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Sexualized Collaborations and the Politics of Ghost-Writing in Franco-Arab Literature: From Paul Bowles to *Tout le Monde Aime Mohamed*

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**“Sexualized Collaborations and the Politics of Ghost-writing in Franco-Arab Literature:
From Paul Bowles to *Tout le monde aime Mohamed*”**

In the summer of 2011, subscribers to the FrancoFil listserv—for academics in French Studies—received an otherwise ordinary message from an author named Malik Kuzman advertising the imminent release of his *Tout le monde aime Mohamed*¹ or, in English, *Everyone Loves Mohamed*. Ostensibly autobiographical, this coming-of-age memoir is the fruit of collaboration between the storyteller “Mohamed” and an unknown “you” figure, to whom Mohamed recounts his adolescence and teenage years. A youth known for his good looks, Mohamed hails from the Moroccan town of Tamrir,² and is an employee in his father’s electronics repair shop. He frequently misses work and school due to an unusual extra-curricular activity: his constant sexcapades both remunerated and not, most often with men but sometimes with women. In this way he earns a supplemental income and finds some meager degree of social promotion. He makes the most of his connections with lovers and tricks by securing favors of various types. A series of monotonously pornographic vignettes constitute the flat narrative, made up of stories very rarely erotic and most often dispiriting. They are notable for the multiplicity of subjects they involve, from lawyers, to tourists, to imams, to policemen, to apprentices, to butchers, to bureaucrats... Mohamed seems to draw in all segments of society, hence the title of the book. He finally manages to make his way to France, a voyage facilitated by a mysterious French male lover, eventually revealed to be the “you” interlocutor Mohamed addresses throughout the novel. In France he finds work in a

¹ The title will henceforth be shortened to *Tout le monde*.
Kuzman, Malik. *Tout le monde aime Mohamed (Everyone loves Mohamed)*. Editions Léo Scheer, 2011.

² The only comparable-sounding town that actually exists is Tamri, near Agadir.

metals factory, continues seeing this man, who later encourages him to recount his past adolescent sexual trysts for the purpose of putting together the work that would become *Tout le monde*. Mohamed eventually marries a woman met in France and has a child, all while continuing to see the “you” lover/literary collaborator; he even makes jokes at the expense of his wife and her ignorance of the clandestine homosexual affair.

The suggested author’s name “Malik Kuzman” refers not to an actual person but rather to a creature of collaboration. By collaboration, I do not mean to inject overtones of treason or informancy, but rather to refer to the work of two creators working together. In the case at hand, the name Malik Kuzman refers to no specific, existing individual. The name is the term of choice for an at once literary and sexual relationship: that of the narrator Mohamed with the French man who collected his (love)story and had it published, in the form of *Tout le monde*. Picking up the book casually at a bookstore, one would not immediately know this, as questions regarding authorship are answered only after consulting the enigmatic, soft-core website promoting the book (now removed from view).³ There, amidst background images of smooth male torsos and necklaces hanging near nipples, the scholar Hervé Baudry-Kruger attempts to answer the pressing question: “Just who is Malik Kuzman?”

This question surrounding a possible double-authorship should not shock readers of Franco-Arab fiction.⁴ *Tout le monde*, and the precedents like it, can be contextualized by referring to a rich heritage of literary collaborations marked by sexual ambivalence. This ambivalent heritage was perhaps best exemplified by the Tangiers generation of sexually

³ Last accessed June 2012. www.malikkuzman.com.

⁴ This last designation refers, in my usage, to literature produced by authors of North African background expressing themselves in French, their novels set in France or transnationally in the country of ancestry, with output mostly published in France; this is a larger category which can include *banlieue* fiction (penned by France-born writers from the multi-ethnic suburbs and projects) as well as transnational fiction with no connection to France besides language. I select the term “Arab” for reasons of self-designation as well as outside designation, with important exceptions allowed for subjects who don’t recognize themselves in the term “Arab,” opting for other ethnic markers (like Kabyle) or national nominations.

experimental American and European writers whose utopian enclave, established in that once international Moroccan city, has been read as either a sanctuary from their own moralizing societies, or in another reading, a sexual playground where impoverished young boys could be had for a small price.⁵ Tangiers was a favourite haunt of the “Beats” (Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsburg), its distance from the US and its international standing turned it into a foreign yet familiar “playground” for tourists and bohemians with a desire to explore. Foreign currencies went a long way, and writers could stretch their funds while living comfortably. In many biographies, Tangiers became a space of both personal and sexual reinvention. Apart from this ambivalence, writers like Paul Bowles did help introduce North African voices who had previously been ignored by Arabic publishers, some critics even coining the new genre “Tangierian literature” to refer to those expressing themselves in an oral vernacular, which was then recorded using audiotape and transcribed to the page.⁶ Over time, this initial collaborative mode has evolved through subsequent generations of mostly European writers, who continued fostering the literature of sexual dissidence in a distinctly storytelling style. “Sexual dissidence,” a term borrowed from Alan Sinfield, refers not just to alternative sexuality but less neutrally to a kind of resistance that “(operates) in terms of gender, and repeatedly unsettles the very opposition between dominant and subordinate.”⁷ This pattern, I note, persists in the field of *beur* and *banlieue*⁸ fiction today.

⁵ Boone, Joseph A.. “Vacation Cruises; Or, the Homoerotics of Orientalism”. *PMLA* 110 #1 (1995): 89-107.

⁶ Edwards, Brian. “The Moroccan Paul Bowles,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* L # 2 (2011). Ann Arbor, MI: MPublishing, University of Michigan Library.

⁷ Sinfield, Alan. *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*. Oxford University Press, 1991.

⁸ “*beur*” is an argotic rearrangement of “Arab” employed in the French context to designate the children (and subsequent generations) of North African immigrants to France. “*Banlieue*” means “suburb” and refers in this case to the impoverished peri-urban housing projects populated by the working class, immigrants, and their descendants.

Oftentimes, the promise of dissidence is replaced with yet more objectification. In this article, I explain the persistence of sexualized affiliation between Euro-American writers and their North African collaborators through the generations. I show that collaboration has often yielded to ventriloquism, and sometimes outright ghostwriting. In a French literary tradition which has famously celebrated the death of the Author,⁹ the act of impersonating Arabs will be examined for the way it makes the outmoded question of authorship newly relevant, especially in fiction that aims for ethnographic “authenticity” and claims to channel, yet in some ways creates, an embattled Arab sexual dissidence. While the motivations for exposing and encouraging this alternative Arab sexuality have been ostensibly “progressive,” the tales related have mostly described a bleak sexual unhappiness.

What factors have encouraged this desire to “speak for”? Why has the issue of author identity not been more forcefully interrogated in literature ostensibly penned by Arabs who opt for anonymity? In order to answer these questions I begin by examining a set of past collaborations in which the act of collaboration, or the content of the resulting work, were themselves heavily sexualized. These occurred between Paul Bowles and the Moroccan authors Mohammed Mrabet and Mohammed Choukri; as well as between the theorists Roland Barthes, Renaud Camus, and the Franco-Arab contemporary writer Farid Tali. I foreground this section by considering several “ghostwriting” controversies on the Parisian literary scene. Where relevant, I examine the gray area where collaboration has turned into ventriloquism. I finally focus on a contemporary instance of these themes, only the most recent, Malik

⁹ The French literary theorist Roland Barthes famously explored this notion, suggesting that matters of biographical context and extra-literary background were not as essential to the interpretation of texts as the consideration of language alone. Interestingly, Roland Barthes is one of the key figures in the genealogy of sexualized collaborations I sketch out here (cf. his close rapport with protégé Renaud Camus, himself a publisher and collaborator of the young gay Franco-Arab writer Farid Tali).
Barthes, Roland. “The Death of the Author”. *Aspen* 5-6 (1967).

