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Negotiations of Masculinity in Francophone Men's Writing

Sophie Catherine Smith

Submitted to the University of Wales in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Swansea University

2009

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Summary

This thesis explores the fictional negotiations of masculinity in Francophone post-colonial literature written by three male authors: namely, Ousmane Sembene's *Xala*, Rachid Boudjedra's *La Répudiation* and Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Partir, L'Homme rompu* and *L'Enfant de sable*. Drawing on sociological and gender theory, it examines the thematics of the novels and analyses constructions of masculine identity(-ies) in works of fiction. The study questions to what extent fictional representations reflect sociological premises on masculinity in Islamicate countries. Moreover, the thesis argues that there is a hierarchy within masculinity, and it explores how this gender order is portrayed in the novels, illustrating the constant process of negotiation and renegotiation between hegemonic, subordinate, marginalised and subversive positions of masculine identity. It therefore asserts that masculinities are pluralistic, and constitute fluid, unfixed and perpetually self-modifying phenomena. Above all, this thesis argues that the intense pressures exerted on men by society to live up to hegemonic versions of manliness, and the unnatural state of this constructed identity, lead to a general discontentment, manifested through emotional, psychological and physical afflictions. In addition, the study considers the influence of modernisation, neo-colonialism and male-female dynamics on the construction of masculine identities, and it analyses the ways in which masculine protagonists interact with the family, women, male peers and work colleagues, and society at large, as well the effects of this interaction on their sense of masculinity. The thesis contends that the theme of discontent acts as a motif for the masculine condition and for deconstructing masculinity. By challenging established normative gender ideology, it suggests that these authors issue a call for traditional formulations of masculinity(-ies) to be rewritten.

DECLARATION

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General Introduction

Gender studies has, in recent decades, radically overhauled the way in which academics from a multitude of disciplines approach their subjects. Indeed, its influence has extended as far as to modify the way in which we approach life in its daily, non-academic context too. It would therefore be difficult to overstate its implications for the way in which we live and conceptualise the world around us. As an independent field of study, however, gender owes its existence to the advent of feminism globally, and particularly to the offshoots of feminism in the West in recent decades.¹ Most of us, whether experts in gender or not, recognise the names of such influential figures as Simone de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer, and can attribute them to this field of feminism and the analysis of the condition of women. While this may not seem to have direct relevance to the study of masculinity, it is of profound importance, for, by re-examining and overturning traditional thoughts on women, these critics at the very same time paved the way for a new approach to gender roles more generally. Indeed, for Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett, editors of *The Masculinities Reader*, feminism was ‘the single most powerful political discourse of the twentieth century’, arguing that ‘the direct consequences of feminist thinking and action has been to expose and highlight the power, position and practices of men’.² Feminism, therefore, identified social power dynamics that were previously unconceptualised. While admittedly it has taken some time to bring men’s gender roles into the field of interrogation, it was this pioneering spirit to reinterpret gender that made it possible.

In previous decades, the significant task of deconstructing femininity has continued to evolve under the watchful eye of many critics, as, indeed, it still does. Masculinity, however, has escaped a similar focus for some time. Yet, significantly, in recent years considerable interest has finally developed in the field of ‘men’s studies’ or ‘masculinity’, as it is called. Renowned critics such as Robert Connell, Michael S. Kimmel and Máirtín Mac an Ghail are but three amongst many others who are at work deconstructing what it is to be a man, and are theorising a concept that until recently appeared to need no investigation. Studies are now

¹ Throughout this thesis, I have chosen to capitalise the term ‘the West’ in order to provide a counterpart to the capitalisation of Islamic(ate), but also in order to draw attention to the existence of a group of influential and highly developed states that are often perceived as a single unity which contrasts with developing nations. This perception of a ‘West’, though grossly oversimplifying, is nevertheless a feature of both the West itself and its perceptions from the outside.

² Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett, ‘The Sociology of Masculinity’, in *The Masculinities Reader*, ed. by Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 1–26 (p. 3).

beginning to explode the meaning of manhood.³ Previously, the concept of ‘man’ escaped scholarly attention to a certain extent because manhood was considered the central reference point against which all human beings were judged. Femininity was theorised in relation to masculinity, as if masculine were ‘normal’ and feminine ‘different’ in some way. Many critics have commented on the all-pervading shadow that a white, middle-class and masculine central focus has cast on readings of femininity, psychology, and even as far afield as the disciplines of anthropology and archaeology.⁴ This process of ‘othering’ meant that the world had, until recently, always been read through a masculine spectrum.⁵ With regard to this, Whitehead and Barrett state: ‘As feminists have long argued, the historical centrality of malestream writing, philosophy and political practice has served to make men invisible, particularly to themselves’.⁶ This extremely limiting – and often misleading – approach has now been increasingly questioned, and many scholars from fields as varied as sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, literature and cultural studies are coming together to recognise the deconstructive potential of ‘masculinity’.

