constructs in the three texts in this chapter subverts social norms to make space for non-normative, transgressive subjects and subjectivities. This subversion demonstrates the potential for national narratives of belonging to shift when considering who inhabits a particular area at a point in time.

Chapter III, “Queer Futures: Female Masculinity and Subjectivity,” takes on notions of subjectivity, temporality, gender, and motion and how they approach affect in three novels: Nina Bouraoui’s *Mes mauvaises pensées* (2005) and *Garçon manqué* (2000), as well as Bahaa Trabelsi’s

Une vie à trois (2000). This chapter conceives of female writers who write about masculinity to interrogate subjects that exist within *queer* masculinities to subvert normative understandings of masculinity. I propose a model of masculinity that is not inherently rooted in genetics, but instead, in one's own construction of masculinity and in a plural denotation. Bahaa Trabelsi and Nina Bouraoui can be read together as producing narratives of *queer* migration, *queer* subjectivity, and *queer* affects. The first part of the chapter approaches the role of affect in forming subjectivities. Furthermore, I ask, how do affects take on positions as subjects to (re)orient the human subject who experiences these affects – the protagonists? To one extent or another, each novel is anchored in a transnational narrative that (re)invents subjectivities.³⁷ Nina Bouraoui's *Garçon manqué* re(constructs) subjectivities through her playfulness with gender, sexuality, and naming. *Mes mauvaises pensées* takes another innovative approach to the subjugation of non-normative subjects. Bouraoui's text functions as a *roman-confession* that grapples with understanding one's position in the world as one must navigate affects. Trabelsi's *Une vie à trois* is more direct in its approach as it is non-normative and queer and treats topics of sexual transgression. Trabelsi's novel (re)invents subjectivity under the premise of *retour* – focusing on how subjectivities are

³⁷ I am thinking of transnational here in a (post)colonial context, one that in the words of Claudia Esposito, “makes visible not only what these writers have been living and creating all along, but also suggests an epistemological object of inquiry that might extend beyond them, sharpening our critical sense of what being in this specific part of the world [the Maghreb] entails.” Claudia Esposito, *The Narrative Mediterranean: Beyond France and the Maghreb* (Lanham: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2014), 10.

constructed by crossing national and regional borders, cultures, and discourses that ultimately (de)construct affects as one's positionality changes.

Chapter IV, "*Le retour au bled: Alterity and Performative Subjectivities*," considers the notion of performative subjectivity in discourses of migration as depicted in two novels of (re)patriation: Hicham Tahir's *Les ruelles des pieds nus* (2015) and Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Au pays* (2009). These two novels serve as epistemological tools to conceptualize performative subjectivities. In the first chapter, I discuss narratives of migration as the protagonists move from the Maghreb to Western Europe. At the site of *francité*, I approach the question of performative subjectivity, and how (im)migrants produce or create subjectivities through discourses that work both as a way of maintaining a certain level of integration while also leaving space for maintaining a relationship with their origins – the reconciliation of distinct cultures, a rupturing of the dichotomous East vs. West model. This chapter, however, also shows how sexuality and subjectivity are (re)interpreted and (re)configured through narratives of return – either permanently or temporarily to reconcile the contentious relationship between and amongst cultures. By "contentious," I refer to the perception of two or more cultures maintaining distinct characteristics that cannot communicate with one another to discuss the subject's understanding of themselves and their status as "citizens" once they have left their homeland for another country – their "adopted" homeland. The distinction between one's "homeland" and "adopted homeland" leads to the question: can a person have more than one homeland? Can we exist between multiple spaces as citizens beyond a socio-juridical context? I argue that this dichotomy *queers* the notion of migration as it further produces the development of subjectivities as one functions within two or more cultures whilst navigating social norms and expectations.

2.0 Chapter 1: *Queering* Masculinity: Establishing Epistemologies of Mediterranean North African Masculinities and Sexualities

Ça n'existe pas les "vrais hommes," c'est une invention, on leur fait croire qu'ils sont forts, on leur dit comment se comporter, et eux ils exécutent, ils sont là pour perpétuer des règles et des traditions qui n'ont plus de sens. Les hommes croient qu'ils ont le pouvoir. Je ne veux pas être comme eux.

—Abdellah Taïa, *Le rouge du tarbouche*

2.1 Introduction

November 12, 2021, marked the fifteenth anniversary of Moroccan novelist and filmmaker, Abdellah Taïa's "coming out" on the front cover of *TelQuel*, a weekly print and digital magazine published in French and based in Casablanca, Morocco.³⁸ *TelQuel* is well-known for its opposition toward the rise of Islamist ideology in Morocco and was founded by Ahmed Benchemsi in 2001; Benchemsi ran the magazine before leaving in 2010 after several conflicts with the Moroccan government.³⁹ The inaugural issue of *TelQuel* featured what would later become the journal's slogan: "le Maroc tel qu'il est."

³⁸Soundouss Chraïbi, "Il y a 15 ans, quand Abdellah Taïa faisait son coming-out dans nos colonnes," *TelQuel*, November 12, 2021. https://telquel.ma/2021/11/12/il-y-a-15-ans-quand-abdellah-taia-faisait-son-coming-out-dans-nos-colonnes_1742972.

³⁹ Currently, Benchemsi is the Director of Advocacy and Communications for Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa division in the United States after a stint as a Visiting Professor of Political Science at Stanford University.

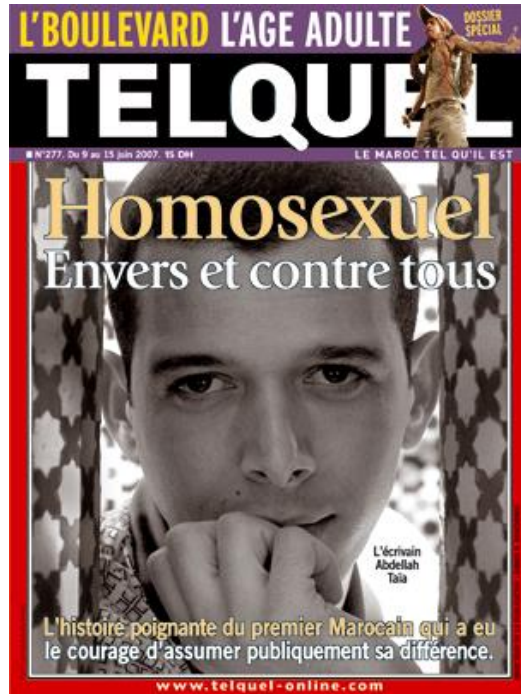


Figure 1: Abdellah Taïa for *TelQuel*

Figure one shows Taïa on the magazine with a cover line that reads: “[l’]histoire poignante du premier Marocain qui a eu le courage d’assumer publiquement sa différence.”⁴⁰ The purposeful reference to the public declaration of Taïa’s homosexuality distinguishes the public from the private, which is a nod to the magazine’s slogan to show all aspects of Moroccan society. According to an interview with City of Asylum, a Pittsburgh based non-profit organization that houses writers who have been exiled due to their writings,⁴¹ Taïa’s public coming out started a

⁴⁰ Karim Boukhari, “Homosexuel: Envers et contre tous,” *TelQuel*, 2007.

⁴¹ For more information on City of Asylum, see their website: <https://cityofasylum.org/>

conversation on sexual (op)repression and human rights in Morocco and in the Arab World at large.⁴²

Beyond the evocation of sexual orientation, Taïa's coming out functioned as a deconstruction of masculinity and the heteronormative expectations that he and other queer North Africans have rejected to launch a critique of social norms considering that they are not based upon any singular truth, but rather, are inventions used as tools of domination. In the epigraph above, Taïa writes that real men do not exist, thus emphasizing how the constructed nature of masculinity puts pressure on the presumed differences between men and women, with the latter usually being recognized as inferior. As Simone de Beauvoir writes, "[i]l est le Sujet, il est l'Absolu: elle est l'Autre."⁴³ Both Taïa and Beauvoir straightforwardly critique the patriarchal model of male dominance, which construes virility – a concept associated with hypermasculinity – as a tool of power and control.

To extend Taïa's critique of masculinity, this chapter poses the following questions: Does the notion of queer masculinity presuppose an effeminization of male subjects, therefore deconstructing the phallogentric perception of masculinity and "manhood"? Or is *queering* masculinity a method that is actively working to bridge femininity and masculinity – creating a third taxonomy – to form a hybrid similar to Homi Bhabha's notion of a "third space? Or Jack Halberstam's idea of female masculinity, which deconstructs binary perceptions of biological sex and presumed gender expression, i.e., male = masculine and female = feminine? This chapter

⁴² Joe Edgar, "A Conversation with Moroccan Novelist Abdellah Taïa," *Sampsonia Way*, September 10, 2012. <https://www.sampsoniaway.org/literary-voices/2012/09/10/a-conversation-with-moroccan-novelist-abdellah-taia/>.

⁴³ Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976 [1949]), 17.

opens with an examination of novels by Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa, the first two Moroccan writers to openly write about non-heterosexual desires and practices. Here, I argue that O. and Taïa, through a process of “self-discovery,” and a “writing of the self” *queer* masculinity, forming a plural masculinity that does not center itself on Western epistemologies that conceive of masculinity as the opposite of femininity. Here, “self-discovery” and “writing of the self” evoke the construction of subjectivities as Taïa and O. function as both narrator and protagonist in the texts studied in this chapter. “Self-discovery” signals the exploratory function of literature that follows a (non)linear timeline. Notably, both Taïa and O. challenge conceptualizations of masculinity through transnational discursive practices that engage with national culture and tradition.

As O. departs Morocco for Switzerland and Taïa Morocco for France by way of Egypt, both authors find themselves in situations of self-exile, which describes the deliberate departure from one’s homeland, which in turn, can accommodate the production of Mediterranean subjectivity and identity formation. This process allows for subjects to maintain the agency of their subjectivities and identities as they encounter the diversity of the region and encounter fragments that construct their sense of self.⁴⁴ Self-exile is a form of displacement that can be categorized in two ways: (meta)physical or metaphorical. Viewing the process of self-exile in this way plays a vital role in considering the development of subjectivities and identities because as the world has become increasingly interconnected via globalization, the perceived socio-cultural dissonance between the Global North and the Global South has decreased.

This chapter approaches the concept of masculinity in three novels written by two gay Moroccan men – *Ce qui reste*, *Le rouge du tarbouche* and *Une mélancolie arabe*. I argue that these

⁴⁴ For the purpose of this dissertation, “homeland” refers to one’s country of birth.

novels, the first by O., and the latter two by Taïa, represent queer masculinities constructed by (meta)physical crossings of borders that are simultaneously mediated by transnational discourses that leave space for a reinterpretation of Mediterranean and Maghrebi masculinities. For psychologist Robert Heasley, “queer masculinity” is defined as “ways of being masculine outside hetero-normative constructions of masculinity that disrupt or have the potential to disrupt traditional images of the hegemonic heterosexual masculine.”⁴⁵ Though this dissertation does not focus on straight men, as Heasley does, his argument can be extended to disrupt hetero-normativity to ultimately reject it entirely. For instance, Halberstam argues that masculinity should be nuanced by considering its inherent hybridity – as it is possessed by everyone and expressed in innumerable ways.⁴⁶ I argue for an approach to studying masculinities that is decentered from biological essentialist discourse entrenched in gender as it relates to masculinity, which assumes that all men hold and experience masculinity in the same way. The deconstructive process of masculinity does not eliminate it altogether nor is that the intention; rather, it produces differing masculinities as subjects continuously reconfigure their own interaction with masculinity as they encounter the world.

The first section of this chapter expands upon Marcia Inhorn’s understanding of her concept, the “New Arab Man,” to decenter and deconstruct masculinity from Western epistemology and thought through the study of North African masculinities. To continue the discussion of epistemology and its inherent connection to Western thought, section two functions as a study of melancholy as a reconstructive epistemological tool as subjects deploy narratives of

⁴⁵ Robert Heasley, “Queer Masculinities of Straight Men: A Typology,” *Men and Masculinities* 7, no. 3 (2005): 310.

⁴⁶ Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

the past to use memory. I contend that this process operates to construct their gender and sexual identities through writing as subjects cross borders and encounter different spaces. The third section focuses largely on the constitution of subjects temporally as the discussion shifts between childhood to adulthood while approaching differing affects, temporalities, and spaces to demonstrate, as depicted in O.'s *Ce qui reste*, the role of non-normative sexual practices in subject development. The fourth section applies my concept of the “fragmented ‘je’” to argue that subjectivities are constantly in flux as they meet dissimilar socio-cultural dimensions and move between borders and temporalities to construct what I call “fragmented subjectivities.” To conclude this chapter, the fifth and final section proposes a critical approach to the notion of self-exile as a space of creation as it generates a “third space,” which Homi Bhabha conceives of as a product of post-colonial hybridity developed due to the legacies of colonialism.⁴⁷ This third space

⁴⁷ I relate Bhabha's notion of the “third space” to Freudian psychoanalysis, which has brought forth a cultural and political analysis as well as critiques of gender and sexuality that offset reductionist rhetoric that presumes a stable model of sex and sexuality. Freud discusses childhood sexuality in his *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* [Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality] (originally published in 1905), compiles three separate analyses that approach, longitudinally, human sexuality – the first essay being “Die sexuellen Abirrungen,” [The Sexual Aberrations] the second “Die infantile Sexualität,” [Infantile Sexuality] and the third “Die Umgestaltungen der Pubertät” [The Transformations of Puberty]. Freud's essays distinguish “sexual object” from “sexual aim.” The latter concept refers to the psychophysiological desires that one possesses – a process that (re)constructs subjectivities and orients individuals as they cross borders that imprint cultural knowledge and artifacts onto them.

serves as a point of departure for the construction of a physical and discursive community that extends outside of heteronormative visions of the Maghreb.

2.2 The “New Arab Man”: From Masculinity to Masculinities

With the “New Arab Man” Inhorn seeks to reconceive of Middle Eastern/Arab masculinity to deconstruct the archetypal “macho” vision of Arab masculinity, which is centered on virility and dominance. Inhorn’s medico-anthropological approach also attempts to envision how subjects who have seemingly been stripped of their virility (through cases of infertility or general childlessness due to a lack of varying circumstances) do not necessarily endorse the patriarchal contract that stipulates procreation and filiation as a means of assessing one’s level of manhood. According to Inhorn, individuals who reject the imagined patriarchal contract, which is embedded in an idea of masculinity as singular and normative, produce “emergent masculinities.” Inhorn demonstrates an example of emergent masculinities by considering the case of “Hamza.”⁴⁸ Hamza is a sterile Lebanese man married to a woman (Janna), has a successful career, and has shifted his understanding of masculinity from being a father to being a good husband and provider. Considering the heterosocial/heteronormative approach that Inhorn undertakes, I propose to employ the concept of emergent masculinities and apply it to the Maghreb – specifically directed toward queer North Africans, which adds an additional layer of complexity to Inhorn’s critical approach to masculinity. This section focuses predominantly on the shift from thinking of masculinity as a singular concept to thinking of its plural forms – an understanding of masculinities that is not reliant on a model where femininity is its antithesis. The concept of emergent

⁴⁸ The name appears in quotes since Inhorn’s study uses pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity of the subjects in her study.

masculinities implies the proliferation of variance that is not rooted in virility, unlike in traditional conceptualizations of masculinity.

According to Gibson Ncubé, Arab-Muslim masculinity is on trial, therefore gesturing toward a paradigm shift from the current discourse on masculinity and allowing for difficult conversations to occur within relatively conservative societies.⁴⁹ Ncubé's evocation of Simone de Beauvoir's groundbreaking text *Le deuxième sexe* points to the arbitrary nature of social constructs like gender categories as he analyzes Arab masculinity. Beauvoir poignantly asks "qu'est-ce qu'une femme,"⁵⁰ which indirectly references the male/female binary, which she challenges in her emblematic "on ne naît pas femme, on le devient."⁵¹ To underscore the importance of Beauvoir's influential feminist analysis, Todd Reeser argues for an approach to masculinities that is in flux and against the assumption of a "natural masculinity." In turn, "masculinities in flux" destabilizes the normalizing process that masculinity has undergone over time, leaving space for an interrogation of plural and divergent forms of masculinity.⁵² To further

⁴⁹ Gibson Ncubé, "Arab-Muslim Masculinity on Trial: Gay Muslim Writers Broaching Homosexuality," *Gender Forum*, no. 47 (2014): 1-10.

⁵⁰ Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, 16.

⁵¹ Ibid., 285-6. Though, the origins of this statement can be traced back to Erasmus' *De pueris institudendis* (1529) in the reverse being "on ne naît pas homme, on le devient" – "homme" being used in the generic sense here. Although it is Beauvoir, not Erasmus, that conceived of the "process" of becoming a wo/man in reference to gender construction and expression.

⁵² Todd W. Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 13.

understand the idea of a “natural masculinity” and the normalizing process of masculinity, I turn to Raewyn Connell’s notion of “hegemonic masculinity,” which refers to a social hierarchy that structures biologically male, masculine subjects as dominant therefore subordinating non-masculine subjects, i.e., those regarded as feminine.⁵³ Connell’s interpretation of hegemonic masculinity, stemming from 1980s discourse asserts that it is “based on practice that permits men’s collective dominance over women to continue.”⁵⁴ Reeser’s discussion of natural masculinity can be understood through his discussion of “manhood” and the symbolic nature of anatomy, i.e., the penis as the epicenter of masculinity. He asserts:

We accord a certain importance to the penis as part of the male body, and certain men (or women) might be obsessed with the penis because they believe that it embodies what a man is. Our ideas about masculinity come to influence what we think the male body and the male sex are. We think a man should be sexually virile, and so we attach great importance to the penis. The male member represents masculinity when in fact it is just a piece of flesh hanging between the legs.⁵⁵

Furthermore, Reeser emphasizes the idea that:

We invent the male sex and imagine that maleness or that sex to reside outside the realm of the social or the linguistic. We imagine that maleness is a result of chromosomes, hormones, testosterone, muscularity, size of the male body (men are larger than women), etc.⁵⁶

⁵³ Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829-859.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 840.

⁵⁵ Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory*, 74.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

This method of conceptualizing masculinity as it relates to the corporeal and a predetermined understanding of masculinity vis-à-vis anatomy can be linked to social order or gender order theory, which implies that society is organized based upon the contributions of men and women.

Connell's emphasis on social order is of particular interest considering that the concept stems from fieldwork conducted in Australia, therefore, rendering it incompatible for direct, unnuanced application to non-Western subjects. Aside from this, and as a possible remedy to the lack of cultural specificity, Moroccan sociologist Abdessamad Dialmy's study *Vers une nouvelle masculinité au Maroc*, approaches the late 1990s as site of a major intellectual shift that "a rendu possible certaines remises en cause et certaines interrogations sur la place des hommes et des femmes dans toutes les sociétés, en lien avec de profonds changements de comportements."⁵⁷ Dialmy cites two conferences in particular that marked new forms of resistance and organization that led to a critical lens being placed upon masculinity and sexuality in the Maghreb, the first of the two conferences being "Le programme d'action de la conférence internationale sur la population et le développement du Caire" (CIPD) in 1994 and the second being "La conférence mondiale sur les femmes de Beijing" in 1995. Notably, neither of these conferences took place within the Maghreb, begging the question as to why Dialmy views these two events as signals of a shift in thought that would alter the ways in which one approaches the notions of masculinity and sexuality within the Maghreb.

In fact, Dialmy does not even evoke these two conferences to link them to the Maghreb necessarily, but rather, to make note of the fact that these conversations within the academy have been ongoing since the mid-to-late 1990s. In a case specific to Morocco, it is the 2004 reform of

⁵⁷ Abdessamad Dialmy, *Vers une nouvelle masculinité au Maroc* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2009), 9.

family law in Morocco – the Moudawana Ousra [Code de la Famille] – that Dialmy is concerned with. These laws were first introduced in 1956 after Moroccan independence from France – foregoing major revisions until 2004, which remains the latest version of the document. The Moudawana Ousra focuses on the regulation of polygamy, marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Inadvertently or perhaps intentionally, the Moudawana Ousra codifies normative masculinity based upon biological sex, stipulating that:

Le Code ne devrait pas être considéré comme une loi édictée à l'intention exclusive de la femme, mais plutôt comme un dispositif destiné à toute la famille, père, mère et enfants. Il obéit au souci, à la fois, de lever l'iniquité qui pèse sur les femmes, de protéger les droits des enfants, et de préserver la dignité de l'homme.⁵⁸

This decree, found within the preamble to the Moudawana Ousra, focuses on the *dignité de l'homme*, with man not being a stand in for human but for biological men alone. Furthermore, this legal document serves the purpose of establishing and protecting the heteronormative family unit, making male subjects responsible for maintaining the honor and dignity of the family unit.

As seen in both Rachid O.'s and Abdellah Taïa's writings, the family unit is central to the construction and establishment of subjecthood as they seek acceptance from their families as they openly lead non-heteronormative lives. In the case of O., it is the traditional need for the acceptance of his father, but for Taïa, it is his mother, M'Barka, through whom he seeks acceptance. Taïa's constant reference to his mother and their interactions, which are often intimate, destabilizes masculinity as he restructures normative conceptualization of "family" or "home" that place the father at the highest point of the hierarchy with the mother below – sometimes even below male children.

⁵⁸ *La Moudawana Ousra* [Code de la Famille], 2004, 14.

<http://expertes.ma/file/2016/04/Code-de-la-Famille-Moudawana.pdf>

2.3 Melancholic Epistemes: Reestablishing and Rethinking Sexualities and Masculinities

Taïa's autofictional novel, *Une mélancolie arabe*, uses a blend of truth and fiction to reconfigure the notions of sexuality and masculinity – mainly through the process of melancholy as he confronts memories of his past. In writing a letter to a past lover, Slimane, also of North African descent, Taïa uses comparison (to Slimane) to demarcate the ways in which the two reconstructed themselves as Arab men based upon an unstable model of masculinity: “[c]omme toi, je suis redevenu un homme de là-bas. Une image arabe de l’homme. Sec. Fier. Dur. Pantin. Ridicule.”⁵⁹ Taïa's assertion that one can *redevenir* a man puts pressure on the presumed existence of stable masculinity – much like the adjectives he uses to describe the “model Arab man,” according to societal standards. The precision of place and space as he uses “là-bas,” operates as a marker of temporality and movement that signals a here vs. there distinction as he moves between the past Slimane and Abdellah and their current embodiment of and contact with Arab masculinity – the latter qualified as “dry, proud, rough, puppeteering, and ridiculous.” These qualities that Slimane associates himself and Abdellah with are criticisms of heteronormative conceptualizations of masculinity entrenched in thinking of “manhood as innate, residing in the particular biological composition of the human male, the result of androgens or the possession of a penis.”⁶⁰

After having lived in France for eight years by the time *Une mélancolie arabe* was published, Taïa finds himself at the intersection of his Moroccan identity as well as his identity as

⁵⁹ Abdellah Taïa, *Une mélancolie arabe*, (Paris: Seuil, 2008), 123.

⁶⁰ Harry W. Brod and Michael Kaufman, *Theorizing Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994), 119.

resident/immigrant. Like Slimane, Abdellah comes to accept his Arab identity through cultural and linguistic exchange that is sedimented by their geographic proximity. Slimane, also a Maghrebi man living in Paris, seeks to avoid the French gaze that surveils Arabs to assess their level of assimilation to French socio-cultural practices. Taïa's protagonists do not only become men again, but they also become Arab men again – nuancing the notion of masculinity as it is situated in a socio-cultural context. According to Slimane, language is an important marker of identity as he addresses Abdellah: “[j]e te parlais en arabe. Notre langue à nous et dans laquelle, hors la loi, on s’est aimés. Avec toi je redevais arabe et je dépassais en même temps cette condition.”⁶¹ The constructivist potential of language relies on a certain level of permissibility – Slimane's use of the possessive “à nous” and the subsequent “hors la loi” signals the subversion of “cette condition”—the condition being the figurative contract that migrants support upon arrival to mainland France. Furthermore, this imagined condition operates as a process of subordination that yields a degree of precarity as migrants must confront and construct fragmented subjectivities as they traverse different socio-political landscapes.

The concept of masculinity is frequently linked to the male sex using a model that assumes male = masculine and female = feminine. Aside from this biological essentialist framework, it should be noted that men in patriarchal societies compete for their virility, a method to determine who is the manliest and most dominant. Epidemiologist Lori Heise explains this competition of manliness as she asserts that “masculinity is associated with aggression and sexual conquest, domineering sexual behavior and violence become not only a means of structuring power relations

⁶¹ Taïa, *Une mélancolie arabe*, 118.

between men and women but a way of establishing power relations among men.”⁶² Arab masculinity, often given power via Islam, seeks to escape colonial frameworks that manage to flourish through history and narratives of masculinity rooted in Western epistemology.⁶³ O.’s construction of Arab masculinity is mediated by his formative experiences with his father and uncle. Serving as a narrative of childhood that approaches adulthood, navigating both temporalities at the same time, *Ce qui reste* also defies linear temporal dimensions as he narrates his early understanding of masculinity as shaped by his vision of his father as a warrior:

Très jeune, pour me consoler, je prenais plaisir à imaginer mon père en guerrier brutal maniant l’épée dans un délire fou, revenant avec une cuirasse et portant de l’or, la peau sombre, l’œil furieux ; sur son turban on le jugeait le caïd, d’une race forte ; il était toujours oisif et dur. J’étais loin de la vérité. Pourtant, il fallait bien que je trouve une manière de mal assumer ce désir qu’il avait de ne pas blesser. Maintenant je souris pour tout, pour son attitude passée, pour celle à venir. Je souris pour ce qu’il est.⁶⁴

The protagonist’s supposition that masculinity is secured via violence and the phallic *épée* has been theorized as subscribing to “toxic masculinity,” a term coined by Shepherd Bliss emerging “within the mythopoetic men’s movement of the 1980s.”⁶⁵ Despite his early supposition, O. is able

⁶² Parker, Richard G., and John H. Gagnon, eds. *Conceiving Sexuality: Approaches to Sex Research in a Postmodern World* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 130.

⁶³ Valentina Fedele, “The Diasporic Islamic Masculinity and the Reformulation of European Islam: Theoretical Approaches and Interpretative Perspectives,” *Nómadas. Revista Crítica de Ciencias Sociales y Jurídicas* 39, no. 3 (2015): 19-54.

https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_NOMA.2013.v40.n4.48341.

⁶⁴ Rachid O., *Ce qui reste* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 64-5.

⁶⁵ Carol Harrington, “What Is ‘Toxic Masculinity’ and Why Does It Matter?,” *Men and Masculinities* 24, no. 2 (2021): 347.

to admit that he was far from the truth and that masculinity does not necessarily need to involve swords, war, violence, and oppression.

O.'s approach to "[se] consoler" is rooted in a stereotypical image of "manhood" and the symbolic representation of fathers and fatherhood. Additionally, with O.'s interplay of imagination and consolation, one is met with what could be described as a reconciliation of his own masculinity or at least his interpretation of what masculinity should be. Furthermore, and at the level of physicality, O. provides a detailed depiction of his father in this imagined portrayal of him as a warrior. With "la peau sombre," "l'œil furieux," and wearing a turban, from "une race forte," O.'s creation of an imagined father presents a specific form of masculinity that is marked ethno-racially, i.e., darker skin and wearing a turban. Unsurprisingly, O. eventually does come to the realization that his father is not exactly as he envisioned nor the *guerrier brutal* that he desperately wanted to be in the past. As a man characterized as "oisif" and "dur," O.'s father's own masculinity, which cannot be classified as toxic nor hypermasculine, is what ultimately comforts O. as he comes to realize and understand divergent representations of masculinity. This realization consoles O. as it sets the narrative for a potential deconstruction of himself as he understands his own subjecthood.

I now turn to Taïa's *Une mélancolie arabe*, which serves as a powerful recollection of memories – stemming from a young, effeminate boy who deals with sexual violence, death, and love as he travels across North Africa and eventually settles in Paris. After narrowly escaping being raped by a gang of boys in his city, the protagonist declares unabashedly that "[il] avai[t] désormais une image. Une étiquette officielle. Un label. Le garçon efféminé. La petite femme. On allait passer sur moi. On allait chaque jour et de plus en plus abuser de moi. On allait me tuer à

petit feu. Me tuer vivant.”⁶⁶ The reference to “une image” presumes a stable articulation of sexuality and masculinity – situating these two notions within a homo/hetero binary despite their constant state of flux at sites of encounter. Much in line with Connell’s articulation of hegemonic masculinity, it is clear that the gang of boys work to put the protagonist in his place, a restructuring of social order despite the fact that the protagonist is, like them, also a boy, but where he falls short is through his “*étiquette officielle*” or label that subordinates him and aligns him with the feminine. Beyond the presence of the physical trauma that this gang rape scene presents, the protagonist’s slow death is attributed to this delineation of him from his masculinity, which places him into a lower rung of society, which effectively removes a significant amount of agency from him as he details these events from his childhood.

In *Une mélancolie arabe*, the protagonists, Abdellah and Slimane, are initially dependent upon distancing themselves from their Arab/North African heritage to assimilate into French national culture. Likewise, O.’s constructivist vision of identity formation takes shape in *Ce qui reste* as he visits two cities – Rome and Paris. These trips take place while he is grappling with the death of his uncle and simultaneously experiences the metaphorical death of his father and uncovers another side of him. The book blurb (the italicized portion of the citation below) provides a preliminary glance into O.’s anxiety and frustration with the lack of agency he possesses regarding his personal subjecthood and its construction. O. fragments this section of the novel, guiding the reader as one traverses his prolonged monologue:

Vous trouverez peut-être que c’est impudique de raconter ça, après avoir parlé de la vie et l’éblouissement, parce que je vous force à me lire. Mais il faudrait être sacrément déprimé pour en venir à ce genre de choses. J’ai besoin d’écrire ça, comme une justification de la douleur et de la beauté malsaine de ma vie, et puis vous m’avez habitué à être compris comme je voudrais l’être. Alors je me laisse glisser, je serai de nouveau dans vos bras

⁶⁶ Taïa, *Une mélancolie arabe*, 28.

l'espace de quelques heures, je traînerai vos esprits par la main, avec la mine sérieuse d'un enfant qui prend possession de quelqu'un qu'il aime. Mais j'ai peur de me réveiller soudain avec un goût amer dans la bouche, parce que je vous tomberai des mains. *Juste, avant de continuer, je voudrais remettre quelque chose en place : je construis malgré moi mon image à vos yeux, ne soyez dupes d'aucun de mes livres. Je me suis résigné depuis longtemps à laisser mes sentiments précéder mon esprit. Je me vois, spectateur complice, guider mes désespoirs et mes euphories comme un peintre compose un portrait. Si je ne sais pas vivre, je sais au moins en donner l'illusion et afficher une apparence qui a quelque chose de celle d'un personnage de roman.*⁶⁷

As he addresses the reader, O. highlights the potential reception of the reader who might find his prose “impudique.” In conversation with the reader albeit its one directional approach, O. justifies the teleological underpinnings of his writing to be better understood and to understand “la douleur” and “la beauté malsaine de [sa] vie.”

Through the construction of a singular read by way of assembling a protagonist, O. seeks the comfort of his reader whom he wishes to be held by as this action allows for a temporary aphasia of sorts that gets rid of the “goût amer dans la bouche” that he experiences from his troubles. As he continues to lament, O. transitions to an aside in the second half of the paragraph, beginning with: “juste, avant de continuer,” which is a representation of the ongoing fragmentation of his subjecthood that is continuously displaced as he encounters the “other.” Moreover, I contend that the “other,” represented as “vous,” goes beyond just the reader to have a tripartite function as it can directly reference his recently deceased uncle and father. Taking these two important figures in O.’s life, his uncle, and his father, as a representation of “vous” makes more sense when the author speaks of the construction of himself – which will be channeled through these two men, which, as discussed earlier, is an imagined construction that is not based in reality. O. knows this, and his tendency to rely on imagined constructions of the self as he references a “personnage d’un

⁶⁷ O., *Ce qui reste*, 25-6. Emphasis mine.

roman” at the end of the quote. I relate invention of imagined constructions to the concept of “orientation,” in a phenomenological sense, which I understand through my concept of “phenomenological migratory subjectivities,” which argues that subjectivities elaborate on the positionality of individuals toward or away from certain subjectivities and how one must reinvent their subjectivities at any given point in time to circumvent marginalization. This process fragments (im)migrants to create unstable subjectivities that are perpetually in flux, allowing them to exist in a multiplicity of spaces.⁶⁸ Applying this theoretical framework to O., it is clear that he purposefully constructs a multifaceted subject, himself, to navigate the complex socio-cultural terrain that exists as he encounters others.