Kuzman's *Tout le monde aime Mohamed*, mentioned at the outset. Though this study examines literature, it focuses more particularly on a cultural history of literary testimony. The question may arise: why not consider these authors' output as literature alone? The tendency of these authors to privilege esthetic exploration over ethics, I maintain, makes considering formal questions of literature a secondary, though important task. These writers' primary focus on the production of literature (without much care for those depicted in that literature) during cross-cultural voyages to North Africa and engagements with North Africans, is what makes cultural injury an object of analysis that is equally if not more important than the formal questions of their work.

As an entry point into this essay, it is worth dwelling for a moment on the fact that Roland Barthes, an author who now belongs to the canon of gay literature, articulated his "Death of the Author" thesis around the same time he penned *Incidents*, a series of often sexual vignettes. In his influential essay, Barthes' argued that attributing an author to a text has the effect of limiting it, and that the author's intentions, as well as other details of biographical context, should not influence the interpretation of the work.¹⁰ In that book, Barthes related time spent in Morocco with a recurrent tonality of complaint, making repeated casual asides about the abundance of different "Mohammeds" he met, in a language that weaved sex into the general Moroccan landscape. One passage from *Incidents* is exceptional for its reduction of Moroccans to a sexualized anonymity:¹¹

On Samarine street, I walked against the current of the human tide. I had the feeling (nothing erotic) that they all had a *zob*/dick and that all these dicks, in rhythm with the march, were being spread out one by one like a manufactured

¹⁰ Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. Hill and Wang, 1978.

¹¹ Barthes, Roland. Quoted in Marie-Haude Caraës et Jean Fernandez, *Tanger ou la dérive littéraire (Tangiers or the Literary Drift/Excess)*. Editions Publisud, 2002.

object that detaches from the mold with a constant cadence. Within this flow, dressed up in the same rugged fabrics, in the same colors, in the same rags, every now and then a gap in the flow of dicks. (69)

In other passages from the book, *Barthes* made light of Moroccans' level of cultural engagement, through dismissive writing about the young male Moroccans he had met, and what he saw as the banality of their literary and professional ambitions, evaluated and compared one after the other in short sequence, in such a way that these Moroccan men seemed anonymous, almost interchangeable. I am interested in the simultaneity of the "Death of the Author" argument with Barthes' experience in Morocco and the rendering anonymous of his Arab literary interlocutors. Before and after Barthes' *Incidents*, so much of what can be termed the gay literature of travel to North Africa has not only rendered anonymous Arab boys, men, and fellow writers, it has also encroached on their authorship through: collaborations that eclipse the Arab party, belittlings of their literary ambitions, and sometimes, as in the case study of *Tout le monde*, shroudings of Arab authorship behind elaborate schemes of ghostwriting, scrambled pen names, and hidden identities.

Upon seeing Malik Kuzman's listserv announcement, I immediately contacted him at what appeared to be his own e-mail address,¹² interested as I was in a new contribution to Francophone Moroccan literature exploring sexuality, while hesitant that it might smack of a familiar sexual exploitation. I received a response not from Kuzman, but rather from a Mr. Bernard Montagner, who nevertheless signed the reply "Malik Kuzman." Montagner, a person

¹² kizman@wanadoo.fr.

seemingly unpublished in literary fields,¹³ revealed a possible rationale for the selection of the Kuzman pen-name in his message. Montagner explained that he was currently at work on an anthology of the divan of the Hispano-Arab poet Ibn Kuzman (1080-1160 approximately), for the publishing house Geuthner which specializes in Orientalism. Ibn Kuzman pioneered poetic forms and has import for French letters because he influenced the southern French Provençal language.¹⁴ Going by the full name Abu Bakr ibn 'Abd al-Malik ibn Quzman, the celebrated poet flourished during the Almoravid period in Cordoba, Islamic Andalusia. While some European commentators of his poetry believed it to be influenced by the conventions of Romance poetry, analyses by James Monroe have complicated this account and brought up the case that it may be of Arabic origin, or a combination of both.¹⁵ Ibn Quzman adapted the poetic form of the popular Andalusí *zajal* for more formal purposes: his poetry featured many humorous and fantastical elements, including sword dances, dogs with human qualities, and importantly for our purposes, cross-dressing.¹⁶

In a flattered and genteel tone, Montagner responded at length to my query. I had asked him whether or not this was truly a book penned by a Moroccan author and not one written by a French author under another name. I posed this somewhat direct question because there has been a precedent in modern French literature of not quite ghostwriters, but

¹³ He is not to be confused with the French cinema actor Bernard Montagner, whose roles stretched from 1978 to 1989. Editors. "Bernard Montagner". Last accessed June 18th, 2012. www.imdb.com. www.imdb.com/name/nm0598730/.

¹⁴ His name is occasionally spelled Ibn Guzman:
Meri, Josef W.. *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia* (Routledge, 2005), 364.

¹⁵ Monroe, James T. . "The Mystery of the Missing Mantle: The Poet as Wittol? (Ibn Quzmān's 'Zajal 20')". *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37 #1 (2006): 1-45.
Monroe, James T. . "Literary Hybridization in the 'Zajal': Ibn Quzmān's 'Zajal 88' (The Visit of Sir Gold)". *Journal of Arabic Literature* 38 #3 (2007): 324-351.

¹⁶ Gies, David T. . *The Cambridge History of Spanish Literature*. (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 119.

what the French inimitably call *nègres littéraires* (or “literary negroes”): this term refers to anonymous authors writing under another person’s name, usually more public or prominent. Alternatively, some established authors have been motivated to publish under different pen-names arguably to show that their first successes did not come at random.¹⁷

There have been more infamous precedents in the realm of Franco-Arab fiction in particular: the writer Paul Smaïl—allegedly Franco-Arab and hailing from the multi-ethnic suburbs—was hailed in the press as an unusually promising new voice, but was finally revealed to be the singer and author Jack-Alain Léger, an elderly Caucasian Frenchman who had already changed his name from Daniel Théron.¹⁸ Smaïl/Léger’s purportedly autobiographical novels contained bleak portrayals of failed inter-cultural love relationships and reluctant, substitutive homosexuality.¹⁹ His purportedly autobiographical *Vivre me tue*—which can be translated as *Living is Killing Me*—chronicled the aimless life of his namesake Paul, who had accumulated a long list of failures. He could not find work beyond pizza delivery despite his secondary degrees, and had failed to save his relationship with a beautiful and educated Jewish girlfriend. He was unable to save his gay brother—addicted to steroids and later spirited off by a German-Turkish sugar daddy—from death via steroid poisoning. Overall, Smaïl felt his bicultural origins to be a form of dilution and disorientation rather than a double horizon. Other segments of the novel described the implosion of an Arab household, with father unmanned by a thankless and jobless immigration project. The brother’s

¹⁷ One author in particular, Romain Gary, managed to do so, under the pen-name Emile Ajar, and thus became the first person to twice win the prestigious Prix Goncourt, France’s highest literary honor. Some make distinctions between ghost-writing and what Gary did, which was more like donning a mask to reveal himself yet again, with renewed glory, as Gary.

¹⁸ Kleppinger, Kathryn. “Why the *Beur* Novel? Writers and Journalists Interact to Construct a New French Voice”. PhD. diss., New York University, 2011.