Manhood is no longer seen as the default position but as a position with as many conflicting and problematic variants as femininity. In logical progression, any status (ethnic, colonised, social class, religious, sexual) can be seen as relational. It has at last been recognised and accepted that taking maleness and masculinity as the ‘norm’, and that analysing and deconstructing femininity solely in relation to them, is in fact an unquestioning perpetuation of a white, imperial, masculinist discourse that has successfully sidelined any other viewpoint for so long. In the case of femininity and feminism, this tactic has rendered approximately half of the human population as different and as ‘Other’. Judith Butler, one of the most prolific and influential writers on gender in recent years, states that patriarchal discourse may dictate that ‘the universal person and the masculine gender are conflated,

³ Stephan Miescher and Lisa Lindsay, working within an Africanist framework, choose to distinguish between ‘masculinity’ and ‘manhood’, using the latter to describe indigenous ideas that relate specifically to the physiology of being a man, and which often corresponds with male adulthood. Masculinity therefore becomes a ‘broader, more abstract, and often implicit’ notion that clarifies the limits of ‘female masculinity’ in certain cases. See Stephan F. Miescher and Lisa A. Lindsay, ‘Introduction: Men and Masculinities in Modern African History’, in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), pp. 1–30 (p. 1). In this thesis, however, given the lack of ritualistic emphasis on male physiology, the two terms will remain interchangeable.

⁴ For instance, Edward Said examines a range of disciplines, ranging from geography, politics, literature, ethnography, history and so forth, and argues that these have been appropriated by a white, colonial voice. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003).

⁵ Todd Reeser and Lewis Seifert draw on French theory, and on the concept of ‘markedness’, to arrive at the same conclusion. Todd W. Reeser and Lewis C. Seifert, ‘Introduction’, in *Entre Hommes: French and Francophone Masculinities in Culture and Theory*, ed. by Todd W. Reeser and Lewis C. Seifert (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), pp. 13–50 (pp. 19–20).

⁶ Whitehead and Barrett, ‘The Sociology of Masculinity’, p. 4.

thereby defining women in terms of their sex and extolling men as the bearers of a body-transparent personhood' for many critics.⁷ Thus, Butler draws attention to the fact that a dominant masculine gender has managed until recently to manoeuvre itself into a position where it has gone unchallenged, resulting in a tendency for scholars to focus on 'marginalised' genders. Revealingly, this continued and determined deflection of critical study onto the Other could have a further significance when viewed through the optic of postcolonialism,⁸ for it is not only women who have undergone the process of otherness. Upon contact with, and colonisation by, the universal white male, other cultures have also been categorised as 'Other', a point exemplified by the existence of postcolonialism as a field of academic enquiry. It is frequently argued, for example, that the cultural output of non-Western societies has been read through the prism of (white) male-dominated hegemony, converting it into discourse that oppresses the subjectivity of the producer and robs it of authentic value. Viewed solely in relation to colonial ideology, Western gender normativity effectively perpetuates a form of ideological colonialism. In a more modern light, the West can be seen as perpetuating former imperialism by relegating unfamiliarity to the realm of Other.

Arguably one of the most prolific critics in the field of postcolonialism, Edward Said expresses postcolonial concerns with representation and the status of Other imposed on the rest of the world by Eurocentric discourse. Perhaps the major work of Said's career, *Orientalism* (1978), focuses on the Western production of representations of the Orient along its own predetermined ideas, and moreover, destined for Western consumption.⁹ By now of course, the emphasis has shifted from European hegemony to that of the United States. Nevertheless, in all too many instances, the normative referent remains the white, Western, middle-class and heterosexual male. Indeed, for Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, orientalism 'provides an interpretive framework, a grid of co-ordinates for understanding other cultures'.¹⁰ One might add here, however, that the West constructs the Orient according

⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York; London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 13–14.

⁸ Roger Little argues that 'post-colonial' can be understood as pertaining to the period which follows the colonial era and that 'postcolonial' refers to the critical approach, a usage adopted in this study. Roger Little, 'Seeds of Postcolonialism: Black Slavery and Cultural Difference to 1800', in *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (London: Arnold, 2003), pp. 17–26 (p. 17). The premise that the colonial era has ended however, remains a contentious one given that Western influences are still felt so heavily through global capitalism and neo-colonialism. For more on this debate, see Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (London: Prentice Hall, 1997), pp. 4–6.

⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 3.

¹⁰ Childs and Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, p. 112.

to its *own* ideas, simultaneously producing a discourse that is inaccurate but that also robs the Orient of the possibility of theorising itself.

It might be argued that postcolonialism has allowed the dramatic growth in interest in masculinity and the conditions that produce it to branch out beyond the immediate concerns of the Western world and to examine masculinities elsewhere. Without doubt, and as Said in particular observes, this process brings with it many problems and complications of its own, in the form of the rich, Westernised world encroaching on non-Western cultures, and perhaps inadvertently, imposing its own ideology upon them. This is an accusation that has been directed at Western feminists in the past.¹¹ While this is certainly one of the pitfalls of gender studies, Western interest in global gender roles is not a project that is entirely doomed to failure, for it does nevertheless begin to open up a dialogue in which the supplanting of masculinity as the normative reference point in any culture becomes the main focus and aim.