Through these encounters, O. subjugates himself, enduring self-exile, while concurrently assembling himself, as he hints in the above citation that “il construi[t] malgré [s]oi [son] image à vos yeux,” which contrasts starkly with Western models of subjecthood that rely on individualistic and self-centered approaches to identity construction that are predicated on the effect of external stimuli. This contrast and O.’s reliance upon his father and uncle to construct a sexual identity and understanding of masculinity are not only signifiers of his own personal engagement with these notions but also a larger cultural phenomenon that reveals non-Western analyses of sexuality and masculinity that seek to build upon a wealth of knowledge that comes from their predecessors – a queer ancestral knowledge that has the potential to shift present day understandings of gender,

⁶⁸ “Positionality” and “position” refer to the (meta)physical orientation or directedness towards subjectivity formation.

sexuality and masculinity as current subjects encounter objects left behind.⁶⁹ O.'s writing evokes a transnational discourse as he moves back and forth between Morocco, France, and Italy, three geographic locations he interacts with to inform his identity as he moves between these spaces.

To expand upon the notion of temporality, I apply and expand upon this concept as it works as a mode of self-construction. Taïa's *Une mélancolie arabe*, functioning as a narrative of memory and absence, uses an autodiegetic narrator to navigate a non-linear account of adolescence and early adulthood. The processes of memory and recall followed by the act of writing is a performance of migration within itself as it involves the conscious recall of events to form the texts, but also to (re)construct the self as written into existence beyond the physical – a site of (dis)orientation. “Disorientation,” functions as a phenomenological model for Sara Ahmed to delineate her groundbreaking conceptualization of “orientation” by which she explains sexual orientation phenomenologically while “thinking about the spatiality of sexuality, gender, and race.”⁷⁰ The insertion of the prefix “dis-” suggests a potential disruption in subjectivity formation

⁶⁹ In Kirk Fiereck, Neville Hoad, and Danai S Mupotsa's “A Queering-to-Come,” a case is made for possibility for African queer studies scholarship to influence Euro-American understandings of the field – noting that queer studies normative tendencies – the queer customary – can and should be transgressed and specifically “entails unsettling the expected roles, subjectivities, and forms of personhood that are normatively proscribed by customary practices...” Kirk Fiereck, Neville Hoad, and Danai S Mupotsa, “A Queering-to-Come,” *GLQ* 26, no. 3 (2020): 365, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-8311743>.

⁷⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 4.

if one is not oriented toward any particular object, thus leaving them in an identitarian limbo with their *cul entre deux chaises*.⁷¹

The novel begins with the section “Je me souviens” – recognizably related to the affect of melancholy that the novel’s title references. According to Claudia Gronemann, “[l]e discours de la mélancolie s’est formé en Occident depuis l’Antiquité produisant un réseau de catégorie.”⁷² Taïa elucidates a productive potential of melancholy that constructs a “mélancolie arabe,” not to be confused with the title of the novel, which is a concept that allows for the renegotiation of one’s relationship to the masculine-feminine binary – rupturing the essentialist bifurcation to create a third space.⁷³ Stefano Micali, who expands upon Bhabha’s notion of the third space, contends that this third space creates “Intersubjektivität” [intersubjectivity]. Micali theorizes intersubjectivity as follows:

Die Melancholie impliziert eine Transformation der Dimension der *Intersubjektivität*: Die Person ist nicht mehr fähig, mit den anderen „synchron“ bzw. „in synch“ zu sein. Der eigene *Leib* verliert seine selbstverständliche und „stille“ Unmittelbarkeit: Der Leib wird steifer und zugleich schwerer.

[Melancholy implies a transformation of the dimension of *intersubjectivity*: The person is no longer able to be "synchronous" or "in synch" with the others. The own *body* loses its

⁷¹ I opt to not change the expression despite its gesture toward a binary way of thought considering it exists as an *expression figée* but mention in this note that there exists a possibility for several *chaises*.

⁷² Claudia Gronemann and Michael Gebhard, eds. *Masculinités maghrébines: Nouvelles perspectives sur la culture, la littérature et le cinéma*. vol. 21. Francopolyphonies. (Boston: Brill, 2017), 175.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 175.

self-evident and "silent" immediacy: The body becomes stiffer and at the same time weaker].⁷⁴

Taïa's protagonist is within this space of intersubjectivity, at least temporarily, as he undergoes psychological and metaphorical death – ultimately coming back to “life.” The protagonist laments: “[j]’étais dans ma deuxième vie. Je venais de rencontrer la mort. J’étais parti. Puis revenu.”⁷⁵ Taïa's positionality, i.e., the here vs. there or the homeland vs. the adopted homeland serve as a type of metaphorical death that is situated in transnational discourse. The narrative construction of the protagonist between Morocco and France (the here and there) puts him in a temporal and physical bind that can only be remedied by displacement. His metaphorical death and resurrection signal an alteration of subjectivity and identity. For Taïa, the act of remembering is integral to the process of writing – allowing for an individual to interact with their memories to create a personal archive of artifacts such as affects and emotions. Taïa also approaches memory and the complexity that begets this intricate process of remembering, forgetting, and recalling. He writes: “[j]e me souviens de tout maintenant. Je peux écrire.”⁷⁶ The use of the verb *pouvoir*, a verb of ability, articulates not only the apparent capacity to write but also the *vouloir* or act of wanting to write. The act of remembering allows Taïa to articulate and bring to life his affective experiences as they meet his “deuxième vie,” to reconstruct a unified sense of self discursively.

⁷⁴ Gerrit Jan van der Heiden, et al., eds. *Investigating Subjectivity: Classical and New Perspectives*. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 235. All translations are mine unless otherwise stated. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁵ Taïa, *Une mélancolie arabe*, 9

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 11

2.4 Establishing Subjecthood in Rachid O.'s *Ce qui reste*: Affect, Temporality & Space

In what could be considered a post-structuralist approach centered on (re)establishing subjecthood, the autobiographical quality of O.'s *Ce qui reste* is focused narratively on the nonlinear construction of subjecthood. Unlike the autofictional approach of *Chocolat chaud* (1998), O. marks his return to the autobiographic genre with *Ce qui reste*, which maneuvers as a novel where he literally writes himself into existence as he probes his divergent sexual and masculine expression.⁷⁷ O.'s deceased uncle haunts the text from beginning to end as he serves as a model for O. while he creates his subjecthood. As O. reminisces about his uncle, he forges a parallel between himself and his uncle that nevertheless fragments him. O. states: “[q]uand je ferme les paupières et je bloque ma respiration, je trouve que je lui ressemble. Je sens ses traits sur mon visage.”⁷⁸ In reality, the man that he grew up knowing as his uncle has no biological relation to him, although he clarifies that “...depuis l’instant même où on m’a bien expliqué que ce n’était pas mon vrai oncle, je crois qu’à partir de cet instant j’ai appris à lui ressembler...”⁷⁹ This specific point of realization leads to another recognition, being one of fantasy embedded in a realm of reality.

⁷⁷ O.'s works frequently approach themes of pedophilia, which the author usually approaches as a means of understanding his own attraction to older men. See Andrea Duranti, “Gay but Not Queer: Defining Liminal Post-Queer Identities in Maghrebian Literature,” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 12, no. 1 (2008): 79-87.

⁷⁸ O., *Ce qui reste*, 63.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

The implication that O. can feel the traits of his uncle on his face serves as a sort of transfiguration that merges O. and his uncle, which forms an identitarian bond that links the two through a lack of biological affiliation that is not discovered until after his uncle's death. It is precisely this absence of a genetic bond that allows O. to connect with his uncle on a deeper level. As O. transitions out of this trance-like state, he enters another fantasy realm:

J'ai entendu le crissement du bois et immédiatement j'ai fantasmé et imaginé une immense pièce à partouzes. Je ne sais pas pourquoi il fallait que je voie ça : beaucoup d'hommes et de garçons en train d'enfoncer leurs bites dans tellement de trous, de baiser et de se retourner, les yeux bandés pour ne pas tenter de choisir, en se faisant marcher dessus sous les chutes successives de corps impressionnants, de bites pas raides à force d'être usées, moches. 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.⁸⁰

This scene *à partouzes* that O. fantasizes about in the citation above, which he refers to as a "tas de vice," signals transgressive desire and behavior as the protagonist engages in voyeurism rather than participating in the orgy himself. I link the act of voyeurism to social psychologist Margaret Wetherell's conceptualization of affect and discourse analysis that postulates:

Affect, unlike emotion or feeling, is something that has not yet been closed down, represented, labelled, communicated, shaped and structured. Affect is 'virtual', untamed and inassimilable, always in the process of becoming, and the leading edge of the wave of any engagement with the world before human minds get to it. Affect is virtual because it sets up and holds as possibility multiple connections and ways of being. These possibilities collapse, however, when discourse, culture, cognition, and consciousness come onto the scene and develop a story line. Even if affective possibilities trigger multiple story lines, affect understood as potential has faded and disappeared. The moment selection occurs, potential and the indeterminate turn into the actual and the determinate.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Ibid., 64.

⁸¹ Margaret Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding* (London: Sage, 2012), 59. Emphasis in original.

The lack of physical participation in the imagined orgy leads to the act of fantasizing, creating a potentiality for said orgy to occur, to serve as an affective agent to the events occurring in front of him. An “affective agent,” a term that already exists in the fields of computational science and cognitive studies, functions as medium for subjects to channel and interact with the affects of others within their immediate surroundings. The affective agent, therefore, allows for subjects to orient themselves toward or against certain affects and emotions to make meaning of the world around them. O.’s metaphorical voyeurism allows for him to partake in nonnormative sexual practices without exposing himself, considering that O. states that the participants in the orgy have their “yeux bandés,” which leads the reader to believe he is not blindfolded in the fantasy due to his ability to describe what is going on and what his peers look like. He also makes the distinction between who is there, a combination of “hommes et garçons,” another marker of temporal difference within the novel. This is to say that O. makes use of these actors in the narrative as affective agents to live out and participate in non-normative sexual acts that he fantasizes about.

Similarly, O.’s evocation of a “tas de vice,” constructs a space of *perversité*, in the words of O., as he refers to his being “armé de [sa] propre perversité,” which weaponizes his act of transgression – postulating a temporal dimension to his rhetoric that bypasses the present to create a possible future. The semiotic underpinnings of the usage of “armé” in O.’s text establishes a target/targeted binary that produces a transience, which is to say, a point of movement that allows for discourse to travel between two or more points. Additionally, O.’s elicitation of sexual transgression as a weapon of sorts elucidates the potential for nonnormative identities to also serve as weapons that deconstruct national narratives in a normative paradigm as they seek to be reproduced temporally.

Khadija El Achir's work on transgression and identity in the works of Rachid O. focuses on the relationship he has to perversity, homoeroticism, and childhood as he undergoes an identitarian quest, which connects to my conceptualization of how O. understands his homosexuality and non-normative desires through fantasy and imagination.⁸² El Achir's use of the notion of childhood goes beyond the temporal where O. simply engages with histories of his past. O.'s commitment to studying the past, his past, is an obsession that is "un retour au paradis perdu de l'enfance, symbole de l'innocence et de la simplicité."⁸³ On the contrary, I do not perceive O.'s obsession with the past and childhood as a method for him to reconstruct himself outside of a transgressive paradigm. O.'s interaction with childhood can be read as the exact opposite of innocent and simple considering the reoccurrence of themes such as pedophilia, incest, gay sex, and voyeurism. It is true that O.'s vision of childhood is analogous to heaven, but not for the reasons El Achir delineates. The fluid movement between the present and past, from adulthood to childhood, from hell to heaven, is what O. uses to construct his identity as his subjectivities shift between these multiple positions. Perhaps it is the perceived sense of freedom that lures O. to the notion of childhood as he reconciles the aging process that generally limits self-expression as related to certain societal codes that should not be challenged – sexuality in the case of O.

I have argued in this section for the possibility of a subjecthood that is constructed neither linearly nor consciously as subjects are met with everchanging temporal and geographic changes. As O.'s protagonist is "written" into existence and discursively constructed by way of his approach

⁸² Khadija El Achir, *Transgression et identité autofictionnelle dans l'œuvre de Rachid O.* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014), 104.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 65.

to memory and affect, one observes the salient notion of affect as “virtual” that Wetherell and others propose.⁸⁴ *Ce qui reste* relies profoundly on memory, not only that of the protagonist, but also the memory of those that have been imprinted onto him through the various stories articulated to him throughout his lifetime. Specifically, the author chooses a stream of consciousness-like approach to storytelling where, “[il] [va] écrire les souvenirs qui [lui] viennent, chercher où ils peuvent bien être, [il] les trouver[a] seul, [il] n’interroger[a] personne ce qu’[il] a vu. [Il] voler[a] quinze ans en arrière, la nuit de la mort de l’ami de [s]on père. [S]on oncle.”⁸⁵ Through the selection of memories *qu’ils viennent*, O. interacts with a non-linear recapitulation of his life and that of his uncle to recount a history of non-normative desire that goes beyond the scope of normative behavior and desire.

After O.’s description of method, he continues by discussing the affective state of his uncle who “traversait une grosse dépression nerveuse.”⁸⁶ Despite the diminishing condition of his uncle, O. makes it clear that he, his uncle, and his father maintain a close relationship: “[j]e suis tout seul dans la chambre de mon oncle, l’unique endroit de l’appartement où personne n’avait le droit de *pénétrer* que mon père et moi, même pendant qu’il allait mal il se donnait la peine de recevoir ma tante dans le salon.”⁸⁷ The distinction between *chambre* and *salon* proves useful as I discuss space

⁸⁴ See for instance Neil Campbell, *Affective Critical Regionality, Place, Memory, Affect* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) and Erica L. Johnson, *Cultural Memory, Memorials, and Reparative Writing* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018).

⁸⁵ O., *Ce qui reste*, 89.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 42. Emphasis mine.

– given that this dichotomy is similar to that of the public vs. private division of space – the home fundamentally being considered a private space. O.’s decision to use *pénétrer* to label the act of entering the bedroom while also speaking to the limiting of the space to his aunt – a representation for women in general – gestures toward the “tas de vice” that O. mentions earlier in the text as he discussed the imagined/remembered orgy. I consider the uncle’s bedroom as a space that allows for the construction of non-normative subjectivities through discourse and exchange. The bedroom becomes a space that can only be “penetrated” by men, thus marginalizing women as men enter into discourse that is meant to stay between men.

O.’s division of space, in a gendered sense, is evocative of Chris Weedon's understanding of subjectivity as a marker of a discontinuity with humanist thought. Weedon writes:

The term *subject* and *subjectivity* are central to post-structuralist theory and they mark a crucial break with humanist conceptions of the individual which are still central to western philosophy and political and social organisation. ‘Subjectivity’ is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world [...] Post-structuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being constituted in discourse each time we think or speak.⁸⁸

Weedon’s evocation of terms such as “subject” and “subjectivity” serves as a springboard for the next section’s discussion of fragmenting or fragmented subjectivities. The constitution of the self, discursively as done by O., complicates notions such as affect, temporality and space. This complication adds another layer to the notion of subjectivity that implies a certain, linear constitution of subjecthood that O. does not uphold as he works with memory that moves outside of linear temporal bounds. It is at this site that one encounters an interplay of several subjects that

⁸⁸ Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 32-

3. Emphasis in original.

exist within O.'s protagonist who shifts between the singular and the plural. This point of departure leads to the discussion of fragmenting subjectivities and potential reasoning behind its occurrence.

2.5 Fragmenting Subjectivities

The bedroom, as an area of encounter, is constructed in O.'s *Ce qui reste* as a homonormative space that allows men to participate in abject behaviors not permitted outside of this private social milieu. This space permits the formation of a private space devoid of public engagement and simultaneously produces a hidden narrative of desire – subordinating queer subjects. The notions of displacement and movement function at the site of the interplay between the public and private space dichotomy. This structure is reproduced as one enters with a narrow perspective of private space being the bedroom, unseen by those not granted access. Public space being situated outside of this boundary and allowing for a certain level of contact with non-normative behavior that is still limited by the confines of social order. Additionally, to further the discussion on social order, *Ce qui reste*, *Le rouge du tarbouche*, and *Une mélancolie arabe* are rife with scenes of (im)migration and displacement. The term displacement, like self-exile, as used in this dissertation, presumes an act of volition, i.e., movement that is not forced with the goal of expelling someone or groups of people such as those living as refugees. Displacement, as a concept and variable of mobility, can be self-imposed, therefore allowing subjects to position themselves within different geo-political, and socio-cultural contexts.

I contend that the concept of displacement can and should be productively linked to the process of *écriture* as it uncovers another layer to migration and movement as *écriture* communicates and constructs histories through written expression. The process of writing autobiographical and or autofictional texts fragments subjectivities as one is forced to encounter temporal realities as they shift between the past, present, and occasionally the future in the latter

genre. Writing involves methods beyond the act of putting words onto a page and constructing a tangible byproduct of a writer's efforts. The construction of narrative histories, such as in nonfictional and autofictional literary texts, depends substantially upon memories of the author. In the case of the fictional genre, Brian Boyd hypothesizes that:

By inventing characters and events, by selecting them to shape emotions toward defined conclusions, fiction can stock memory with compact and compelling examples, not usually of scenarios we are likely to relive closely, but of situations with enough emotional and ethical similarities to those we do experience to provide a basis for our thinking. Fiction can *design* events and characters to provoke us to reflect on, say, generosity, or threat, or deception and counter-deception. And it efficiently evokes our intense emotional engagement without requiring our belief.⁸⁹

Boyd's engagement with fiction leaves space to interrogate the autofictional genre – a balancing act between truth and untruth. Where does autofiction situate itself in this postulation that inventing scenarios alters one's association to their concrete lived experiences?

The use of “je” or “I” is imperative in both O.'s *Ce qui reste* and Taïa's *Le rouge du tarbouche* considering both texts are autodiegetic – having the author and protagonist as the same person. Constructing subjecthood through writers who take fragments of themselves and others to construct literary depictions that rely on their own interaction with their own realities forms the “narrative self.” This concept, situated in the fields of psychology and philosophy is used to construct “a model [that] consists of various interwoven narratives about oneself in which past, present and future are integrated, based on the temporally extended concerns and the ever-

⁸⁹ Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 193. Emphasis in original.

changing circumstances.”⁹⁰ A narrative-self informed by the use of “je” supposes an engagement, on the part of the author, to construct a plural or fragmented self as they bypass temporal borders to confront the past, present and future. I situate the use of “je” as it is constructed in an amalgamation of multiple “I’s” as a site of fragmentation ultimately serving a bipartite purpose – the first being the writing of the self and constructing a stable subjecthood and the second being the formation of tools of resistance that defy prescriptive models of subjectivities.

Despite archetypical depictions in discourses coming from the West, Abdelkebir Khatibi’s main point of contention with Western epistemology is that it relies heavily on the impression that:

Current Arab knowledge is a conflicting interference between two epistemes, one of which (the Western) covers the other; it restructures the other from within, detaching it from its historical continuity. And this to such an extent that the Arab researcher, who is accustomed to Western knowledge, always risks not having an idea of the place from where he speaks, and where these problems tormenting him really come from.⁹¹

As a method to deconstruct the Western vs. Eastern approach to epistemology and ontology, Khatibi introduces three modes of thought: institutional, critical, and the impossible. I focus here on critical thoughts, which refer to the “conceptual decentering, a shifting of the intellectual ground on which this episteme has been elaborated.”⁹² Fundamentally, Khatibi is arguing for a

⁹⁰ Roy Dings and Albert Newen, “Constructing the Past: The Relevance of the Narrative Self in Modulating Episodic Memory,” *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* (2023): 91.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-021-00581-2>.

⁹¹ Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Plural Maghreb: Writings on Postcolonialism*, Translated by P. Burcu Yalim. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 34. Notably, Khatibi does not make the distinction between North Africans and Arabs as I do in this dissertation.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 36.

deconstructionist approach that does not center any specific point of origin of an episteme, but rather, for a diverse engagement with knowledge that does not adhere to any one dominant rhetoric.

Khatibi's idea of a "plural Maghreb" and my notions of "fragmented 'je'" and "(meta)physical migration" conceive of a relationship between movement, subjectivity construction and knowledge production.⁹³ As mentioned earlier in this section, *Ce qui reste* and *Le rouge du tarbouche* are autodiegetic, denoting a symbiotic relationship between the author and the central protagonist as they function as two mutually beneficial literary agents, while maintaining some form of critical distance as the author constructs their literary self. This direct relationship catalyzes the fragmentation of subjecthood – the novelists in this case – as they reconstruct their subjectivities and identities through memory and share their varied experiences with readers as they experience disorientation.

To demonstrate disorientation and its disruptive potential, a turn toward Taïa is necessary, specifically the first section of *Le rouge du tarbouche* entitled "Les corsaires," where the author announces an assumed parallel between himself and *les corsaires de Salé* – an almost direct representation of the expression of having the *cul entre deux chaises*. In this paralleled constructionist rhetoric Taïa notes that the *corsaires*:

Sont surtout célèbres pour leurs exploits au cours des XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles. Ils gagnèrent de nombreuses batailles et accomplirent des exploits légendaires. Ils défendirent le Maroc musulman des attaques des mécréants européens qui envahissaient le monde pour le civiliser. Ils laissèrent derrière eux des bâtards, des prisonniers, des blondes à jamais

⁹³ I do not consider "movement" as an act directly related to motion. I employ the term "(meta)physical migration" to refer to cognitive processes that are involved or related in the formation of subjectivities and identities. These cognitive processes are language, memory, perception, and thought.

captives, des scripteurs unijambistes, des trésors cachés dans le Haut Atlas, des orphelins, des veuves.⁹⁴

Ironically, Taïa is not a descendent of *les corsaires* about whom he spends almost two full pages discussing their virility and resistance to European forces. However, the evocation of *les corsaires* here expresses a double meaning considering there were French *corsaires* as well as the “Barbaresques.” The latter refers to Muslim pirates that were based primarily in the ports of Salé, Rabat, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli.⁹⁵ Taïa makes use of these Muslim *corsaires* to combat apparent orientalism that vilified the conquests of Muslims yet celebrates the conquests of Europeans. Taïa uses this group to reverse the roles of Muslims and white Europeans to highlight the remnants of their exploits that left those in North Africa – Morocco in this specific example – to pick up the pieces. Through this discourse, Taïa proudly celebrates and owns his regional identity (even before his national identity) as he declares:

Je suis d’une ville connue dans l’histoire par ses corsaires. Salé ! *Sala*, en arabe classique. *Sla*, en arabe dialectal marocain. Je suis un Slaoui : ce nom se prononce de la même façon, en arabe comme en français. Un Slaoui d’adoption seulement. Mais un vrai Slaoui dans l’âme et dans le cœur quand même.⁹⁶

Taïa, once a native of Rabat makes the distinction between the capital city, his birthplace, and the smaller, commuter town of Salé that is situated only a few kilometers northeast of Rabat. Taïa refers to himself as a “Slaoui d’adoption” – on one hand, a marker of belonging and on the other, a marker of a split identity. Taïa’s use of *les corsaires* is striking considering this category of work

⁹⁴ Abdellah Taïa, *Le rouge du tarbouche* (Paris: Points, 2004), 9.

⁹⁵ Hugh Murray, *The Encyclopædia of Geography: Comprising a Complete Description of the Earth, Physical, Statistical, Civil, and Political* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1841).

⁹⁶ Taïa, *Le rouge du tarbouche*, 9. Emphasis in original.

involves the traversing of large bodies of water – be it for expedition or maritime warfare – notably along the Mediterranean in search of domination, i.e., virility through conquest.

The Mediterranean as a geo-political construct embodies a complex assemblage of cultures, precipitating a reworking of the appellation for this milieu. Edwige Talbayev and yasser elhariry opt for the use of “trans-Mediterranean” as a “celebration of common historical legacies and shared roots [...] to [think] its way beyond the binaries of the post/colonial relation.”⁹⁷ Considering the notion of a trans-Mediterranean identity, the concept of “home” surfaces through its multiple evocations according to sociologist Anne-Marie Fortier’s study on queer migrations.⁹⁸ According to Fortier, “home” is not a point of origin, but rather, a destination.⁹⁹ In the ongoing research in queer migration studies, the notion of “home” is often used to refer to a point of origin or departure, but has been problematized to display the multi-staged process of constructing a “home” or a sense thereof.¹⁰⁰ Jon Binnie’s *The Globalization of Sexuality* illustrates how non-

⁹⁷ yasser elhariry and Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, eds. *Critically Mediterranean: Temporalities, Aesthetics, and Deployments of a Sea in Crisis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 7.

⁹⁸ Anne-Marie Fortier, “Coming Home: Queer Migrations and Multiple Evocations of Home,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4, no. 4 (2001): 405-24.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*: 405.

¹⁰⁰ See: Eithne Luibhéid, “QUEER/MIGRATION: An Unruly Body of Scholarship,” *GLQ* 14, no. 2–3 (2008): 169-90, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2007-029>.; Andrew Gorman-Murray, “Intimate Mobilities: Emotional Embodiment and Queer Migration,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 10, no. 4 (2009): 441-60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360902853262>.; Rachel A.

normative or queer sexualities materialize transgressively as they are out of place within their “home” communities – triggering a self-imposed relocation (a form of self-exile) to other communities where potential and possibility for queer sexuality is permissible. Principally, Binnie argues that amongst the myriad of reasons subjects choose or are forced to (im)migrate including, but are not limited to education, employment, and economic stability, sexuality should be recognized as one of these variables that influence one’s decision to leave their “homeland.” I agree marginally with Binnie’s contention that some queer migrants may decide to leave their “homeland” to fully assume a queer identity. However, Binnie’s supposition that migration alone facilitates the formation of inclusive queer communities by way of globalization risks essentializing queer identities as he argues for the construction of a “Global Gay” identity.

This universalist approach stems from a “strong disidentification with one’s own citizens, which has characterized many radical elements of lesbian, gay, and queer politics and movement.”¹⁰¹ The assumption is that movement outside of the Global South toward the Global North is problematic and essentialist as it reinforces the idea that Western nations are progressive and “queer friendly,” while non-Western nations are regressive wastelands where queer subjects can exist as targets of execution. Despite this apparent essentialization of movement, Binnie does, in fact, argue against the homogenization of queer communities as he contends that there is relative unsustainability with concern to the construction of a common identity shared by queer citizens. To expand and complicate this discussion of identity politics amongst queer citizens, space should

Lewis and Nancy A. Naples, “Introduction: Queer Migration, Asylum, and Displacement,” *Sexualities* 17, no. 8 (2014): 911-18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460714552251>.

¹⁰¹ Jon Binnie, *The Globalization of Sexuality* (London: Sage, 2004), 35.

be left for the innumerable subjectivities that are not accounted for when identity is relegated solely to sexuality and sexual identity. Subjectivities such as gender, race, religion, and citizenship are often not considered when discussing the identities of queer subjects, which is something that Taïa does in *Une mélancolie arabe*.

Elucidating the lack of racial homogenization in Morocco, Taïa details the fourth night of his trip to Egypt where he encounters a 17-year-old hotel worker named Karabiino who provokes a visceral reaction on the part of Taïa due to his being “[n]oir. Très noir.”¹⁰² For Taïa, the physical differences between himself and Karabiino are extraordinary as the latter has,

Un corps surprenant, tout entier dans l’allongement. Maigre, mais puissant. Solide. Une démarche de gazelle qui sautille. Une présence inédite pour moi. Il remplissait l’espace, tout l’espace. Dès qu’il est entré dans la pièce pour la ranger, je n’ai rien pu faire que de le regarder. Le contempler vivre. Respirer. Marcher. Se baisser, se relever. Balayer. Plier les couvertures. Nettoyer le sol, le lavabo, la baignoire. Changer les serviettes.¹⁰³

Aware of his observations and what is presumably one of the few instances where he interacts, albeit passively, with a Black person, Taïa makes it a point to highlight the differences and similarities between the two of them:

Je n’avais pas beaucoup voyagé dans ma vie. Face à Karabiino, je me rendais compte que l’Humanité est une espèce qui m’était en grande partie inconnue. Ce garçon n’était pas comme moi. Ne pouvait pas avoir les mêmes origines que moi. Les mêmes racines. Impossible. Évidemment, je le savais, mais je ne pouvais pas m’empêcher de le remarquer, de me le répéter. Après tout, j’étais africain moi aussi, comme lui. Il avait l’air encore pur, encore frais, encore précieux, loin de la banalité des autres hommes. Ce garçon de 17 ans réinventait l’homme pour moi et révolutionnait du même coup l’idée que je me faisais de la grâce.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Taïa, *Une mélancolie arabe*, 72.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 72-3.

Taïa's reference to cultural origins and skin, a phenotypic marker of origins is confounded by his affirmation that both are African despite their different physical features, which reinforces the distinction between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa beyond physical borders. Taïa's inability to "s'empêcher de le remarquer" allows for the continued bifurcation of North Africa as one geographic point and Sub-Saharan Africa as another when one is met with racial differences that may not be common to them. Rather, Taïa elects for terms like "humanity" and "man" to yield community and functions to elide this dichotomous language, albeit unsuccessfully.

As Taïa thinks about a more expanded African identity, I turn to Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's theorization of a "Mediterranean consciousness," which can be thought of as a form of community that constructs a more unified and expansive imagining of the Mediterranean that does not essentialize the region considering that:

Sempre s'han produït aquestes tensions culturals i aquestes creacions de mitologies mediterrànies sota la sensació que el Mediterrani és un espai petit, delimitat, feble, i que per això ha de tenir sempre la necessitat de la por a la invasió dels bàrbars. L'imaginari del bàrbar, de l'estranger, de l'estrany que arriba i destrueix unes relacions interhumanes, unes relacions culturals, ha pesat sobre la consciència dels homes i les dones del Mediterrani, creant aquesta sensació d'espai amenaçat sense saber que, des del seu origen, el Mediterrani ha estat un lloc de pas, de trobada, de conquesta, d'aquesta convencionalitat que anomenem bàrbars. El Mediterrani passa després per una etapa d'idealització.

[Cultural tensions to create Mediterranean mythologies have always taken place under the belief that the Mediterranean is a small, delimited, weak space, and that for this reason, it must have always had the need for fear of an invasion of barbarians. The imagination of the barbarian, of the foreigner, of the stranger who arrives and destroys interhuman relations, cultural relations, has weighed on the consciousness of Mediterranean men and women to create this feeling of threatened space without knowing that, since its origin, the Mediterranean has been a place of passage, of encounter, and of conquest that we call barbarian. The Mediterranean then goes through a stage of idealization].¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Ángel San Martín, ed., *La Mediterrània: Realitat o Metàfora* (València: Universitat de València, 1993), 68.

Montalbán's reference to the cultural tensions present in the Mediterranean and the reductive discourse that rids the region of its historical and socio-cultural diversity can be simultaneously applied to the field of queer studies.¹⁰⁶ However, I do not limit my analysis solely to a binary or "double" since subjectivities do not exist linearly nor in a vacuum. The concept of "fragmented je" addresses components of performativity involved in forming subjectivities and, more broadly, identities. The following section continues to investigate the intricate ways that communities and subjectivities are formed based upon the positionality of subjects as they inhabit certain spaces. This is done firstly by a discussion of the bipartite exile vs. self-exile, which treats how subjectivities take shape when they are willingly deconstructed. Secondly, I consider the various sociocultural components that are at play when one crosses (meta)physical borders across the

¹⁰⁶ American political scientist Samuel Huntington argues in "The Clash of Civilizations?" (1993) that wars in the post-Cold War era (1991 to present), would be between cultures rather than nations. Huntington's principal argument is based upon a strict division between the Global North and the Global South, therefore not entrenched in any specific geographic location like the Mediterranean. However, Huntington's argument is not dissimilar to the micro-bifurcation of the African continent i.e., a North African vs. Sub-Saharan African model of geographic and cultural specificity. Huntington's West vs. East rhetoric presupposes large scale advancement in the former and civilizational collapse of the latter which will trickle over to the West. If one takes this analogy as it applies to Euro-American understandings of queer identities and compares it to Afro-Arab considerations of queer subjects, perhaps one would be faced with this question of civilizational incompatibility that Huntington embarks on.

Mediterranean to construct a sense of self that may or may not be compatible with the presumed societal roles.