¹⁹ *Vivre me tue* was adapted into a film starring veteran Franco-Arab actors Sami Bouajila and Jalil Lespert. Smaïl, Paul. *Vivre me tue*. Balland, 1997. Sinapi, Jean-Pierre, dir.. *Vivre me tue*. Canal +, 2003.

homosexuality and later death, as well as the protagonist's failed heterosexual venture, all point to a "no future" of failed reproduction that is a common feature of popular fiction featuring *banlieue* or Franco-Arab characters. In certain ways, this literary tradition reflects precedents in colonial literature penned by French metropolitan writers about the colonies that alluded to an essentialized, culture-specific pattern of failure, of being held back, or lacking the tools of progress.

Writers that reinforce the sexual failings of French Muslims often criticize the religion of this demographic group in parallel. Léger/Smaïl later penned a book-length critique of the Koran, *A contre coran (Against the Koran)*—a play on the expression "*a contre courant (against the current)*"²⁰—in which he asks the question "is the Koran a book of hatred?" before answering in the affirmative (148). The cover image features a sketched figure kneeling in prayer, with middle finger outstretched toward the reader. Another novel Léger penned as Smaïl, *Ali le magnifique*, was derived from the real-life story of serial killer Sid Ahmed Rezala, a disaffected Franco-Arab youth who had murdered women, and raped a young boy at a train station.²¹ Léger's projections of sexual aimlessness or aggression and his attribution of religious hatred, I suggest, reflect complementary sides of an attempt to belittle Franco-Arab identity in its very viability and reproduction. Though I'm making this argument in regard to predominant, post-colonial French representations of North African minorities, one could connect such representational trends to an earlier period in colonial ideology toward the Arab world. This stance involved a strong skepticism of fraternal universalism even within ventures that strove for more equality between the French Muslims of colonies and the settler populations, such as the advent of the "évolués," a category that referred to

²⁰ Léger, Jack-Alain. *A contre coran (Counter Koran)*. Editions Hors Commerce/ Collection Hors de moi, 2004.

²¹ Smaïl, Paul. *Ali le magnifique (Ali The Magnificent)*. Denoël, 2001.

those “elite,” native subjects who had assimilated, spoke French, and were governed by French laws, yet found themselves restricted by yet other limits and ceilings.

Another controversy about questionable authorship involved Chimo, the purported author of *Lila Says*,²² an “autobiographical” real-life story of sexual and affective anomie in the French suburbs. Chimo is widely believed in literary and journalistic circles to have been a creation,²³ this despite an editor’s note claiming a manuscript had arrived via a lawyer. The memoir chronicles the life of a Franco-Arab, unemployed boy who falls in love with a beautiful blond, verbally nymphomaniac but chaste girl named Lila. Chimo states at the outset that, even though he intends to pen a novel, he has actually never read a book all the way through. Lila, with her pornographic yet somehow tender and transfixing language, acts as Chimo’s muse, and by recording everything “Lila says,” Chimo turns into the writer he never had the wherewithal to be. The novel ends with sudden tragedy when Chimo’s own gang of friends, absent him, rapes his beloved, ending in her death by suicide, as she jumps out of an open window thinking that Chimo, who had come to save her, might actually be an accomplice to their crime. Thus Chimo abandons the hopeful writing project inspired by his muse at the same time that he loses her forever. He claims that his last authorial act will be the delivery of his manuscript to a publisher, and that he will probably never write again. This vow was short-lived however, because Chimo came out of the shadows shortly after *Lila Says* became a critical and popular success, in order to pen *J’ai peur*,²⁴ in which he explains how he went about tracking down his royalty money, after it was stolen. Olivier Le Naire, a writer for

²² Chimo. *Lila dit ça* (“*Lila Says*”). Pocket, 1997.

²³ Le Naire, Olivier. “Mais qui est donc Chimo? (Who is Chimo then?)” *L’Express*, April 25, 1996. Last accessed April 4, 2012.
http://www.lexpress.fr/informations/mais-qui-est-donc-chimo_613793.html.

²⁴ Chimo. *J’ai peur* (I’m scared). Pocket, 1997.

the magazine *L'Express*, is the only journalist to have prominently investigated Chimo's identity, and with the release of *J'ai Peur*, he suggested that the novel may have been penned by a pool of writers.²⁵

Like Léger's *Vivre me tue*, *Lila Says* was made into a film²⁶—one important mark of a novel's impact—by Lebanese director Ziad Doueiri of *West Beirut* fame. In his version, *misérabilisme* was upended and the story remade into a heartwarmer about how mixed relationships can succeed against all odds in the French suburbs. Rather than having Lila die “at the hands” of Chimo, Doueiri transforms the Franco-Arab protagonist from loser to hero, enabling him to save the damsel, and then beat up (and finally renounce) his former gang-mates. The two lovers make projects to be united in a near future, a future that also sees Chimo win a scholarship to a prestigious academy for young writers, thus concluding the “ghetto exit strategy” that has become a staple of most *banlieue* survival fiction. In this way, Doueiri's adaptation becomes an activist gesture against the culture of poverty and failure that plagued the book. The issue of discursive violence in altering a work of fiction for the screen seems less important when the original work has itself shown infidelity—in the act of stereotypical impersonation—to the population it supposedly represents. As such Doueiri was faithful, albeit faithful to a tradition of dishonesty, making the most of a dubious “original” work to offer an image of *banlieue* love that does not reinforce the oft-tread tropes of sexual misery. In this way, Doueiri contests patterns of ghostwriting by departing from the authenticity that had paradoxically been elevated as a value by “inauthentic” Franco-Arab writers (ghostwriters).

²⁵ Le Naire, Olivier. “Chimo Dit ça (Chimo Says),” *L'Express*, Sept 18, 1997. Last accessed December 19, 2012. http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/j-ai-peur_817581.html.

²⁶ Doueiri, Ziad (dir.). *Lila Says (Lila dit ça)*. Samuel Goldwyn Films, 2005.

The question may be asked: do these authorship scandals have anything to do with the way *Tout le monde*, or other books in this vein, should be read? Several factors must first be noted: the author and publisher are making claims to authenticity in the press; *Tout le monde* is being considered as literature based on a true story; and the book jacket (as well as other promotional literature) claims to depict with realism a lost age of Moroccan sexual freedom. The author and publisher have already exited the Barthesian frame in so far as they have placed great emphasis on the biographical context and authorial intentionality Barthes deemed irrelevant to the interpretation of texts. What's more, Montagner's own acknowledgment of standing in for the narrator Mohamed, thus admitting to ghostwriting, indicate that what has been presented as reality-inspired fiction may in fact be pure fiction. Similarities with authorship scandals of the past involving ghostwriting for purportedly Arab authors also call for added scrutiny. The stakes are all the more important because an author may be writing fictions about supposedly real people in a non-fiction mode, representing Mohamed, his lovers, and acquaintances, as sexually promiscuous, dishonest, misogynistic, uncultured, self-interested, and occasionally brutal. These figures have already maligned sexually within motifs of "neo-Orientalist" representation that stress brutality, patriarchy, and sexual tyranny, motifs that are needless to say abundant in the gay literature representing North Africa, and more recently, Arab immigrants to France. Joseph Massad has critiqued such representational trends in contemporary gay-interest media depicting Arabs: behind the condemnation of the "sexual instability" of Arab men—which involves bafflement about how they can "hypocritically" practice both same-sex and different-sex contact—is a universalization of western sexual subjectivity, one which drives away the polymorphousness that doesn't conform with a normative gay lifestyle.²⁷ What's more, the fact that Montagner and the

²⁷ Massad, Joseph. *Desiring Arabs*. (University of Chicago Press, 2007): 40, 164.

materials promoting *Tout le monde* locate the narrator Mohamed's existence solely within his testimony captured on the page, leads to a continuation of the orientalist tendency of confusing people with texts, these people all the more transparent and "readable." While testimonial writing about real events cannot be contested in its reality, when such writing gets considered as fiction, the chosen manner of representation can be criticized, as well as the dishonesty of passing one genre off as another. It is in this sense that the freedom and importance of literary fabulation— so integral to the Death of the Author argument, and the separation of fabulated text from author—take second stage when supposedly real people and events have been fabulated.