This interrogation of gender has been built upon the recognition that there is no single feminism, but a need for multiple feminisms. 'Black feminism' for instance is a well-established field by now, as, indeed, is African feminism, and the many dilemmas, issues and concerns of non-white women are now clearly outlined in a wealth of literature.¹² A similar situation now exists for women of the Islamic world who have also fiercely challenged and rejected Western hegemony over women's liberation and have sought to develop their own, culturally more authentic path towards improving women's condition.

¹¹ Feminism and colonialism have worked together in the past with the common aim of undermining colonised cultures. Leila Ahmed argues that in the times of the British Empire and other European conquests, 'the idea that Other men, men in colonized societies beyond the borders of the civilized West, oppressed women was to be used, in the rhetoric of colonialism, to render morally justifiable its project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized peoples'. She adds that: 'Colonized societies, in the colonial thesis, were alike in that they were inferior but differed as to their specific inferiority. Colonial feminism, or feminism as used against other cultures in the service of colonialism was shaped into a variety of similar constructs, each tailored to fit the particular culture that was the immediate target of domination – India, the Islamic world, sub-Saharan Africa'. See Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 144–68 (p. 151).

¹² Black feminism developed out of a need to conceive of a feminism that was relevant for non-white, primarily middle-class women. Initially, it was an African-American project but has since broadened its ambition to include African women, with African feminism becoming its own sub-category still closely aligned to black feminism, or womanism, and third world feminism. The development of black feminism anticipated the need for feminisms and to recognise that women, although united in a feminist cause, were by no means a single homogenous group. By now, black feminism is an influential sub-category within women's studies, intent upon conceiving a feminist consciousness applicable to the particular context(s) of the black woman. Among black feminism's most influential thinkers are Alice Walker, Angela Davis, Ann Moody, Barbara Smith and Audre Lorde. For more on black feminism, see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London; New York: Routledge, 1991).

Rejecting the notion that to be a liberated woman is to fall in line with current Western concepts of femininity and women's rights, studies in what has been dubbed 'Islamic feminism' now abound.¹³ As regards to masculinity, however, the process has been a little slower. There are, nevertheless, a wide range of publications across the disciplines on masculinity in the West, and the most in-depth and widely-respected introduction perhaps is Robert W. Connell's *Masculinities*.¹⁴ Black masculinity, too, as a sub-category of men's studies, has been opened up to scrutiny.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Islamicate masculinity lacks the depth of investigation and the wealth of publications of its feminine counterpart.¹⁶ It almost seems as if women's studies in Islamic(ate) contexts have very nearly colonised the term *gender*. Anyone searching for *Islamic* and *Gender* invariably finds a whole host of literature concerning women and Islam, as if the word 'gender' were synonymous with 'female',

¹³ See, for example, Amina Wadud's *Inside the Gender Jihad* that attempts to set a new trajectory for Muslim women without reneging on Islamic values. 'Believing Women' in Islam by Asma Barlas also works towards improving gender relations in Muslim communities whilst holding on to cultural and religious principles. Both studies indicate the desire to nurture an Islamic feminism distinct from Eurocentric dictates of what feminism should be. Asma Barlas, *Believing Women' in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

¹⁴ Robert Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Many Western masculinity critics choose to deal with black African-American masculinity(-ies) in their work on Western masculinity. There are also other critics who specialise in black masculinity, which usually refers to African-American masculinity. For instance, see Paul Hoch, *White Hero, Black Beast: Racism, Sexism and the Mask of Masculinity* (London: Pluto Press, 1979) or K. Coleman, *Webs of Masculinity: Power, Money, and Sex(uality)* (Baltimore: Publish America, 2007).