2.6 Constructing Subjectivities and Community through Self-Exile

Self-exile or the act of “choosing” exile is obvious in Taïa’s *Le rouge du tarbouche* as he writes in the section entitled “Voyeur à la rue de Clignancourt”: “[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.”¹⁰⁷ In this passage, Taïa constructs himself as a “voyeur” subject that “[...] depuis qu’[il] [s’est] installé à la rue de Clignancourt dans le 18^e arrondissement parisien.”¹⁰⁸ Taïa connects the verb *choisir* to the notion of self-exile considering the act of volition to signal the want and possible need to reorient oneself, which ultimately reconfigures subjectivities as one encounters objects and others. This specific citation from Taïa mentions family, specifically the biological family that he leaves behind in his hometown of Salé. The term “voyeur,” originating from the French verb for “to see” or *voir*, dates back the 18th-century to refer to a “personne qui assiste à quelque chose par curiosité.”¹⁰⁹ By the mid 19th-century, the term became associated with people, typically men, who paid to peak through holes in Parisian brothels – engaging in transgressive sexual practices.¹¹⁰ Taïa’s use of the term “voyeur” is not explicitly

¹⁰⁷ Taïa, *Le rouge du tarbouche*, 72.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 68.

¹⁰⁹ “Voyeur, -euse.” In *Trèsor de la langue française*, n.d.

<http://stella.atilf.fr/Dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/advanced.exe?8;s=4061000715;>

¹¹⁰ Diederik F. Janssen, “‘Voyeuristic Disorder’: Etymological and Historical Note,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 47, no. 5 (2018): 1307-11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1199-2>.

sexual in nature, but he does suggest that while dwelling in his studio apartment – virtually sequestered from all outside distraction and stimuli – he is able to connect to the non-physical as he interacts with a mystical voice that he begins to hear. Taïa adds:

Soudain, un frêle bruit, un murmure, un chuchotement, me parvint jusqu’aux oreilles. Les paroles étaient arabes ; je les ai tout de suite identifiées. De l’arabe classique. Du Coran. Une voix marocaine disait des versets coraniques d’une façon douce, pieuse [...] Grâce à cette voix, je pénétrais un autre monde et je montais dans un autre ciel, lentement, intensément. Je m’accrochais.¹¹¹

In this trance-like state, Taïa’s interaction with this *murmure* reconnects him to his identity as both Moroccan and a Muslim as the voice recites “des versets coraniques.” Notably, the voice is that of a woman, which allows for him to penetrate “un autre monde.” Similar to my reading of subjectivity formation that presumes fragmentation as a point of construction, there is always the potential to conceive of community – in this case, a mystical community formed by a re-engagement with religion and language as Taïa is overtaken by *une voix marocaine* that appears out of nowhere. In this way, as Taïa crosses the Mediterranean to reach *l’Hexagone*, settling in the one of the world’s queer capitals, Paris, he inadvertently rewrites the notion of nation.¹¹² Taïa’s understanding of nation is not predicated on any normative understanding of nation that presumes

¹¹¹ Taïa, *Le rouge du tarbouche*, 69.

¹¹² In the context of Filipino gay men, Manalansan IV writes in his ethnographic study, *Global Divas* (2003), how global and transnational discourses as experienced by Filipino gay men living in New York City challenge the establishment of an assimilationist gay modernity. Manalansan thus argues for the acknowledgement of alternative paths to gay modernity, identity and citizenship therefore making use of discourse within the diaspora.

its citizens belong to a homogenous collective that does not deviate from normative social order and understandings of culture.

To understand how Taïa approaches the concept of nation, I turn to political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson who writes in *Imagined Communities* (1983) that the concept of “nation” is socially constructed, composed of the shared histories of those who perceive themselves to be members of an interconnected group. To take the concept of “nation” and move from the macro-level to a micro-level, I evoke the concepts of “self” or the “psychology of self.” The “self” refers to the distinction between the self as *I*, the subjective knower, and the self as *Me*, the known object.¹¹³ I draw upon William James’ theorization of the self to develop the “fragmented ‘je,’” which allows for the deconstruction of the self and selfhood into plural subjectivities that one maintains to understand what is at stake at the site of fragmentation. The three novels that I study in this chapter – *Ce qui reste*, *Le rouge du tarbouche*, and *Une mélancolie arabe* – each depict the construction, deconstruction, and subsequent reconstruction of the self through varying discourses of migration. In the first, the introspective protagonist reflects upon his writing as he retraces his life as he inhabits North Africa (Morocco) and Europe (Italy and France) to conceive of a novel that rests perpetually in an infantile state, continuously undergoing development and being in flux. The second novel, *Le rouge du tarbouche* speaks more directly to the act of migration considering the protagonist, also autodiegetic like in Rachid O.’s *Ce qui reste*, leaves his hometown for Paris due to a perceived lack of a future and opportunity in Salé. The protagonist is eager to depart Morocco for Europe, stating: “[i]l faut que j’entre en Europe... en

¹¹³ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1891).

Espagne, en Allemagne, en Italie ... peu importe.”¹¹⁴ Notably, the choice of country is not based purely upon Taïa’s linguistic abilities considering he is able to communicate well in French at this point – signaling towards Europe or Western Europe as a whole, as a region of opportunity that has a future for him and other queer migrants.

Une mélancolie arabe, published just four years after *Le rouge du tarbouche* can be read alongside the latter as a novel of *retour*. The writing of return allows Taïa to reconstruct an Arab/Maghrebi identity that he feels is lost since settling in France and the various trips in between. Reading these two texts together functions as an “inextricable intertwining, virtually a fusion, of personal and cultural meaning.”¹¹⁵ Taïa’s involvements with France, in his novels, are marked by the metropole, Paris. Through an analysis of his return to Paris after spending a week in Marrakech to shoot a film, and the connection that he has to the city and his Franco-Hispanic lover, Javier, Taïa follows a ceaseless quest to invent himself, according to the author. Through a reevaluation of home, he reflects upon Paris by contrasting this city to Marrakech as he undergoes this process:

Paris, ma ville d’adoption depuis sept ans, où je me cherchais et réinventais sans cesse, était difficile à reconquérir comme à chaque retour. Il pleuvait sans arrêt et les murs des immeubles étaient plus noirs. Paris sans soleil, sans « Bonjour », vide malgré ses millions d’habitants. Je voulais dormir tout de suite. Oublier la grisaille. Aller je ne sais où reprendre de la force, de l’énergie, pour pouvoir renouer avec les lumières artificielles, et pourtant vraies, de cette mégapole capricieuse. Aller au sommeil, le rejoindre vite, vérifier que me souviens de lui, de « tout lui », avant de le revoir pour de vrai dans quelques heures.”¹¹⁶

Taïa’s appellation of Paris as his adopted city solidifies a link between his status as Moroccan and the Frenchness that he has come to acquire over time. As he looks for and reinvents himself, Taïa

¹¹⁴ Taïa, *Le rouge du tarbouche*, 138.

¹¹⁵ Nancy Chodorow, *The Power of Feelings: Personal Meaning in Psychoanalysis, Gender and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 70.

¹¹⁶ Taïa, *Une mélancolie arabe*, 35. Emphasis in original.

relies upon a fluid stream of consciousness that shifts statements of what he would rather be doing, and descriptions of Paris. The duality that is produced here reflects the constant searching for and reinventing that Taïa mentions at the beginning of the citation. Furthermore, Taïa's use of the adjective "capricieuse," to modify "mégapole" can be applied directly to the lack of stability and constant fluctuations that identities and subjectivities undergo.

2.7 Conclusion

The writings of Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa constitute an emergent canon of queer Maghrebi literature that reflect upon their statuses as gay and Arab as they travel within the Mediterranean to construct transgressive subjectivities that exist outside of Western understandings of masculinity and sexuality. O.'s constant interaction with childhood institutes discourses of non-normative desire that transcend temporal bounds as he moves between the present and the past to detail a complex relationship between himself, his father, and his uncle – only after the latter has passed away. This delineation of temporality fragments his subjectivities, thus allowing for a renegotiation of his subjecthood as he moves from adolescence to adulthood – a process that constitutes the construction of "manhood," which is disrupted by O.'s text. Taïa's manipulation of temporality and space is not dissimilar to O.'s. As he constructs a narrative that travels from Morocco to France in *Le rouge du tarbouche* and across North Africa via a stop in Cairo in *Une mélancolie arabe*, Taïa deconstructs normative notions of masculinity, sexuality, and gender to (re)write discourses of the Maghreb.

Approaching the Mediterranean as a shared and diverse space that comprises innumerable cultures allows for a productive interrogation of a region that has been fragmented, epistemologically speaking. Considering the complex history of the region, Talbayev's "transcontinental" method supports my model of *queering* migration that does not rely on a

framework that centers on colonial expeditions and exploits as the core of Mediterranean identities. The reconstruction of Mediterranean identities as discussed in this chapter reflects not only a complex historical contact between nations like Morocco and France, for instance, but also the intricate processes subjects must undergo as they shift between subjectivities at sites of encounter that do not necessarily align with their own understandings of the world.

3.0 Chapter 2: Narratives of Belonging: Masculinity and Disorientation

Malgré tous mes ratés pour apprendre l'arabe, je vis encore avec l'idée que j'ai l'arabe coincé quelque part, qu'il est à portée de main : est-ce qu'il n'y a pas juste un bouton à activer pour que ma langue maternelle revienne ? Une formule magique qui doit être récitée trois fois, une quantité de falafels à avaler, une méthode pour se muscler le cerveau et lui faire découvrir les recoins dont il avait oublié l'existence.

–Nabil Wakim, “L'Arabe pour tous : Pourquoi ma langue est taboue en France”

3.1. Introduction

What does it mean to belong? Does belonging rely on the assumption that one comes from a similar ethnic background as others in their vicinity? That they supposedly share the same taste in cuisine, or that they share a similar language? Or is the notion of belonging more complicated as individuals encounter several others that construct individualized and unique understandings of what it means to be “home,” “at home,” or in one’s “homeland”? Nabil Wakim’s treatment of the concept of belonging challenges traditional conceptualizations of “home” as he confronts his connection to Arabic, which he refers to as his *langue maternelle*.¹¹⁷ As a Lebanese-born French citizen, Wakim, like several individuals in the diaspora, has a complicated relationship with Arabic. After several failed attempts at learning Arabic, he still believes that he maintains a connection with the language that is “coincé[e] quelque part,” and that perhaps, there is a figurative “bouton à activer pour que [sa] langue maternelle revienne.”¹¹⁸ The metaphorical *bouton* that Wakim mentions is inspired by the idea that he can somehow be reacquainted with a lost part of

¹¹⁷ Nabil Wakim, “L'Arabe pour tous : Pourquoi ma langue est taboue en France” (Paris: Seuil, 2020), 15.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 85.

himself. Beyond the question of language, Wakim is interested in the connection of linguistic capacity, i.e., his ability to use Arabic and a supposed level of “Arab-ness,” which can be deduced by his mentioning of falafel and knefe – staples of Middle Eastern cuisine – and which functions as an integral method for him to reacquaint himself with the Arabic language and more broadly with his Lebanese identity.

Scholars have taken on the question of what it means to be “at home,” or more simply put, “to belong.” For instance, Sara Ahmed et al. emphasizes the interdependence of the construction of belonging and movement. For them, “[t]he affectivity of home is bound up with the temporality of home, with the past, the present and the future. It takes time to feel at home. For those who have left their homes, a nostalgic relation to both the past and home might become part of the lived reality in the present.”¹¹⁹ In expanding upon this idea of cross-temporal interactions to construct a present sense of home, this chapter considers how concepts such as race, ethnicity, citizenship, masculinity, and the temporal link to childhood influence one’s sense of belonging to construct subjectivities and identities within specific socio-cultural, political and temporal contexts. In so doing, it approaches social constructivism – especially when considering masculinity, which is normally considered to be inherent to a subject based upon their biological sex.

The seemingly uncomplicated notion of “home” is actually quite complex, especially at sites of immigration, emigration and (self)exile. Through the study of three primary sources, including Amin Maalouf’s *Les désorientés* (2012), Riad Sattouf’s graphic novel *L’Arabe du futur: Une jeunesse au Moyen-Orient (1978-1984)* (2014), and Nabil Wakim’s “L’Arabe pour tous:

¹¹⁹ Sara Ahmed et al., eds., *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 9.

Pourquoi ma langue est taboue en France” (2020), I deconstruct the terms “home” and “homeland” and put them in dialogue by way of transnational discourse that moves between France, Syria, Lebanon, and Libya. This chapter also serves as a departure outside of the Maghreb and into the Middle East – the Levant in particular. Considering that this dissertation is situated largely in Mediterranean studies, I find it important to have an expansive corpus and an extensive geographic outreach to other socio-cultural and political contexts as I think through ways to productively approach the Mediterranean as a space of encounter and exchange, which makes this region particularly diverse.

I contend in this chapter that these three narratives of self-exile shape individual subjectivities as individuals find themselves at different temporal points such as the varying stages of human development. This chapter examines depictions of adolescence and childhood as subjects leave their “homes” at relatively young ages and find themselves reflecting upon their journeys of self-construction. Race, ethnicity, citizenship, masculinity, and linguistic ability play a major role, considering how these are subjectivities, i.e., social constructions, that are dependent upon one’s interaction with them as they encounter others.

As Wakim’s essay, Maalouf’s novel, and Sattouf’s graphic novel elaborate upon and complicate development and subjecthood construction, they queer migration. I contend that these texts queer migration not because of any reference to non-normative practices but due to their reliance on narratives that transcend temporal and geographic boundaries to convey the impact that movement has on subjects as they are also in the process of physical development. To think of queerness is to think of disorientation – especially at sites of identity and subjectivity that continuously deconstruct and reconstruct themselves. Each author begins at different developmental points in their respective narratives – Sattouf being the youngest of them.

Moreover, the connection between migration and subject development is important to analyze as I think through the process of disorientation, which further complicates what it means to be a queer subject.

3.2. Assembling “Citizens”: Rethinking Belonging

Who is considered a “citizen” within a nation is a seemingly straightforward concept – usually, this term is used to designate a “membre d’un État et qui de ce fait jouit des droits civils et politiques garantis par cet État.”¹²⁰ Although helpful in a juridical sense, the concept of “citizen” is not equally applied to all members of a nation – regardless of their status as natural born or naturalized. This section examines Wakim’s *L’Arabe pour tous*, an example of ethnic disorientation, to think through how France actively constructs a model of ideal citizens through discourse meant to alienate certain sub-sections of the population.¹²¹ The nation-state plays a crucial role in understanding how citizenship is obtained, maintained, and regulated through the policing of subjects. The nation-state as a concept has been critiqued by Etienne Balibar who contends that:

The idea of nations without a state, or nations “before” the state, is thus a contradiction in terms, because a state always is implied in the historic framework of a national formation (even if not necessarily within the limits of its territory). But this contradiction is masked by the fact that national states, whose integrity suffers from internal conflicts that threaten its survival (regional conflicts, and especially class conflicts), project beneath their political

¹²⁰ For a definition of *citoyen* see: <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/citoyen>

¹²¹ I use “sub-sections” here to highlight the inequality of the classification “citizen” as it is placed upon subjects. For instance, Black and brown French citizens have often been relegated to the status of “citoyen.ne de seconde zone,” which denotes a person that faces systemic discrimination within the confines of a specific nation.

existence to a preexisting “ethnic” or “popular” unity (into the past, into the depths of “civil society”).¹²²

Fundamentally, Balibar argues against the idea of knowing when exactly a nation came into existence, which then also implies the inability to also classify who, precisely, is “native” to modern nations. In the case of Wakim, language is at the core of questions regarding citizenship, subjectivity, and belonging.

Although born in Beirut, Lebanon, during the Lebanese Civil War in the early 1980s, Wakim and his family relocated to France when he was four years old.¹²³ In the introduction to his essay, he recounts:

Quelque part entre mes quatre ans et mes presque quarante ans, j’ai perdu l’arabe en cours de route. Sans vraiment y faire attention, sans vraiment savoir pourquoi. Pendant toute mon adolescence, j’ai chassé l’arabe de ma vie : j’étais français, je parlais français, j’avais des bonnes notes en français, les choses étaient très simples.¹²⁴

What Wakim is describing is an example of what has been coined as a “model minority,” which, as a term, can be “traced to the publication of two 1966 U.S. magazine articles that heralded the economic success and hard work of Japanese and Chinese Americans.”¹²⁵ Despite the term’s origins and its application to Asian-Americans, it can equally be applied to North African and Arab

¹²² Etienne Balibar, “The Nation Form: History and Ideology,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 13, no. 3 (1990): 331.

¹²³ The Lebanese Civil War spanned from 1975 to 1990.

¹²⁴ Wakim, “L’Arabe pour tous,” 15.

¹²⁵ Nicholas Daniel Hartlep, *Modern Societal Impacts of the Model Minority Stereotype* (Hershey: IGI Global, 2015), 2.

(im)migrants who find themselves in France under immense pressure to assimilate and adopt French national values, i.e., *liberté, égalité, fraternité* and *laïcité*.¹²⁶

As Wakim retraces his connection or lack thereof with Arabic, a language that he does not specifically know why or how he lost, he admits that “[il a] chassé l’arabe de [sa] vie,” which implies that he was under at least some pressure to assimilate himself into French culture and society. Furthermore, and clearly articulating his position as a French citizen who “parlai[t] français” and received good grades in French at school, Wakim’s essay is not just a retelling of his lost heritage, nor is it a sort of manifesto for him to forge a pathway for the creation of other “model minorities” composed of citizens and non-citizens. On the contrary, Wakim uses his experiences and his subsequent self-reflections to critique the various practices that the French government imparts to its citizens that stifle opportunities for students to learn Arabic.

In chapter seven of his essay, unabashedly entitled “L’école publique contre l’arabe,” Wakim underscores what he refers to as a paradox that “alors que la France est depuis la Renaissance l’un des lieux phares de l’apprentissage de l’arabe dans le monde, il est quasiment impossible d’apprendre cette langue correctement dans le système français.”¹²⁷ Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, France’s former Minister of Education (2014-2017), who happens to be Moroccan-born, is known for her position on *l’enseignement de l’arabe* as early as *l’école élémentaire* – the equivalent of elementary or primary school. In an interview with *Le Monde*, Vallaud-Belkacem

¹²⁶ I add “laïcité” here to signal French, universalist rhetoric that has become synonymous with anti-Muslim rhetoric since the postcolonial period of the 50s and 60s that saw a large influx of Arabs and Muslims migrate to mainland France.

¹²⁷ Wakim, “L’Arabe pour tous,” 99.

defends the instruction of Arabic in schools, which is a language often accused of being a “langue communautaire” that has the potential to fragment French society and disrupt national normative discourse.¹²⁸ In France, the term “communautaire” has been used to speak of an ideology that divides a society based upon characteristics that would group individuals based upon similar ethnic, cultural or religious identities. Wakim’s supposition that the public education system is against the teaching of Arabic language courses follows Vallaud-Belkacem’s reference to the language being labeled as “communautaire,” which signals an apparent lack of assimilation or integration into French society where the French language should be prioritized.

I argue that this supposed link between Arabic, Islam, and the ethnolinguistic classification of “Arab” produces sites of disorientation that can allow for a productive rethinking of “belonging” and “home.” This argument can bridge the discourse on “communautarisme” to further discuss the notion of belonging as it involves language and other identity markers. Arabic is often, if not most of the time, associated with Islam as it is *la langue du Coran*. Wakim, coming from a Lebanese Maronite-Christian family, notes that the detachment of Arabic from Islam is “un paradoxe difficile à expliquer à des Français, qu’ils soient islamophobes ou islamophiles: mon arabe, c’est littéralement un arabe de curé.”¹²⁹ This connection between Arabic and Islam is predominantly due to assumptions that exist which posit that “l’arabe est indissociable de l’Islam”

¹²⁸ Anne-Aël Durand. “L’arabe, une langue ‘communautaire’? C’est surtout une matière oubliée de l’école.” *Le Monde*. 2016. https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2016/05/27/l-arabe-une-langue-communautaire-c-est-surtout-une-matiere-oubliee-de-l-ecole_4927967_4355770.html.

¹²⁹ Wakim, “L’Arabe pour tous,” 135.

and “enseigner l’arabe, c’est enseigner l’Islam,” which Wakim mentions is not exactly the case considering most Muslims do not speak Arabic nor do most Muslims live in Arab nations.¹³⁰ The Arabic language became a dominant language in the Arabian Peninsula because of the Arab conquests of the 7th-century led by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to attempt to establish an Islamic empire.¹³¹ Considering that the Makkah al-Mukarranmah [مكة المكرمة] or more commonly, “Makkah,” [مكة] is situated in modern-day Saudi Arabia, and is considered to be the “cradle of Islam,” it is easy to understand how one could conflate identities such as Arab and Muslim or even Arabophone when one does not necessarily beget the other.

The sites of disorientation mentioned above are a direct result of the conflation of these identities as they encounter subjects either through their own (self)evaluations or those imposed upon them. To demonstrate a case of disorientation that is evoked by such confluations, I turn to Amin Maalouf’s novel, which is ironically entitled *Les désorientés* as the title serves as a direct reference to the status of not only the migrants in the texts, but a larger, overarching notion of diasporic disorientation shared by subjects in precarious movement. The central protagonist of Maalouf’s novel, Adam, is a forty-seven-year-old man who returns to his homeland after an extended period abroad to visit an old friend, Mourad, who has fallen ill and eventually dies before

¹³⁰ Ibid., 137. On the preceding page, Wakim details this point further : “il y a presque deux milliards de musulmans dans le monde et l’immense majorité d’entre eux ne parlent pas arabe. Les sept pays qui comptent le plus de musulmans ne sont pas arabophones : l’Indonésie, le Pakistan, l’Inde, le Bangladesh, le Nigeria, l’Iran et la Turquie. Vient ensuite l’Égypte – et encore, ça dépend comment on compte les musulmans de Chine” (136).

¹³¹ This does not account for classical Arabic which existed well before the Arab conquests.

Adam can see him. Maalouf foregoes mentioning the specific geographic location of the text. Still, it can be deduced that the narrative takes place in Lebanon and that Adam is Lebanese, like Maalouf, and from the capital city of Beirut. Also, like Wakim and Maalouf, Adam is a Christian, an identity he claims in the first journal entry of the text. A change to an italic script signals the journal entries. At the beginning of the novel, the writer begins with a sort of Biblical historiography of the name Adam – “[il] porte dans [son] prénom l’humanité naissante, mais [il appartient] à une humanité qui s’éteint...”¹³² Maalouf’s entrance into the novel by way of the Judeo-Christian figure, Adam, the first human according to the Book of Genesis, is an immediate entrance into a narrative that attempts to orient Adam by clearly establishing his identity as an Arab Christian man and leaving no room for ambiguity as to his religious affiliation.

3.3 (Self)Exile and Resistance

Maalouf’s *Les désorientés* is, in essence, both an account of self-exile and forced return. After more than two decades of living in self-exile in Paris, the now historian and acclaimed intellectual, Adam, returns “home.” It is now, ultimately, a place that no longer feels like home and is only predicated on the fact that he is expected to be at the deathbed of his friend, Mourad. Unfortunately, Adam does not make it in time, but he does find himself being reacquainted with his old friends and his home country. In an interview, حلقة خاصة مع الكاتب امين معلوف [A Special Episode with the Writer Amin Maalouf] with Lebanese journalist, Paula Yacoubian for Lebanon’s Future TV, Maalouf does state that the novel is based in Lebanon, but that the setting could be any

¹³² Amin Maalouf, *Les désorientés* (Paris: Grasset, 2012), 11. Emphasis in original.

Arab nation.¹³³ Lebanon specifically is a nation that has been plagued by wars since the beginning of the 20th-century with the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, which was a result of the 1947-1949 Palestine War, which is otherwise referred to as “النكبة” [The Catastrophe] to refer to the permanent displacement of Palestinians in 1948.¹³⁴

The notion of self-exile is inherently political and performative. Adam’s “performance” as both an insider/outsider and native/tourist opens avenues that allow us to understand the reasons why he enters a fragmented approach to self-construction. Perhaps this is in attempt to “explorar a contradição entre o ‘verdadeiro’ e o ‘aparente’ por meio da tensão entre a literalidade e a figuratividade” [to explore the contradiction between the ‘truth’ and the ‘apparent’ by way of the

¹³³ Notably, the Lebanese television network “Future Television” [تلفزيون المستقبل] was founded in 1993 by Rafik Hariri who would become the Prime Minister of Lebanon from October 23, 2000 to October 21, 2004. This television network predates “Future Movement,” which is a center-right Lebanese political founded by Rafik Hariri’s son, Saad Hariri, in 2007 who is currently the chairperson of the political party and the former Prime Minister of Lebanon (2009 to 2011 and 2016 to 2020). The television network operated from 1993 until going defunct in 2019.

See the episode here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfLF1Fcyvys&ab_channel=FutureTVInterviews

¹³⁴ See David Tal, *War in Palestine, 1948: Strategy and Diplomacy*, Cass Series–Israeli History, Politics, and Society (Portland: Frank Cass, 2003); Aḥmad Sa‘dī and Lila Abu-Lughod, *Nakba Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, Cultures of History (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); and Eve Spangler, *Understanding Israel/Palestine: Race, Nation, and Human Rights in the Conflict*, Second edition, Teaching Race and Ethnicity, Volume 8 (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

tension between the literal and the figurative].¹³⁵ As Adam laments his position in his journal – a position that is split between Lebanon and France, he remarks:

*Peut-être bien que je considère désormais Paris comme un « chez moi ». Mais est-ce que cela m'interdit de me dire également chez moi dans ma ville natale ? Rien, en tous cas, n'autorise une tierce personne, amie ou pas, endeuillé ou pas, à me renvoyer de cette manière à ma condition d'étranger.*¹³⁶

Already, he questions the ability to have multiple places of belonging. Working within a binary, Adam proposes that Paris be his home, his *chez moi*, or his new “home.” This denomination of “home” is marked by uncertainty and disorientation as he uses words like “peut-être” and “un” before “chez moi,” which signals a lack of clarity and leaves space for performativity that does not force him into any specific identity. Adam’s identity, challenged by Mourad’s widow, Tania, pushes him to resist the marker of “étranger” that he incessantly seeks to elide in his quest for a stable identity. I understand his interaction with Tania as a space of disorientation as it works within the framework that forces those who have left their native countries to confront those who did not leave, which places both subjects in awkward positions as they attempt to solidify stable identities.

To depart from the idea of a stable identity, it is during a rather tense taxi ride that Adam’s identity is called into question. The narrator says to the taxi driver that “[t]out émigrant redoute de commettre un impair, et il est facile pour ceux qui sont restés de susciter chez lui la peur du ridicule et la honte d’être devenu un vulgaire touriste.”¹³⁷ This conversation leads to the conclusion that

¹³⁵ Fernanda Isabel Bitazi, “Auto-Exílio: Fuga para um Além Inexistente/Self-Exile: Escape to a Non-Existing Beyond,” *Literatura em debate* 2, no. 2 (2008): 3.

¹³⁶ Maalouf, *Les désorientés*, 48. Emphasis in original.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

Adam, after having lived outside of Lebanon for such a long time, has forgotten certain social norms, which leads to the taxi driver calling Adam out for his cultural misstep considering that “Adam avait sorti son portefeuille pour régler la course, mais le chauffeur refusa son argent pour prendre plutôt le billet que l’hôtesse lui tendait par la vitre ouverte.”¹³⁸ Adam’s use of “tout émigrant” constructs a certain form of community – one that connects himself to his friends who are also mostly emigrants as well as to the larger emigrant community that has left Lebanon and the Levantine region. The notion of community, here, is used in two ways – the first being Adam’s maintaining of roots in his homeland despite not living there and the second, to allow for him to circumnavigate discourse that puts him on the fringes of a society he once belonged to.

The notion of self-exile is a complication of the concepts of “home” and “away,” which either directly or indirectly situates subjects physically and temporally within a given context. In another journal entry, Adam reflects on why he or any other person would decide to emigrate. According to Adam, there exists a certain order to leaving one’s homeland – perhaps, even an anticipation of the necessity to abandon their country of origin.

*Quitter son pays est dans l’ordre des choses ; quelquefois, les événements l’imposent ; sinon, il faut s’inventer un prétexte. Je suis né sur une planète, pas dans un pays. Si, bien sûr, je suis né aussi dans un pays, dans une ville, dans une communauté, dans une famille, dans une maternité, dans son lit... Mais la seule chose importante, pour moi comme pour tous les humains, c’est d’être venu au monde, pas dans tel ou tel pays, pas dans telle ou telle maison.*¹³⁹

This journal entry provides a glimpse into the existential crises that Adam experiences throughout the novel. For instance, at the level of discourse, Adam begins on a much larger scale that he uses to reflect upon what could be considered a shared emigrant identity by way of “quitter son pays”

¹³⁸ Ibid., 52.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 61-2. Emphasis in original.

instead of beginning on a personal level, which he does in the second sentence of the journal entry. Furthermore, his assertion that leaving one's homeland is in "l'ordre des choses," implies that even if Lebanon were not undergoing a Civil War at the time of his departure, he would have still left the country for France or another country.

Adam does attempt to counteract this assertion by gesturing towards the notion of self-exile, i.e., "quelquefois, les événements l'imposent," which removes a level of agency from one's decision to emigrate for reasons such as war, human rights violations, and economic insecurity. Despite Adam's attempt to justify his leaving, it falls flat as he universalizes the notion of self-exile to insist on his identity as a human being that is "né sur une planète" and not in a country – again eliding a fixed classification of his identity. Adam plays with language here to nuance the concept of citizenship to construct what is more closely related to the idea of "postnational citizenship," which posits that subjects within a given space maintain the same level of rights regardless of their legal status within a nation.¹⁴⁰ Citizenship, as a socio-cultural concept, refers to "[h]istorically, the civil, political, and social rights that separate full human life from its stateless counterpart are gained through national membership – membership determined by ethnicity, right

¹⁴⁰ Irene Bloemraad, Anna Korteweg, and Gökce Yurdakul. "Citizenship and Immigration: Multiculturalism, Assimilation, and Challenges to the Nation-State." *Annual Review of Sociology* 34, no. 1 (2008): 153–79; David Jacobson. *Rights Across Borders: Immigration and The Decline of Citizenship* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Yasemin Nuhoğlu Soysal. *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Damian Tambini. "Post-National Citizenship." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24, no. 2 (2001): 195–217.

of birth, or formal naturalization.”¹⁴¹ Taking this definition of citizenship and applying it to Adam’s understanding of his level of belonging in Lebanon deconstructs his engagement with his own identity. This disengagement is a site of disorientation that further pushes Adam into a state of non-belonging where he gestures toward various disidentifications with his homeland.

As Adam’s articulation of citizenship and belonging moves from the macro level (planet and country) to the micro level (city, community, and family), he brings in, again, by way of a universalist approach, the fact that “la seule chose importante, pour moi comme pour tous les humains, c’est d’être venu au monde, pas dans tel ou tel pays, pas dans telle ou telle maison,” which works to detach subjects from the idea that individuals are forcibly connected to their points of origin, such as birthplaces, and families to simultaneously construct communities.¹⁴² The idea of community goes beyond the essentialization of belonging as one may, incorrectly, apply this term to refer to the nationality one possesses, the language one speaks, or the various cultural affiliations that may serve as markers of identity and subjectivity. Ironically, Adam’s challenging of the notion of belonging is further complicated by the novel’s ending, which is left open and with Adam’s future in limbo – much like his status as an emigrant. Adam enters this liminal space due to a car accident, which is an event that I read as a metaphor for his subjecthood. As a subject, Adam is never quite comfortable in his own body and through the state of disorientation, he exists only as a disembodied figure – much like his comatose state due to the car accident that puts him in a state between life and death.

¹⁴¹ Natalie Delia Deckard and Alison Heslin, “After Postnational Citizenship: Constructing the Boundaries of Inclusion in Neoliberal Contexts,” *Sociology Compass* 10, no. 4 (2016): 295.

¹⁴² Maalouf, *Les désorientés*, 61-2.

Maalouf's *Les désorientés* begins and ends tragically. The narrative journey of the novel is prompted by Adam's need to return to Lebanon due to his friend, Mourad, requesting for him to accompany him as he lies on his deathbed. Equally tragic, the novel ends with Adam in a state of limbo. The novel's narrator ends the novel gesturing toward Adam's lack of consciousness, therefore, his lack of presence. Through the voice of the narrator declares that "[c]et épilogue différent, Adam ne l'a écrit nulle part. Peut-être était-il en train de le composer dans sa tête lorsque la voiture a quitté la route. On ne le saura que le jour où il reprendra connaissance."¹⁴³ Dolorès, Adam's French partner, has him transported back to Paris to receive treatment there. Finishing the novel, she states, "[c]omme son pays, comme cette planète [...] en sursis, comme nous tous," which emphasizes the complicated identity quest Adam undergoes in the novel that transitions to him being suspended between the complex relationship of life and death despite his resistance and hesitance toward categories and binaries.¹⁴⁴

3.4 *Queering Homeland*

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, to think of queerness is to think of disorientation – especially at sites of identity and subjectivity that continuously deconstruct and reconstruct themselves. The title of Maalouf's novel constructs a narrative that is not necessarily one of discovery, considering the central protagonist, Adam, maintains a certain level of comfort and, arguably, power with his status as an emigrant. However, *Les désorientés* does not only denote Adam's situation but also that of his entire friend group, all but one of whom left their homeland for elsewhere. Maalouf's novel, written in a bifurcated style, includes a narrator and the first-

¹⁴³ Ibid., 526.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 526.

person accounts of Adam. Furthermore, the narrative is constructed in a multifaceted manner that includes the narrator's perspective, Adam's perspective, alongside a glimpse inside his private thoughts in the form of italicized journal entries as well as letters from his friends that Adam discovers and shares with the reader.