Indeed, it is Montagner/Kuzman's sensitive angling around both the identity of author and nature of the genre that takes away from the veracity of his claims. He appeared quite conscious of French ghostwriting precedents in his lengthy response to my first query:

I thank you for the interest you have shown in my novel. I understand, in fact, your perplexity and I can reassure you: this is not yet another ghost-written work (*énième commande négrière*) but rather an original text in which the subject matter is the coming-of-age and education (*récit d'apprentissage*) of a young Moroccan, before the gay era and the time of condoms: it's a Morocco without condoms that is disappearing right now, before our eyes (I don't know if it would be appropriate to talk of sexual minorities²⁸)...Don't forget that the character of Mohamed is illiterate, he thus needed someone to write for him and also to relate his voice. I am happy to discover that young Moroccans may have identified with this story. Nevertheless, my intention in writing it was not the search for any kind of mirror effect, but to recount the extraordinary things that happened and to let them flow in a language as faithful as

²⁸ I had used this terminology in my initial letter.

possible to that of the Mohamed from over there. From one standpoint, I am that Mohamed, I carry him within myself in any case!

Montagner's response is noteworthy on a number of levels. It can be attached to previous chapters within North African Francophone and Anglophone literary history, especially as regards literary collaborations and affiliations that are also sexually ambiguous. Montagner doesn't answer outright the question of authorship posed to him, nevertheless, he wishes to distance himself from the ghostwriters outlined earlier, while not proving definitely that he isn't himself one. He privileges a framework of collaboration over one of ghostwriting, yet his response does not clarify the difference between the two. He does not explain how distinct they are in terms of the possibility of discursive violence against the person written "over" or spoken for, whether an actual person or an imagined figure meant to represent a real social type. The question then arises, to what extent can the narrator of *Tout le monde* and its author be distinguished? In a sense, answering such a question proves impossible because the pen-name Malik Kuzman refers to an invention of collaboration, an author who (one should say "that") exists solely as a synthesis between the supposedly real, oral storyteller Mohamed and his unnamed French interlocutor committing the story to the page. Yet, as with retellings and translations of the *1001 Nights*, the stories could very well be bare-bones blueprints, to which the writer who seeks to capture a fleeting and unstable oral testimony adds his or her own literary stamp. Hence the many passages in *Tout le monde* that are meant to be the retranscription of oral testimony but come off as overworked literary meditation.

In a follow-up message (for which I received no reply, marking the end of our correspondence), I asked him whether Montagner/Kuzman lined himself up, in terms of literary heritage and affiliation, with a collaborative writer like the American Paul Bowles,

who lived in Morocco and used the same medium of recording oral testimony to foster the literary output of Mohamed Mrabet and Mohamed Choukri. Bowles had a working knowledge of Moroccan Arabic or “Moghrebi” as he called it (the dialect from which he translated his interlocutors’ stories). He admittedly did not understand literary arabic, which is to say he could not read the Arabic manuscripts Choukri later produced. In *Tout le monde*, the storyteller Mohamed recounts events that occurred when he spoke Moroccan Arabic almost exclusively, and was just beginning to seriously learn French. When Mohamed immigrates to France, with the help of his French lover, he recounts the sexual trysts that make up *Tout le monde* in a slowly-improving French. It is importantly not yet a literary French, which is where the collector and weaver of testimony (Montagner? the second half of Malik Kuzman?) comes in to produce the text. Thus, Moroccan Arabic, the language of communication in most of the vignettes recounted, is not heard, except here and there as colorful fragments that sound more like a basic vocabulary necessary for touristic orientation.

The literary collaboration that occurred between Bowles and Choukri, while opening new publishing vistas for Choukri, was often rocky, with some disputes rendered metaphorical and figured in Choukri’s own stories: their relationship has been called exploitative by Tahar Ben Jelloun, Choukri’s French translator, who went so far as to title a 1971 Op-ed in *Le Monde des lettres* on Bowles’ relationship with Moroccan writers “Technique for a Rape.”²⁹ Choukri and Bowles’ ended their literary relationship with a very public falling out, contained in Choukri’s *In Tangier*; as Brian Edwards, who had spent time interviewing Bowles in Morocco prior to his passing, explains: “In his book, Choukri launched a full-scale attack of Bowles, criticizing him as a homosexual, as much worse in Arabic than he pretended, and as someone who may have loved Morocco but surely hated

²⁹ Ben Jelloun, Tahar. "Technique d'un viol," *Le Monde*, June 19, 1972.

Moroccans. For Choukri, Bowles had worn out his welcome in Tangier.”³⁰ In a public talk, Ben Jelloun disputed the official storyline behind the “translation” of *For Bread Alone*. Bowles maintained in his introduction that he had asked Choukri to take the manuscript he had written in literary Arabic and “reduce” it to the “Moghrebi” dialect for his understanding and translation, with French and Spanish used to find nuances of meaning.³¹ Ben Jelloun had also initially claimed that Mohamed Mrabet, Bowles’ other collaborator, did not exist, a statement which enraged the actual Mrabet.³² Ben Jelloun, who was in charge of the French translation, said in a public talk that when he asked Choukri about the manuscript, Choukri replied that there wasn’t one, that he had recounted the narrative to Bowles who then transcribed it. Ben Jelloun then explained that Choukri would have to write a book if he wanted it translated.³³

In Kuzman’s novel as in Bowles’ Moroccan “translations,” anecdotes involving young or underage boys abound, with the difference that in *Tout le monde*, the protagonist practices homosexuality of his own accord and not solely the substitutive, resentful type that comes exclusively out of financial necessity. Though Mohamed frequently prostitutes himself, he does acknowledge taking pleasure from homosexual sex and seeks it outside of prostitution. In Mohamed Mrabet’s novels as in this one, the Moroccan narrator writes in meta-mode about the act of working with a benefactor/collaborator, which is assimilated, directly or indirectly, to a sexual relation. “Meta” because in *Tout le monde*, Mohamed talks about the oral

³⁰ Edwards.

³¹ “*For Bread Alone* is a manuscript, written in classical Arabic, a language I do not know. The author had to reduce it first to Moroccan Arabic for me. Then we used Spanish and French for ascertaining shades of meaning. Although exact, the translation is far from literal.”
Choukri, Mohamed. *For Bread Alone*. Translated by Paul Bowles. Peter Owen, 1973.

³² Edwards.