¹⁶ The term 'Islamicate' was coined by Marshall G. S. Hodgeson, and has also been adopted by the critic Afsaneh Najmabadi. 'Islamicate' refers to the variety of cultures, and to the broad cultural heritage of Islamic influence, without referring to the dictates of the religion itself. In her introduction to her prominent work *Women and Gender in Islam*, Leila Ahmed discusses her dilemma with regard to finding suitable terminology to use when talking of gender in the Islamic world. Ahmed states: 'It is unusual to refer to the Western world as the 'Christian world' or the world of 'Christendom' unless one intends to highlight its religious heritage, whereas with respect to the Islamic Middle East there is no equivalent nonethnic, nonreligious term in common English usage, and the terms Islamic and Islam (as in the 'world of Islam') are those commonly used to refer to regions whose civilizational heritage is Islamic as well as, specifically, to the religion of Islam'. The question that Ahmed poses here with regards to terminology is a pertinent one and clearly illustrates the problem with using the term 'Islamic' to denote masculinity, femininity and gender in general for the very reason that genders themselves can embody countless variations. Furthermore, countries vary greatly in their way of practising Islam or the influence of Islam on day-to-day life. See Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p. 7. Hodgeson discusses the problematics of terminology at length in his *Introduction to the Study of Islamic Civilization*, and argues that the adjective *Islamic* should be restricted to the religion of the Muslims. *Islamicate*, on the other hand, can be used to denote anything typically associated with Islamic culture or, as Hodgeson puts it: 'The social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims'. Although used extremely rarely, it is, nevertheless, an altogether more apposite term and one which I will adopt in this work when not referring specifically to the religion of Islam itself. See Marshall S. Hodgeson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1974-1978) I (1974), 59. See also Afsaneh Najmabadi, 'Reading "Wiles of Women" Stories as Fictions of Masculinity', in *Imagined Masculinities*, ed. by Mai Ghousoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb (London: Saqi Books, 2006), pp. 147-168 (p. 147).

‘feminine’ and/or ‘feminism’.¹⁷ However, necessarily, gender studies mean that very thing – gender. Gender is neither masculine nor feminine. It is necessarily both, or, indeed, neither.¹⁸ The mere fact that no direct equivalent masculine term for ‘feminism’ exists, in English at least, is indicative of the fact that this process is still perhaps at an early stage, since women continued to be studied through the additional category of gender, and men remain, to an extent, symbolic of the universal. Masculinism is not a term that is widely used or accepted in scholarly work in English. The only exception to this, perhaps, is its use to mean ‘masculinist discourse’, alluding of course to patriarchy and male-dominated society. It therefore nearly always expresses a strong anti-women connotation, or at least the idea of safeguarding male privilege. With masculinity being deconstructed, it is perhaps time for a suitable term to balance ‘feminism’ to be coined.

This tendency towards unquestioned malecentric positioning is reflected also in the field of Francophone¹⁹ studies which, in the past, has also been accused of placing France, and therefore the primarily colonial, white, heterosexual, middle-class male at the centre of critical and analytical output. Indeed, Forsdick and Murphy argue that: ‘Intellectual and revolutionary challenges to empire emanating from the colonies (or indeed from within the imperial centre) have often been caricatured in France as “alien”, simplistic and unjustified challenges to the integrity of the (imperial) nation’.²⁰ We can, no doubt, assume that the ‘imperial nation’ is masculine in its nature (though much of its symbolism may take a

¹⁷ This is not just the case in Islamicate gender research, but in the West too, where ‘gender’ is to an extent still usually taken to suggest a strong alignment with women’s rights or feminism.

¹⁸ Indeed, Stephan Miescher and Lisa Lindsay argue that: ‘There is theoretically no limit to the number of genders in a given society’. Miescher and Lindsay, ‘Introduction’ in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, p. 7.

¹⁹ According to Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, the term ‘francophone’ is a gesture of exclusion in that it implies an ethnic variant of a French norm. They also state that the term represents a ‘neo-colonial segregation’ – a category for ‘French’ and a category for everything else. See Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, ‘Introduction: The Case for Francophone Postcolonial Studies’, in *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (London: Arnold, 2003), pp. 1–14 (pp. 3–7). In their most recent publication, they argue for the use of the term to include continental France also although they point out that this is not a generalised practice as yet. They therefore choose to refer to the ‘French-speaking world’ in order to include the broadest possible range of contexts. See Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, ‘Introduction: Situating Francophone Postcolonial Thought’, in *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), pp. 1–27 (pp. 4–5). For Jean-Marc Moura, ‘le terme “francophonie” renvoie à une diversité géographique et culturelle organisée par rapport à un fait linguistique: à la fois l’ensemble des régions où le français est réputé jouer un rôle social incontestable et l’ensemble de celles (à l’exception de la France) où existent des locuteurs de langue première’ [*the term ‘francophone world’ refers to a geographic and cultural diversity organised around a linguistic fact; on the one hand, it is the total number of regions where French is reputed to play a significant social role and on the other, regions where there are speakers of French as a mother-tongue, France being the exception*] (All translations are my own unless noted otherwise). Jean-Marc Moura, ‘Introduction’, in *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale* (Paris: Quadrigue PUF, 2007), pp. 1–22 (pp. 5–6). This study will use the term to refer to the French-speaking world in its totality.