In situating who makes up this group of disoriented subjects, in a journal entry on his second day back in his homeland, Maalouf writes about what became of his friends. “Le premier à s’en aller fut Naïm avec toute sa famille – son père sa mère, sa grand-mère”¹⁴⁵ and “[a]près lui fut Bilal. Une tout autre manière de partir : la mort.”¹⁴⁶ Adam himself does, ultimately, decide to leave six months after Bilal's death. Mapping out the departures of his friends allows Adam to construct a shared history or narrative – one that situates him amongst a group of people who leave their home country for similar if not the same reasons. In many ways, this evokes a certain solidarity in their disorientation that *queers* the notion of homeland as he uses his friends' departures as a justification for his leaving.

In the first official journal entry after Adam arrives in Lebanon, he laments the complicated relationship he has with Mourad, his *ancien ami*, which initiates a sort of cultural criticism that situates him as an outsider in his “former” home country. Adam notes in the journal entry that “[s]i j’étais resté au pays, je me serais peut-être comporté comme lui. De loin, on peut impunément dire non ; sur place, on n’a pas toujours cette liberté.”¹⁴⁷ I argue that Adam's evocation of a binary consisting of “de loin” and “sur place” functions as a queer or non-normative interrogation of the

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 35.

¹⁴⁶ Maalouf, *Les désorientés*, 38

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 20. Emphasis in original.

concept of “homeland.” Maalouf’s novel is a text of *retour* that the novelist admits on the book’s back cover, which states that the text is inspired “très librement de [sa] propre jeunesse.” Along with Maalouf’s construction of a text that reconfigures the notion of homeland, he also deconstructs his own connection with his country of origin, Lebanon. This movement away from the possession of a “homeland” by birth and into a more neutral understanding of home as a place where one resides or has chosen to reside is evocative of Edward Saïd’s notion of “metaphorical exile,” which he posits as a term to participate in intellectual forms of exile, which are experienced by those who perhaps have not experienced actual exile.¹⁴⁸ In the case of Adam, it is unclear why exactly he leaves Lebanon besides the presence of political and economic instability in the country.

Maalouf, a Lebanese-born French novelist, was born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1949, which is where he lived until the onset of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975. He has since gone on to win the Prix Goncourt (1993), join the *Académie française* (2011), and receive the *Ordre national du Mérite* (2020), which is bestowed by the French President. In many ways, Maalouf has come to embody and even supersede the notion of a “model minority.”¹⁴⁹ Intriguingly, Maalouf makes no mention of the exact country the novel takes place in – only vague mentions of cultural references that allow for geographically and culturally aware readers to make educated assumptions as to

¹⁴⁸ Edward Saïd, “Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals,” in *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York, 1996): 112-24.

¹⁴⁹ In the journal entry that precedes the beginning of the novel, Adam writes, in reference to the Lebanese Civil War: “Dès les premières tueries, je suis parti, je me suis sauvé ; j’ai gardé les mains propres. Mon lâche privilège de déserteur honnête” (21). Essentially, Adam details here the lived reality of many migrants, which forces subjects to seek refuge in seemingly safer places.

where the events of the novel take place. I read this abstention of reference to his home country as Maalouf's desire to write a novel that is somewhat homogenous and dedicated to, in his words, "la civilisation levantine" to situate himself culturally and geographically.¹⁵⁰ This lack of geographical specificity leaves room for several layers of (mis)interpretation by the reader. Furthermore, it presumes a certain level of knowledge of the Levant as a region to identify which specific country Maalouf is speaking about if one is not to assume he is drawing upon his own lived experiences in Lebanon. I also posit that this lack of geographic identification is disorienting to Adam – providing a glimpse into why he feels out of place upon returning home.

To elaborate upon his experience as a migrant, Adam intellectualizes this process in the following:

*Il faut croire que, pour le migrant que j'étais en ces années-là, devenir résident d'un autre pays que le mien n'était pas une simple démarche administrative, c'était un choix existentiel ; et que les paroles de mes amis n'étaient pas pour moi de simples opinions, mais des voix intérieures. Aujourd'hui, malgré mes efforts, je ne parviens plus à retrouver mes sentiments de l'époque, ni à me remettre dans la peau du jeune émigré que j'étais.*¹⁵¹

The protagonist's decision to classify his act of migration outside of his homeland as a "choix existentiel" as he enters a metaphorical dialogue with his friends – also undergoing their own periods of transition and migration, evokes a certain disembodiment that evades normative temporal and spatial demarcations. For instance, Adam's inability to interact with the past concerning migration is evocative of an act of volition where he does not want to engage in such work of remembrance in relation to his emigration. Aside from this apparent binary of

¹⁵⁰ Maalouf, *Les désorientés*, 34.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 71-2. Emphasis in original.

remembering/non-remembering or engagement/non-engagement, Adam also fixates on the resident/non-resident binary, which is a complicated issue for many migrants.

In an important study on migration, refugees, and the future of gubernatorial institutions, Elizabeth Ferris and Katharine Donato detail the creation of the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, which laid the foundation for the creation of governance, in theory, affording international representation to both migrants and refugees – only the latter possessed clear definitions and protections in the past.¹⁵² Adam’s status as *émigré* places him in a privileged position compared to other migrants. The status of *émigré*, which neither Ferris nor Donato refers to when accounting for the estimated 89.3 million forcibly displaced individuals according to the United Nations Refugee Agency’s 2021 report.¹⁵³ Although Adam is an *émigré*, he is also cognizant of the fact that “[t]out homme a le droit de partir, c’est son pays qui doit le persuader de rester – quoi qu’en disent les politiques grandiloquents.”¹⁵⁴ Adam’s evocation of politics here and the sense that every person has “le droit de partir,” is reminiscent of Anne-Marie Fortier’s case study on belonging as it relates to Italian migrants in Britain, where she contends that “[e]migration is the basis of a new cultural terrain located between localism and transnationalism, a diasporic

¹⁵² Elizabeth G. Ferris and Katharine M. Donato, *Refugees, Migration and Global Governance: Negotiating the Global Compacts* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

¹⁵³ See the UNHCR’s Global Trends report, which estimates that at the end of 2021, 89.3 million people have been forcibly displaced by way of persecution, human rights violations, violence, conflict, and other extenuating factors. <https://www.unhcr.org/62a9d1494/global-trends-report-2021>

¹⁵⁴ Maalouf, *Les désorientés*, 68

third space.”¹⁵⁵ Similar to my reading of Adam’s experience as an emigrant, as displayed by his movement from Lebanon to France and back, this movement ultimately constructs a third space that disorients his identity as emigrant – or former emigrant to use his words. This begs the question of when and how one loses their status as emigrant? In the novel, Adam is quite clear when he says “[le] jeune émigrant que j’étais,” which as a declaration, sets him apart from emigrant groups and effaces his former identity as emigrant – something predicated on him obtaining French citizenship. This site of identity effacement is what ultimately leaves Adam in limbo as he attempts to construct his various subjectivities while simultaneously fighting for his life while in a coma.

3.5 Constructing *L’Arabe du futur*: Arab Hegemonic Masculinity and Identity

Further discussing the queering and destabilizing of masculinity and identity, I turn to Franco-Syrian writer and illustrator Riad Sattouf’s graphic novel, *L’Arabe du futur* (2014), which is a series of autobiographical graphic novels that depict the author’s complex and transnational childhood as he moves back and forth across the Mediterranean.¹⁵⁶ This section looks at how, through a process of negotiation, the graphic novel encounters normative, hegemonic masculinity, stubborn conceptualizations of gender, and narratives of migration that shift between Western Europe (France), North Africa (Libya), and the Middle East (Syria). Sattouf evokes the former *de*

¹⁵⁵ Anne-Marie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 157.

¹⁵⁶ The series consists of six volumes, all of which have the same main title but with different dates. The first volume depicts 1978-1984 (2014), the second 1984-5 (2015), the third 1985-7 (2016), the fourth 1987-1992 (2018), the fifth 1992-4 (2020) and the sixth, and most recent volume 1994-2011 was just released in November 2022.



Figure 2: *L'Arabe du futur*, p. 157

facto leader of Libya, Muammar Khadafi (1969-2011), and former Syrian President, Hafez Al-Assad (1971-2000), to construct transnational masculinity, a term that exemplifies the diversity of masculinity as it moves back and forth between borders. Adopting Judith Butler's conception of gender as performance, which includes "imitation" and "miming," this section looks at how Sattouf's father, Abdel-Razak, moves his family from France to Libya and then back to his native Syria – a point of construction of transnational masculinity and the solidification of Riad's identity as "L'Arabe du futur." Chapter 4, being the last section of the first volume ends with Riad's father, Adbel-Razak, calling him "L'Arabe du futur," which is a term that I deconstruct to demonstrate how this appellation is based upon a rigid understanding of masculinity and gender. In this section, I argue that as Sattouf moves between these three distinct geographic regions, he reconstructs the notions of masculinity and gender through transnational discourse and thus generates possibilities to resist binary understandings of these concepts.

As seen in Figure 2, a petrified Riad and Clémentine, Riad's mother, are concerned about their imminent return to Syria that will (1) force Riad to learn Arabic, (2) reunite Riad with his cousins Anas and Waël, who incessantly accuse him of being a "Yahoudi" [Jewish] therefore questioning his "Arab-ness" despite his father being both Syrian and Muslim and (3) force Riad to interact with a transnational form of masculinity that assists him in resisting marginalization in France and in Syria, which usually comes from his father not maintaining a stable masculine subjectivity. For example, in Libya, Abdel-Razak's clean-shaven face – a look imitated by many Libyans at the time – is a nod to Muammar Khadafi and droves of political propaganda posted all over the walls of buildings in Tripoli. Later, in Syria, Abdel-Razak is shown with Hafez Al-Assad's signature mustache, another popular style at the time. In both instances, miming or imitation is not just about displaying a certain level of masculinity or hyper-masculinity, but also a referent to one's political allegiance and support for local and state government. Notably, while in France, Sattouf's father rejects what he sees as the inferiority of European masculinity as he simultaneously subordinates his French wife, Clémentine.

In the first volume of the series of graphic novels and the only volume studied in this section, we encounter a narrative of “une jeunesse au Moyen-Orient (1978-1984),” which opens with a two-year-old Riad in 1980.

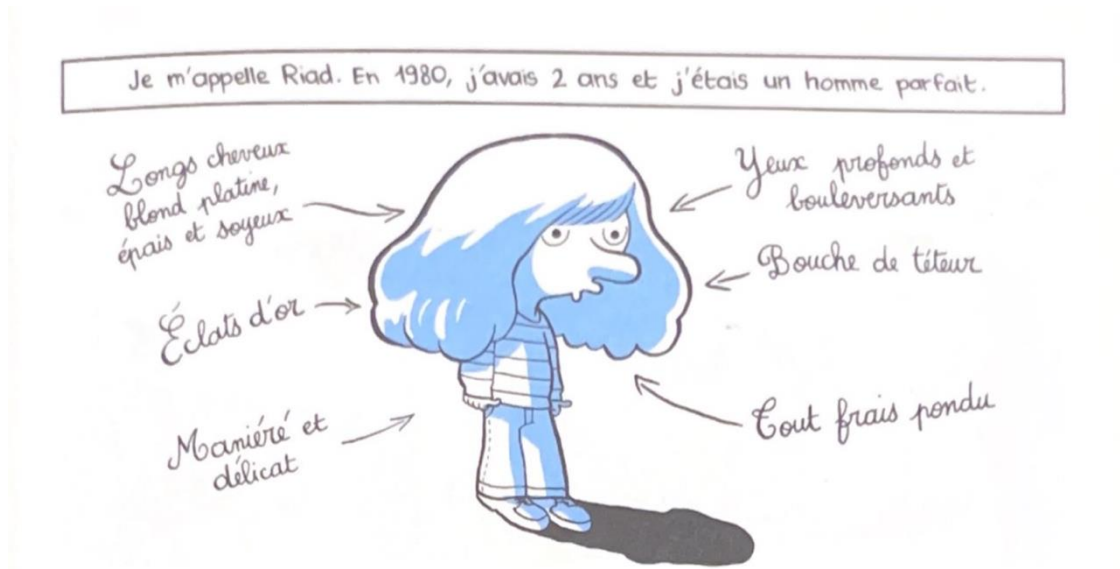


Figure 3: *L'Arabe du futur*, p. 7

This first page and the entrance into the graphic novel series is marked by Sattouf’s introduction of himself: “Je m’appelle Riad. En 1980, j’avais 2 ans et j’étais un homme parfait.”¹⁵⁷ Already, at the age of two, he classifies himself as an “homme” and specifically, an “homme parfait.” Accompanying this description, he gives an even more detailed description of himself and the physical features that make him a “perfect man” – at least in the eyes of a two-year-old. This description of an “homme parfait” are mostly qualities that reflect upon his hair, which is “blond platine, épais et soyeux.” These descriptions serve as signifiers of his mixed-race identity and his identity as a masculine or even hyper-masculine subject, which all are subjectivities in flux as he moves between very distinct regions like North Africa (Libya), the Middle East (Syria), and

¹⁵⁷ Riad Sattouf. *L'Arabe du futur: Une jeunesse au Moyen-Orient (1978-1984): tome 1* (Paris: Allary Éditions, 2014), 7.

Western Europe (France). Figure 2 is set entirely in France, indicated by the tinge of blue that colors all the subjects and most of the background images.¹⁵⁸

The panels move in a sweeping succession as they begin with Sattouf’s auto-description and discursive construction of masculinity, then to a series of panels where he encounters strangers as seen in figure 4, who he describes as “géants admiratifs” who admire him for his atypical features and small stature.

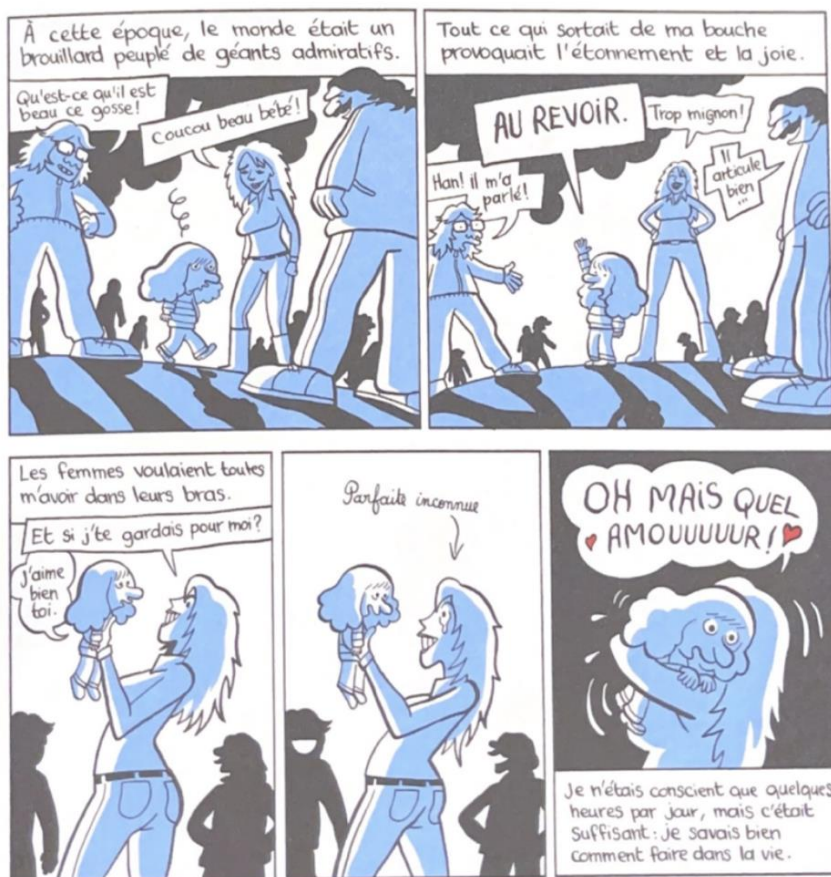


Figure 4: *L'Arabe du futur*, p. 7

¹⁵⁸ Saatouf’s use of color serves as a marker of location and space. Blue symbolizes France, yellow Libya aside from the president of the former Libyan president Muammar Khadafi who features green, and a pinkish red color that demarcates Syria.

Unlike the other two women in the panel, the only other male in the scene beside a young Riad is a man who, besides commenting on his appearance, speaks of Riad's level of language – “[i]l articule bien,” which could be due to his young age or the man's shock that Riad would say “au revoir” rather than the expected Arabic. The bottom three panels only feature Riad, a woman who has taken a serious liking to him. This woman is classified as a “parfaite inconnue” in the words of Riad in relation to her height – a symbol of masculinity for both the woman and Riad as she is one of the “géants admiratifs” that finds Riad adorable while he finds himself attracted to her and the others based upon their difference in size.

As introduced by Sattouf in the first panel, masculinity is emblematic of hegemony and normativity, which are inflexible and stable. I argue that Sattouf's interaction with masculinity and his father's construction of an Arab masculinity functions at the intersection of race, language, and religion as subjects perform their masculinities to conform to or adapt to conventional masculinity that is neither flexible nor plural. Judith Butler argues for the social construction of gender through speech acts, which I apply to my analysis, such as the utterances made by Riad as he describes the people around him as well as his environment.¹⁵⁹ Similar to the model of social constructivism that considers gender, masculinity is also a social construct that relies upon speech acts to be constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed to promulgate and impact subjects within their given societies and contexts. In the case of Sattouf, his graphic novel relies heavily on discourse from

¹⁵⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

Riad's father as well as his younger male friends and cousins to construct masculinity.¹⁶⁰ This may seem stereotypical, but this discursive pattern is almost always constructed in the presence of



Figure 5: *L'Arabe du futur*, p. 33

¹⁶⁰ Interestingly and perhaps the most striking link with tradition presented in the graphic novel is Abdel-Razak's move from France to Libya. As we find out later in the graphic novel, he eats pork, does not pray, and is critical of religion while living in France – despite identifying as a Muslim. Nevertheless, upon arriving in Libya, he gradually reverts to traditional ideals he obtained from childhood and adolescence in Syria – in part due to social codes that reinforce the idea that men should be the main provider for their families and maintain control over them.

Riad's mother, Clémentine, or in relation to religion and or political figures and propaganda. One may ask, how is masculinity a social construct? Is it not inherent to individuals according to their biological sex? Is it not something passed down from father to son and onward? Sattouf's graphic novel demonstrates how Arab masculinity functions outside of Western hegemonic masculinity and is situated within a framework that assembles masculinity that both resists and conforms to Western notions of masculinity through his father's, and other men in the narrative who demonstrate varying forms of masculinity.

Riad, being just two years old in the first volume of the graphic novel, relies heavily upon his father Abdel-Razak's vision of masculinity to construct his sense of subjecthood and masculinity, which usually comes at the expense of demeaning his French wife, Clémentine. The first instance of this, as shown in figure 5, depicts a tense series of events that begin with Clémentine, who has just been summoned after her first day working at a local radio station, called Radio Ramsin, where she reads local and international news in French. While reading a segment on Khadhafi and his criticisms of Western forces, predominantly France and the United States, she bursts into laughter. This lapse of judgment leads to her being brought into the radio station's director's office where she is accompanied by her Arabic-speaking husband. Rather than letting his wife explain the reason behind her laughter, Abdel-Razak takes it upon himself to explain, on her behalf, considering the language barrier between her and her boss – removing her agency and leaving her in an awkward position, bearing in mind that she does not understand what the two men are saying to one another.

Abdel-Razak initiates the conversation by addressing the director: "Monsieur, ma femme ne parle pas arabe, je vais répondre pour elle. Voici la raison de sa crise de rire, la feuille sur laquelle était tapé le texte était agrafée dans le mauvais sens. Elle en a été surprise et a donc éclaté

de rire nerveusement.”¹⁶¹ This description of the events is all a lie that Abdel-Razak creates to prevent his wife from being accused of criticizing Khadhafi’s government and the leader himself – possibly leading to a fine, prison sentence or being expelled from the country. In so doing, Abdel-Razak alienates his wife and reduces her to being just “une femme... Elle est un peu hystérique... Haha.”¹⁶² Abdel-Razak’s misogyny functions as a means of protecting his masculinity and avoiding personal and professional embarrassment considering his desire for “[une] femme [qui] reste à la maison désormais... Et s’occupe de [son] fils.”¹⁶³ Just after this, unprompted, Abdel-Razak refers to himself using his professional title “docteur à l’université,” which he uses as both a signifier of his ability to provide for his family but also to provide, intellectually, for his community and perhaps Khadhafi himself. Abdel-Razak even goes as far as to lie to Clémentine, offering a letter of resignation to the radio station director on her behalf despite the director stating that “[l]e Guide aime voir des Françaises.”¹⁶⁴ In reality, Clémentine was not in much trouble after all, but rather, could have had more opportunities, even being offered to appear on television. Due to her inability to speak or understand Arabic, she is unable to speak for herself, which is an ongoing problem for her and Riad in the graphic novel. This lack of competence signals transnational difficulties as they relate to communication and socio-cultural nuance.

¹⁶¹ Sattouf, *L’Arabe du futur*, 33.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.



Figure 6: *L'Arabe du futur*, p. 39

Riad, more aligned with his mother but also taking after his father, exists within a complex and ambiguous space. During a visit with his paternal uncle and paternal grandmother, his grandmother asks Abdel-Razak “[h]ad sabei ouala benet?!?” [Is it a boy or a girl?!?], which is followed by Abdel-Razak's insistence on cutting Riad's hair, which makes him resemble the famous French actress Brigitte Bardot.¹⁶⁵ Riad's gender-bending qualities and racial ambiguity put

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 39.

pressure on his Arab masculinity as his father reminds Riad forcefully in figure 7, “tu n’es pas français, tu es syrien ! Et en Syrie, les garçons doivent prendre le parti de leur père !”¹⁶⁶



Figure 7: *L'Arabe du futur*, p. 146

Essentially, Riad’s father constructs a hierarchy that places Syrian or Arab masculinity above European/French masculinity, which he aligns with femininity and, therefore, is submissive, and weak. Abdel-Razak’s unwavering definition of masculinity leaves Riad in a liminal space as his several conflicting subjectivities force him to question his gender, masculinity, and racial subjectivities as he constructs an identity as a Franco-Syrian individual.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 146.

The intersections of race, gender, and masculinity, as presented in the graphic novel, form a hybrid identity that disorients Riad – leaving him in an ambiguous space of precarity as he attempts to situate himself in the world. Riad’s contact with multiple subjectivities is complicated because he is a child and does not have much experience understanding questions of identity and subjectivity. For instance, after being asked, or rather, accused several times of being Jewish due to his blond hair and white, European mother, Riad finally decides to pose the question “c’est quoi ‘juif’” to his father as they watch then Syrian President, Hafaz Al-Assad, give an interview on television.¹⁶⁷ Without flinching, Abdel-Razak says: “[c]’est les ennemis des Syriens. Ils occupent la Palestine.”¹⁶⁸ He continues, “[c]’est la pire race qui soit. Les juifs et les Américains, qui sont leurs grands amis, bien sûr.”¹⁶⁹ Riad’s mother appears in the scene, for the first time, to interject and confront Abdel-Razak on his antisemitic rhetoric, but is quickly dismissed by her husband as he asks “[v]rai ou pas?” to which she only makes a sound and leaves the scene. Not satisfied with his father’s response, Riad finally decides to out his cousins as the culprits of said accusations, which his father dismisses as a case of misunderstanding on the part of Riad – telling him “[t]’as dû mal comprendre, vu que tu parles pas arabe !”¹⁷⁰ This further complicates Riad’s identity as an Arab subject, on the level of language, where even his father dismisses his son’s grievances due to his inability to speak Arabic despite comprehending most of what is being said to him.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 137.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 137.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 137.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 137.

Sattouf's work with the past, specifically his childhood, is intriguing because the author is entrenched in a linear analysis of his life from 1978 (the year he was born) to 2011 (the ending of volume 6 of the graphic novel). Such linearity of the graphic novel in terms of temporality facilitates the interpretation of the evolution of Riad, his family, and socio-cultural political landscapes as they are evoked in the text. Due to his age and the time of the first volume (1978 to 1984), the question of memory is critical here, considering that much of the details were undoubtedly channeled through encounters with the memories of others and their recognition of what was going on during specific points in time. Arguably, this is another site of disorientation due to the conflation of several memories that must collide to produce a final product – this volume of the graphic novel's subsequent volumes.

3.6. The Politics of Masculinity

The back cover of *L'Arabe du futur* states, “[c]e livre raconte l’histoire vraie d’un enfant blond et de sa famille dans la Libye de Kadhafi et la Syrie d’Hafez Al-Assad.”¹⁷¹ Sattouf's involvement with politics to write a graphic novel that includes political figures and discourse works to solidify the notion of Arab masculinity as it is constructed by two dictators – Muammar Khadafi and Hafez Al-Assad. These two figures both gained power through coups d'état in the 1960s and 1970s, respectively. The front cover shows Khadafi on a billboard, in his military attire and saluting the public with green flags behind him to symbolize Khadafi's government and the

¹⁷¹ Sattouf opts for the spelling of the former Libyan dictator's name as “Kadhafi” whereas I use “Khadafi” throughout this chapter. There exist several variations of the spelling of this name in English transliteration such as “Gaddafi” to denote the Arabic "قذافي", which changes based upon the specific dialect represented in transliteration.

Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (1977-1986), which later became the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya which lasted from 1986 until Khadafi's ousting in 2011. In 1976, a year before his official takeover of Libya after staging a coup d'état against King Idris I in 1969, officially abolishing the monarchy in Libya. Khadafi published الكتاب الأخضر [The Green Book], which, following Vandewalle,

contains a compilation of Qadhafi's utopian ideas on what Libya's social, political, and economic organization should look like. He refers to this new state as a Jamahiriya – a political community marked by consultation, rather than representation. In it, ordinary citizens own the country's resources, they exercise authority, and directly manage the country's administration and its bureaucracy through a system of popular congresses and committees. Each volume of *The Green Book* contains common themes: a distrust of the hierarchal bureaucratic structures inherent in modern states, and Qadhafi's abhorrence for the presence of intermediaries who – via the impersonal structures of bureaucracies and administrative institutions – prevent individuals from directly managing their own lives. Qadhafi himself clearly viewed *The Green Book* as, above all, a manifesto for action. It was meant to intensify his earlier mobilizational efforts that had been frustrated so far, he argued, because the country's political system could not express the true voice of the Libyan people (Volume 1), because Libyans were not directly in charge of the economic resources of the country (Volume 2), and because of the country's archaic social structures (Volume 3).¹⁷²

Abdel-Razak, a fan of Khadafi's Pan-Arabism, references *The Green Book* (figures 8 and 9) to offer a comparison between Western and Eastern civilization while speaking with his wife.

¹⁷² Diederick Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 101-2.



Figure 8: L'Arabe du futur, p. 18



Figure 9: L'Arabe du futur, p. 19

In figure 8, Abdel-Razak introduces *The Green Book* to his wife as a cultural artifact – beginning with an introduction to the text as “un petit livre qui détaillait la pensée du Guide Suprême sur tous les sujets.”¹⁷³ Shocking to both Abdel-Razak and Clémentine, Khadafi’s *Green Book* posits, at least on paper that “[l]a femme, comme l’homme, est un être humain. Il n’y a en ceci aucun doute,” which is continued by a distinction based in biology “[s]elon les gynécologues, les femmes, à la différence des hommes, ont leurs règles chaque mois” and another difference based in affect as “[l]a femme est affectueuse, belle, émotive et craintive. Bref, la femme est douce et l’homme brutal.”¹⁷⁴ Abdel-Razak’s shock in reading Khadafi’s words serves as a rupture in what I call the “politics of masculinity” because it does not coincide with the vision he has constructed of Arab leaders as inherently hyper-masculine, dominant and oppressive. This section argues that there exists a politics of masculinity that is communicated by leaders to their citizens, which, as an expectation, should be replicated by citizens as they perform masculinity.

Continuing the discussion of *The Green Book*, Abdel-Razak mentions his father and states that, like Khadhafi, he also admired Gamal Abdel Nasser, the second president of Egypt, from 1954 until he died in 1970. At one point considered a leading figure of the Pan-Arabism movement, Nasser established a political union with Syria to inaugurate the United Arab Republic in 1958 until the 1961 Syrian coup d’état. Despite this separation, Egypt continued to be called the United Arab Republic until 1971, one year after Nasser’s death. Abdel-Razak acknowledges this attempt at establishing a long-lasting political relationship between Syria and Egypt through his continued reading of the *Green Book*. As Abdel-Razak delineates the events of Nasser’s presidency, and the

¹⁷³ Sattouf, *L’Arabe du futur*, 18.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

beginning of Khadhafi's political career, he turns to his wife to blame her – as a stand-in for all Europeans – as it was “la race blanche qui a envahi elle aussi tous les continents par une vaste entreprise colonialiste.”¹⁷⁵ Abdel-Razak then turns to Clémentine to say, “ça c'est toi !” as he points behind her back, as she is facing away from him and ironing clothes to prepare Riad for the following day, virtually ignoring him.¹⁷⁶ Clémentine, clearly annoyed, does not respond directly. Still, her face expresses annoyance, not at Abdel-Razak's recounting of colonial realities, but rather, his inability to interact seriously with history despite his profession as a trained historian.

The politics of masculinity in this section encounters political figures due to their presence in the graphic novel. As Riad and his family, within six years, move back and forth between three countries (France, Libya, and Syria), the construction of masculinities is complicated by these geographical changes and their respective sociocultural and political differences. Beginning in France, the first political figure we encounter is Georges Pompidou, the French president from 1969 to 1974. Abdel-Razak is still in the process of writing his doctoral thesis at the beginning of the graphic novel, which is ironically on “[l']opinion publique française à l'égard de l'Angleterre de 1912 à 1914.”¹⁷⁷ Ironic, because after sharing the subject of his thesis, he claims, “[j]e changerais tout chez les Arabes ! Je forcerais eux à arrêter d'être bigots, qu'ils s'éduquent et entrent dans le monde moderne ... Je serais un bon président.”¹⁷⁸ This discourse is satirical on two levels – the first being that Abdel-Razak is not working on a project related to Arab or Middle Eastern

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 19.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 9.

politics. Second, he makes the case for a French politician and France in general to construct a utopia. According to Abdel-Razak, “[l]a France, c’est merveilleux, chacun, il peut faire tout qu’est-ce qu’il veut, ici !”¹⁷⁹ As mentioned above, during my discussion of Abdel-Razak’s admiration for Arab leaders such as Muammar Khadhafi and Gamal Abdel Nasser, he creates a dangerous parallel that associates civilization or enlightenment with Pompidou (France) and the uncivilization or the lack of enlightenment with Khadhafi (Libya) and Nasser (Egypt). It is not that Abdel-Razak does not like these leaders – since one knows that he does admire them – but that he is not consistent with his positions. If he admires France at the beginning of the graphic novel, he has increasing contempt for France as he spends more time outside *l’Héxagone*.



Figure 10: *L'Arabe du futur*, p. 11

The family abruptly leaves France after Abdel-Razak defends his doctoral thesis in 1978 – the same year Riad is born. After a job offer from Oxford as *maître-assistant*, a position Abdel-Razak turns down because, “[i]ls ont fait une faute d’orthographe à mon nom dans la lettre,” he

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 9.

announces to his wife, unexpectedly, that the family will move to Libya, where he is offered a job as *maître*.¹⁸⁰ After this announcement, Clémentine's look of terror is eclipsed by Abdel-Razak listening to the radio, which relays the news of Imam Ruhollah Khomeiny being expelled from Iraq by Saddam Hussein, another major political figure in the Middle East.¹⁸¹ The family's move is depicted via a map drawn by Sattouf to show their starting point, Paris, and their final destination (at least at this point in the text), Tripoli.

