

Queer Maghrebi French: language, temporalities, transfiliation

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Queer Maghrebi French: language, temporalities, transfiliation, by Denis M.

Provencher, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2017, 314 pp., 20 euros (paperback), ISBN 987 1 78138 279 0

In *Queer Maghrebi French*, Denis M. Provencher investigates how queer Maghrebi men living in contemporary France and beyond narrate their stories of sexual selfhood, freedom, and belonging. Contributing to a growing scholarship of how the rhetoric of 'sexual democracy' (Fassin 2006) reproduces neoliberal narratives of modernity and progress, *Queer Maghrebi French* is an original and timely study of how queer Maghrebi men contest, negotiate, and rearticulate 'narratives of arrival' where the 'good sexual citizen' (Provencher 2007) leaves *la banlieue* or *le bled* and the traditional Muslim family once and for all in order to arrive in the city and assume his sexuality. These queer Maghrebi men navigate within an international rhetoric of a 'sexual clash of civilizations' (Fassin 2006) where Islam and the Muslim world is constructed as inherently misogynist and homophobic as opposed to a liberated West constructed as inherently supportive of women's rights and LGBT rights. While a study, such as Joseph A. Massad's *Desiring Arabs* (2007), has provided a welcome critique of Western representations of so-called Arab sexual desires and pointed to the Orientalist underpinnings of Western gay rights movements, it leaves little room for hybridities and identity ambivalences, such as those presented in *Queer Maghrebi French*, and this makes the latter an important contribution to the field.

Queer Maghrebi French combines original French language data from ethnographic fieldwork in Paris, Lyon, and Marseille (conducted between 2009 and 2014) with recent narratives and cultural productions by queer Maghrebi artists and intellectuals living in France and beyond. Provencher examines the life and work of 2Fik, a French-born photographer and performance artist of Moroccan descent living in Montreal (chapter one); Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed, a French-Algerian imam and founder of the LGBT organization HM2F (Homosexual Muslims in France) and the first inclusive mosque in Paris (chapter two); Abdellah Taïa, Moroccan author and cineaste living in Paris (chapter three); Mehdi Ben Attia, Tunisian screenwriter and director living in Paris (chapter four); and three queer Maghrebi French men of working-class and middle-class families (chapter five). All in all, these chapters demonstrate that queer diasporic experiences are multiple and that the speakers have varying access to what Provencher has coined 'flexible language' and 'transfiliation'. Through subversive artistic, intellectual, and activist productions they each in their way create spaces of belonging and transfilial ties that draw on both the tradition of their families of origin and their experiences living in France and beyond.

In the introduction to the book Provencher provides the reader with a rich theoretical and analytical framework drawing on queer theory, gender studies, postcolonial and diaspora studies, queer linguistics and ethnography. Given this well-argued intersectional approach in the introduction and the rich empirical data laid out in chapters one to five, it would have been interesting with a more elaborate discussion of how empirical data and theoretical framework intersect and inform each other. While the book is opened with a discussion about how queer Maghrebi men—by writing or staging the self as 'other'—unsettle hegemonic identity categories related to gender, sexuality, religion, race, and class, the analyses in chapters one to five primarily focus on how they create a dual filiation with the tradition of their families and secular French culture by replacing the 'coming out' narrative with 'comings and goings' between France and the Maghreb. However, I would have liked to read more about how their identity performances contaminate hegemonic discourses, such as the 'Hetero-Nation' (Hayes 2000) or homonationalism (Puar 2007), as well as how they destabilise prevailing narratives of what it means to be homosexual, Muslim, North African, male, French, secular, etc.

The juxtaposition of men, literature and secular *baraka*, on the one side, and women, revolutionaries and sacred *baraka*, on the other, in the analysis of Abdellah Taïa's creative writing appears somewhat simplistic, and I would argue that it could have benefitted from an account of how Taïa's use of 'poor French' (Taïa and Idier 2016) and his references to Egyptian cinema and pop culture function as a parodic performance of the norms and conventions of literature as high culture as well as of the French language as a site of emancipation. I would argue that a focus on these aspects of Taïa's creative writing could have informed the theoretical development of 'flexible language' and 'transfiliation' better than so-called secular and religious *baraka*.

Apart from these minor reservations, *Queer Maghrebi French* is a timely and well-researched book that provides an important contribution to its field. It will be of interest to both students and scholars within the fields of French and francophone studies, gender studies, queer studies, and postcolonial and diaspora studies.

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Quand la gauche se réinventait. Le PSU, histoire d'un parti visionnaire, by Bernard Ravenel, Paris, La Découverte, 2016, 380 pp., 24.50 euros (paperback), ISBN 978-2-7071-8889-2

It is unusual for a party so apparently puny in conventional terms, never exceeding four members of the National Assembly, to exercise as much influence over French political and intellectual life as the Parti socialiste unifié. At a 2017 conference on the PSU's best-known former leader, the late Michel Rocard, the historian Michelle Perrot recalled that just in her local branch, fellow members included not only Rocard but also Mona Ozouf, François Furet and Serge Mallet. Among those with walk-on parts in Bernard Ravenel's book are Claude Bourdet, René Dumont, André Gorz, Daniel Guérin, Henri Lefebvre, Jérôme Lindon, Pierre Mendès-France, Laurent Schwarz and Pierre Vidal-Naquet. Ever the internationalists, the PSU's reputation traversed the Mediterranean: its founding conference in 1960 was addressed by the ill-fated Mehdi Ben Barka, and it was invited to the funeral of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1970. Although the last decade has seen a rediscovery of the PSU, because this has typically taken the form of reminiscences between participants or scholarly edited books on specialised aspects, there was for a long time a gap in the market for an