²⁰ Forsdick and Murphy, ‘Introduction’, in *Postcolonial Thought in the French-speaking World*, p. 3.

feminine form). Furthermore, French academia has consistently been perceived as hostile to the postcolonial project, and as 'lagging behind' by its Anglophone counterpart.²¹ This point is somewhat curious given that many of postcolonialism's most influential thinkers have been Francophone critics.²²

Echoing the evolution in gender studies, however, Francophone studies, and Francophone postcolonial studies are by now established areas of enquiry and are increasingly seeking to problematise traditional approaches.²³ Indeed, French studies, or Francophone studies, now finds itself experiencing somewhat of an identity-crisis, a situation that Charles Forsdick outlines in his *état present*, 'Between "French" and "Francophone": French Studies and the Postcolonial Turn'.²⁴ Forsdick argues that this sudden insecurity can be explained by the radically changing face of Francophone studies, and by the 'growing awareness of an alternative curriculum, of a set of texts written by women, of items belonging to other media, of works of popular culture – but also of a body of (post-)colonial material in French that was not "franco-français"'.²⁵ Moreover, he believes the arrival of postcolonial studies to be 'the most significant shift' in French studies since the advent of theoretical and feminist revolutions after 1968.²⁶ Postcolonial studies has provoked a radical change in critical direction by questioning the very nature of French/Francophone studies. Whilst this may provoke a degree of soul-searching amongst certain academic circles, a broader, and more significant consequence is the removal of the Frenchman from the centre of the colonial and post-colonial universe.

One of the notable ramifications of postcolonial studies in the field of Francophone literary analysis has been the abundance of studies now focusing on women's writing from outside the hexagon, a development reflecting the recent state of affairs in gender studies.

²¹ Forsdick and Murphy, 'Introduction', in *Postcolonial Thought in the French-speaking World*, p. 8.

²² Frantz Fanon, for example, is considered one of the forerunners of postcolonialism. Perhaps his best-known work is *Les Damnés de la terre* [*The Wretched of the Earth*] (Paris: La Découverte, 1961). Despite his brief life, his work has had a tangible influence on other postcolonial critics and theorists, such as Homi Bhabha. Fanon himself was influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre, the famous French writer, playwright and philosopher. Moreover, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire, along with Léon Damas, helped to found the *Négritude* movement, a far-reaching philosophy advocating a celebration of black identity in reaction to French colonial racism. Abdelkebir Khatibi is another influential theorist, known for his theory of the plural Maghreb; Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel* [*The Plural Maghreb*] (Paris: Denoël, 1983). Therefore, despite its relatively late adoption as a valid critical stance, Francophone postcolonial studies has, in a sense, been around for a long time. For more, see Forsdick and Murphy, eds, *Postcolonial Thought in the French-speaking World*.

²³ Forsdick and Murphy assert: 'It seems fair to claim that postcolonial studies has progressively gained a foothold in French intellectual life'. Forsdick and Murphy, 'Introduction', in *Postcolonial Thought in the French-speaking World*, p. 9.

²⁴ Charles Forsdick, 'Between "French" and "Francophone": French Studies and the Postcolonial Turn', *French Studies*, 59:4 (2005), 523–530.

²⁵ Forsdick, 'Between "French" and "Francophone"', p. 525.

²⁶ Forsdick, 'Between "French" and "Francophone"', p. 525.

Indeed, it might be true to state that women's writing is currently in vogue, being such a noteworthy intersection between feminist studies and postcolonialism. Female writers such as Assia Djebar, Mariama Bâ and Maryse Condé are widely taught at universities at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and provide the focus for countless critical works. Nicki Hitchcott's *Women Writers in Francophone Africa*, as well as Anne Donadey's *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing Between Worlds*, are but two of an ever-increasing number of critical publications focusing on women's writing in the French-speaking world, an area of study that was all too often neglected or ignored in the past.²⁷ Interest in Francophone women's writing stemmed from the fact that their writing offered what was at one point a rare woman's voice in the field of post-colonial literary studies. Their works introduced the Western reader for the first time to the complexities of womanhood in nations formerly colonised by the French and marked a departure from the hitherto Eurocentric domination of the analysis of women's condition, rendering it a domain of marked importance and heightened value. It also represents a breaking-free from the domineering yoke of (masculine) colonial discourse, influence and interest.

Nevertheless, as valuable a subject as women's writing and feminism(s) may be, its rapid rise in status does, by now, signal a glaring omission in Francophone literary studies. If we consider the current state of masculinity studies, there appear to be few studies published specifically on *masculinity* in Francophone literature from North and West Africa. Some critics might argue that until recently, *all* studies have been male-centred, given that 'man' was the automatic referent. Indeed, the advent of women's writing as a site of primary investigation, and the devotion of chapters and/or sections on female-authored works and feminist-orientated readings in published works, may then be seen as a wholly justifiable attempt to correct this imbalance. However, to assume that previously Francophone literature was dominated by an overwhelmingly malestream output that can only be rebalanced by the inclusion of women's writing as its own category, and as a category that is often affiliated closely with the term gender, would be to miss the point. This is because what past studies have failed to do is to interrogate notions of masculinity and to recognise masculinity's highly unstable and pluralistic nature. Men and masculinity have largely been portrayed or referred to as a monolithic group (with a possible differentiation made between the colonising French and colonised natives) but little attention has been paid to the different constructions