³³ Ben Jelloun, Tahar. "Comparative Approaches to Middle Eastern Literature: Leaving Tangier". NYU Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, October 22, 2010.

testimony that is in the process of being collected, at the same time that he speaks to the unnamed lover who asked for and records the story. In Mrabet's works, the Moroccan narrator frequently makes veiled allusions to a British Man who is both a caretaker and an employer : the theme of sexualized collaboration was a focus of *The Lemon*, in which a Moroccan youth seeking to build a familial and economic future maintains a relationship of convenience with a Britishman named Mr. David³⁴ (with critics suggesting a loose link with Paul Bowles). In Kuzman's case, the person collecting the story, who eggs him on in *1 001 Nights* style to tell him everything and at once, is designated as both "you" and his longtime lover, incidentally the person who made it possible for Mohamed to immigrate to France. In both Kuzman and Mrabet's novels, the protagonist marries a woman, with homosexual relations continuing in parallel: such a representation reinforces the motif of widespread Arab bisexuality (as well as disrespect for women) often promoted in gay sexual tourism literature.³⁵ Michael Walonen here comments on Greg Mullins' scholarship—which chronicled Bowles', Burroughs', and Chester's presence in Tangier—and describes the perceptions of Moroccan men among that generation of travellers and writers: "The Moroccan 'Arab' male took on a very particular sexual allure for those attracted to them, as Greg Mullins notes. Accorded much of the same exotic virility and untrammled sexualized masculinity as commonly attributed to black men, the 'Arab' was prized as someone bisexual or 'sexually undifferentiated' rather than gay, and hence 'a *man* whose masculinity is uncompromised' ”³⁶

³⁴ Mrabet, Mohamed. *The Lemon*. Translated by Paul Bowles. London: Peter Owen, 1969.

³⁵ Luongo, Michael, ed.. *Gay Travels in the Muslim World*. Harrington Park Press, 2007.

³⁶ Walonen, Michael. *Writing Tangier in the Postcolonial Transition*. (Ashgate, 2011): 22.

Such descriptions culturize sexual practices so that they become built into the notion of an Arab time “before homosexuality,”³⁷ when homosexual identity was, as some argue, an unintelligible category. This idea shows up in *Tout le monde* as well, with Mohamed feeling no need to explain away his bisexual infidelity to his wife; the practice is rather celebrated and ascribed to a cultural particularity that is eroticized in so far as it contributes to the idea of a segregated Arab society, in which clandestine homosexual relations can flourish away from scrutiny. Building on the scholarship of Eve Sedgwick, Mervat Hatem described an instance of this phenomenon in Mamluk-governed Egypt, explaining how male homosexuality flourished within a sex-segregated society as a form of sexual solidarity, contributing in one sense to the marginalization of wives but in another sense, as she postulates, freeing them up for other preoccupations.³⁸

Elements of nostalgia for an unrecoverable, Golden Age of Arab homosexual erotics show up in the promotional materials surrounding the release of *Tout le monde*. When further pressed about the question of authorship, Mr. Montagner referred me back to the “Who is Malik Kuzman?” article (by Hervé Baudry-Kruger) on the now defunct malikkuzman.com website, an article which he said was “as clear as possible as to defining the enunciative frame of this equivocal text.” Baudry-Kruger’s article is far from clear and introduces further degrees of mystery, posing (and inviting) more questions than the initial he one he sets out to answer. It also contains many instances of eroticization rather than elucidation, as though the erotic content could distract from the ambiguous circumstances of the text’s creation: erotica

³⁷ This provocative word choice recalls an earlier, less ahistorical study of past homosexual practices in the Arab/Islamic world, substantiated with various cultural and legal documents: El-Rouayheb, Khaled. *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Muslim world: 1500-1800*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

³⁸ Hatem, Mervat. “The Politics of Sexuality and Gender in Segregated Patriarchal Systems: The Case of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Egypt,” *Feminist Studies* 12 #2 (1986): 250-274.

being a genre in which skepticism is routinely suspended. Baudry-Kruger, author of a book-length work on rectal washing in Molière's plays,³⁹ sidesteps the issue authorship by bringing in the notion that structuralism has taught us that the author's identity is ultimately unimportant for its interpretation. He concludes with this revelatory rhetorical question: "What does the storyteller's identity matter as long as he was beautiful, young, and his body as fresh as mint? Everything else is weakness." Quotes such as these sexualize the context of *Tout le monde*; yet one still wonders to what extent the nature of sexual collaboration in the book is available to be known. In Bowles, the evidence for such encounters was not alluded to directly in texts: such guesswork was left to readers making their own analogies between Bowles' life and the literary anecdotes that seemed to resemble it; it was also left to Bowles' entourage of gay writers and critics like Ben Jelloun and Choukri. In *Tout le monde* the context is much clearer: Montagner states that he is, in a certain sense, Mohamed, because he holds a part of him within himself, because he insinuates that he is the "you" figure, the recorder of Mohamed's testimony, and because Mohamed thus recounts to him their own sexual encounters.

This romanticized vision of a beautiful Arab storyteller flows from Baudry-Kruger's attempt to place this post-colonial novel in "filiation"⁴⁰ with erotic texts from an embellished, Iranian/Arab, erotological Golden Age. Baudry-Kruger plays up the erotics of ephebe sexuality, safely locked away in Morocco or more generally in a distant Islamic past, where it is unlikely to face judgment according to more globalized and current ethical standards⁴¹:

³⁹ Baudry-Kruger, Hervé. *Molière par-derrière (Molière from Behind)*. Éditions Talus d'approche, 2007.

⁴⁰ When the website was still active, hovering the mouse over the rubric "Who?" brought up the word "filiation," as though the author's identity was perhaps less important than the various strands of his or her literary heritage.

⁴¹ Baudry-Kruger, Hervé. "Qui est Malik Kuzman?". Last accessed June 2012, <http://Malikkuzman.com> (inactive).

Every average connoisseur of Golden Age Andalusia will have detected the filiation.

This Moroccan has rebaptized himself the son of poets but his story is not sentimental, not made of rosewater. The epicurianism of Turks and Persians finds in this human savagery its most raw, most cruel equivalent: food of metaphors, a child does not live off flowers alone, even if he finishes there, his ass raised up to the phallus of an imam.

Baudry-Kruger's overlooking of the author's identity can be affiliated with Barthes' "death of the author" argument, as mentioned before: Barthes was himself in literary affiliation with other homosexual writers who have toured Morocco, and has continued the line with younger plumes. Barthes produced an acutely othering account of meetings with young men in Morocco, *Incidents*, accompanied in its most recent edition⁴² by photographs of South Asian (not North African) men. Unable to keep track of all the Mohammeds he meets, Barthes writes: "Mohammed (of course), a policeman's son, wants (later on, when he's through with the *lycée*), to be a police inspector: that's his vocation. Moreover (he says): he likes football (right guard), pinball, and girls" (28).⁴³ That the Death of the Author argument emerged at a time when writers across the Mediterranean were celebrating "authentic" authorship rid of the colonial yoke, indicates the possible estrangement between Barthes' and his young North African colleagues. The authors' in "filiation" with Barthes seem to have entrenched this estrangement for the context of contemporary France, such that authorship can be toyed with in gay-interest literature just as scandals about the "injustice" of Franco-Arab, *banlieue* ghostwriting have broken out.

One of Barthes' protégés—the French writer and current anti-"islamization"

⁴² Barthes, Roland. *Incidents*. Translated by Teresa Lavender Fagan. London: Seagull Books, 2010. Samaddar, Bishan. "Roland Barthes' *Incidents*: Photographs by Bishan Samaddar". Last accessed April 6, 2012. <http://seagullindia.com/samrc/incidents/incidents.html>.

