

Denis Provencher. *Queer Maghrebi French: Language, Temporalities, Transfiliations*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2017. 314 pp.

The unusual coupling of the terms “Queer,” “Maghrebi,” and “French” captures the conflict between these identity groups in both French and Maghrebi politics. Just as postcolonial tensions permute contemporary French-Maghrebi relations, queer subcultures continue to have important contentions in both regions. Against such a divisive image, Denis Provencher investigates cases where these conflicting imaginaries and cultures coexist and establish alternative forms of family and cultural heritage, or as he calls them, “transfiliations.” Combining ethnography with literary, visual arts, conversation, and discourse analyses, Provencher aims not only to bridge these worlds but to explore new possible spaces from the perspective of queer Maghrebi French men. The resulting mapped identities, inspired by a drawing of “gay” Paris by “Samir,” a queer Maghrebi French man, indicating places where he feels comfortable or unwelcome, ignite Provencher’s argument that queer Maghrebi and queer Maghrebi French men possess a different understanding of same-sex longing and identity than their European French counterparts. Attending to the ways in which queer men of color narrate their social identities, Provencher demonstrates how their narratives of self and linguistic and artistic practices can yield to the construction of transcultural and transnational temporalities.

At its core, *Queer Maghrebi French* presents a series of interviews with and analyses of works by queer Maghrebi men living in France, which include the voices of exiled and second generation artists, scholars, and anonymous working-class men. Drawing on a theoretical framework that encompasses queer migration, diaspora studies, and queer linguistics, including William Leap’s work on flexible language, Provencher emphasizes the accumulation of linguistic and cultural resources in his interlocutors’ speech acts. The first chapter discusses the life story of French-Moroccan photographer and performance artist 2Fik between France, Morocco, and Quebec. With a focus on the exploration of his sexuality and performance art, which includes the construction of a wide variety of male and female characters, 2Fik introduces his de-centered concept of “coming out à l’orientale.” Contrary to the Western sexual act of enunciation, this concept entails continuous indirect acts and is embedded with religious and family elements. The chapter also centers on 2Fik’s migration to Quebec and highlights the challenges faced while living in French society and expressing queer and ethnic difference in his own life, performance art, and photography.

2Fik’s quest to live and express his differences contrasts with the second chapter that focuses on the French-raised activist, imam, scholar, and author Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed whose work aims precisely to redress differences between Islam, France, and homosexuality. In fact, this scholar, well-informed in

queer theory, subaltern studies, and Islam, re-appropriates his own Maghrebi and French cultures and constructs an interpretation of his faith that allows him to unite Islam, heritage, and universal rights in France. By fostering an identity where he does not have to choose between being “queer,” “Muslim,” and “French,” Zahed forms yet another “transfiliation.”

The third and fourth chapters turn to renowned artists Abdellah Taïa and Mehdi Ben Attia, again analyzing their life stories and works as examples of queer Maghrebi temporalities. Provencher rightly highlights Taïa’s inventive uses of performative writing for expressing queer sexuality in his own terms. These include using a flexible verbal and visual language that allows him to build alliances with other social groups and movements. One particularly interesting example of Taïa’s language comes from a letter addressed to his illiterate mother, where he explains his homosexuality and describes himself in Arabic as “*mathali*” (159). Translated in the book as “pride-filled gay person,” the word also signifies “like me,” which is a positive term in Arabic that, if included, could have tied in well with Zahed’s de-centering of the home culture. The chapter dedicated to Tunisian film director and screenwriter Ben Attia traces his life story growing up in a middle-class educated Francophone Tunisian family and immigrating to France to complete his studies. Ben Attia’s narrative possesses numerous temporalities and spaces that he transposes into his on-screen characters. One fascinating observation that Provencher makes is how both Taïa and Ben Attia have summoned the image of Jean Genet in their works as a queer Maghrebi French figure.

While the first four chapters of the book focus on artists who use their work to create and unite multiple facets of themselves, the last chapter turns to the life stories of three anonymous men. The first story follows “Nacir,” an Algerian who immigrates to France after never feeling completely integrated in his native culture. It must be noted that Nacir’s grandmother is of Alsatian descent, which he uses to create a sense of French filiation and citizenship that contributes to his feeling of being completely integrated into French society. Provencher proceeds with the story of Tahar, a French-raised educated man who works as a language teacher. His story is overtly personal, mentioning his struggle with his weight, which brings an additional example of intersectionality in queer Maghrebi French men.

The last story on “Farid” could have included a broader perspective. Although I enjoyed Provencher’s analysis of the internet as an alternative space that allows for self-expression in Algeria, the author mostly focuses on the negative aspects of Farid’s story. Provencher points out that he is a less successful artist than 2Fik and Taïa, that he is currently single, and that he is not happy. But it seems that this would be expected of someone like Farid, who had been living in France only three years, having recently moved from Angers (which he

enjoyed) to Paris eight months before the interview. Hence, calling Farid an “impossible subject” outside of both French and Maghrebi hetero-and homonormative spaces may seem perfunctory to some readers sensitive to the difficulties of a recent move to a fast-paced and expensive European capital.

Queer Maghrebi French offers truly interdisciplinary analyses of Queer Maghrebi French identity, providing a much needed resource for French, Francophone, and LGBT studies. Provencher’s linguistic theoretical frameworks, usually applied to populations other than Maghrebi French men, emphasize the opportunity for future comparative work between disciplines. While the stories do make references to the perceived differences between French-raised and foreign-born Maghrebi French men, Provencher could have incorporated (French-born) Franco-Maghrebi interlocutors to better understand the perspective of other fractions of the queer Maghrebi diaspora. At any rate, the book is an important step towards addressing the challenges and cultural spaces fostered in communities of queer men of color.

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