²⁷ Nicki Hitchcott, *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2000); Anne Donadey, *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing Between Worlds* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinmann, 2001).

of masculinity within the previously accepted order of things.²⁸ Masculinity should not be viewed as a single, fixed category but should, in fact, be considered an umbrella term for a variety of distinct constructions of manliness. Winifred Woodhull, for instance, notes the dangers of writing on women as if they were one homogenous group, believing it to be a highly reductive approach.²⁹ On cultural identity, Nikki Hitchcott observes the impossibility of alluding to a 'pan-African' identity, and in doing so, observes a persistent critical tendency to reduce the postcolonial subject to a limiting category which does not permit a more accurate consideration of ethnic/cultural/social/racial/national/political identities.³⁰ Whilst both Woodhull and Hitchcott's observations refer to critical analysis of women's condition, the same might also be argued of men's condition, particularly given that many sociologists and gender theorists now perceive masculinity to be structured by its very own hierarchy and therefore constituting dominant, subordinate and marginalised positions.³¹

The role of masculinity, therefore, has been all too frequently ignored by most critics, or, if mentioned in the course of analysis, symbolises only a series of two-dimensional masculine stereotypes included for the purpose of illustrating the detrimental impact of patriarchy on the female protagonist(s) or a set of masculine attributes somehow perceived to be normative and not requiring further explanation.³² In general, there is little direct engagement with masculinity in its function as a pluralistic, variable and ever-evolving gender construct nor with the subordination or problematic status of masculinity except, perhaps, in relation to the colonising man. Furthermore, there has been scant attention paid to alternative versions of the masculine self, to those who do not conform to hegemonic norms or who do not engage actively in exploitative relations with the female. Thus, constructions

²⁸ From a specifically Africanist optic, this same point is underlined by Miescher and Lindsay, who remark: 'While gender has become a major research focus in African Studies over the last twenty years, men have rarely been the subject of research on gender in Africa. As the field of gender study emerged, the male subject was frequently positioned as given, serving as a backdrop in the examination of women's experiences'. Miescher and Lindsay, 'Introduction' to *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, p. 1. Robert Morrell and Lahoucine Ouzgane also observe the lack of critical work on masculinities, despite a flourishing field of African gender studies. Robert Morrell and Lahoucine Ouzgane, 'African Masculinities: An Introduction', in *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*, ed. by Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 1–20 (p. 1).

²⁹ Winifred Woodhull, *Transfigurations of the Maghreb: Feminism, Decolonization, and Literatures* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 2–3.

³⁰ Hitchcott, *Women Writers in Francophone Africa*, p. 7.

³¹ Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 29.

³² Miescher and Lindsay note, for example, that: 'Most Africanist (and other) historiography has centred on men's experiences and assumed that they are universal', therefore illustrating a lack of critical engagement with what we understand by 'masculinity'. Miescher and Lindsay, 'Introduction', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, p. 4.

of masculinity have been relegated to a secondary level, almost as background details and the deconstructive potential of masculinity has remained largely unaddressed and unfulfilled.

However, this shifting focus of literary criticism in recent years, in part directly attributable to the advent of 'women's studies', has broadened the interpretative possibilities for a wide range of texts, and in particular, has seen the introduction of gendered readings of Francophone novels. The Maghrebian male author has frequently been concerned with women, womanhood and feminine gender (see Driss Chraïbi's *La Civilisation, ma mère!* or Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* to cite just two examples).³³ Thus, themes such as patriarchy, polygamy and marriage have all become feminised. Male writers have hitherto been reluctant to address and interrogate masculinity and to focus on the very configuration that causes the female plight about which they write. To what extent are fictional men concerned with those themes that dominate in women's literature? Or, perhaps, it might be more accurate to state that critics, rather than authors, have been the ones to glide over fictional constructions of masculinity, preferring to focus solely on what female (or male) authors have to say on the condition of women. Indeed, rather ironically, the established field of women's literature and the much-deserved attention that it receives essentially continues to allow constructions of masculinity to escape uninterrogated. Thus, in this instance, and somewhat ironically, the canonical normalisation of masculinity actually contributes towards its marginalisation within gendered critiques of post-colonial literature.

Nevertheless, there is now a context emerging within Francophone literary studies which allows for a more meaningful engagement with masculinity and authors and critics alike are beginning to focus on fictionalised masculinities and on identifying destabilising phenomena that bring the hitherto invisible construction of masculinity to the fore. In a recent collection of articles, editors Todd Reeser and Lewis Seifert have attempted to problematise masculinity and to focus on a field of enquiry that has been greatly neglected. Their *Entre Hommes: French and Francophone Masculinities in Culture and Theory* is a valuable contribution to the study of fictional representations of masculinity in French and Francophone literature.³⁴ Reeser and Seifert argue that the English-language field of literary masculinity studies has seen a significant growth whereas an equivalent flourishing of critical activity has not materialised within French academia. They attribute the rather reluctant

³³ Driss Chraïbi, *La Civilisation, ma mère!* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989); Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1956).