Sattouf's map affords a view of much of the Mediterranean region, spanning from Spain to Syria. In what could be a referent to transnational discourse, from the Global North to the Global South, the first discussion presented on the yellow content panels, synonymous with Libya, Sattouf as narrator mentions his father's stance on Pan-Arabism. He lets the readers know, "[s]on père était pour le pan-arabisme. Il était obsédé par l'éducation des Arabes. Il pensait que l'homme arabe devait s'éduquer pour sortir de l'obscurantisme religieux."¹⁸² One could ask, what is the role of women? Is it not possible for them to also be situated within the "obscurantisme religieux" that could necessitate education? Of course, women can fall victim to religious extremism just as easily as men. Still, Abdel-Razak's rationale only involves men because he interprets political power in normative masculine forms, which is to say, existing through people assigned male at birth that exemplify hegemonic masculinity. The graphic novel mentions several Arab leaders who have shaped society but fails to mention any women. This is not the fault of Sattouf, but rather, the

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 10. Saddam Hussein served as the fifth president of the Republic of Iraq from July 16, 1979, to April 9, 2003, when American and British forces invaded Iraq to depose Hussein.

¹⁸² Ibid., 11.

simple fact that there had not been any female heads of government until 2021, when Najla Bouden Romdhane was appointed Prime Minister by Tunisia’s President, Kais Saied.¹⁸³

The politics of masculinity does more than envision a critical interrogation of the function of masculinity within the political sphere and how it is placed upon and or interpreted by male and female citizens – although, according to heteronormativity, should only be reproduced by male citizens. Bob Pease argues for the recreation of male subjectivities outside of dominant, patriarchal narratives that homogenize “men.”¹⁸⁴ As shown in *L’Arabe du futur*, Abdel-Razak does not reconstruct masculinity, but rather, reproduces it to match the given context in which he is in. The reproduction of masculinity through movement exemplifies the liminality of masculinity, showing that it is neither homogenous nor possessed and reproduced in the same ways in different socio-political milieus. This section has endeavored to underscore the graphic novel's several mentions of political figures as they were referenced by Riad’s father as, mostly, sources of inspiration and admiration for the future of Arab masculinity and Arab male subjects. At the very end, Abdel-Razak says sternly as the family prepares to board a plane from France to Syria that “[l]’Arabe du futur, il va à l’école !”¹⁸⁵ Here, Abdel-Razak’s evocation of the title of the graphic novel solidifies the desired reproduction of masculinity and “Arab-ness.” This attempt to stabilize masculinity is

¹⁸³ Caroline Alexander, “The Controversy Over the Arab World’s First Female Prime Minister,” *Bloomberg*, 2021,

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2021-10-14/will-the-arab-world-s-first-prime-minister-be-just-a-figurehead>.

¹⁸⁴ Bob Pease, *Recreating Men: Postmodern Masculinity Politics* (London: SAGE Publications, 2000), 40.

¹⁸⁵ Sattouf, *L’Arabe du futur*, 157.

put into flux as the family moves, again, between different borders. After returning to France from Syria and then only to leave again, Riad's notion of masculinity is disoriented by the multiple iterations of masculinities he has experienced in France, Libya, and Syria.

3.7 Conclusion

The three texts analyzed in this chapter – Amin Maalouf's *Les désorientés*, the first volume of Riad Sattouf's *L'Arabe du futur*, and Nabil Wakim's essay, *L'Arabe pour tous*, signal a movement, or shift across the Mediterranean, from the Maghreb to the Middle East. This movement is critical to this study as it gestures toward the various connections that this region also has to France through language, culture, and socio-political and economic rule. For instance, we can think of how Sattouf's perceived racial and ethnic identity is challenged throughout the first volume of his *bande dessinée* as he is met with disparaging remarks due to his phenotypic appearance. Nabil Wakim's *L'Arabe pour tous* challenges questions of national identity and citizenship, including what it means to be French, and the ways in which Arabic language enters France's national archive, if at all. In *Les désorientés*, Amin Maalouf's central protagonist, Adam, tries to reconcile his two identities (French and Lebanese) as he returns to his unnamed homeland from his adopted homeland – France. The name Adam, a nod to Maalouf's Christian upbringing, introduces the religious tensions of Adam's unnamed homeland, which is Lebanon. Through these interactions, an apparent *queering* functions to disorient Adam's understanding of Lebanon as a nation and his position towards the country and his belonging to it. Furthermore, Adam's interaction with his surroundings allows for the queering of national culture, subverting a conservative nation and its history.

Masculinity is intertwined into this chapter throughout the various sections to elucidate its importance when interrogating history and politics – especially in the case of Sattouf's graphic

novel and, to a lesser extent, Wakim's essay. Sattouf directly tackles political themes unambiguously as the front cover of the graphic novel features Muammar Khadafi at the height of his political career. Wakim's essay enters into the question of politics differently, which is not as relevant to masculinity. Still, it evokes the question of identity and subjectivity concerning national narratives and the disorientation experienced by first- and second-generation Arab subjects who reside in France. Maalouf's text is deeply political, like Wakim's essay, since both authors are of Lebanese origin. Maalouf's protagonist, Adam, whose life is based loosely on his own experiences, leaves Lebanon for France due to the ongoing civil war in the country. Be it due to war or a lack of work opportunities for the subjects studied in this chapter, they all experience migrations in distinct yet similar ways and they all construct layers of subjectivity that they interrogate to attempt to construct identities outside of Western, hegemonic conceptions of masculinity.

4.0 Chapter 3: Queer Futures: Female Masculinity and Subjectivity

Il y a cette pénétration du lieu dans mon corps, comme je ne peux pas séparer le corps de la Chanteuse de mon voyage en Espagne ; les moulins à vents, c'est elle, le bateau de Formentera, c'est elle, la plage de Tarifa, c'est elle, puis vient Séville, je ne la regarde plus marcher, je reste près d'elle, parce que je ne veux plus la voir de dos, j'ai peur de lui lancer une pierre, j'ai peur de lui casser la nuque, j'ai peur de moi sur elle, puis je n'ai plus peur, les rues de Séville sont silencieuses, seules nous avançons, si seules dans cette histoire qui deviendra mon histoire espagnole...

–Nina Bouraoui, *Mes mauvaises pensées*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter encounters female writers and highlights their work's impact on masculinity studies as they write about non-normative practices and modes of being. Most research focusing on masculinity and masculinities is centered around the experiences of cisgender men with little incorporation of women's voices. This dissertation departs from the standard utilization of masculinity with a critical undertaking of female masculinity, a term that I borrow from Jack Halberstam to think of divergent and transgressive forms of masculinity. Furthermore, this chapter opens several avenues for thinking about and critically engaging with masculinity to understand social constructionism. Bouraoui and Trabelsi approach masculinity to better communicate with their identities or their protagonists as national subjects with hybrid identities. In the context of Bouraoui, readers are met with a mixed-race woman who is neither heterosexual nor feminine presenting. For Trabelsi, the central protagonist, Adam, is a gay man who does not adhere to national rhetoric surrounding what it means to be a man in Morocco. The female protagonist of Trabelsi's novel, Rim, also does not fit into normative national rhetoric concerning Moroccan women as she enters a relationship, initially unknowingly, with two men.

Being the child of a mixed-race couple, born just a few short years after the Algerian War of Independence (1954-62) in 1967, Franco-Algerian writer, Nina Bouraoui, is no stranger to the “pénétration du lieu” evoked in the epigraph above. As she navigates the island of Formentera to the Andalusian city of Tarifa and then to the Andalusian capital, Seville, Bouraoui proposes a trajectory that is not unlike her childhood and adolescence. Born to a French mother and an Algerian father, Bouraoui constantly shuffled between France and Algeria during her childhood and adolescence. According to her novels, Bouraoui spent her summers with her grandparents in France before returning to Algeria, where she grew up and was raised. Bouraoui’s use of the nominal form of the verb “pénétrer” at the opening of the epigraph should not only be associated with phallic imagery as she constructs a metaphorical penetration that nods at the entering of geographic space into the physical body – a corporeal assemblage of sorts. Intriguingly, the protagonist and narrator of *Mes mauvaises pensées* traverses Spain in a way that imitates Bouraoui’s cultural *métissage*, a possible reference to the Muslim invasion of Spain that began in 711 during the Ummayyad conquest of Hispania to form Al-Andalus (modern-day Andalusia), an Arab-European hybrid.¹⁸⁶

Unlike Bouraoui, Bahaa Trabelsi is Moroccan and is not of mixed ethnic origin, which positions her as a writer that does not necessarily identify with Bouraoui’s narratives of

¹⁸⁶ See Robert G. Hoyland, *In God’s Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (Oxford: University Press, 2014); Hugh Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus* (London: Longman, 1996); Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston: Back Bay Books, Little, Brown, 2003).

becoming.¹⁸⁷ However, Trabelsi did immigrate to France following her secondary studies before returning to Morocco after completing her degree. Trabelsi was born in 1966, just 10 years after the French Protectorate of Morocco ended. Both writers, born shortly after their respective country's decolonial periods, use this era to profoundly shape how they interact with subjects like culture and politics in their writings. More broadly, the two also discuss topics such as feminism, gender, sexuality, migration, and identity. Their position as women differentiates them from the other works in this dissertation and allows individuals to uncover narratives of identity and national histories from different perspectives. Novels written by women, specifically in the context of Francophone North Africa, are not necessarily at the forefront of narratives as men dominate them. It is helpful to remember that both Bouraoui and Trabelsi discuss gender, sexuality, culture, and politics in their novels. Trabelsi's *Une vie à trois* and Bouraoui's *Garçon manqué* and *Mes mauvaises pensées*, are among the few texts written by women from North Africa that approach such topics openly – especially during the early part of the 21st-century.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ This is to say that their respective novels discuss the process of becoming differently as Bouraoui's novels use an autobiographical approach to understand her own lived experiences related to her fragmented identities and subjectivities. Trabelsi, on the other hand, writes a fictional narrative that is loosely based upon lived experiences and interactions that she has had with others.

¹⁸⁸ More recently, Leïla Slimani's *Sexe et mensonges: La vie sexuelle au Maroc* (2017) was released to interrogate sexual transgression in Morocco specifically. Her study, an anthropological one, demonstrates the progress being made while also showing how much work still needs to be done.

North African female writers such as Nina Bouraoui and Bahaa Trabelsi approach questions of female masculinity, subjectivity, and temporality and how these notions are *queered* through involving female subjects who are “trapped” between identities and subjectivities. The first section of this chapter argues that the French capital city, Paris, is used to create a “queer mecca” that reaches back and forth across the Mediterranean in *Une vie à trois* as the main protagonist, Adam, evokes the city to gesture toward presumed freedom of expression and a possibility for a fragmented identity.¹⁸⁹ The second section draws upon Halberstam’s notion of “female masculinity” to articulate how Bouraoui’s protagonist in the novel restructures and queers the notion of masculinity to describe her interaction with a split self that exists between several personas as she symbolically transitions throughout different parts of the text. Furthermore, in the third section, I read Bouraoui’s two novels together to understand how she “assembles” her protagonist and herself to produce a movement that adds another level to her use of movement and space. The fourth section considers all three novels, approaching their unique uses of and interaction with temporality as their protagonists encounter their non-normative identities and subjectivities, which ultimately queers time as they encounter various subjects.

4.2 Translating “Normative” Transnationally from Morocco to France in *Une vie à trois*

Edwige Talbayev addresses the past and current disregard for the “entangled origins of the Mediterranean” that limits current understandings of the contemporary socio-political

¹⁸⁹ I argue that this “presumed” freedom is based in an orientalist understanding of non-Western nations, which place the label of progressivism on the Global North and the contrary upon the Global South.

landscape.¹⁹⁰ This section considers the vast geographic, political, cultural, linguistic, and religious differences that span the Mediterranean. My decision for taking two geographic regions, France and Morocco, into consideration is to discuss how (post)colonial relationships have evolved and express themselves in literature.

Trabelsi's first novel, *Une vie à trois*, was published in 2000 at the turn of the century, a period marked by both despair and hope due to the Moroccan King, Hassan II's, death on July 23, 1999, and the ascension of his young and "progressive" son, Mohammed VI the same day. Mohammed VI's rise to the throne served as a sign of progress and further entrance into the West, something his father was known for.¹⁹¹ *Une vie à trois* does not directly involve politics nor the political changes that went on after the death of the late monarch, which could be due to the novel having already been written before the passing of Hassan II. However, *Une vie à trois* approaches several inherently political concepts, including, but not limited to, sexuality, class, and masculinity and their place within Moroccan society and the Arab World at large. In the novel, normativity is produced through bilateral discourse that travels between France and Morocco, allowing for the

¹⁹⁰ Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, *The Transcontinental Maghreb: Francophone Literature Across the Mediterranean* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 2.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9780823275182>.

¹⁹¹ Joseph Gregory, "Hassan II of Morocco Dies at 70; A Monarch Oriented to the West," *The New York Times*, July 24, 1999, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/07/24/world/hassan-ii-of-morocco-dies-at-70-a-monarch-oriented-to-the-west.html>.

production of shared epistemologies.¹⁹² Normative social spaces, dictated by the masculine/feminine binary in contemporary Moroccan society, are deconstructed and subsequently reconstructed in Trabelsi's *Une vie à trois* as she provides "discourse from below" – phrasing I borrow from Lucien Febvre, who signals the importance of considering "l'histoire vue d'en bas et non d'en haut" to understand history from several points of view and to avoid prioritizing dominant perspectives.¹⁹³

In this section, I argue that Trabelsi uses Paris, a social milieu marked by presumed progressivism and liberation, to (de)construct the figure of the novel's main character, Adam, which eventually shapes the other protagonists, Jamal and Rim, who make up the love triangle along with Adam. Trabelsi mentions Paris in the text for two reasons, the first being to produce transnational discourse that is used to adopt a comparative approach in relation to Morocco and the second being to complicate notions of gender, sexuality, and masculinity as they encounter the three central protagonists and are altered by their movement outside of a Western epistemological

¹⁹² I use the term "shared epistemologies" to refer to the exchange of knowledge between nations. In this specific example, it would be the exchange of socio-cultural knowledge between France and Morocco. Philosopher José Medina argues in *The Epistemology of Resistance* (2013) that "[o]ur cognitive, affective, and political lives are permeated by different forms of conformity and resistance that shape our lives in various (and not always fully coherent) ways" (14). Medina's theorization of epistemology as a form of resistance against oppression conveys the productivity of shared epistemologies as they construct discursive connections.

¹⁹³ Lucien Febvre, "Albert Mathiez : un tempérament, une éducation," *Annales* 4, no. 18 (1932): 573–76, <https://doi.org/10.3406/ahess.1932.1357>.

paradigm. Trabelsi's goal is not necessarily to create a model for queer ontology or epistemology. Still, she inadvertently does this through her critique of both Moroccan society as well as French society.

Trabelsi's discursive communication with gender, sexuality, and masculinity is written in concurrence with the framing of an omnipresent France that continues to exist within the Maghreb. This framing occurs through the novel's marked focus on Paris, one of the world's queer capitals or meccas alongside San Francisco, Tel Aviv, Bangkok, and several other destinations known for their influx of queer tourists.¹⁹⁴ Paris is a top destination for queer Maghrebis due to its proximity and ease of integration on socio-cultural and linguistic levels. The central protagonist, Adam, is an affluent Moroccan man who carries considerable socio-cultural and political baggage, which only grows upon his return home to Casablanca from *l'Héxagone*. During a therapy session, Adam reflects upon his return to Casablanca and poses, rhetorically and internally, the question of “[q]ue pourrait-il dire à un homme qui s’applique à bâtir sa propre prison? Le paradis n’en est pas un s’il n’enferme pas en lui toutes les imperfections.”¹⁹⁵ The prison that Adam speaks of is metaphorical, but made real by the weight of heteronormative pressures that tell him he cannot be with a man (in

¹⁹⁴ See Friedemann Yi-Neumann et al., eds., *Material Culture and (Forced) Migration* (London: UCL Press, 2022), which elucidates the need for migrants to bring along material possessions to maintain markers of socio-cultural identity. It is an excellent start to a conversation for what could be a productive discussion on how cultural baggage relates to one's non-normative identity, can be centered when discussing forced migration or exile.

¹⁹⁵ Bahaa Trabelsi, *Une vie à trois* (Brussels: Éditions Labor, 2002), 15.

this case not even legally), that he should be married at a particular age and more importantly, should procreate to insure the continued honor of his family.¹⁹⁶

To conceptualize and situate this novel, Trabelsi has stated in interviews that *Une vie à trois* is meant to reflect society and “what is going on on the ground” and not just a method of evoking an idealistic portrayal of the nation to appease its subjects and show order and lack of “deviant” or “non-normative” behaviors and embodiments. Fundamentally, Trabelsi attempts to represent the experiences of queer subjects that live in what are typified as conservative societies – especially at the turn of the 21st-century – only some twenty-three years ago, when she first got involved in activism with queer subjects.

In the third section of *Une vie à trois*, Adam narrates for the first time after returning home from Paris where he lived for several years. Adam reminisces about the metropole and his former partner, a Frenchman, named Christophe:

J’ai vécu une passion dans un monde où je me suis senti libre. Le Paris gay m’a comblé. Je me suis découvert émotionnellement et sexuellement, avec la sensation d’appartenir à une communauté dotée d’une culture, d’un système de valeurs qui lui est propre, au-delà des frontières et des problèmes raciaux. Décalé, dévoyé, heureux. Le sida ne me faisait pas peur. Christophe et moi avons été fidèles l’un à l’autre, à notre façon.¹⁹⁷

Adam’s reference to “le Paris gay” conceives of space as a signifier of a homo/hetero binary where the formation of a “gay Paris” establishes a straight or heterosexual Paris by virtue of the

¹⁹⁶ See section 489 of the Moroccan penal code which forbids same-sex sexual acts:

<https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/SERIAL/69975/69182/F1186528577/MAR-69975.pdf>

¹⁹⁷ Trabelsi, *Une vie à trois*, 17. I note here that the novel is mostly divided into sections according to who is the principal narrator at the time. For example, if Adam is narrating, the title of the chapter is “Adam” and if Jamal is narrating, the title is “Jamal.”

comparison alone as Adam qualifies the identitarian quest he underwent in Paris as he worked to discover himself emotionally and sexually, and the formation of a community rooted in gay culture. In his discussion of gay culture, Adam similarly contends that a West/East binary, which is to say Paris/Casablanca, situates the former as an accommodating space. The latter being Adam's point of origin, his hometown, points to a rejection of his home as he reflects upon what Paris has given him – liberation and a proper queer identity. The verb “appartenir,” meaning “to belong to” or “to be a member of” an organization or group, creates a shared identity that Adam idealizes through the deconstruction of borders and race as he is seemingly accommodated by French society.

Adam's idealization of France, which can be understood as both colorblind and naïve, is built upon the supposition that France cannot be racist or prejudiced due to the nation's supposed colorblindness or putative refusal of race-based categories or discrimination. This places the country in a category that implies that it is marginally more accepting of queer subjects, deconstructing sexual, racial, and national borders. Of course, this expression, “aveugle à la couleur” does not appear in the novel considering its hyper-contemporary use despite the conceptualization of this ideology in Adam's discourse. Perhaps this connection could be linked to Trabelsi's lived experiences, having worked with individuals afflicted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic in North Africa. Adam not being afraid of the virus is a direct reference to his time in Paris – a period marked by sexual freedom both with his partner and other queer men. Adam speaks to his and Christophe's level of fidelity, which he says is done “à notre façon,” which implies that the two have an open relationship. Apart from being colorblind, Adam is equally oblivious to the HIV/AIDS crisis in the metropole as he gets involved in what could be considered high-risk sexual

activity since he has no fear of being persecuted or prosecuted for his sexual orientation or activities, which is not a reality in his native Morocco.

As mentioned earlier, Trabelsi wrote *Une vie à trois* while doing social work committed to combating the AIDS epidemic in the Maghreb – working alongside several North African LGBTQ activists and building a rapport within this circle.¹⁹⁸ It is during this period that she met several individuals that shared their intimate stories and experiences with her. With these experiences, Trabelsi was able to document the discourses she initiated to highlight another part of society in which she lived – a rupture of the public/private binary to disrupt normative national ideals of (sex)uality. *Une vie à trois* is not just a love-triangle narrative but a retelling of queer experiences and sexual transgression in North Africa. Still, more importantly, it is a novel that produces a plurality of discourses to change how one approaches discussions of societal norms and non-normative desires.

My reading of what is “normative” is based on normative theory, which, as a phenomenon, implies that there are desirable societal standards – ultimately bearing a series of binaries that dictate subjectivity formation and markers of identity. For instance, there are binaries like good/bad, permissible/impermissible, desirable/non-desirable, and the more culturally relevant, *haram/halal*, which is in flux as the subversion of social order encounters societies as transnational discourses allow for the generative sharing of national histories and cultures. In chapter one, I

¹⁹⁸ Jamal Saidi, “Homophobia in Bahaa Trabelsi’s *Une vie à trois*,” Morocco World News, 2012, <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2012/05/42213/homophobia-in-bahaa-trabelsis-une-vie-a-trois-2>.

reference medical anthropologist Marcia Inhorn's *The New Arab Man: Emergent Masculinities, Technologies and Islam in the Middle East* (2012), which is a study of the everchanging socio-medico-political landscape that is currently underway in the Arab World. Inhorn argues that due to the widespread epidemic of male infertility among Middle Eastern men, there has been a "recalibration of manhood" that has usurped the question of (1) what does it mean to be a man (2) what does it mean to be the head of a family and more simply (3) what does it mean to create a family of one's own? Inhorn's research shows that there are, in fact, several ways to work against the normalizing approach that seeks to place moral and value judgments upon actions and concepts.

Returning to Trabelsi's novel, one must account for the contrast of a wealthy Moroccan man (Adam) and a young Moroccan male prostitute (Jamal), as it signals the various inequalities and social dynamics that many "non-normative" or "anti-normative" Maghrebi subjects challenge within conservative societies that reject non-normativity by way of marginalization. This section examines the multi-layered queer subjectivity (re)formation that queer Maghrebi subjects undergo as they (re)interpret their relationship to and orient themselves toward certain genders, sexualities, and/or social classes. For instance, Rim, who is Adam's young bride, is unaware of Adam's homosexuality and his involvement with Jamal. Rim is queered as she is essentially forced into a love triangle with Adam and Jamal out of social and economic obligation, which is to say, her and Adam's need to be wed. Having a minimal voice in the narrative and only one section where she is a narrator, Rim does not necessarily reject antinormative practices.

C'est ma vie. Adam a été mon mari et Jamal, mon ami. J'aurais aimé pouvoir continuer à y croire. Mensonge ou pas. Peut-être qu'un jour, j'aurais découvert la vérité. À ma façon. Sans qu'on me la jette au visage comme une insulte. Petit à petit, en prenant le temps de

connaître Jamal et Adam. J’aurais également eu le loisir de mûrir à leur côté. Et de me doter d’un regard sur la vie et sur les êtres. Mon regard.¹⁹⁹

Rim’s reclamation of agency – “c’est *ma* vie” – speaks to her longing to maintain a certain degree of agency within the narrative. Admittedly, it is not the queer relationship that is the problem for Rim, considering she believes she would have matured if she had stayed in this non-normative relationship.

Along this line, I read Trabelsi’s work as an analysis and critique of masculinity – Trabelsi simultaneously critiques Moroccan society by way of exploring narratives of revolt where subjects take it upon themselves to not conform to societal pressures and situate themselves as “other” within their communities to serve as a form of liberation. Liberation and the concept of space are of particular importance in Trabelsi’s novel as discourse travels between France and Morocco both physically and non-physically – often evoking technology as a critical means of communication within the narrative – in what represents another connector of France and Morocco to serve as a sort of epistemological exchange of queer desire and masculinities. All of which ultimately leads to the exposure of an unbalanced power dynamic that continues to exist since Morocco’s independence from France in 1956.²⁰⁰

Trabelsi’s insistence on creating and displaying unequal power dynamics is a reproduction of colonial thought that subsists as a tool of domination and subordination. Trabelsi constructs a binary that is situated in a dominator/dominated dichotomy as it is personified by the central protagonist, Adam, whom I read as a representation of France and perceived Western European

¹⁹⁹ Trabelsi, *Une vie à trois*, 139.

²⁰⁰ For a discussion on French colonial rule and its present remnants, see Driss Maghraoui, *Revisiting the Colonial Past in Morocco* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013).

progressivism. Then there is Jamal, the young sex worker and lover of Adam who represents the colonized figure who willingly embraces the dominator's assimilationist tactics. As for Rim, she represents “une couverture,” according to Adam, as he reassures Jamal that he is “incapable de faire la peine à [ses] parents.”²⁰¹ Rim is situated as the third point of the love triangle as evoked by the title of the novel *Une vie à trois* – despite Rim’s limited presence in the narrative often being overstepped by her sister Amina, who is more of a protagonist than Rim – making her the *troisième personne* by proxy in the novel.

Trabelsi’s evocation of this structure that evaluates levels of (female) masculinity relative to societal preconceptions of masculinity functions transgressively to alter the notions of family, masculinity, gender, and sexuality. Upon Adam’s return to Casablanca, he reflects upon the many years he spent in Paris – a perceived mecca of freedom that permitted him to construct subjecthood that he believes would not have been possible in Morocco. Conversely, speaking of Casablanca, Adam describes and personifies the city as “une folle [qu]’il la sent étouffer sous la pression et la répression [...] qu’elle crève de ses contradictions et de son mal de vivre [...] c’est d’elle pourtant, qu’un jour, vont peut-être naître les tolérances.”²⁰² The contrast between the two cities – Casablanca and Paris – is followed by a scenario where Adam undergoes psychoanalysis – asking himself the question “[q]ue pourrait-il dire à un homme qui s’applique à bâtir sa propre prison ?”²⁰³

Trabelsi writes about heteronormative and queer relationships concurrently, which effectively queers strict, rigid models of relationships. Through this interrogation of relationships,

²⁰¹ Trabelsi, *Une vie à trois*, 78.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 15.

she furthers with masculinity or masculinities to reconfigure (1) how to understand masculinity and (2) to understand how masculinity can be stripped of its association with biological essentialism that implies a chromosomal link to the embodiment of masculine traits. Kalle Berggren conceptualizes masculinity as sticky as it “allows us to see both that subjects are positioned by competing discourses, and that through repeated enactment, the cultural signs of masculinity tends to stick to bodies.”²⁰⁴ Berggren’s understanding of masculinity is rooted in sociologist Raewyn Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity, a term coined almost three decades ago to understand how male patriarchal dominance is secured in society while simultaneously subordinating those who fall outside of normative masculinity.²⁰⁵

The notion of hegemonic masculinity stems from Antonio Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony – a method of understanding power dynamics amongst social classes – meaning the organization of a hierarchy that works to valorize specific members within a given society while simultaneously devaluing others. I read *Une vie à trois* through the lens of Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony while conversely applying a postcolonial lens that sheds light on colonial tropes that shape the novel’s protagonists.²⁰⁶ Evidently, Adam represents the upper-class via his wealth,

²⁰⁴ Kalle Berggren, “Sticky Masculinity: Post-Structuralism, Phenomenology and Subjectivity in Critical Studies on Men,” *Men and Masculinities* 17, no. 3 (2014): 247.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14539510>.

²⁰⁵ Raewyn Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829–59.

²⁰⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from The Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1978).

his exclusive use of the French language and his imposition of this language upon Jamal demanding that “[il ira] aussi aux cours du soir à l’Institut Français pour apprendre à parler correctement la langue française.”²⁰⁷ Jamal, lacking formal education and working as a sex worker confesses that “[a]vant de me prostituer, j’ai d’abord été un enfant de la rue.”²⁰⁸ As a member of society that is relegated to a lower rung of society in comparison to Adam, Jamal maintains a position of inferiority that is apparent from the beginning of the novel. Rim’s position within the narrative is constantly in flux – on the one hand, the 17 or 18-year-old (we do not know her exact age, only that she is completing her baccalaureate as she prepares for her marriage) has some form of agency considering she is not explicitly forced to marry Adam but on the other, is expected to become Adam’s *poupée*, which he describes as being someone “qu’on regarde tendrement sans y toucher ni la convoiter, de peur de l’abîmer. [Rim] n’éveille en moi aucune sensualité.”²⁰⁹

I note that beyond references to France in the form of former partners, perceived progressivism, and Adam’s “gay Parisian life,” only once are borders crossed in the novel, and they are transnational. These border crossings are done by Rim’s sister, Amina, who travels to Paris as detailed in the section “Le Voyage à Paris,” and thus forces an unexpected meeting and interaction between Amina and Adam’s ex-boyfriend, Christophe. This coincidental meeting ultimately outs Adam, exposing his *double vie* and leading to the realization that the love triangle

²⁰⁷ Trabelsi, *Une vie à trois*, 67.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

is not a sustainable reality—not because of those involved, but rather, the outsiders looking in to impose their interpretation of social order within civil society.²¹⁰

4.3. Constructing Female Masculinities in *Garçon manqué*

Halberstam’s groundbreaking work argues for a “masculinity without men,” which is not merely an “imitation of maleness” but a concept that “affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity.”²¹¹ This articulation is predicated on the idea that when masculinity leaves the male body, it can be isolated and not directly connected to biological sex. Bouraoui’s autofictional novel approaches the concept of masculinity or plural masculinities that the central protagonist, Nina, embodies to (de)construct her various, fragmented subjectivities and identities. Bouraoui approaches identity through a multifaceted lens that is based upon parental lineage and heritage.

Je suis tout. Je ne suis rien. Ma peau. Mes yeux. Ma voix. Mon corps s’enferme par deux fois. Je reste avec ma mère. Je reste avec mon père. Je prends des deux. Je perds des deux. Chaque partie se fond à l’autre puis s’en détache. Elles s’embrassent et se disputent. C’est une guerre. C’est une union. C’est un rejet. C’est une séduction. Je ne choisis pas. Je vais et je reviens. Mon corps se compose de deux exils. Je voyage à l’intérieur de moi.²¹²

In the citation above, Bouraoui uses parallel structure to identify markers of one’s personal identity, such as phenotypic characteristics, to probe her existence as a queer, Franco-Algerian person that rejects being marginalized. Bouraoui’s contention that Nina is “tout” and “rien”

²¹⁰ See for instance Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani, *Civil Society: History and Possibilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), for a discussion of this Western, socio-political concept which argues that the invention of the notion of “civil society” has penetrated thought within the Global South and modified cultural practices and intellectual thought.

²¹¹ Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 1.

²¹² Nina Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué* (Paris: Stock, 2000), 20.

communicates the liminality of identity and subjectivity construction as it presents itself in the novel. Coming from the Latin term “limen” to signify “threshold,” I deploy this term to think of Bouraoui’s inability or refusal to label herself as any specific ethnic, racial, cultural, gender identity or sexual orientation.

As Bouraoui illustrates what I have labeled as a liminal space as “une guerre” and likewise “une union,” this discord creates “un rejet” as she states right after. Still, ironically, she also refers to this *guerre/union* as “une séduction.” One does not usually associate *guerre* with *union*. Aside from this, war is a political term that involves nations, governments, (non)citizens, and several other factors. This is a provocative word choice considering that Bouraoui was born just five years after the Algerian War of Independence in 1967. Bouraoui, herself, is a Franco-Algerian and is an example of the ironic *guerre/union* paradigm – her *métisse* identity is what informs and constructs the concept of self-exile as “[son] corps se compose de deux exils.”²¹³ Subsequently, Nina gestures toward an internal migration that she refers to in the first person as: “[j]e voyage à l’intérieur de moi,” which reengages with the notion of the self and subjecthood.

I return to Halberstam’s writing on female masculinity to think through a section written on tomboys to elucidate this phenomenon that bridges masculinity and female subjects. In his section on tomboys, Halberstam deploys the term “tomboyism,” which “generally describes an extended childhood period of female masculinity” to reference a presumed level of freedom that

²¹³ For more on the study of exile and memory see Sara Leek, “‘L’écriture qui saigne’ Exile and wounding in the narratives of Nina Bouraoui and Linda Lê,” *International Journal of Francophone studies* 15, no. 2 (2012): 237–56.

is associated with masculinity.²¹⁴ In *Garçon manqué*, Bouraoui's protagonist is in a state of flux where she metaphorically transitions between several shared, interconnected, yet distinct identities. Bouraoui constructs a protagonist that embodies three other subjects to create a multifaceted and complex network of identities and subjectivities. Out of different identities, only two of them exist – Yasmina and the shortened form, Nina. However, I still do make note of the difference between Yasmina and Nina, considering the latter is attributed to her identity as French and the former as her identity as Algerian. These four identities include Yasmina, Nina, Ahmed, and Brio. The former two are the centering of her Arab identity – opting for a more ambiguous “Nina” with “Ahmed” being a representation of masculine embodiment and “Brio” in a state of flux due to a lack of identifiable, stereotypical markers or representations of gender.