⁴³ Barthes, Roland. *Incidents*. Translated by Richard Howard. University of California Press, 1992.

campaigner Renaud Camus—also published an account of encounters, in the explicit *Tricks*,⁴⁴ which is to date still his most famous work and the only one to be translated into English. Camus, like Bowles before him, later ushered in a new writer of North African background, the French writer Farid Tali, in an experiment of side-by-side writing: *Incomparable*.⁴⁵ The title derived from the meaning of Farid’s name in Arabic (unique): the book is composed of parallel diaries, in which both men recount their impressions of one another after their first meeting, the contents not to be revealed before the end of the experiment. Camus’ account revolved around unreciprocated desire while Tali’s dwelled on the discomfort of longing for literary instruction rather than physical admiration. Tali often felt eclipsed by the literary legend, writing that he felt at a disadvantage from the start and could never properly emerge from Camus’ shadow. In that book, Camus explicitly inscribes himself in the re-creation of Roland Barthes’ itinerary, almost as a sort of affiliation ritual connecting sentimental mentorships past and present: “Everything makes me think of Barthes, in this story, this non-story—starting with Morocco of course. There was, between Barthes and I, the same age difference, give or take, as between myself and this boy. And not once did I consider, despite the veneration I had for Barthes, that anything on a sentimental or sexual level might transpire” (12).

These literary affiliations, tied to Morocco, haunt *Tout le monde* in both the *incident-based* vignettes and the inter-generational dynamics on display, pointing to an author well-versed in this history. What with the open defiance of both the author (Montagner/Kuzman) and the promoter (Baudry-Kruger) in the face of questions about author identity, it comes as a surprise that only one other person has investigated Kuzman: Salim Jay. The Franco-

⁴⁴ Camus, Renaud. *Tricks*. Serpent’s Tail, 1995.

⁴⁵ Tali, Farid and Renaud Camus. *Incomparable*. P.O.L., 1999.

Moroccan author, however, emulates Baudry-Kruger in the sense that both their articles on *Tout le monde* set out to answer the “who?” question, in the seeming posture of investigative journalists, only to skirt the question entirely. They eventually laud the novel for its internal merits which, in their logic, then render the initial question about authorship unimportant. Jay quizzically titled his article “Malik Kuzman, the joker of Moroccan literature in French?” as if to hint at possible dishonesty, while also saluting the art and craft of the joker. He eventually concluded that the book seemed more loyal to “authentic voices” than ghostwriters past like Paul Smaïl/Léger. He simultaneously acknowledges, but does not seek to explore, the suspicion of ghostwriting: “(the novel) is above all a remarkable literary success, so much so that one suspects a literary hoax...”⁴⁶ This response brings up the discomfiting notion that it is unlikely for a previously unknown Moroccan writer to produce fine literature without it being ghostwritten by someone else, an issue often aired within the Paul Smaïl controversy. Smaïl/Léger was hailed throughout press and literary circles as a promising young talent, was praised as uniquely creative, and then shortlisted for a prize normally bestowed upon first-time young writers.⁴⁷ Smaïl/Léger managed to avoid the scrutiny of interviewers by saying that he did not want to become the typical *keur de service* (“house” Arab or servile Arab worker), just as he was stereotyping *beurs* in his purportedly autobiographical novel.⁴⁸ In this sense, he appropriated anti-racist speech albeit for the purpose of perpetuating discursive violence against Franco-Arabs in *keur* literature. Enabled by the era of multi-culturalism and the permission to peer into Other’s environments and mindsets, what results here is a sabotage

⁴⁶ Jay, Salim. “Malik Kuzman, joker de la littérature marocaine de langue française ?” *Lesoir-echos.com*, July 19, 2011. Last accessed July 25, 2012, <http://www.lesoir-echos.com/malik-kuzman-joker-de-la-litterature-marocaine-de-langue-francaise/culture/26685/>.

⁴⁷ Kleppinger, 229.

⁴⁸ Kleppinger, 230.

of the multi-cultural promise of mutual respect. With each new question mark around the authorship of *beur* novels, *beur* writing is impacted in its viability and value.

Jay, born in France to a Moroccan Father and French mother, has himself faced an aggressive reception in Morocco (from Driss Chraïbi and others), and has been questioned in media and literary circles about his assertion of being a “Moroccan author”⁴⁹ while writing in French from France (in this he is no different from many “fully” Moroccan authors also living abroad). Jay belongs to the field encouraging the literature of Arab homosexuality: he was instrumental to the recognition of the work of Mohamed Leftah, a Moroccan author who wrote on homosexual themes,⁵⁰ a central focus of a recent and controversial article entitled “The Suffocated voice of the Oriental Homosexual” which appeared in *Le Monde des livres*.⁵¹ Bernard Montagner e-mailed Jay’s laudatory review to the listserv mentioned at the outset, an article which also appears on the publisher’s webpage devoted to *Tout le monde*.

A consistent feature of *Tout le monde*, and other highly ethnographic novels of dubious authorship, is the “oral” storytelling style. The assertion in *Tout le monde* of Mohamed’s “illiteracy” is designed to render the oral testimony attributed to him more plausible and “authentic.” This becomes an element which serves to ramp up orality, while also reinforcing dependency, because Mohamed is bound to an illiterate helplessness that justifies the need to “speak for” him. Mohamed declares, in the narrative, having begun to properly learn French only after having moved to France, remaining illiterate up until the text’s present. The novel often departs, however, from a simple storytelling register when it

⁴⁹ Laraoui, Fouad. “Salim Jay est-il un écrivain marocain?”. www.jeuneafrique.com, February 28, 2006. Last accessed July 29, 2012. <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/LIN26026salimniacor0/>.

⁵⁰ Leftah, Mohamed. *Le Dernier Combat du capitain Ni'mat*. Editions La Différence, 2011.

⁵¹ Simon, Catherine. “La Voix étouffée de l’homo moyen-oriental,” *Le Monde des Livres*, December 9, 2011. Last accessed April 6, 2012, http://www.ladifference.fr/La-voix-etouffee-de-l-homo.html?id_document=221.

ventures into florid description and interior monologue that exit the parameters of the story being told, indicating another author weaving Mohamed's voice with his or her own. These latter passages are written in a writerly French full of aphorisms, peppered every now and then by current French urban speak and argotic language, rather than renderings of Moroccan vernacular. When recounting the early days of his apprenticeship as a butcher, Mohamed, who is meant to be orally recounting a biographical event says, as if a writer making decisions about realism, that "it's obligatory, in stories involving Arabs, to include a slaughterhouse. The day they will cease to (be included), is the day the world will have changed" (28). This passage constitutes perhaps the most telling betrayal of a literary education in *Tout le monde*. In addition, Mohamed pronounces during descriptive passages many expressions along the lines of "as the Arabs do" or "like an Arab" that if truly pronounced by Mohamed would amount to a startling self-alienation or even self-Orientalism, far beyond the explanatory asides necessary in storytelling.