³⁴ Just prior to the submission of this thesis, another work was published, illustrating the emergence of masculinity as an important site of investigation: Lawrence R. Schehr, *French Post-Modern Masculinities: From Neuromatrices to Seropositivity* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009).

adoption of masculinities studies by French/Francophone scholarship as symptomatic of the unease regarding the deconstruction of masculinity in a culture which places a heightened importance on the notion of *l'universalisme* (universalism).³⁵ One of the particular strengths of this collection is the engagement with masculinity across Francophone contexts, not just within the metropolitan centre itself, but also its engagement with masculinities across the centuries, leading the editors to conclude that masculinity is 'both variable and invariable, dynamic and static, less and more familiar'.³⁶

This thesis, however, will focus on North and West African post-colonial literature written in French, of which there has been, as yet, little sustained discussion in terms of masculinity. There is a well-established literary practice of rewriting femininity and focusing on the ramifications of patriarchy and male ascendancy for women, through examining the themes of polygamy, women's (lack of) education and so forth. One of the primary sites of investigation into masculinity in Francophone literature has, traditionally, been that of portrayals of fatherhood and its asphyxiating influence on daughters. Nevertheless, this theme is now beginning to be related to the development of adult masculine identity bearing witness to the detrimental effect of the authoritative *pater* on other men, too. This is an area that continues to bear fruit, as generational tensions and paternal-filial relations come to symbolise the growing rift between traditional models of masculinity and newly-nascent gender roles in the modern age. Two of the novels discussed in this thesis, *La Répudiation* and *L'Enfant de sable*, are but two of the texts that dismantle the paternal-filial bond; others include Mourad Bourboune's *Le Muezzin* (1968) and Mohammed Dib's *La Grande Maison* (1952) for example.³⁷

Another theme that has traditionally been consigned to the category of the universal male has been that of revolutionary political activism, whereas women's writing has been more closely associated with more domestic thematics, such as sexuality, polygamy and subordination. Rather ironically, this unofficial categorisation reflects the Muslim tradition of

³⁵ In exploring this hesitant French attitude towards masculinity studies, Reeser and Seifert point to the rather ironic fact that much of Anglophone gender scholarship is, in fact, grounded in a primarily French body of theory and, most specifically, within post-structuralism. They assert that *communautarisme* (communitarianism) – a strategy of marking specific groups in society and giving them certain rights – is highly problematic in a culture that has a strong tradition of elevating the ideal of the universal French citizen. They demonstrate how notions surrounding *parité* (parity) might prove divisive and threaten the notion of citizenship in France, paving the way for the much-feared positive discrimination that would posit men and women as essentially different. Gender thus runs the risk of splitting the hitherto united French Republic. See Reeser and Seifert, 'Introduction', in *Entre Hommes*, pp. 13–50 (pp. 14–19).

³⁶ Reeser and Seifert, 'Introduction' in *Entre Hommes*, pp. 13–50 (p. 36).

³⁷ Mohammed Dib, *La Grande Maison* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952); Mourad Bourboune, *Le Muezzin* (Paris: C. Bourgois, 1968).

segregation of the sexes, with public space deemed as male and private or domestic space labelled as suitable for females. However, authors such as Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar have begun to reinvent fictionalised womanhood. Djebar's *Loin de Médine* for instance radically reinvents femininity, placing women at the very heart of Mohammedan society, therefore giving them a very public position within the development of Islam that contrasts with their sheltered status following the dictates of cultural tradition.³⁸ Similarly, both Sembene's *Xala* and Boudjedra's *La Répudiation* deal with polygamy and patriarchy but with an emphasis on masculinity. They therefore deal with themes associated with women, but from a male point of view.

Moreover, Western gender theory is beginning to provide new theoretical frameworks which serve as useful starting points from which to approach masculinity in other cultures. This ever-increasing body of theory destabilises what previously seemed unchallengeable, and masculinity is coming to be seen more and more as plural and hierarchical.³⁹ In a further effort to dismantle the sureties of traditionally dominant paradigms of masculinity, there are now authors who engage explicitly with the relationship between masculinity and sexuality. In a very recent development, Maghrebien men who identify themselves as homosexuals are writing novels that actively seek to subvert traditional constructions of manhood, proclaiming and appropriating a gay identity for themselves that, until very recently, did not appear to exist.⁴⁰ Reflecting this trend, some critics are now turning towards queer theory in order to examine masculinity in Francophone postcolonial literature, exploring the roles of homoeroticism and homosexuality in Maghrebien works in particular.⁴¹ The transnational world in which we live also provides a fruitful avenue of inquiry, and writers such as Leïla Sebbar, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Simon Njami, Daniel Biyaoula, Alain Mabanckou and Sami Tchak utilise these transnational spaces in order to destabilise and interrogate gender formation and masculine identity. Thus, the portrayal of immigrant experience in

³⁸ Assia Djebar, *Loin de Médine* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel (S.A.), 1992).