Bouraoui “transitions” to, not between, each individual identity and the process in which they occur, experiencing a feeling of loss through figurative assassination she experiences.²¹⁵

Je passe de Yasmina à Nina. De Nina à Ahmed. D’Ahmed à Brio. C’est un assassinat. C’est un infanticide. C’est un suicide. Je ne sais pas qui je suis. Une et multiple. Mentreuse et vraie. Forte et fragile. Fille et garçon. Mon corps me trahira un jour. Il sera formé. Il sera féminin. Il sera contre moi. Il fera résistance. Je retiendrai Nina, de force, comme un animal sauvage.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018),

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478002703.5>.

²¹⁵ I emphasize the word transition here to shed light on the possibility of a trans* narrative taking place within the work. The protagonist does not literally undergo any transition – on a physical level – but does experience gender dysphoria that permits her to move between masculine and feminine subjects – creating a tomboy or *garçon manqué*.

²¹⁶ Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, 60.

The use of the transitive verb “passer” followed by the various subjects embodied by the protagonist establishes a fragmented identity, thus evoking an interplay of these various identities that Bouraoui is unable to reconcile. This inability to reconcile or construct a uniform identity is likened to assassination, infanticide, and suicide – the latter being linked to the self, which is further established through the lack of a sense of self, i.e., “[j]e ne sais pas qui je suis.” This line is not only mentioned here, but throughout the text. Eloi Grasset signals in their article on *l’identité indécidable* that Nina opts to use “plus” instead of “pas” since the former insinuates the loss of a sense of self rather than its complete inexistence.²¹⁷

Focusing on the citation that uses “pas” in lieu of “plus,” it must be noted that Bouraoui’s use of the verb “trahir” is striking. I believe this is for two reasons, the first being due to the intensity of the word that implies the presence of another subject or subjects, and secondly, since Bouraoui does, in fact, speak of her body in the third person stating that her body will betray her because “[i]l sera formé. Il sera contre moi. Il fera résistance.”²¹⁸ Clearly, Bouraoui is speaking of the developmental process of puberty, which is, according to her, the ultimate betrayal. In this sense, Bouraoui’s main protagonist feels that her body is betraying her because physical development will disallow the playfulness of and the disruption of gender and gender

²¹⁷ Eloi Grasset, “Je ne sais plus qui je suis » L’identité indécidable et l’écriture du délire dans *Mes mauvaises pensées* de Nina Bouraoui,” *Expressions Maghrébines* 14, no. 1 (2015): 173–82, <https://doi.org/10.1353/exp.2015.0011>.

²¹⁸ Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, 60.

expression.²¹⁹ Essentially, she speaks to the fact that as one develops, one tends to be situated and classified as either male/female or masculine/feminine based upon their corporeal appearance.

Despite Bouraoui's focus on the metaphorical prison that surrounds her, she summons her other identities who exist in prisons of their own:

Parle, Ahmed ! Parle, Brio ! Seule le langage sauve. Où es-tu, Yasmina ? Noyée, écartée, en dessous. Une femme étouffée. Il faut dire. Pour plus tard. Préparer. Anticiper. Mon silence construit mon avenir. Ne jamais être à sa place. À côté de soi. Ne pas correspondre à l'image donnée. Les yeux des autres. Ma fausse beauté. Être belle avant d'écrire, voilà l'enfer des autres. Voilà ce qu'ils m'imposeront.²²⁰

The imperative use of “parle” and the emphasis placed upon discursive action, i.e., “[s]eule le langage sauve,” highlights the importance that Bouraoui places upon discourse and identity formation. As she addresses her masculine and possibly non-binary personas, Bouraoui effectively kills or cuts off the possibility of the existence of any level of femininity – leaving no space for femininity and masculinity to coexist or be intertwined. Helen Vassallo has taken a keen interest in Bouraoui's approach to writing and the creation of an “identité de fracture,” which she says is

²¹⁹ Similar to popular drag culture, “gender bending,” as Meredith Heller argues, allows for the ability to *queer* hegemonic, normative, identities. Although not actively engaging in drag performance, Bouraoui's protagonist(s) do engage in gender-bending and artfully play with the spectacle of transformation that occurs during drag performances. As Bouraoui “passes” from one subject to the next, she actively deconstructs the normative notion of gender as stagnant. See Meredith Heller, *Queering Drag: Redefining the Discourse of Gender-Bending* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020).

²²⁰ Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, 63.

an “integral feature of her [Bouraoui’s] writing, and points to the importance of autobiography as identity quest.”²²¹

The “identity quest” that Vassallo points out facilitates the understanding of Bouraoui’s writing since Bouraoui often writes in a trajectory that allows for a constructivist narrative, i.e., from the present to the future. The novelist both constructs and deconstructs identity due to her ability to simultaneously do both things in her writing – mainly through her frequent use of questions and fluctuations between several identities. It is the case that the identity quest is something that begins once the protagonist awakens: “[t]ous les matins je vérifie mon identité. J’ai quatre problèmes. Française ? Algérienne ? Fille ? Garçon ?”²²² These four “problems” are rooted in ethnonational and gender identity – culminating in the inability of the protagonist to align with her Franco-Algerian heritage or her identity as a tomboy – possessing both masculine and feminine traits. In order to think of hybridity and ethnic origins and identity, in the case of Bouraoui, I signal Alfonso de Toro who writes about what he calls “hybrid-performative-diasporas,” which he argues can be classified into eleven distinct categories:

1. Movement; de-and reterritorialization;
2. Location in space and time;
3. Identifiable structures;
4. Awareness of being part of a diaspora, strong group interest;
5. Similar experience of destiny;
6. Similar life and emotional situations (unfulfilled yearning for home vs. a long-term locational project);
7. Common forms of representation;

²²¹ Helen Vassallo, “Unsuccessful Alterity? The Pursuit of Otherness in Nina Bouraoui’s Autobiographical Writing” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 12, no. 1 (2009), 38, https://doi.org/10.1386/ijfs.12.1.37_1.

²²² Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, 163.

8. Strong internal sense of loyalty and solidarity and external hybrid loyalty and solidarity;
9. Transethnic, transcultural, transidentity;
10. Reinvention of the self and invention of the homeland;
11. External assignations and internal description of the Self.²²³

I discuss de Toro's "constituents of hybrid-performative-diasporas" due to his dynamic approach to understanding the complexity of subjects that exist within and between multiple spaces – the case for Bouraoui as she, despite growing up in Algeria, frequently visits France and has a French mother and possesses a French passport. Despite this supposed shared identity – one that encompasses a biracial socio-cultural experience, Bouraoui feels that "[l]a France m'oublie. L'Algérie ne me reconnaît pas."²²⁴ Essentially, it is not that Bouraoui feels rejected by one side of her shared Franco-Algerian heritage; rather, she belongs to neither. On the one hand, there is France which has forgotten her, and on the other, there is Algeria which does not recognize her. This points to the role of space in Bouraoui's writing, specifically in her third autobiographical novel *Mes mauvaises pensées* (2005), which allows for a more detailed discussion of how Bouraoui uses space as a tool of (de)construction.

4.4. Assembling Space in Nina Bouraoui's *Mes mauvaises pensées* and *Garçon manqué*

Winning the prestigious Prix Renaudot in 2005, Bouraoui's *Mes mauvaises pensées* is a text that depicts little movement as it is confined mostly within the four walls of a psychoanalyst's office as Bouraoui undergoes psychoanalysis to uncover and understand her *mauvaises pensées*.

²²³ Juliane Tauchnitz and Alfonso de Toro, *The World in Movement: Performative Identities and Diasporas* (Leiden: BRILL, 2019), 20.

²²⁴ Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, 29.

The novel begins with Bouraoui addressing the psychoanalyst directly, stating why she visits “Doctor C.,” the only identifier of this mysterious subject whose full name is never revealed.

Je viens vous voir parce que j’ai des mauvaises pensées. Mon âme se dévore, je suis assiégée. Je porte quelqu’un à l’intérieur de ma tête, quelqu’un qui n’est plus moi ou qui serait un *moi* que j’aurais longtemps tenu, longtemps étouffé. Les mauvaises pensées se fixent aux corps des gens que j’aime, ou aux corps des gens que je désire, je me dis que l’histoire des tueurs commence ainsi, cela prend la nuit, jusqu’au matin. J’aimerais me défaire de mon cerveau, j’aimerais me couper les mains, j’ai très peur, vous savez, j’ai très peur de ce que je suis en train de devenir, je pense à A., le philosophe qui poignarda sa femme ; je crois que c’était comme dans un rêve pour lui, j’ai si peur que mon crime arrive ainsi, dans un demi-songe, dans un état où je ne contrôlerais plus rien.²²⁵

Like *Garçon manqué*, Bouraoui’s stream of consciousness prose returns in *Mes mauvaises pensées*. However, in this latter text, there are no sections, just one paragraph break at the beginning and sporadic punctuation from thereon out. The quote above, which is the introduction to the novel, bounces around from the self-prognosis by the protagonist, who medicalizes her “mauvaises pensées” to evoke her “self-devouring soul,” which furthers her understanding of her body betraying itself as another inhabits it according to Bouraoui.

Bouraoui continues to write within binaries which are composed of the self and the “other,” which inhabits or represents the self outside of reality as an internal exemplification of subjecthood. The bifurcation of the soul as it devours itself contrasts morning and night and, probably most importantly, the act of becoming, i.e., *devenir*. This performance represents space since it implies transfiguration and movement between two different points of origin – one being the starting point and the other being found on a spectrum composed of several steps in this process of transfiguration. The processes that Bouraoui tends to focus on are relegated to one of three

²²⁵ Bouraoui, *Mes mauvaises pensées*, 11. Emphasis in original.

categories (1) ethnicity and race, (2) gender and sexuality, and (3) becoming.²²⁶ As stated above, she declares that “[elle a] très peur de ce qu’[elle est] en train de devenir,” which announces a lack of a sense of control, which is something that she mentions explicitly as she may enter “un état où je ne contrôlerais plus rien.” The lack of (self)control, elucidated by way of a figurative nod to the very real event of the murder of Hélène Rytman in 1980 by French philosopher Louis Althusser, which is just one example of how Bouraoui views the inability of individuals to maintain a sense of reality.

In the case of Bouraoui, the act of murder should be taken figuratively and be applied to the notions of identity and subjectivity – two concepts that trouble Bouraoui and that are insinuated frequently during her session with Doctor C. Just as in *Garçon manqué*, Bouraoui continues to maintain the importance of being able to construct a sense of self through communicating a statement that adequately, in her standards, writes what it means to identify as someone that exists outside of a heteronormative paradigm. The act of writing is how Bouraoui constructs her subjecthood, stating that “[elle doit] rendre des comptes, [elle doit] écrire ce qu’[elle voit], c’est [sa] façon d’habiter l’existence, c’est ma façon de fermer ma peau ; pour effacer mes mauvaises pensées”²²⁷ In what could be a vital point of tension, there seems to be a disagreement between the act of writing and the act of erasing or editing of already assembled discourse. For instance, despite

²²⁶ I opt to put category two, i.e., “gender and sexuality” together to confront these terms in a similar way to Bouraoui. In her writing, she finds it difficult to define herself in terms of her gender identity and sexual orientation as she tends to conflate gender and sexuality, which in turn, makes it more difficult for her to place herself within any labeled category, which she seems to desire.

²²⁷ Bouraoui, *Mes mauvaises pensées*, 79.

Bouraoui wanting to get rid of her *mauvaises pensées*, she also uses them to conceive of a narrative of becoming and the inevitable fragmentation of the self.

Francophone studies scholar Adrienne Angelo argues that Bouraoui's writing "manages to appropriate and assert a specific gaze via the act of writing in the textual space of her fiction, thus creating a potential opening for women's writing to become simultaneously a vehicle of cultural subversion and a topos of personal identity."²²⁸ Bouraoui's use of space goes beyond the questioning of borders and nations but paves a way for an understanding of gender and how it is performed within the confines of certain spaces. For instance, in *Garçon manqué*, Bouraoui affirms, "[ê]tre un homme en Algérie c'est perdre la peur. Ici je suis terrifiée. Leurs yeux. Leurs mains. Leurs corps contre les grilles du lycée. Jamais je ne regarde. Je les sens. Ils attendent. Mes yeux. Mons corps. Ma voix. Des objets à prendre."²²⁹ Bouraoui's contention that being a man in Algeria, "c'est perdre la peur," signals the imbalance of power in patriarchal societies. For instance, when Bouraoui uses the singular "je," she is not just speaking only for or about herself, but for all women that exist within the confined borders of the country – this is further elucidated when she speaks of women being viewed as "des objets à prendre," which constructs a predator/prey binary that situates Algerian men as predators and Algerian women as the prey being constantly surveilled, waiting to be attacked. This relationship between men and women is reminiscent of the dichotomy of France and Algeria – a (post)colonial relationship predicated on a supposed superior entity (France) and an inferior one (Algeria). After lamenting about why these

²²⁸ Cybelle H. McFadden and Sandrine F. Teixidor, *Francophone Women: Between Visibility and Invisibility*, *Francophone Cultures and Literatures*, v. 56 (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 77.

²²⁹ Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, 37-8.

men objectify women, which includes supposed boredom according to Bouraoui, she goes on to say:

Ils inventent un départ. Ils inventent une arrivée. Ils feront mieux que les autres. Ils sauront. *Le rêve français*. Leur regard est une arme. Leur main est une braise. Leur désir est un conflit. Ils se blessent, seuls. Ils sont fragiles. Je les aime pour ça. Ils ne savent pas. Moi je sais la France. Moi je sais le mépris. Moi je sais la guerre sans fin, Amine. En France tu seras un étranger.²³⁰

This invention of a *départ* takes place “devant la mer,” which is a recurring space for the writer as she exists between Algeria and France.²³¹

In socio-anthropologic fashion, Bouraoui’s study of Algerian men that wait on the beach near the Mediterranean is a fascinating interaction with space because these men are essentially looking across the sea to France to seek what they believe would be better lives, with more opportunities and possible futures. Bouraoui, despite being half French, denounces the myth of “le rêve français” as she addresses her friend Amine because she knows all too well that upon arrival in France, they will be classified as *étranger*. Unlike these men that Bouraoui mentions, she is a dual-national and possesses the ability to move between and across the Mediterranean from Algeria to France and vice-versa. However, due to her inability to reconcile this double identity, she constructs a “corps français,” which is distinctly different from her “corps algérien” in that the latter is “[son] premier corps amoureux” and the former construction of a distinct personality that

²³⁰ Ibid., 38. Emphasis is mine. I highlight the use of “le rêve français” to note the use as a parallel to the “American Dream,” which was coined in 1931 to speak to the possibility for upward mobility and prosperity despite one’s origins or background in, allegedly, just societies such as in the United States.

²³¹ Ibid., 38.

is “comme un vertige dans [sa] tête.”²³² The splitting of her Franco-Algerian identity into two distinct, separate embodiments of the self further fragments Bouraoui as she continues to undergo psychotherapy.

Moreover, and further exhibiting the splitting or fragmenting of the self, Bouraoui imagines that her mind and body are separating from one another.

...je crois perdre mon corps, ou plutôt je crois détacher mon corps de mon cerveau, et je sais que c'est la peur qui génère tout, j'ai en fait peur de croire que mon corps va se détacher de mon cerveau, qu'il va faire sa vie sans moi, et une vie forcément dangereuse²³³

As the protagonist details this sensation, it evokes the philosophical debate of the “mind-body problem,” which is reminiscent of the Cartesian dualism model that the mind and the body, i.e., the mental and the physical, are distinct and separate.²³⁴ Philosopher Jonathan Westphal references Descartes in *The Mind-Body Problem* to note that “[o]ur mind-body problem is not just a difficulty about how the mind and body are related and how they affect one another. It is also a difficulty about how they *can* be related and how they *can* affect one another.”²³⁵ The use of “can” expresses the potentiality of the occurrence of such a phenomenon. Bouraoui’s reference to her double identity is directly related to this notion of a mind-body problem, which Mohamed Boudjadja pushes forward, asserting that “ses personnages errent en quête de repères. La perte de soi, la

²³² Bouraoui, *Mes mauvaises pensées*, 196.

²³³ Ibid., 206.

²³⁴ See Joao Carlos Neves de Souza Nunes Dias, “A medida do corpo na filosofia cartesiana,” *Synesis* 10, no. 1 (2018): 111–23.

²³⁵ Jonathan Westphal, *The Mind-Body Problem* (Cambridge, United States: MIT Press, 2016), 12. Emphasis in original.

double vie, le double parcours, la double culture rendent compte non seulement d'un mal être identitaire mais également d'un déracinement."²³⁶

The concept of “double” is prevalent in Bouraoui’s work. Be it regarding race, gender, sexuality, language, masculinity or any other marker of identity and subjectivity, the writer works heavily within a dichotomous framework to fragment her identity productively – forming an assemblage composed of these fragments. Assemblage or *agencement* as a posthumanist theory is inherently fluid and queer as it seeks to understand human behavior as a collective entity that is structured around complex socio-cultural interplay. On the topic of queer time, Jasbir Puar argues:

Queerness as an assemblage moves away from excavation work, deprivileges a binary opposition between queer and not-queer subjects, and, instead of retaining queerness exclusively as dissenting, resistant, and alternative (all of which queerness importantly is and does), it underscores contingency and complicity with dominant formations.²³⁷

Bouraoui’s writing serves as a queer assemblage, situated in queer time as she attempts to navigate or “effacer [ses] mauvaises pensées” to deconstruct her identity through writing, which operates as her “façon d’habiter l’existence.”²³⁸ Bouraoui’s contention that writing functions as her way of existing or being a subject in space while simultaneously separating herself from her *mauvaises pensées* further fragments her unveiling a space beyond double.

²³⁶ Mohamed Boudjadja, “Autofiction et double culture chez Nina Bouraoui,” *Limba Si Literature – Repère Identitaire in Context European*, no. 19 (2016): 187–95.

²³⁷ Jasbir K. Puar, “Queer Times, Queer Assemblages,” *Social Text* 23, no. 3–4 (2005): 121–22, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-23-3-4_84-85-121.

²³⁸ Bouraoui, *Mes mauvaises pensées*, 79. Queer time, here, is in reference to the lack of a stable temporality that Nina experiences in the novel.

The use of an assemblage model allows for a productive encounter with the various subjectivities that are imprinted onto queer Arab and Maghrebi subjects as they (de)construct their identities. In the case of Bouraoui, she does not use the term assemblage, nor does she navigate concepts intentionally between binaries in the two novels studied in this chapter, but she does construct a fluid notion of space that does flow into other subjectivities such as race, gender, sexuality, and language. For instance, in *Garçon manqué*, Bouraoui bridges these different subjectivities to rationalize the complex relationship she has with her native homelands of Algeria and France, which take up the level of language. In the following citation, Bouraoui gestures toward the use of language as a tool of identity construction.²³⁹

Je parle en français. Uniquement. Je rêve en français. Uniquement. J'écrirai en français. Uniquement. La langue arabe est un son, un chant, une voix. Que je retiens. Que je sens. Mais que je ne sais pas. La langue arabe est une émotion. C'est Faïrouz et Abdel Wahab. C'est cet autre que j'abrite. C'est ma petite blessure. L'Algérie n'est pas dans ma langue. Elle est dans mon corps. L'Algérie n'est pas dans mes mots. Elle est à l'intérieur de moi. L'Algérie n'est pas dans ce qui sort. Elle est dans ce qui dévore. Elle est physique. Dans ce que je ne contrôle pas. Dans mes exigences. Dans ma volonté. Dans ma force. L'Algérie est dans mon désir fou d'être aimée.²⁴⁰

Bouraoui's use of "uniquement" after the first three sentences stresses the French language as the foundation of her identity – it is her *only* method of expression and experiencing the physical and metaphysical world. Considering she only speaks in French, dreams in French, and emphasizing further, in the future tense "écrirai en français," which decenters her Arab identity from the Arabic language. Furthermore, Bouraoui positions the Arabic language as "une émotion," which she does

²³⁹ For more on language as a tool of identity construction see

David Evans, *Language, Identity and Symbolic Culture* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350023031>.

²⁴⁰ Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, 167.

by linking the language to two popular singers – legendary Lebanese singer Fairouz and prominent 20th-century Egyptian composer, singer, and writer Mohammed Abdel Wahab.²⁴¹ For Bouraoui, her Algerian identity is not predicated on her mastery or her usage of the Arabic language, rather, it is something that exists within her, in her *corps*. As a writer of French expression, Bouraoui positions herself strategically to be a part of a canon of literature that is more readily accessible on both sides of the Mediterranean, where French is a *lingua franca* in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Perhaps this is a forced decision considering her admitted inability to communicate effectively in Arabic, unlike other writers studied in this dissertation.

4.5 Queer Futures: Subjective Temporalities

Trabelsi's reliance on linear constructions of time, i.e., past–present–future differs from Bouraoui, who works outside of this framework, effectively *queering* time as she rejects heteronormative notions of ontology and temporality. In Trabelsi's *Une vie à trois*, time is a heteronormative marker that symbolizes Adam, the novel's central protagonists' need to get married and take over his family's business. In *Garçon manqué*, Bouraoui uses time to figuratively transition between male and female subjects as she attempts to understand her identity as a lesbian during her adolescence. Additionally, in *Mes mauvaises pensées*, Bouraoui's use of temporality is fragmented as she writes a stream-of-consciousness novel, which I consider to be an intimate

²⁴¹ Interestingly, Bouraoui does not reference famous Algerians in this passage, which is yet another marker of her lack of contact with Algerian popular culture, but this could also be due to the large consumption of Levantine and Egyptian media in the Arab World. This fact is not uncommon, considering the prevalence of Levantine and Egyptian popular culture in the Arab World.

journal to understand her life better. The temporal shift between *Garçon manqué* and *Mes mauvaises pensées* is that in the former she is still an adolescent and living in Algeria; in the latter, she is an adult living in Paris. *Mes mauvaises pensées* does more with the question of sexuality rather than gender as the protagonist has developed an understanding of the difference between gender and sexuality, which was not evident in *Garçon manqué*.

French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's understanding of temporality – which converses heavily with Heidegger and Hegel – seeks to uncover a link between temporality and subjectivity if one considers that:

[l]e passé *n'est* donc pas passé, ni le futur. Il n'existe que lorsqu'une subjectivité vient briser la plénitude de l'être en soi, y dessiner une perspective, y introduire le non-être. Un passé et un avenir jaillissent quand je m'entends vers eux. Je ne suis pas pour moi-même à l'heure qu'il est, je suis aussi bien à la matinée de ce jour ou à la nuit qui va venir, et mon présent, c'est, si l'on veut, cet instant, mais c'est aussi bien ce jour, cette année, ma vie tout entière.²⁴²

Merleau-Ponty's evocation of temporality marks the fluid construction of subjects as they encounter time. For instance, the act of writing an autobiography and/or work of autofiction relies upon communication with the past to construct the text in the present with a future in mind that constructs a work or works that bridge these distinct temporalities. Merleau-Ponty's understanding of temporality also elucidates questions of being and becoming as processes that are continuously ongoing. The meeting of ontology and temporality function almost inextricably due to their

²⁴² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 481.

Emphasis in original.

reliance upon one another and is often situated in an understanding of what is a fixed past and an open future.²⁴³

The notions of a fixed past and an open future are nuanced as they meet non-normative, queer subjects. In the case of the protagonist in *Garçon manqué*, contact with the past and the future are completely outside of “normative” temporal bounds. For instance, Bouraoui’s use of the simple future tense throughout the narrative creates a stagnant future that is bound to the present. The protagonist’s act of becoming is always predicated on the act of a future becoming that *will*, rather than being situated in the present. For example, Bouraoui details what could be considered a trans narrative of becoming; Bouraoui is precise in detail about how and in what manner she *will* become an Algerian man but returns to the fact that she *is* a woman.

Je deviendrai un homme avec les hommes. Je deviendrai un corps sans nom. Je deviendrai une voix sans visage. Je deviendrai une partie. Je deviendrai un élément. Je deviendrai une ombre serrée. Je deviendrai un fragment. J’existe trop. Je suis une femme. Je reste à l’extérieur de la forêt.²⁴⁴

This interweaving of temporal boundaries contributes to the narrative flow of Bouraoui’s texts, which read like fluid thoughts that are imprinted onto pages. In the citation above, Bouraoui seems to plan out her future in an inflexible manner, but as one approaches the end of the passage, she returns to the present. What is fascinating is the text in which she returns to the present – “j’existe trop,” which positions her as critical of both her present and future selves. Her status as *femme* instead of *homme* is heavily demarcated even further in *Mes mauvaises pensées*.

²⁴³ See for instance Ross P. Cameron, *The Moving Spotlight: An Essay on Time and Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²⁴⁴ Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué*, 40.

Written from the perspective of a different time in Bouraoui's life, as an adult, *Mes mauvaises pensées* poses different ontological questions than *Garçon manqué*. Where the latter details the act of becoming, i.e., the future, the former seeks to unravel the past to reconstruct the present and future – engaging fluidly with time and space. From the onset of the novel, when Bouraoui encounters Doctor C., she visits the psychotherapist to uncover why she has these specific thoughts and, in a way, to rid herself of previous experiences that she feels inhibit her ability to inhabit her body. Bouraoui's encounter with Doctor C. is only made possible through their connection through "M." – the pseudonym that Bouraoui uses for someone whom she no longer speaks to but was recommended to visit this psychotherapist by them. Telling this to Doctor C. during their first session, Bouraoui admits:

je ne la vois plus et c'est mieux ainsi, j'aurais eu l'impression de prendre sa place, j'aurais eu l'impression de lui devoir une histoire, j'aurais eu l'impression d'être son messenger, elle était si amoureuse de vous. Je ne suis pas venue pour voler son passé ni pour le remonter, je ne suis pas venue pour vérifier votre visage, votre voix, vos mains, je n'ai jamais désiré M. et je n'ai jamais été jalouse de vous.²⁴⁵

It is unclear whether M. is still a patient of Doctor C., but there exists a longing between the protagonist and Doctor C., a connection clearly established through M.'s discourse. The citation begins in the present before swiftly transitioning into the past conditional, which establishes another temporal fragment that cleaves a space for possibility – the principal function of the conditional tense. Additionally, Bouraoui claims she is not present "pour voler son passé," which is about M.'s relationship with Doctor C. Again, Bouraoui brings us back to the notion of disembodiment – this time engaging with the past as she struggles to separate herself from others as they encounter one another.

²⁴⁵ Bouraoui, *Mes mauvaises pensées*, 11.

To think of temporality in Trabelsi's *Une vie à trois*, the author uses temporality on a socio-cultural level to dictate how Adam, the main protagonist, must adhere to heteronormative conventions such as getting married to a woman, starting a family, and taking over his family's business. After returning home from living in France for almost a decade, and during a discussion with his father, the two begin to speak about religion. Adam's father laments that "[a]vant que tu naisses, tout était déjà écrit. Dieu décide de tout dans notre vie."²⁴⁶ Entrenched in predeterminism, Adam's father's understanding of temporality is normative, unlike Adam's, who tells his father that he does not wish to get married but is met with a rebuttal from his father who declares that "[t]out le monde finit par se marier un jour."²⁴⁷ At the age of 35, it has become apparent and almost obligatory, culturally speaking, that Adam gets married, which eventually does happen once he is set up with Rim, a young Moroccan girl that is almost half his age.

4.6. Conclusion

The notion of queer time relies upon the fundamental belief that queer uses of time and space work against normative understandings of sexuality, i.e., presumed heterosexuality, reproduction, and the heteronormative view of nuclear families being composed of one male and one female who have reproductive capabilities. The works investigated in this chapter are situated at the beginning of the 21st-century, which is a period that has allowed for novels of revolt and non-normativity, such as these three novels, to exist, albeit Bouraoui's much larger literary popularity and presence both in the Maghreb and in France. More importantly, this chapter seeks to show a unique intervention of a temporality that represents and produces distinct "queer futures" that differ from their male contemporaries.

²⁴⁶ Trabelsi, *Une vie à trois*, 33.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

Additionally, the notion of temporality being at the heart of this chapter is no coincidence considering each novel operates under different temporal bounds. As discussed in the sections above, several concepts find themselves deconstructed by this interaction with temporalities, such as female masculinity, subjectivity, temporality, and space, which make up the various ways that both Bouraoui and Trabelsi use to understand and connect with larger socio-cultural norms that would otherwise reject them if they did not write themselves into such narratives. Considering that these two female authors have constructed novels based on non-normative sexualities, relationships, and sexual encounters, it uniquely positions them within a canon that is mostly populated by gay, male writers whose works further subordinate non-male subjects, which is something Bouraoui and Trabelsi work against through their unique perspectives.

5.0 Chapter 4: *Le retour au bled*: Alterity and Performative Subjectivities

En arrivant tôt le matin à Tanger, Mohamed eut honte de découvrir la mer si tard dans sa vie. Elle était d'un bleu limpide, calme, recevant les premiers rayons du soleil qui en faisaient un miroir vivant [...] La mer, il n'en avait même pas entendu parler. Il savait qu'Agadir était au bord de la mer mais il n'y avait jamais été. Il eut le temps d'aller marcher sur le sable et même de goûter l'eau de mer. Il avait vingt ans et n'avait jamais touché du doigt la mer. Il se comportait comme un enfant, jouait avec le sable, barbotait dans l'eau, s'en mettait dans les cheveux, sur le visage. C'était une belle journée.

–Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Au pays*

5.1 Introduction

Through interrelating Moroccan novelists Tahar Ben Jelloun and Hicham Tahir, this chapter underscores how sexuality and subjectivity are (re)interpreted and (re)configured through narratives of return – either permanently or temporarily to navigate the contentious relationship between and amongst cultures. This chapter discusses the Moroccan subject's understanding of themselves and their status as “citizens” once they have left their homeland for another country – their “adopted” homelands.²⁴⁸ The distinction between one's “homeland” and “adopted homeland” leads to the question: what is at stake when one inhabits multiple places at the same time, i.e., their homeland and adopted homeland? Can subjects exist between multiple spaces as citizens beyond socio-juridical contexts? I argue that this dichotomy *queers* the notion of migration as it produces new subjectivities since queer subjects must bridge two or more cultures while navigating differing and sometimes conflicting social norms and expectations.

²⁴⁸ Adopted homeland is used here to refer to the host country. In the case of these texts, Mohamed's host country is France and Mouad's is Canada.

Tahar Ben Jelloun is known for several award-winning texts; this chapter discusses one of his more recent texts, *Au pays*, a novel about repatriation, family, and self-discovery.²⁴⁹ *Au pays* details the life of a man named Mohamed who is in his early sixties, nearing retirement, and has committed himself to the idea of returning to his unnamed home village in Morocco situated near Agadir – an example of the *retour* that I discuss in this chapter. I treat Ben Jelloun’s novel in tandem with another Moroccan novelist, Hicham Tahir, whose novel *Les ruelles des pieds nus* also works through the notion of *retour* that follows the journey of Mouad, who, after eight years, goes back to his hometown of Kenitra for the first time since emigrating to Canada. In this chapter, I use the notion of performative subjectivity to (1) analyze these two novels of (re)patriation, (2) examine the discourse on migration articulated in the two texts, (3) analyze how these novels serve as epistemological tools to inform notions of alterity and subjectivity and (4) further establish a conceptualization of queer as related to sexuality, but not necessarily same-sex or non-normative sexual practices. As stated in the second chapter, to think of queerness is to think of disorientation – especially at sites of identity and subjectivity that continue to deconstruct and reconstruct themselves. I contend that my open-ended use of the term “queer” allows for the discussion of texts like *Au pays* and *Les ruelles des pieds nus* because the former represents a text that is not conventionally queer, i.e., not a “gay” text while the latter is. The pairing of two texts that are seemingly opposites beyond their discussions of *retour* provides a productive space to discuss national cultures and how transgressive citizens impact rhetoric both from inside and outside of the nation.

²⁴⁹ The French protectorate of Morocco was the period of colonial rule that spanned from 1912 to 1956. This protectorate is sometimes referred to as “French Morocco.”

Au pays and *Les ruelles des pieds nus* approach the act of return through a cross-cultural exchange. In Ben Jelloun's text, the protagonist seeks to permanently return to his home country in search of a stable, fixed identity. However, Tahir's protagonist returns only temporarily to reconnect with and ultimately discover an alternate vision of the Morocco that he left before moving to Canada, which fragments not only his sense of self, but the national rhetoric of the country as perceived by its inhabitants. The alternate vision that he uncovers or discovers is what *queers* the protagonist as his identity is fragmented, and he begins to question what it means to be Moroccan and what it means to be a non-heterosexual subject – both in Canada and in Morocco.