The question of illiteracy also makes for a striking intertext with Choukri's *For Bread Alone*. Within that autobiographic novel's storyline, Mohamed becomes literate just as he finds "a way out" of his predicament, which includes situations of sexualized objectification. Over the course of *Tout le monde*, Mohamed also becomes literate, albeit in French, and for the purposes of recounting his sexual objectification. Yet both Mohamed Choukri and the Mohamed of *Tout le monde* were restricted to an enforced orality, even while literate, thus assuring a role for their literary interlocutors, Bowles and Montagner/Kuzman. In both cases, the newly literate narrators reminisce about a childhood and adolescence during which they were illiterate, and in each case they adopt an oral mode to recount the story to a listener. This "rendering oral" or "returning to oral" takes on new meaning when considered alongside the fact that the oral mode did not have to be the default option. This authorial decision provides

support for the argument that the oral storytelling mode is not an essential cultural feature of North African literature but rather contingent on limitations of language and communication having to do with European literary interlocutors. It also provides a pertinent rejoinder to Barthes' idea that there was a dearth of literary readiness in Morocco, as described in *Incidents*. Bowles himself recounted asking Choukri to "reduce" the manuscript of *For Bread Alone*, written in literary arabic, into the "Moghrebi" dialect intelligible to him, adding that Choukri's illiteracy was a stroke of "good luck" that enriched the narration, that provided for a certain literary "technique."⁵² This comment emerged from Bowles' idea that the illiterate had a greater attention to detail, and a greater capacity for memory, forced as they were to remember everything due to the lack of a recording system, as he explained. In *Tout le monde*, illiteracy also becomes a tool in the service of the writer collecting the oral testimony, as the oral status of the narrator becomes a premise for a richness of detail, for background explanation, for pauses to explain local terms, all of which make for smooth storytelling.

Other striking similarities between Kuzman's novel and literary precedents involve the type of sexuality described. *Tout le monde* revisits, on nearly every page, a recurrent feature of "affiliated" works in European languages that sexualize North Africans: an abundance of adolescent or even children's sexuality. Kuzman here describes the unsuspecting way Mohamed would routinely fall under the charms of homosexual older men:

⁵² "It has been my experience that the illiterate, not having learned to classify what goes into his memory, remembers everything. This too is a technique. Total recall is like perfect pitch: it means nothing in itself, but it can be extremely helpful to the writer who uses it professionally. It seems almost a stroke of good luck that Choukri's encounter with the written word should have come so late, for by then his habits of thought were already fully formed; the educative process did not modify them. As a writer then, he is in an enviable position, even though he paid a high price for it in suffering" (5)
Bowles, Paul. "Introduction." In Choukri, Mohamed. *For Bread Alone*. Translated by Paul Bowles. Peter Owen, 1973.

Why had I never manifested any kind of worry or suspicion when it came to these *hommes sexuels* (sexual men)⁵³, as I used to say? Maybe because I believed in the idea that they were subject to the obscure orders of virility. They served it without a grudge, at the peril of being miserable. When it came to me, I bent myself to accommodate this honorable service, to see them, hand in hand, on the terraces of the *méchouar* smoothing out the tips of their mustaches with each passage of good looking lads (*beaux gosses*)... That was the rule. I am not sure to have always hated it. I associated it most of all with something naturally befitting a more complicated order, in which good and evil exchanged polite gestures. (41)

Such enthusiasm for recounting anecdotes about the sexual availability of Arab boys (Mohamed was an adolescent at the time) has already been highlighted, as far as the Tangiers generations and its precedents, in a pioneering article by Joseph Boone: “The Homoerotics of Orientalism.” Boone writes that “a corollary of the occidental tourist's fantasy that all boys are available for the right price is the assumption that they represent interchangeable versions of the same commodity: (nearly) under-age sex. The number of identically named Mohameds that (American writer Joe) Orton meets thus becomes a running joke in his diary.”⁵⁴

Post-colonially, writers from North Africa have in important ways broken with or responded to this condemnation to anonymous sexual interchangeability.

Walonen notes such a transition here:⁵⁵

⁵³ A play of words on the similarity between “homosexuels (homosexuals)” and “hommes sexuels (sexual men)”

⁵⁴ Boone, 102.

⁵⁵ Walonen, 22.

While from the 1960's onward individuals like the playwright Joe Orton continued to seek out Tangier as a site of easy access to sex with young men, there was and continues to be a tendency in Morocco to see sexual relationships between natives and foreigners as a form of neocolonial imposition, an abuse of Western power.

Abdellah Taïa, who has recently been celebrated by the popular gay press the world over for his very public op-eds highlighting the homosexual condition in Morocco, included in his *Le Rouge du tarbouche* a chapter, entitled “Terminus des anges” (Last Stop for Angels), that readers turning to his literature for erotic distraction may have found troubling. In it, a French tourist meets a handsome local, with all signs pointing to the bedroom, only to be lectured within the walls of his host’s house about the economic privilege tourists like him enjoy in a country that seems tailor-made for them.⁵⁶ As such, Taïa can be placed in partial “filiation” with writers like Anouar Majid and Tahar Ben Jelloun, whose “representations of Moroccan place,” as Walonen explains, “differ from those of Tangier's expatriate writers ... in their focus on spatially manifested forms of oppression that have enabled privileged spatial access to Morocco's social elite and moneyed foreign visitors—expatriates and tourists alike (140).” Importantly, Taïa’s chapter was one of the first critical interpellations of sex tourists from a homosexual North African perspective in literature. In his later novel *Salvation Army*, Taïa recalled a humiliating autobiographical episode in which Marrakech’s tourism police interpellated him using sexual epithets: he was insulted for accompanying an older frenchman who was actually his boyfriend at the time, and told to stop bothering the tourists who were the livelihood of the city. These resistant elements notwithstanding, many of the most celebrated and read Franco-Arab gay authors (including Taïa) still saturate their novels and

⁵⁶ Taïa, Abdellah. *Le Rouge du tarbouche*. Paris: Editions Séguier, 2005.

autobiographies with anecdotes of adolescent and sometimes child sexuality.⁵⁷ I highlight this not to demonize authors writing in their own name about their sexual agency as children, a singular aspect of their work, but rather to indicate a recurring feature of post-colonial gay-interest literature about North Africa written in French.⁵⁸ Jarrod Hayes remarked upon the juxtaposition of sexual tourism and pedophilia in his book *Queer Nations*, commenting on the iconoclastic Leila Sebbar short story *Le pédophile et la maman: l'amour des enfants* (*The Pedophile and the Mom: Love for Children*), in which the author boldly imagines a bond between a mother and the pedophile the latter reads about in the media. Hayes brings up the importance of guarding against sexism in the oftentimes too easy condemnation of sexual tourism:⁵⁹

Sebbar dislodges assumptions about the pedophile/sexual tourist and the pedophile as enemy of children and, therefore, as a parent's worst nightmare. She thus creates the possibility of a double-edged critical sword with which one can articulate a critique of sexual tourism without reinforcing the heterosexism of most such critiques and a critique of the colonial or neocolonial implications of some sexual encounters without the abjection of non normative sexualities in and of themselves. (41)

Salim Jay, mentioned earlier, connects all the dots and alludes to an emerging market for this type of fiction. Writing in the francophone Moroccan paper *Le Soir* about *Tout le monde*, he aimed to connect the book's possible reading public with that of O. and Taïa: "Even if

⁵⁷ O. Rachid. *L'Enfant Ebloui*. Gallimard, 1999.

⁵⁸ Rachid O.'s semi-autobiographic *L'Enfant ébloui* notably featured as its cover image a male child in the lap of an elderly man in traditional Moroccan clothing.
O., Rachid. *L'Enfant ébloui*. Gallimard, 1999.