My decision to pair *Les ruelles des pieds nus* with *Au pays* stems from the fact that these two novels deal with two different generations and conflicting visions of Moroccan society. Ben Jelloun speaks to the wave of immigration from Morocco post-independence, a period markedly different from Tahir's novel, which deals with a population vastly more receptive to non-normative discourse. Moreover, Tahir is focused on the younger generation after the turn of the millennium that seeks to move beyond the French/Moroccan divide that stems from colonial oppression, although still operating under the confines of Francophone Canada, i.e., Quebec. Tahir's central protagonist, Mouad, is a young Moroccan man who returns to his hometown of Kenitra after eight years. Tahir's decision to situate the novel in Quebec is emblematic of the decision to move outside of the France/Morocco binary, but still being situated in a Francophone milieu. Mouad left Kenitra due to his preoccupation with his future, which was "la raison qui m'avait fait quitter ma terre natale."²⁵⁰ Due to Mouad's return, he must reckon with the feeling that his homeland no longer feels like home, which forces him to create a bridge between his life in Quebec and his former life

²⁵⁰ Hicham Tahir, *Les ruelles des pieds nus* (Paris-Rabat: Casa Express, 2015), 7-8.

in Morocco. Mouad's return forces him to rediscover himself and his surroundings to attempt to form his identity as a Moroccan. Upon leaving to go back to Montreal, he speaks rather melancholically of the country:

Je quittais mon pays, de nouveau. Ce Maroc qui m'a bercé, le dialecte que je parlais et les coutumes qui m'avaient habité. Je quittais la langue du Coran pour celles de Molière et Shakespeare.²⁵¹

Through the lens of Mouad's newfound reinterpretation of his own homosexuality as well as national culture and practices, this chapter proposes a nuanced study of the role of immigrants in constructing national cultures, histories, and epistemologies. Tahir's *Les ruelles des pieds nus* and Ben Jelloun's *Au pays* can both be read as *roman-confession*, which is similar to my reading of *Mes mauvaises pensées* in the third chapter.²⁵² However, I do not apply the term *roman-confession* to these two texts as they do not verbalize a need to confess anything. Instead, "confession," here, informs individuals outside and within the Maghreb to constitute transnational discourses to construct national narratives. The idea of "confessing" non-normative sexualit(ies), modes of being, or thoughts can impact the social position concerning their status as a citizen, which I discuss in this chapter.

²⁵¹ Tahir, *Les ruelles des pieds nus*, 199.

²⁵² The genre and act of "the confession" is critical to understanding these two texts because the perspectives given by the protagonists are often done as internal dialogues that are not shared with others around them. Essentially, the novels are written in a style similar to a journal as they go on their respective journeys. I compare the two to Bouraoui's texts as she also writes in a similar fashion. To further my reading of confession as an epistemological tool, I unpack how these two novels function as confessions to (1) the self and (2) national culture and practices.

This chapter is organized into sections that relay the connectedness of the return to performative subjectivities, identity, and place in the Maghreb. This chapter investigates the relationship between citizenship and belonging as Mohamed, the central protagonist of *Au pays* approaches retirement. I draw upon Butler's notion of performativity to discuss the possibility for the transition from "adopted homeland" to "homeland." I then interrogate the notion of return as Mouad, the protagonist of *Les ruelles des pieds nus*, as he makes his way back to Morocco and uncovers elements of his identity and subjectivity. The following section approaches the question of the nation, loosely using the theoretical framework of Benedict Anderson and Hakim Abderrezak to consider think of how narrative constructions of the nation can alter citizens' and residents' senses of self. From here, I discuss how identities can be reconfigured as one conceives of transgressive understandings of nations. Before concluding, I enter in the debate on space and place, particularly the public vs. private space debate within the Maghreb. Religion as a marker of identity is used completely differently in both novels discussed in this chapter – one being heavily influenced by religion and the other engaging in religion only as a cultural marker.

5.2 Navigating Belonging and Non-Belonging in *Au Pays*

Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Au pays* navigates the complicated return of a Moroccan man who is essentially paralyzed by a sense of non-belonging in a place that he once considered his home, which signals his position as an outsider despite his nationality and physical location. Mohamed, a soon-to-be-retired factory worker from Morocco, settled in France to provide a better life for himself and his family. Despite Mohamed's decision to migrate to France, he has no interest in ever becoming French. He asks the question: "pourquoi demander la nationalité?," which leads

him to discuss his current stance on obtaining French nationality.²⁵³ To detail further his lack of interest in obtaining a second nationality, Mohamed adds, “je suis bien avec mon passeport vert, avec ma carte de séjour de dix ans, pas besoin d’un passeport d’une autre couleur.”²⁵⁴ Mohamed’s understanding of citizenship as the possession of a specific passport is rooted in belonging being entrenched completely in jurisprudence – a legal understanding of belonging. The system of dichotomy that contrasts Morocco’s green passport and France’s burgundy passport is a way for Mohamed to express his disdain for the prospect of becoming French.²⁵⁵ Mohamed places himself in a liminal space where he is Moroccan based on his passport, however, as a resident of France for several decades, he still maintains a certain level of *francité*. As Moha Ennaji points out:

Muslim immigrants are generally united by a sense of belonging to a nation and ardently claim their original identity. For example, Moroccan men and women, even those who are naturalized (that is, in possession of a passport of the host country), feel that they are Moroccan, Arab, or Amazigh, and Muslim.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Au pays* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 62. In an earlier passage, Mohamed leans on the equal decision of his colleagues, who also did not obtain French nationality. “Ni Brahim que Dieu ait son âme en sa miséricorde, ni Lahcen, ni Hamdouch, ni Larej, pas même Ahmed qui se faisait appeler Tony et bien d’autres, aucun de nous n’a demandé la nationalité, ça on le laisse aux jeunes” (50-1).

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁵⁵ All European Union member states issue burgundy passports except for Croatia; therefore, the argument for Mohamed avoiding being naturalized as French is also a rejection of European identity.

²⁵⁶ Moha Ennaji, ed., *The Maghreb-Europe Paradigm: Migration, Gender and Cultural Dialogue* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), 30.

Mohamed's constant refusal to cleave a space for himself within France is what *queers* him – essentially classifying himself as a transgressive subject that rejects the normative, assimilationist tactics presented to him. Ennaji's focus on Muslim immigrants, in particular Moroccan ones like Mohamed, explains why Mohamed exiles himself as he moves to make a better life for his family while rejecting his new country of residence and its practices. The protagonist's decision to exile himself stems from his perception of sexual deviance and non-normative thoughts and practices in France that go against his Muslim values. As Mohamed rests on the margins of a shared Franco-Moroccan identity, he ultimately does not fit within either as he begins to reckon with his own criticisms of France and Morocco. Instead of it being Mohamed's sexuality, as he is presumably heterosexual, that queers him, it is his insistence on not being typified that classifies him as a queer subject. His resistance to stringent classifications, social rules, and normative national rhetoric put him on the margins of society – both in France and in Morocco.

From the beginning of the novel, Mohamed expresses that he does not want to retire, which would force him into unfamiliar territory, considering all that he has done while in France is work and provide for his family. Despite his disdain for many things in France, notably the lack of morality that conflicts with his Muslim identity, he has come to accept his role at his job, which has allowed for him to not focus so much on the world around him. The prospect of retirement is disorienting for Mohamed who does not know what he will do with his life during this transitional phase even as he plans to return home and eventually does. It is so disorienting that he begins to hear voices upon his return to Morocco. The narrator says: “[I]a voix était insistante, elle lui parlait à présent en français. Une langue qu’il avait fini par comprendre mais qu’il n’utilisait pas. C’était seulement à cause de ses enfants qu’il en connaissait quelques mots, car ils ne s’adressaient à lui

qu'en français, ce qui le rendait bien malheureux."²⁵⁷ It is odd that the voice addressing Mohamed speaks in French, considering that he, himself, admits to not having a solid grasp on the language despite spending the past four decades in the country and having children who are native French speakers. The fact that his children who were born and raised in France, speak the language as their first is a point of contention for Mohamed, who begrudges his children's use of French and their lack of Arabic or Berber use, which is ironic because the children, like Mohamed, alienate themselves from a part of their identity as they have completely assimilated into French culture – even taking French names (as I will discuss later). This linguistic link to my use of queerness is important considering that Mohamed has not and does not care to learn French, at least at a level that is highly proficient.

I contend that this phantasmic voice is in response to the fragmentation of his subjectivities as parts of him are put in flux. As the father of adult children, Mohamed no longer maintains the dominant role in their lives. Moreover, as he approaches his retirement and leaves a job where he feels as though he has a sense of community, he risks losing a vital part of his daily routine, which provides him comfort and a stable identity. At the novel's beginning, the reader may be aware that Mohamed has only a few more months to work before he is forced to retire. After a short section describing Mohamed's job and why he was an "ouvrier modèle," the narrator describes retirement: "La retraite ! Non, pas pour lui et surtout pas maintenant ! C'était quoi cette histoire ? Qui l'avait inventée ? C'était comme si on lui signifiait qu'il était malade et qu'il ne pouvait plus être rentable pour la société."²⁵⁸ The voice that Mohamed hears places him into a trance-like state that forces

²⁵⁷ Ben Jelloun, *Au pays*, 23.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

him to confront his supposed faults. Firstly, there is the issue that his children cannot speak Arabic or Berber. Secondly, Mohamed must come to terms with his retirement, which, for him, signals a lack of utility – the absence of a need for him and his personhood. Furthermore, he pathologizes retirement as if it were a condition one suffers from rather than a stage in one’s life. In a later section it is stated that “Mohamed repensait à la retraite et ne se sentait pas bien. Quand la salive manquait, il buvait plusieurs verres d’eau. Ce n’était pas le diabète qui attaquait son corps mais la retraite proche, l’idée de la retraite.”²⁵⁹ The pathologizing of retirement further complicates his relationship with time and identity. Diabetes being the disease that retirement is compared to functions logically within the framework of retirement being linked to a lack of need or utility. Although diabetes is complex, it refers to a group of diseases associated with regulation. For Mohamed, the absence of work signals his inability to regulate his life, i.e., his body, ultimately leading to his body failing him. The prospective “failure of the body” indicates Mohamed’s own internal sense of failure and lack of purpose. The shift from the internalized lack of purpose that Mohamed feels to the physical, presented through his imminent death, represents a crisis for Mohamed.

The reconstruction of the “need” for Mohamed as he seeks to regain a sense of purpose and subjecthood relies upon his return to Morocco. What I consider queer about Mohamed’s movement is that from the beginning of the novel, his movements and reasoning behind them appear to be quite typical as many migrants move for economic, social, and/or political reasons. However, Mohamed, who presents his reason for migrating through the prism of economic gain, has qualms with the Moroccan government. Mohamed decides to move back to Morocco, after almost four decades in France, to reinvent himself as he reaches retirement age. In many ways,

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 71.

Mohamed's place of work offers him an outlet to connect with others with a similar background – *ouvrier* and immigrant. The people Mohamed works with come from North Africa and West Africa, allowing him to have a shared community of religious and linguistic similarities. He has been able to live outside of Morocco for so long because he has this group of individuals, a community, to provide him with the capacity to be “at home” while being far from home. Mohamed's community is what also queers him as he performs both his Moroccan identity but also his identity as a worker, in France, that has immigrated to provide for his family.

5.3 Performing Subjectivities

Performativity or the act of performing is marked by ontological instability, which I connect to the concept of fragmentation that I have applied throughout this dissertation. Ontological instability and “queerness” relay the idea that subjects are constantly performing or in the process of becoming as they construct subjectivities. As a concept, performativity is profoundly entrenched in Butler's understanding of performativity: “[g]ender proves to be performance,” Butler explains, “that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed.”²⁶⁰ Drawing from Butler, I propose the question: can one's adopted homeland become one's homeland without the denotation of “adopted,” which supposes a lack of origin or marginalization? The production of alterity found both in *Au pays* and *Les ruelles des pieds nus* forces their protagonists to perform as political actors, therefore, performing subjectivities – as male subjects who are subject to heteronormative roles – to situate themselves as they return home and exist in two or

²⁶⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 25.

more spaces at once – being both Moroccan and *résident* or a naturalized citizen in *Les ruelles des pieds nus*. One's citizenship status is *queered* even if a subject never seeks to undergo the naturalization process – a procedure that risks being perceived as transgressive, further subordinating them.²⁶¹ If one does undergo the naturalization process, there is no guarantee that they will be considered full citizens even if they have the proper documents.²⁶² Additionally, the status as *résident* is temporary – this status can be changed, renounced, lost, or stripped. I read the citizen/resident dichotomy as a method of signaling a potentiality for queerness as one does not exist only within these two categories and that these subjectivities are formed beyond a socio-judicial context that relies on two poles rather than being expansive and in flux.

To further discuss the notion of performative subjectivities, I turn to an interview that Tahar Ben Jelloun took part in with the literary magazine, *BANIPAL*. In the interview, Ben Jelloun is asked a series of questions – notably about his relationship with the French language. French is

²⁶¹ The *queering* of citizenship in this example is in reference to the fragmenting of identities. For example, despite Mohamed's refusal to become a naturalized French citizen, he does maintain a level of integration within the nation.

²⁶² The distinction between full citizen and citizen refers to the level of integration a subject possesses within a nation. To build on this further, the appellation of second-class citizen (*citoyen de seconde zone*) denotes a person who maintains an inferior role both socially and politically in comparison to the dominant societal majority.

Ben Jelloun's second language but his primary language in terms of literary expression.²⁶³ The interviewer, Georgia de Chamberet, asks him if he "feels like a writer in exile," to which he quickly retorts that he is not in exile in the sense that he cannot freely move between Morocco and France but that he is in exile "in terms of language." To refer to juridical notions of identity, Ben Jelloun notes, "[t]he passport we use for traveling or the passport of the country of our birth gives an administrative identity. In my case language defines my identity as a writer. What does it mean, to be a French writer? It is important to always specify *écrivain d'expression française*."²⁶⁴ Ben Jelloun's gesturing toward passports, and their deliverance of an administrative identity is reminiscent of Mohamed in *Au pays*, who, despite living in France for several decades at the time the narrative takes place, has taken the position to not apply for French nationalization. He does so not because he is unable to, but because, to him, this would be a betrayal of his Moroccan identity. Mohamed's attempt to maintain a singular Moroccan identity is unsuccessful considering that those around him maintain hyphenated, Franco-Moroccan identities, such as his children and their partners. These hyphenated identities transpose onto Mohamed who, upon returning to Morocco, finds himself at a point of disorientation and disembodiment.

Tahir's *Les ruelles des pieds nus* takes a different approach to the question of subjectivity that could be loosely connected to Ben Jelloun's novel but is also situated in a completely different context, temporally and socially. For instance, Mouad, the central protagonist of Tahir's novel, is not interested in returning to Morocco forever as he has permanently settled in Canada and has

²⁶³ Georgia de Chamberet, "Tahar Ben Jelloun: I am Exiled in Terms of Language," 2009, <https://bookblast.com/blog/interview-tahar-ben-jelloun-i-am-exiled-in-terms-of-language-banipal-magazine-2009/>.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

just become a Canadian citizen. For him, Canada is a place that has allowed him to obtain a higher degree of social mobility than Morocco. Furthermore, it is Mouad's absence of over eight years that has evoked in him a specific curiosity as the protagonist rediscovers his hometown of Kenitra in northwestern Morocco. Mouad's identity as a Moroccan subject is reformed as he encounters the ins and outs of Kenitra, which he discovers is more transgressive than he previously thought – not that non-normative practices did not occur before he had left, but rather, he had not really taken note of them.

Tahir's novel begins with the first chapter, entitled “[l]e retour du fils prodigue,” which announces that “[l]a rumeur du retour de l'enfant prodigue circulait déjà dans le quartier. C'était avec peu d'*a priori* que je me rendais chez moi. C'était quand même les ruelles dans lesquelles j'avais grandi. Je connaissais tout le monde. Ou presque. J'étais au courant de tout, malgré la distance.”²⁶⁵ Mouad, unlike those living in his old neighborhood, has left, and not just a short distance away. This movement and his completion of higher education have allowed him to receive the appellation of “fils prodigue,” which immediately distinguishes him from the others in his vicinity – essentially constructing a binary of those who have left versus those who have stayed behind.

As a subject that has returned home, this time as a Moroccan Canadian man, Mouad is put into a strange position where he must reacquaint himself with his origins and, in more ways than one, (re)construct his subjecthood. Upon arriving home, Mouad goes to his former childhood bedroom, which to his surprise, has stayed pretty much the same:

Je lui ai fait un sourire, j'ai pris la grosse valise et monté les marches, jusqu'au deuxième étage où se trouvait ma chambre. Celle où j'ai grandi. Celle où j'ai tout connu. Celle qui connaissait tous mes secrets. Les plus intimes. Cette chambre qui avait embrassé mon

²⁶⁵ Tahir, *Les ruelles des pieds nus*, 7. Emphasis in original.

corps. Elle n'avait pas pris une ride. Même mon lit était comme je l'avais laissé, à part la couette et le drap. Tout était pareil. Mon bureau, ma table de chevet avec trois de mes photos. L'une où j'étais encore enfant, à quelques mois. La seconde, celle de ma rentrée scolaire pour le baccalauréat. Et la troisième, de moi, au Canada. Une photo que je leur avais envoyée lors de ma quatrième année là-bas. C'était beau. Être chez soi. Enfin. J'étais enfant de nouveau. J'étais heureux. J'étais enfant. Puis je me suis allongé. Endormi sur le coup.²⁶⁶

Mouad oscillates here between adult and child. His insistence on being an *enfant* operates as a method for him to avoid reverse culture shock, a term that describes individuals who go back to their home country after an extended period of time and find that it is not as they remember.²⁶⁷ Initially, Mouad's return is relatively smooth as things have not changed much aside from the noticeable development of the region and the increased wealth he remarks. His engagement with his childhood is essential because it positions him as a native subject or informant – someone who has not necessarily spent the last eight years living abroad, which Mouad has just done.

Mouad's melancholic reinterpretation of his childhood bedroom mimics his contact and relationship with Morocco upon returning. His room, which he personifies when he says that he

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 25.

²⁶⁷ Several sociological studies have been conducted to show the effects of a phenomenon referred to as “reverse culture shock,” which is a term that usually refers to the experience of dis-orientation after re-entry into one's home nation after studying abroad, but this phenomenon can be extended to also refer to individuals who have spent extended periods outside of their home country for a variety of reasons. See Craig Storti, *The Art of Coming Home* (Yarmouth: Intercultural Press, 2001); Miriam Alkubaidi and Nesreen Alzhrani, “‘We Are Back’: Reverse Culture Shock Among Saudi Scholars After Doctoral Study Abroad,” *SAGE Open* 10, no. 4 (2020): 215824402097055-, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020970555>.

“connaissait tous [ses] secrets,” evokes a public vs. private division as seen in Rachid O.’s *Ce qui reste* in chapter one. The room knowing his secrets constructs a space where Mouad expresses himself, transgressively due to the confines of the space that blocks off the outside world. Through a continuous description of the room, Mouad further personifies this intimate space that has defied time aside from “la couette” and “le drap.” These two pieces of fabric, which are used to cover the mattress and, ultimately, the body, signify change and difference. As the protagonist has, from the beginning of the novel, signaled towards a changed and changing Morocco, I read this as a kind of change of national fabric – the ever evolving, discursive construction of a nation. Beyond the fabric, Mouad builds upon the physical construction of this space to include the furniture, which has not changed at all, but then he moves towards communication with time through an assortment of photos, which have changed since he has last been in his childhood bedroom.

The succession of photographs that are staged in Mouad’s bedroom provide a glimpse into the trajectory of Mouad’s life, both socially and spatially. The first image depicts him at a few months old, then him during his secondary studies, and lastly, a more recent picture of him, in Canada. Temporality here functions to demonstrate the physical development of Mouad as he ages as well as his ultimate migration to North America. These photographs operate in a *queer* way as they set the stage for narrative development as Mouad takes the reader down several paths of discovery, rediscovery, construction, and reconstruction of “his Morocco,” a phrase he uses to articulate the Morocco of his past that he left, the Morocco he comes to rediscover through his return and the Morocco of the future. The future Morocco that Mouad experiences is an assemblage or a hybrid as he accepts his identity as both Canadian and Moroccan. Upon looking at the third photo, which shows him in Canada, he refers to the beauty of the picture – “[c]’était beau” – but continues on by saying “être chez soi” followed by “enfin.”

Mouad's nostalgic revision of the photos found in his old room positions him as a diasporic subject who, after years of living abroad, now feels at home in his place of residence. The sensation of "feeling at home," transports him to the past where he "étai[t] enfant de nouveau." The relationship between feeling at home and being at home are *queered* as Mouad blurs temporal lines as he feels like a child again. One can presume, that at one point in time, Mouad felt at home in Morocco, but he came to be disconnected to his former home due to his identity as a non-normative, transgressive subject that had to navigate a space that, at the time, was not welcoming or accepting of him. Mouad's complicated relationship with Morocco and his identity as queer are what encourages him to revisit his country of origin – the premise of the novel. As a diasporic subject who spent close to a decade in North America, which is much further away than Europe, Mouad evokes a migratory path that goes beyond the traditional routes between Morocco and France.

Returning to Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Au pays*, I focus on the use of movement and migration, considering that Ben Jelloun's protagonist seeks to permanently return to Morocco unlike Mouad in *Les ruelles des pieds nus*. Most importantly, Mohamed does not return to Morocco for a short trip, but rather returns home and continues to construct a residence for himself and his family, despite his children being adults and disinterested in living outside France. The narrator points out that "Mohamed avait toujours rêvé d'une maison, une belle et grande maison où toute la famille serait réunie dans la paix, le bonheur et le respect."²⁶⁸ Setting his sights on France, he eventually ends up spending more time than intended in the country. As a factory worker, Mohamed was surrounded by other immigrants who had several, similar goals to his. Ultimately, Mohamed's

²⁶⁸ Ben Jelloun, *Au pays*, 15.

identity is entrenched in his line of work – more so as his children grow older and have their own children.

According to Mohamed, retirement is a death sentence. This point is clarified as a former colleague of Mohamed's, Brahim, is introduced into the narrative:

Brahim, mort cinq mois après s'être arrêté de travailler. Il n'était pas malade, mais *lenraite* l'avait tué. Oui, la retraite, la fin de tout, l'inutilité absolue, le rien, le silence l'avaient condamné à mourir à soixante ans et quelques mois. C'était la sentence. Condamné à la retraite, condamné à mourir d'ennui et de solitude.²⁶⁹

Clearly, Mohamed is equating his identity as a subject and his identity as a worker. Outside of his work, he presents a certain level of disorientation as he compares retirement to prison, death, and nothingness. The "sentence" that Mohamed faces is not just in relation to his impending retirement, but also his imminent move back to Morocco and convincing his children to join him in embarking on the mission of building a family home, which he ultimately fails to do. Ben Jelloun's contextualization of and use of anecdotal evidence channeled through the use of Brahim as an example sets up this character as a means of eliciting empathy for Mohamed. The introduction of Brahim, as a point of comparison, provides evidence to the reader to demonstrate the negative ramifications of retirement on subjects as it produces "la fin de tout, l'inutilité absolue, le rien, le silence." Listing such negative attributes of retirement sets the stage for positive conceptualizations of the notion of return and what this complex act does to subjects and their subjectivities.

5.4 *Le retour in Les ruelles des pieds nus*

Tahir's *Les ruelles des pieds nus* navigates the Hay-Atlas neighborhood in Kenitra, where the protagonist, Mouad, grew up. Mouad is involved in intimate encounters within this

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 28. Emphasis in original. Ben Jelloun emphasizes words in the text to display Mohamed's mispronunciation of words.

neighborhood, allowing him to perceive Morocco as more complicated than he had once thought. Mouad's self-discovery during his trip home leads to a series of questions on (sex)uality, gender, and the *queering* of subjectivities as they are destabilized by internal conflicts and affects. Tahir's novel takes the reader on a (meta)physical journey through Kenitra as Mouad traverses his hometown again, although much older this time, he sees and experiences the town in a new light. Mouad comes to terms with his former view of Kenitra, and even though all the *haram* practices and objects he witnesses were and are always there, he is ignorant of them.²⁷⁰ As these interactions continue, Mouad begins to question his own masculinity and sexuality as he sees another side of Morocco that he once was naïve to before – ultimately constructing a metaphorical bridge between his past, present and future.

Each chapter of Tahir's novel is named after a specific person who has impacted Mouad's life in one way or another.. This name-based approach to chapters adds a layer of textuality that permits the protagonist to revisit his hometown and do it alongside someone from his past life. The use of several voices is illustrative of Bakhtin's theory of polyphony, which draws from the musical term to refer to two or more independent melody lines to combine sounds – voices. Tahir's use of several voices to frame Mouad's subjectivities is polyphonic and operates as a site of assemblage to construct what Bakhtin considers a “plurality of independent and unmerged voices

²⁷⁰ The term “haram” means forbidden in Arabic to refer to sinful actions that should not be done. For more of a discussion on Islamic law and jurisprudence, see Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Morris Messick, and David Stephan Powers, *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and Their Fatwas*, Harvard Studies in Islamic Law (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

and consciousnesses...”²⁷¹ As I construct a conceptualization of queer that is based upon assemblages and disorientation, such polyphony informs the multiple experiences and voices that contribute to my conceptualization of queer.

The fourth chapter of *Les ruelles des pieds nus* is dedicated to “Ayoub.” In this chapter, Mouad is brought back to his adolescence, a time marked by “[u]ne douceur mélangée à une violence. De l’amour avec de l’envie. C’est une beauté moche. Comme une première cigarette, dont on n’aime pas le goût, mais dont on adore l’effet. C’est doux. Cette rue. Celle où j’ai grandi. Celle où je me suis battu pour la première fois.”²⁷² Mouad’s descriptions are based on parallels or juxtapositions – again, gesturing toward the contrasts between past and present. The ugly beauty, the disdain for the taste of the cigarette, but the adoration of its effects evokes the conflicting visions of Mouad’s surroundings as he encounters them. The evocation of these conflicting visions is disorienting to Mouad as he positions himself between different spaces, places, and persons. Gayatri Gopinath writes about queer disorientations, disorienting landscapes, and the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora to posit the idea of queer regional imaginaries, which “reorient us toward other spaces and temporalities that promise alternative pathways through the world.”²⁷³ Gopinath points to the possibility for multiple, divergent paths or sites of emergence. As Mouad navigates Kenitra for the first time in more than eight years, he is taken on a (meta)physical journey

²⁷¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 6.

²⁷² Tahir, *Les ruelles des pieds nus*, 49.

²⁷³ Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 60.

where he discovers, again, not only his hometown but also the multi-layered subjectivities he has come to embody. As he shifts between temporalities of the past and present, Tahir's protagonist makes several connections between his and others' sexualities and their link to masculinity.

In a section that retraces Mouad's adolescence, he details the connection between football and virility – a way of linking a subject's sexuality and masculinity to sports and physical activity, which is a rather common trope used to identify a subject's level of "queerness." Mouad highlights, while speaking of a past encounter with friends that "[à] l'époque, ne pas aimer le foot, surtout dans un quartier populaire, était signe de manque de virilité. Seules les filles se devaient de ne pas aimer le foot. Les filles et les tapettes. Les *zwamel*."²⁷⁴ According to Mouad, and supposedly the rest of the other boys and men in his neighborhood, football should be interpreted as a measure of one's heterosexuality (or lack thereof) and their masculinity. The use of "à l'époque" signals a shift where this is no longer the case, which shows either development or the fact that Mouad just did not have the opportunity to witness the act in the present like during his past. Specifically, Mouad compares the act of not liking football to a "signe de manque de virilité" and a sort of femininity, which, when put in opposition to masculinity, is used as a means of effeminizing men while equally denigrating women. This specific deduction supposes a performance of heterosexuality and masculinity that forces male subjects to like and partake in sports; otherwise, these subjects risk being accused of being a "zamel" or "tapette," which are words generally used in derogatory ways to refer to homosexual men. The uses of these terms and the evocation of femininity alert the reader to the protagonist's and his friend's need to exhibit and perform

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 49. Emphasis in original to refer to the plural form of the term "zamel," which refers to homosexual men in Moroccan Darija and colloquial Arabic.

heterosexuality and masculinity to maintain their virility and to avoid social persecution, i.e., being considered feminine and, therefore, homosexual.

Performing heterosexuality and masculinity relies upon the assumption that there is a static, universal understanding of what it means to be and act like a heterosexual male. These two concepts have long been theorized as social constructions that are (re)produced discursively, in Foucauldian terms. The example used above of Mouad's friends and their adherence to social conventions works to solidify the point of this experience being disorienting. As Mouad reflects upon this adolescent experience, he exhibits a recognizance of his own role as an agent of performativity, which I use to refer to the actors of said speech-acts that construct subjectivities such as masculinity and sexuality. The protagonist's reflections on his past position him towards a future, a queer future, which is representative of the assemblage of his many past experiences that he merges with his current, present experiences to construct his future. What I refer to as a "queer future," finds its roots in Halberstam's understanding of *queer* in *In a Queer Time and Place*, which emphasizes the capacity for "[queer] to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space."²⁷⁵ I argue that Mouad's return home, although a new interrogation of space, is also deeply based upon his constant reengagement with distinct temporalities that shift throughout the novel.

Shifting to his present, and to another individual or character in the narrative, *Les ruelles des pieds nus* introduces the reader to a chapter dedicated to a woman named "Basma." Mouad speaks with this woman about several topics that could be considered taboo, as they share a

²⁷⁵ Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 2.

Heineken in a bar despite his not consuming alcohol.²⁷⁶ Unlike the others in the text, Basma is not a friend of Mouad, but a woman who is supposedly from Marrakech whom he meets randomly in a bar. Furthermore, he confronts his conflicting thoughts since “[c]ertainement parce qu’au Maroc, s’alcooliser peut mener en prison. Le goût de l’aventure, du *haram* pour une simple bière. On ne connaît pas vraiment ça au Canada.”²⁷⁷ One could deduce two things here. Mouad’s interest in consuming beer is perhaps related to the “goût de l’aventure” and the “gout du haram” he finds insatiable. Or, perhaps, his entrance into the bar is a way for him to be transgressive and bring his Canadian identity with him to Morocco. Arguably, both scenarios work to establish reasons for Mouad’s interest in what are generally considered *haram* habits and practices. The duality of *halal* and *haram* provides a limited framework when assessing behaviors. Essentially, it classifies acts, therefore being, into good or bad, which automatically places a value judgment upon subjects and their comportment. Mouad’s transgressions should not be classified as *haram* purely on the basis that they do not conform to normative social practices. The exploratory nature of Tahir’s text makes room for classifications outside of the *haram/halal* binary, which allows for the discussion of and partaking in taboo subjects and acts.

During the conversation with Basma and Mouad, the two discuss topics such as poverty, religion, racism, sexuality, prostitution, and a variety of other topics that one would not usually

²⁷⁶ In the text, Mouad describes the setting and his feelings on being there – “Dans un bar. J’avais envie de bière. Je ne sais pas pourquoi. Moi, le garçon qui n’a jamais su apprécier l’alcool. Ce jour-là, j’en avais envie” (61).

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

discuss with a complete stranger – especially in Morocco. Speaking of her time working in a *hammam*, Basma brings up the topic of homosexuality:

S'ils préfèrent les hommes et se faire prendre par les hommes, tant mieux pour eux, tant qu'ils ne font de mal à personne. Je ne comprends pas leur mode de vie, mais qui suis-je pour les juger ? Ils ne sont pas malades, je ne pense pas, ou du moins pas tous. Les seuls vrais pédés malades sont les plus pauvres d'entre eux.²⁷⁸

Basma's discourse is resonant with contemporary rhetoric surrounding homosexuality, as she says she does not understand their "mode de vie." Additionally, she evokes medicalized discourse on homosexuality, which can be traced back to 19th-century discussions that considered non-normative sexual practices indicative of mental disorders.²⁷⁹ Just like the binary of *haram* and *halal*, the medicalized and pathological classification of homosexuality as a sign of disease and sickness limits homosexuality or "queer" to limited, linear understandings of the concept. The essentialization of "queer" through these binaries limits potential understanding of what queer is and what queer *does*.²⁸⁰ Basma's understanding of homosexuality as a "mode de vie," however, is not essentialist as she opens spaces of comparison between queerness and social phenomena.

Basma's link between homosexuality and poverty is intriguing since she also believes that "[à] vrai dire, je ne crois en rien, même pas en Dieu. Dieu, c'est pour les pauvres, parce qu'ils

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 69.

²⁷⁹ For further reading, see also Frank Muscarella, "Clinical Psychology, Psychiatry and Homosexuality," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition)*, ed. James D. Wright (Oxford: Elsevier, 2015): 884–92, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.21026-X>.

²⁸⁰ I use italics here to emphasize the active construction of "queer" as an ever-evolving concept, subjectivity, and identity.

doivent bien croire en quelque chose, que ce n'est pas leur faute s'ils sont pauvres, de pauvres merdes. Le pauvre, c'est juste la merde de la société, je te le dis parce que j'en étais une."²⁸¹ Basma's stance positions her as an open subject that neither judges nor casts judgment upon those around her – even for topics such as homosexuality, prostitution, atheism and the consumption of alcohol. This openness is questioned towards the end of the chapter, where it is revealed that she is not whom she portrays herself as, nor is her name Basma. Upon leaving the bar, Mouad encounters another man, who asks him if he knows. “[C]’est Ilham,” the man says, to which Mouad replies “[n]on, elle s’appelle Basma.”²⁸²

As a subject in the novel, Basma or Ilham represents the instability of identity and subjectivity – the blurring of lines that exist or have the potential to exist. Mouad's shock to find out that she was not actually from Marrakech, but from Kenitra like him, and that most of what she said has been a lie ultimately leaves him confused. Ilham's stories, perhaps based on truth, are part of Mouad's various lived experiences as he rediscovers his hometown and reconstructs what it means to be a Moroccan man that does not function within the confines of societal expectations. Moreover, the fact that Ilham is the only person that Mouad meets for the first time that is not a family member or friend from his past puts her presence into question. Perhaps she is not an actual person, but rather, an invented construct to allow for a depersonalized discourse with topics that he may not have otherwise discussed on his own.

If one is to believe that Ilham is an aberration, what does this mean for Mouad specifically? Is this transgressive “phantom” meant to serve as a *porte-parole* for all things *haram* and liminal? Furthermore, what are the implications of having a woman serve as an extension to Mouad, a man?

²⁸¹ Ibid., 75.

²⁸² Ibid., 78.

If this protagonist is, in fact, an invention, the author could be utilizing her in a few ways. Firstly, the use of an invented and “imagined” figure allows for a certain level of creativity that can go beyond the boundaries of normative expression. Secondly, by using a woman, Mouad can distance himself from her both socially and ideologically – mostly since it is her that introduces taboo topics to the conversation, not Mouad. Arguably, Ilham’s role as a potential invented character can also be compared to social constructions of nations, which are done discursively and through the voices of ghosts, i.e., historical figures who have passed down narratives of the past that shape the present and future.

5.5 Imagining the Nation

In *Entanglements of the Maghreb*, Hakim Abderrezak writes that “[t]oday’s Maghreb cannot be fully understood without considering the growing number of Maghrebis eager to leave their countries of origin.”²⁸³ In both novels studied in this chapter, the two central protagonists decide to leave Morocco for better futures and more opportunities. For Mouad, it is to pursue university studies in Canada, and for Mohamed, it is to go to France to earn enough capital in hopes of returning to Morocco. Unlike Mohamed, Mouad does not seek to return permanently and has wholly integrated himself into Canadian society – going as far as to become a naturalized citizen.

Another point of difference between the two men is their final destinations. Spain, sharing a border with Morocco, is a practical point of emigration. France’s colonial presence and being

²⁸³ Friederike Pannewick. et al., *Entanglements of the Maghreb: Cultural and Political Aspects of a Region in Motion (Postcolonial Studies)* (Bern: Transcript Publishing, 2021), 47.

across the Mediterranean from Morocco is another logical point of departure for Moroccans.

Abderrezak points out:

The Maghreb is part of the Global South, where the freedom to emigrate is extremely limited; yet Spain is visible across the Mediterranean Sea from Morocco. Studies about the Maghreb must therefore acknowledge the desire to reach European shores, for a significant portion of the Maghrebi population lives a short distance away, and many have attempted the crossing.²⁸⁴

I note that the two novels, although contemporary in nature, speak of two completely different socio-political contexts. For instance, Ben Jelloun's novel's protagonist moves to France at the beginning of the decolonial period, which turns into spending over forty years in France. Tahir's novel is situated closer to the present, many years after decolonization, but still within the context of decolonial movements that do interrogate the question as to why certain members of populations decide to leave their home country for other nations.

In *Au pays*, Mohamed's narrative of emigration is not necessarily positive, nor is it one that many would find particularly aspirational, unlike Mouad's in *Les ruelles des pieds nus*.

Mohamed's time back in Morocco is cut short as he falls ill and ultimately dies:

Un cousin réussit même à réunir la tribu qui pria pour l'âme de Mohamed maltraitée par la France : Mohamed est un homme perdu, il souffre, la France lui a pris ses enfants, la France lui a donné du travail puis elle lui a tout pris ; je dis ça pour tous ceux qui rêvent de partir travailler à l'étranger ; là-bas, nos valeurs ne valent rien, là-bas, nos traditions ne sont pas respectées, regardez le pauvre Mohamed, c'était un sage, un bon musulman, et le voilà aujourd'hui, misérable, abandonné, à la limite de la folie. Il est déjà gagné par la folie, nous allons faire quelques prières pour que Dieu vienne à son secours, nous allons entamer la prière de la délivrance.²⁸⁵

From the beginning, the reader is presented with the lasting colonial relationship between France and Morocco. Accordingly, the former has caused the latter to suffer, but in this case, personified

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 48.

²⁸⁵ Ben Jelloun, *Au pays*, 165.

through one person – Mohamed. The characterization of Mohamed as a “lost” subject due to his mistreatment in France and his suffering due to a country that “lui a pris ses enfants” and everything else for that matter is a societal critique as Mohamed is often unhappy with what France has done to him, his family and other families alike. Early on in the text, Mohamed mentions that “LA France nous empêche d’éduquer nos enfants, LA France leur donne trop de droits et après c’est nous qui sommes dans la merde, LA France, la Belgique, la Hollande, tous ces pays qui ne savent plus ce qu’est l’autorité, oui, mon frère, les enfants ici c’est pas les enfants de là-bas.”²⁸⁶ Ben Jelloun’s insistence on using “là-bas” constructs a binary or parallel between a “here” and “there” that allows for Mohamed to make generalizations as to how his children would have been if they were raised in Morocco instead of in France.

In the block quote above, Mohamed is in a trance-like state, effectively paralyzed and unable to communicate with those around him, he is an empty vessel, an “homme perdu.” Mohamed’s physical state is evocative of a narrative of alienation and non-belonging as he rests between stages of life and death. As a figure, Mohamed has always been between “stages” or at a point of connecting the multiple facets of his identity. As a Moroccan man, living in France for more years than he lived in Morocco, he is forced to reconcile with the idea of being in a nation that he does not consider his own while his family maintains a different position. Through his constant reference to “là-bas” when referring to France in juxtaposition to Morocco or, more broadly, Islamic nations, he constructs an ideal of what a nation should be. Despite gaining economic stability in France, which has allowed him to construct a family home in Morocco and potentially move his family there, he is still dissatisfied with the idea that France took everything from him.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 29. Emphasis in original.

For Mohamed, the “nation” is complex and does not only represent one’s citizenship or legal status. Like most individuals, a nation represents the varied socio-cultural components or facets that would define citizens, such as language, religion, ethnicity, social practices, and customs. Like many migrants, Mohamed leaves his homeland for more opportunities to expand to better himself, which he does. In an attempt to justify his reasons for leaving, which go beyond economic insecurity, Mohamed speaks of a time just after Morocco became a sovereign nation. Highlighting the social injustices going on in the nation at the time, he recounts that “[l]e pauvre n’a aucun droit. Il subit et se tait. Celui qui gueule, on le fait disparaître. C’est ce Maroc-là que j’avais laissé en 1960 avant de prendre le bateau puis le train pour LallaFrança.”²⁸⁷ Mohamed’s mention of poverty and the lack of agency is in relation to the *Makhzen*, which in Moroccan Darija refers to the government or a governing body. Further elucidating the role of the *Makhzen* in Morocco, he clarifies by saying that “c’est le caïd, le pacha, le gouverneur, représentants du pouvoir central qui nous commandent. On ne sait pas comment ça fonctionne, mais le Makhzen c’est la gendarmerie, la police, et l’armée qui font ce qu’ils veulent.”²⁸⁸ It is evident that there is a hint of frustration, even some forty-odd years after Mohamed has left this situation that continues similarly to this day.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 62. I note that Mohamed places the “Lalla” before referring to France here to denote the perceived generosity of France, which he refers to in the text as the country “nous donne du travail et nous sommes contents” (95). In North Africa, women of any status could be referred to as “Lalla,” but it is most used as a title of respect and honor, especially when referring to royal family members such as Lalla Salma of Morocco.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 62.

Several scholars have written extensively on the role of the *Makhzen* in pre-colonial, colonial, and contemporary North African societies.²⁸⁹ Mohamed Daadaoui writes, “[a] clear conception of makhzen is still elusive [and that] [t]he development of makhzen was established progressively throughout the history of Morocco.”²⁹⁰ Daadaoui does clarify that for most Moroccans, Makhzen is “an apparatus of state violence and domination, and at the same time, a system of representation of traditional royal power.”²⁹¹ The conflict between seeing this form of absolutist government as either positive or negative seemingly constructs a rite of passage or a system of being that is not contested or, at least, should not be. Mohamed’s reference to this governing power as a “caïd” gives insight into his resentment toward the Moroccan government of the 1960s where “[l]e pauvre n’a aucun droit. Il subit et se tait.”²⁹² Although this resentment

²⁸⁹ Mohammed. Ennaji, *Serving the Master: Slavery and Society in Nineteenth-Century Morocco*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999); Fatima Harrak, “Abid Al-Bukhari and the Development of the Makhzen System in Seventeenth-Century Morocco,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 38, no. 2 (2018): 280-95; Antoine Perrier, “Écrire au réconfort de Dieu. La patrimonialisation des savoirs administratifs des monarchies marocaine et tunisienne sous le protectorat,” *L’année du Maghreb* 19, no. 19 (2018): 19-35; Jean-Luc Piermay, “Le Makhzen est-il soluble dans la mondialisation ? : La fabrique du territoire marocain à l’heure de l’ouverture au monde,” *EchoGéo*, no. 13 (2010): 1-11.

²⁹⁰ Mohamed Daadaoui, *Moroccan Monarchy and the Islamist Challenge: Maintaining Makhzen Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 41-2.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁹² Ben Jelloun, *Au pays*, 26.

carries on to the present, Mohamed is not directly critical of the monarchy nor other government officials and is certainly not critical of Islam or Islamic forms of governance.

Mohamed's critiques in *Au pays* construct an identity of a political dissident that is dissatisfied not only with Morocco but also with France. As a protagonist, Mohamed is complex in his grievances as they shift back and forth between Morocco and France throughout the narrative. On one hand, Morocco has become too conservative; on the other, France is too liberal. France has left his children and those alike without a structure of morals and values, which he views as extremely important. In this alterity, Mohamed develops his subjecthood and becomes obsessed with his work. "À l'usine il avait ses habitudes, Il arrivait toujours à l'heure. Jamais de retard ni d'absence. Même malade, sauf vaincu par la grippe, il tenait à être là, à travailler."²⁹³ From the novel's beginning, the narrator makes it quite clear that Mohamed's identity exists on two levels – as a Moroccan man and as an *ouvrier*. Mohamed's insistence on returning to Morocco is influenced by the forced retirement he is facing after several decades working at an automobile factory. When thinking of Mohamed's identity, the reader should not limit his identity to the bipartite Moroccan/*ouvrier* since his identity is further complicated by his role as a father. The discourse on his children, who have not lived up to their father's expectations regarding their expression of their Moroccan identities, opens pathways for us to continue thinking about fragmented identities. Mohamed's children do not necessarily reject their Moroccan identities, nor have they necessarily assumed French identities. What is complicated for Mohamed to understand is the possibility for identities that exist outside of rigid confines – for him, one must be either

²⁹³ Ibid., 26.

French or Moroccan, not both. What he does not come to realize, is that he, himself, reconfigures his own identity and what it means to be a Moroccan subject.

5.6 Reconfiguring Identity in the Maghreb

Both *Au pays* and *Les ruelles des pieds nus* complicate the notion of identity as they take readers on journeys of return to explore newfound visions and understandings of Moroccan and, on a larger scale, Maghrebi cultural diversity.²⁹⁴ Tahir and Ben Jelloun write about two protagonists who have different understandings of what it means to be Moroccan or Maghrebi in general. For Tahir, the character of Mouad represents someone who approaches identity openly and is willing to have what he has known for so many years called into question by new encounters and experiences. Ben Jelloun's character, Mohamed, is not so open to these new experiences or the challenging of his identity as he returns to Morocco permanently, to stabilize his unstable identity. In reality, what they both do is they expose readers to different, non-stable Moroccan identities, which I argue leads to the reconfiguration of identity within the Maghreb that goes beyond normative depictions of the region as subjects move between spaces.

In the context of *Au pays*, María Rodríguez points out that “[s]us hijos, nacidos y criados en la cultura del país de acogida, rechazan esa vuelta al bled y nunca visitarán la tierra de la cultura en la que nacieron y se criaron dentro del entorno familiar” [His children, born and raised in the host country's culture, reject this return to the bled and will never visit the land of the culture in

²⁹⁴ The newfound understanding of Morocco and Maghrebi cultural diversity relates to the crossing of national borders, again, as a site of epistemological exchange and reconfiguration. As Mouad and Mohamed return to their native land after several years, they are confronted with changed physical and socio-cultural landscapes.

which they were born and raised within the family environment.]²⁹⁵ Rodriguez's use of the term "host country" signals Mohamed's sense of a lack of belonging in France, but does not reflect his children's identities since they are born and raised in France and consider themselves to be French of Maghrebi origin. Mohamed's children are named Mourad, Rachid, Jamila, Othman, and Rekya, but Mohamed does call out one son saying: "[n]'oublie jamais d'où tu viens, mon fils. Dis-moi, c'est vrai que tu te fais appeler Richard ? Richard Ben Abdallah ! Ça va pas ensemble, tu maquilles le prénom mais le nom te dénonce, Ben Abdallah, fils de l'adorateur d'Allah !"²⁹⁶ Mohamed is referring to Rachid here, who has opted to *franciser* his first name, perhaps as an assimilationist technique to blend in with or fall in line with traditional notions of *francité*.²⁹⁷

In the case of *Les ruelles des pieds nus*, Mouad's identity is in flux as he returns home for the first time with an added identity of Canadian since becoming a naturalized citizen. Mouad is also faced with his own complex subjecthood development as he continues to explore questions of his past and present. In chapter eleven Mouad speaks of a person named "Ishak," who, according to him "représentait tout ce que je refusais d'être. Tout ce que je refusais d'admettre. Tout ce que je détestais chez l'autre [...] Je le détestais parce que j'avais peur d'être comme lui. D'être lui. Mais au fond."²⁹⁸ Mouad despises Ishak due to a fear of being like him or as he confirms, he fears

²⁹⁵ María Loreto Cantón Rodríguez, "Partir, Au pays: Un viaje de ida y vuelta en la memoria de Tahar Ben Jelloun," *Anales de filología francesa* 20 (2012): 46.

²⁹⁶ Ben Jelloun, *Au pays*, 55.

²⁹⁷ See for instance Simona Livescu, "Redeeming Francophonie: A New Concept of *Francité*," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 12, no. 2/3 (December 2009): 341–64.

²⁹⁸ Tahir, *Les ruelles des pieds nus*, 143.

admitting that he is like him. Mouad goes into detail noting that “[c]e qu’il faisait n’était pas digne d’un homme. Il était homosexuel. Il était prostitué. Il était sans père. Il vivait avec sa mère et sa sœur. Toutes les deux prostituées.”²⁹⁹ Mouad does not initially mention his sexuality nor his sexual sense, but his gesture towards Ishak and the use of the verb “admettre” signals his own unspoken homosexuality. Mouad’s sexuality is essentially mediated through Ishak’s own experiences and assumed homosexuality, which leaves space for Mouad to interrogate his own sexuality. Ishak is emblematic of sexual and ontological transgression – what one should not be. As Mouad engages with his own negative sentiments about this person, he simultaneously reconstructs his own involvement with sexual transgression as a non-heterosexual man.

Toward the end of the novel, in the penultimate chapter entitled “Bouazza,” there is a confession of homosexuality where the narrator says that “[c]acher une sexualité qui était mienne, que je ne connaissais pas encore bien. Une sexualité qui m’était étrangère. Indomptable. Qui était moi. Pour ne pas vexer. Pour ne pas choquer. Pour ne pas mourir. Pour garder le mystère. Le secret.”³⁰⁰ The notion of return is fundamental to Mouad’s understanding of himself as a queer subject. From his use of “admettre” to “cacher” in relation to his unspoken homosexuality and his subsequent use of the verb “connaître,” he points to a lack of understanding of his own sexuality. I understand this as Mouad’s inability to transport his homosexuality from Canada to Morocco, which disorients and inhibits him from, initially, speaking about his homosexuality.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 143.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 182.

The link between socio-economic status and expression of homosexuality, which is to say, the effect of capital on sexual identity is explored by Joseph Massad who points out in *Desiring Arabs* that:

The advent of colonialism and Western capital to the Arab world has transformed most aspects of daily living; however, it has failed to impose a European heterosexual regime on all Arab men, although its efforts were successful in the upper classes and among the increasingly Westernized middle classes.³⁰¹

Massad's linking of colonialism and colonial regimes effectively influencing the daily lives of colonial subjects – specifically in reference to sexual activity – is interesting considering that one can make sense of his observation in Tahir's novel. Additionally, it is Massad's specificity to a certain social class, i.e., middle, and upper classes, that were more susceptible to European colonial ideals and norms.

Massad argues for understanding colonialism through the lens of anxiety that draws upon alienation, an experience that most individuals want to avoid. Massad's observation that middle- and upper-class citizens were more susceptible to European or Western influence can be related to alienation and the process of self-othering to maintain their social status despite being under the rule of foreign forces. Returning to Tahir's text, one can understand Mouad as a figure that does not want to avoid being alienated but also alienates himself to avoid being "othered" by those who would not, perhaps, agree with his homosexuality or desire to continue residing outside of Morocco. The novel's title gestures toward *les ruelles*, which are not only extensions of streets but are pathways that are usually associated with non-normative and transgressive activities such as sex work and drug use. Tahir uses *ruelle* in a similar yet distinct way to refer to newly discovered paths as his protagonist reencounters Morocco for the first time after many years away and with a

³⁰¹ Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 172.

newfound perspective. Additionally, the adage of “pieds nus” brings him back to his roots as a native who connects to his land on a (meta)physical level to encounter nature and its various elements. As a term representative of space, *ruelle* signals areas or positions outside the parameters of strict barriers, much like what queer does when thinking of individual and collective identities. These divergences lead to new openings and experiences as the metaphorical interpretation of “ruelle” – a place of difference and transgression – renders the potential for queer practices and embodiments to take form.

Mouad’s process of alienation, which functions as a site of adhering and not adhering to socio-cultural norms such as being heterosexual and married, cleaves a space for the possibility of constructing a new vision of North African identities. As Mouad enters and explores the literal and figurative *ruelles*, he rewrites national culture that dictates a limited and rigid understanding of masculinity. Mouad makes it clear that he has some level of understanding of masculinity: “Je devais trouver la virilité chez mes oncles. Mes voisins. Les pères de mes amis. Ou le débris et l’image qu’ils donnaient de cette figure.”³⁰² As he reflects upon the past, he speaks of normative models of masculinity and being, which rely upon socialization, which is composed of experiences that one has to inform their identities and act of performing said identities. Abdessamad Dialmy states that “[I]a socialisation du garçon se fait dans le sens d’une préparation à l’espace public fondée sur la virilité phallique, agressive et compétitive.”³⁰³ Dialmy’s use of terms such as socialization and public space leads to my discussion of public and private space at the site of

³⁰² Tahir, *Les ruelles des pieds nus*, 83.

³⁰³ Abdessamad Dialmy, *Critique de la masculinité au Maroc* (Rabat: Saad Warzazi Éditions, 2009), 32-3.

subjectivity and identity construction. The concept of space (both public and private) helps to uncover how discourse constructs individual subjects. In Tahir's text, for example, the *ruelles* serve as a space evocative of both public and private space. They serve as a public place due their presence within cities and by the fact that they are accessible to anyone. The *ruelles* are also private in that they are divergent extensions of main streets, which serve as spaces where transgression does not need permission to take place, but rather, exist for transgression to occur.

5.7 Space and Place in the Maghreb

Similar to the above discussion of public/private spaces, which takes into account Tahir's encounter with *ruelles*, many scholars have worked on the question of public vs. private space.³⁰⁴ When discussing the notions of public and private space, in the context of Arabo-Islamic societies, it is easy to assume that one is referring to the gender binary between men and women who, typically, live parallel lives outside of the nuclear family unit.³⁰⁵ In both novels, the central

³⁰⁴ William Leap, *Public Sex/Gay Space (Between Men-Between Women: Lesbian and Gay Studies)*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Paul Fairfield, *Public/Private* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005); Mohamed Bendahan and Yassine Akhiate, "Religious Media in the Maghreb: What Are the Boundaries Between the Public and Private Spheres?," *Religions* 11, no. 12 (2020): 1-11.

³⁰⁵ In an attempt to fight for better and fair representation of Muslim women, Amina Wadud, a Muslim, African American feminist, and activist has pushed for a movement called the "gender jihad," which she refers to as a "struggle to establish gender justice in Muslim thought and praxis. At its simplest level, gender justice is gender mainstreaming – the inclusion of women in *all* aspects of Muslim practice, performance, policy construction, and in both political and religious

protagonists, Mohamed and Mouad, interact differently with public and private spaces. For Mohamed, being a practicing Muslim bound by tradition and seeking to promulgate it, the distinction between public and private space is essential to maintaining a certain level of respect in the face of the larger, extended, Muslim community. The case of Mouad is different as he does not consider himself religious, nor does he restrict himself in terms of the subjects he discusses as he navigates Morocco for the first time in eight years.

The final chapter of Tahir's novel is entitled "Montréal," which is where Mouad settles in Canada. Rather than functioning within the logical progression of the novel, in terms of temporality, the narrative takes the reader to the moment that Mouad says his goodbyes to his close relatives. The chapter sets up a reading of the protagonist as the "fils prodigue," an appellation referenced at the novel's beginning, as I pointed out earlier in this chapter. Ending the novel by going back to the beginning of Mouad's journey gives a glimpse into him as a native subject who, initially, had no experience living abroad, having a completely different perspective from that of the beginning of the novel. Furthermore, one encounters the physical crossing of borders that is happening within the novel – the movement from Morocco to Canada as Mouad boards the plane with hopes for more opportunities. Although *Les ruelles des pieds nus* takes place principally in Morocco, the narrative is haunted by Mouad's time in Canada. Temporally, the discussion of Mouad's departure to Canada at the end of the novel is *queer* in that the reader begins in the present and ends in the past. There is, of course, a progressive build up that begins with the act of *retour*,

leadership." See for instance Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 10. Emphasis in original.

then narrates the period of return marked by cross-temporal comparisons, then ends with Mouad reflecting upon his departure, for the first time, to Quebec.

As Mouad reflects upon the impact his leaving will have on himself as well as those close to him, he realizes:

Je quittais mon pays, de nouveau. Ce Maroc qui m’a bercé, le dialecte que je parlais et les coutumes qui m’avaient habité. Je quittais la langue du Coran pour celles de Molière et Shakespeare. C’était différent. Je ne quittais plus ma ville pour quelques maudites heures ou une poignée de minutes. Cette fois-ci, je quittais mon pays.³⁰⁶

The use of “de nouveau” at the beginning of the citation makes it seem as though Mouad had left Morocco for an extended period before this trip. Still, his frustration is clear as he continues to say that “[il] ne quittai[t] plus [sa] ville pour quelques maudites heures ou une poignée de minutes,” which beyond frustration is evocative of his need for change. As Mouad discusses temporality and evokes a prolonged departure from Morocco, he qualifies “heures” as “maudites,” which depicts his relationship with time and perhaps an inherent need for more of it. Considering that Mouad had not returned to Morocco for more than eight years since his initial departure, this discussion could explain why he chose to do so. Never having left his home country for more than a few “cursed” hours or a handful of minutes left Mouad needing time to reflect upon his everchanging subjectivities as he crossed the border – a transitional space of development and identity construction.

5.8 Conclusion

The act of return as explored in *Au pays* and *Les ruelles des pieds nus* makes room for the discussion of migration, specifically *queer* migration as readers are made to investigate another form of movement. I have argued in this chapter for an understanding of subjecthood

³⁰⁶ Tahir, *Les ruelles des pieds nus*, 199.

(re)construction as individuals inhabit multiple spaces as they cross borders. These two novels explore two types of return, considering that in *Au pays*, the return is meant to be permanent, while in *Les ruelles des pieds nus*, the return is in the form of a vacation to visit family and friends. Making this distinction is critical because both protagonists maintain different objectives for their returns. Mohamed, the central protagonist of Ben Jelloun's novel, returns to Morocco on an ontological journey – to find himself and to reconnect to his home country. For Mouad, the protagonist of Tahir's novel, the act of return is written as a method of self-discovery or a reconciliation of identities he feels as though he has lost and with identities that he has gained.

Neither Mohamed nor Mouad is in a position where they fled home for reasons of war or conflict. Still, they both did leave due partly to the legacies of colonialism that exploited most of Africa – forcing many to leave for Europe and North America for opportunities and a better quality of life. Critical analyses of these two texts has led to a broader and more extensive understanding of *queer*. *Les ruelles des pieds nus* actively discusses non-normative sexual practices while *Au pays* approaches the question of non-normativity through socio-cultural practices. For this reason, I use these two texts to discuss *queer* migration as a concept using two seemingly different texts about how they involve socio-cultural practices, to demonstrate varying approaches to understanding non-normativity. In Tahir's novel, non-normativity is shown in various ways beyond sexuality, mainly relating to issues concerning the *haram/halal* system of ethics and morality.

Au pays provides a direct entry point into my contention of *queer* as a site of disorientation. As Mohamed approaches a key transitional period in his life – retirement – he becomes completely disoriented, almost nonexistent without his role as a worker being an option for him. I argue for Mohamed's appellation as *queer* due to his position as a disoriented subject that exists in a space

where he must reconstruct his selfhood vis-à-vis an outdated vision of himself. Mohamed's sense of disorientation goes as far as putting him into a catatonic state where he is unable to communicate and, perhaps, not even form coherent thoughts to reflect upon where he is at any given moment. His medical condition, unknown to the reader, leaves the reader only with the fact that "[a]u quatrième jour la terre avait englouti la tête. Quelqu'un cria : parti ! Mohamed est parti chez Dieu !" ³⁰⁷ Mohamed's death was not slow, spanning forty days of waiting, but the announcement of his death, in the manner of a public declaration, turns him into a spectacle. Even at the site of death, Mohamed's subjectivity continues to be performative as it is then the job of the public to construct him as a subject. The spectacle of Mohamed's death serves as a continuation of the protagonist's subjectivity and identity construction. For the forty days of slow death, the narrative progresses to uncover a fragmented subject who, once upon turning to Morocco as he had always wished for, never really returned.

³⁰⁷ Ben Jelloun, *Au pays*, 167.

6.0 Conclusion: Queer Potentialities

Queerness is not yet here.

–José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*

Queer Arabs, and especially queer Arab women, face a discursive double bind that often invisibilizes or undermines their presence: Orientalism fashions Arab cultures as abject via queerness, and Arab cultures often reject queerness as symptomatic of Western assimilation. This double bind produces “queer Arab” as a site of anxiety. How do we call someone queer when the act of recognition can produce misrecognition, stigmatizing the subject as inauthentic or assimilated?

–Mejdulene Bernard Shomali, *Between Banat*

José Esteban Muñoz’s contention that “queerness is not yet here” in his influential monograph speaks to the continued construction of queer – a signaled potentiality.³⁰⁸ The *queering* of queer that this dissertation has exemplified is evocative of the work that still needs to be done within the field. As this dissertation has attempted to demonstrate, queerness, like migration, as subjectivities, are not stagnant in their experience nor their embodiment – all of which suggests the need for the continued disruption of what queer is, does, and signifies. In doing so, this dissertation has argued for an approach to migration studies that considers the Mediterranean – through the linking of the Maghreb and the Levant – as a space of encounter, exchange and complex processes that facilitates the establishment of new ways of thinking about queerness and masculinities amongst subjects in motion. Literature, as a medium and genre of study can be useful when considering questions of migration and subject formation as one considers the multiple facets of individuals. This is done through detailed accounts of their lives, the lives of constructed

³⁰⁸ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

“actors” within their narratives, their complex and unique interactions with their surroundings, and their traversing of (meta)physical borders.

As Muñoz speaks of queerness on the horizon, Mejdulene Bernard Shomali discusses queer Arabs, and in particular, the position of queer Arab women *Between Banat*. Shomali proposes a “queer Arab critique,” which is reminiscent of queer of color critique in that she also seeks to oppose the project of Western, Euro-American conceptualizations of *queer* onto subjects who do not fit within that paradigm. Shomali departs from queer of color critique in the question of *banat*, or women in Arabic focusing on the production and presence of anxiety that stems from a bipartite problem – the fetishization of Arab culture that has rendered it virtually both monolithic and “othered” and the resistance to this “othering” that has disallowed the existence of queer lives. My project’s argumentation for migration as a subjectivity functions similarly to Shomali’s argument as a way of conceiving of research that takes into account how movement shapes queer subjects – in my understanding of the term as well as normative understandings of queer – as they move between spaces.

Shomali’s study provides an essential framework for scholars who study queer subjects in the Arab world:

Queer Arab critique is affirmative insofar as it insists on the historical, contemporary, and future presence and relevance of queer women in and of Arab cultures. It is tentative insofar as I do not offer conclusive and exclusive definitions of what constitutes Arab or queer cultures. I maintain elasticity as a foundational premise to understanding queer Arab women’s subjectivity, desires, and lives. The certainty in this work then is derived not from a prescription toward how we must discuss or think queerness in Arab cultures, but rather a certainty that dialogue is already ongoing, has been, and will continue.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁹ Mejdulene Bernard Shomali, *Between Banat: Queer Arab Critique and Transnational Arab Archives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023), 2.

Considering that Shomali's conceptualization of what "queer Arab critique" means remains mostly in development, I envision an expansion of this theoretical framework to include more possible connections beyond those of the France/Maghreb binary. Through her, Muñoz's and my insistence on temporalities that insist on the construction of possible futures, this connects to the many arguments that I have made throughout this project that exhibited how diversity or plurality of voices and thought contribute to the development of epistemologies of the Mediterranean. These epistemologies are critical when one considers the larger question of globalization that is progressively linking more regions of the world as individuals move and or are displaced. In many ways, this dissertation is elastic in the way that Shomali uses the term and equally reminiscent of Muñoz's utterance of queerness not yet being here. I say this as a means of reminding readers of the emergent potentialities of queer that rest on the horizon. Through a mediation of queer and the Mediterranean, there are even more possibilities when it comes to encountering subjectivities and non-normativity.

The Mediterranean region is a kind of assemblage of varying and, at times, opposing displays of subjectivities and identities. As mentioned in chapter one, Edwige Talbayev and Yasser Elhariry have argued for a more expansive view of the Mediterranean – what they call a "trans-Mediterranean" approach. One may ask why it is important to approach the Mediterranean region as a plural rather than as a singular entity. As this project has shown, the Mediterranean is a region is not just one single entity nor is it just one nation, culture, language, or civilization. Moving from North Africa to the Middle East, north to France and across the Atlantic, to Canada, one can encounter multiple subjectivities and identities as they cross the Mediterranean.

As I continue to think of a more expansive vision of the Mediterranean, a future literary and cultural studies project could consider texts in regions and languages outside of French and

English considering many living within the diaspora involve multilingual exchanges. For instance, one could analyze Khaled Alesmael's *Selamlık* [Gateway to the Sea] (2020), Najat El Hachmi's *Jo també sóc catalana* [I, Too, Am Catalan] (2015), and Samar Yazbek's القرفة رائحة [Cinnamon] (2008). Each of these novels approach autobiographical, autofictional and or fictional accounts of subjectivity, identity and/or queer subjects and practices – both in the conventional and non-conventional use of queer. The act or process of *queering* migration, as this dissertation's title suggests, is a way to conceive of a region or space that is constantly changing – both the space and its inhabitants. Just as the Mediterranean is endlessly (re)forming itself, so are its queer subjects who transgress and defy normative understandings of subjecthood.

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