⁵⁹ Hayes, Jarrod. *Queer Nations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

everyone loves Mohamed, who will love reading Malik Kuzman? All those who have already read the stories of Rachid O. ... of Taïa... and of Farid Tali.... But the real readers of this book will not be those titillated by homoeroticism, they will be recruited amongst those who love literature.”⁶⁰

Taïa pursued a collaboration of his own⁶¹ with Frédéric Mitterrand—a former Culture Minister and nephew to former French President François—who was embroiled in a sex tourism controversy in 2009. Following his support of Roman Polanski in the wake of the director’s own child sex scandal, there was renewed interest in Mitterrand’s memoir *La Mauvaise vie (The Bad Life)*,⁶² in which he recounted trysts with South Asian boys (young but of legal age, he insisted). Mitterrand, who was accorded Tunisian nationality by deposed president Ben Ali, also produced a short film entitled *Mon copain Rachid (My [Boy]Friend Rachid)*,⁶³ in which a white French adolescent becomes obsessed with his Arab friend’s large genitals, paying for a chance to see them, while simultaneously acknowledging that this was not the thing he was truly after (rather, something deeper, an intimate bond). Mitterrand was scrutinized when the film was unearthed in the midst of the underage sex allegations. The film ends on a bleak note when the kids meet again as adults by chance in the street: the macho Arab seems too proud of his own manhood to have attempted any upward mobility, and it is suggested that he has been outpaced in the rat race by his childhood “playmate,” who, once juvenile and underdeveloped, has grown into a successful, heterosexually coupled man

⁶⁰ Jay, Salim. “Malik Kuzman, joker de la littérature marocaine de langue française ?” *Lesoir-echos.com*, July 19, 2011. Last accessed July 25, 2012, <http://www.lesoir-echos.com/malik-kuzman-joker-de-la-litterature-marocaine-de-langue-francaise/culture/26685/>.

⁶¹ Mitterrand, Frédéric with Abdellah Taïa. *Maroc, 1900-1960 Un certain regard (Morocco 1900-1960 A Certain Gaze)*. Actes Sud, 2007.

⁶² Mitterrand, Frédéric. *La Mauvaise vie (The Bad Life)*. Robert Laffont, 2005.

⁶³ Barassat, Philippe (dir.). *Mon copain Rachid (My friend/boyfriend Rachid)*. La Vie Est Belle Films, 1998.

(accompanied by his girlfriend), while Rachid has no such female accompaniment, wandering the streets aimlessly. In his review article for *Tout le monde*, Baudry-Kruger notably tries to distance the work from association with Frédéric Mitterrand yet seems to bring on even more suspicion by mentioning him: “the tools of love (in this novel) are not so much Mitterrandian as Virgilian: the towel, the cushion, and the teapot heater.”

Novelist Tahar Ben Jelloun locates part of this enthusiasm for North African adolescents and young men to the Beat generation’s arrival in Morocco.⁶⁴ In Tangiers and other cities, it was thought that a sort of sheltered respite might be found away from the moralistic scrutiny of the then more sexually intolerant Euro-American world. Walonen describes the draw of Tangier here⁶⁵:

...the geographical, sociological, and historical reasons for mid-century Tangier's particular sexual climate were manifold. For a great many homosexuals this climate made Tangier seem like a dream come true. As Tessa Condrington writes in her photo-memoir, *Spirits of Tangier*, "It's difficult to imagine how far public perception has changed now, but in those days for a gay man to arrive in Tangier and find himself surrounded by willing, exuberant, uninhibited boys was like arriving in heaven."⁶⁶

Tahar Ben Jelloun relates that when he asked Burroughs why the Beat generation chose Morocco and not Oran, Algeria for instance, he responded, “why, the boys of course!” In his 1972 *Le Monde* “Rape Technique” article⁶⁷ against Bowles, Ben Jelloun denounced Bowles’ intrusive way of interviewing young men and telling their stories in books. Despite Ben

⁶⁴ Ben Jelloun, Tahar. “Comparative Approaches...”

⁶⁵ Walonen, 21-22.

⁶⁶ Condrington, Tessa. *Spirits of Tangier*. (Arcadia Books, 2008): 120.

⁶⁷ Ben Jelloun, Tahar. “Technique d’un viol.”

Jelloun's condemnations, deemed in some circles to be insufficiently cognizant of Bowles' fostering of emergent North African voices, Ben Jelloun himself gives a sometimes crude treatment to homosexual themes, as in one of his novels that focusing on the international Moroccan city, *Leaving Tangier*.⁶⁸ In it, a Moroccan immigrant to Spain practices a reluctant homosexuality of economic necessity with an older Spaniard, evocative of a passage in Choukri's *For Bread Alone*.

The recurring theme of intergenerational sex across borders can become problematic in non-fiction, due to issues of consent and economic disparity: these factors turn what seems like a freely contracted exchange between desiring bodies into a possibly coercive act agreed to only out of economic necessity. Along with adolescent sexuality, the eroticization of a pre-condom era is another trope that suffuses *Tout le monde*. The recurrent anecdotes about unprotected sex are part and parcel of the idea that these lands, in the novel's time period at least, had remained in the pre-condom era, "magically" untouched by the spread of AIDS, and importantly for the novel's eroticism, prevention measures. This focus on condomless sex is present in Kuzman/Montagner's framing of his own book (he mentions it twice), as well as the promotional materials surrounding the book's release. The transition from pre-condom to post-condom eras has much resonance for Euro-American homosexual audiences, who were seized, from the realm of public health to that of pornography, by a sudden injunction to protect themselves in the era of AIDS. A consistent nostalgia has since surfaced for the pre-condom era, a time when contact was freer, visible in the enthusiasm for vintage pornography, increasing sales of high-risk condomless European gay pornography, as well as, on another level, literature waxing romantic about a carefree, innocent gay past. In Kuzman/Montagner's Morocco, imagined as a few paces "behind" in terms of awareness about condoms, freedom

⁶⁸ Ben Jelloun, Tahar. *Leaving Tangier*. Penguin, 2009.

could last just a bit longer. That Euro-American visitors aware of the necessity for condoms might have nevertheless sought condomless sex in not only Morocco but the developing world writ large, does not become a point of critical inquiry in this production.

In a sense, the careless freedom with which Kuzman/Montagner discusses and at times celebrates condomless sex is made possible by the measures they have taken toward anonymity. Such enthusiasm for condomless sex in the post-AIDS era is rarely seen in prominent presses, and when it has appeared, has been condemned in the gay media without much regard for the literary freedom argument. A question can be raised here: to what extent has the privileging of textual liberty over transparent authorship enabled literature about a freer, albeit less responsible encounter? Is there a corporeal consequence to this turn in literary theory, following the death of the author? While a full and definite answer is out of reach, one can say that in the corpus of works that simultaneously address homosexuality between France North Africa *and* have taken measures to assure anonymity, taboo themes like adolescent, inter-generational sexuality, sex tourism, condomless sex, and underage prostitution have abounded.

Montagner, at the end of his response, finally admits that he may in fact be Mohamed, both in the sense of writing as Mohamed and containing a version of Mohamed within himself in the way that lovers keep symbolic remnants of the beloved on their person. Within the frame of sexualized literary collaboration examined here, such confusions have come to be routine. Surveying the corpus of works resulting from collaborations that insist on exposing sexuality, one cannot help but notice a consistent reinforcement of Franco-Arab sexual frustration, aimlessness, or misery. Why has this group of French writers, so mysterious when it comes to the circumstances of authorship, ventriloquized North African storytellers, in order to air stories of bleak sexuality for a European-language audience? These

trends, I have argued, play into a form of literary elitism that salutes, in the same gesture, the progress of European homosexuals just as it simultaneously eroticizes the progress-less Other, often defined by a limiting virility that is only enhanced by poverty. Within this phenomenon, a literary market has emerged for audiences interested in those infantilized by the narrative of no progress, best exemplified by stories of adolescent sexuality, a market that is safely removed from ethical objection, because it concerns individuals somewhere on the verge of fiction and non-fiction, who remain outside of France just as they remain outside of scrutiny.