³⁹ Lahoucine Ouzgane has written on masculinity in the Islamic world and in Africa, drawing on masculinities criticism from the West, as well as sociological theory on Islamicate countries, in order to highlight the gendered hierarchy that exists in the fiction of Tahar Ben Jelloun and the eminent Egyptian doctor, politician, feminist and writer Nawal El Saadawi in particular. See Lahoucine Ouzgane, 'The Rape Continuum: Masculinities in Ben Jelloun's and in El Saadawi's Works', *Queen: A Journal of Rhetoric and Power* <<http://www.ars-rhetorica.net/Queen/Volume11/Articles/Ouzgane.htm>> [accessed 15 October 2009]

⁴⁰ There has, until recently, been no gender in North Africa that allows a man to identify himself as homosexual along Western lines. This is discussed further on pages 41–46. Abdellah Taïa and Eyet Chékib Djaziri are examples of Maghrebien male authors overturning this tradition by openly identifying themselves as homosexual. See, for example, Abdellah Taïa, *L'Armée du salut* (Paris: Points, 2008); Abdellah Taïa, *Une Mélancolie arabe* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008); Eyet Chékib Djaziri, *Mon Frère, mon amour* (Paris: Le Manuscrit, 2004); Eyet Chékib Djaziri, *L'Innocence du diable* (Paris: Broché, 2001).

⁴¹ Jarrod Hayes, *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

Francophone literature becomes another noteworthy site for reading masculinity.⁴² The study of masculinity in Francophone literature, therefore, no longer seems to centre around the traditionally 'masculine' spheres of war, politics, and revolution, but is now becoming a far broader site of enquiry.

This study will therefore aim to contribute to this emerging pool of knowledge by exploring how male authors from Francophone North and West Africa depict a variety of masculine positions. It will focus on the thematic representation of gender and will consider masculinity to be not one single gender or position, but an umbrella term which will designate a variety of masculinities and, in line with current gender thought, the discursive constitution of manhood, and therefore recognising the diversity of male subjecthoods. Whilst this study could equally have been sociological or anthropological in its nature, literary analysis, and therefore the study of fictional representations, permits the critic to delve into the cultural sphere, and to look at the paradigms of masculinity that are projected by society. Thus, rather than the examination of society and culture itself from a (hopefully) objective, outside point of view (as would be the case in sociology or anthropology), literary analysis serves to investigate how society chooses to represent itself *to* itself, and to unveil a culture as it believes itself to be. The five novels that constitute the focus of this present study are examples of men writing men. However, with its overarching theme of discontent, this study is, by necessity, selective. It will explore to what extent five specific novels portray masculinity as ailing, and how, thereby, they deflate its omnipotence. It will seek to define how these male authors, in the first instance, name and identify masculinity and, in the second, how they comply with or challenge socially dominant ideals of manhood. This study will draw conclusions on how the male author engages in the deconstruction of manhood, and in doing so, how he might undermine the myth of normative Islamicate masculinity in a potentially radical way.

Peter F. Murphy, editor of *Fictions of Masculinity: Crossing Cultures, Crossing Sexualities*, bases his collection of essays on primarily Anglo-American literary analyses of masculinity on the 'realization that masculinity, like femininity, is a fictional construction', and a construction which is frequently propagated and upheld in literature, art, popular

⁴² Devin Bryson identifies the transnational and problematic gendered identities of immigrants in African fiction in order to explore the construction (and deconstruction) of masculinity in African literature, whilst highlighting the inter-cultural and inter-racial dynamics of immigrant masculinity and constructions of sexuality. Devin Bryson, 'The Submitted Body: Discursive and Masochistic Transformations of Masculinity in Simon Njami's *African Gigolo*', *Research in African Literatures*, 39:4 (2008), 84–104.

culture and the politics of day-to-day life in society.⁴³ Its role therefore extends beyond a purely literary role because it consolidates social myths of 'man' in the collective mind of society. Similarly, this thesis will also approach manhood in Maghrebian and West African literature as a fictional construction, or rather, as fictional constructions. Whereas Murphy's study has focused on literature's role in reinforcing norms of masculinity, this present study will seek to determine to what extent post-colonial French language literature world seeks to undermine the myth of masculine norms. It will consider how male writers have sought to undermine traditional and hegemonic paradigms of 'doing' manhood, and will attempt to determine how these authors engage with stereotypes of manhood and how they dismantle these traditional templates in the fictionalised masculinity of Rachid Boudjedra, Ousmane Sembene and Tahar Ben Jelloun, three of Francophone post-colonial literature's most celebrated and well-established authors. A principal aim in this current study, therefore, is to ascertain what new visions of manhood are being explored by male Francophone writers from Islamicate countries. It will examine the portrayals of masculinity and principally the tensions between hegemonic and marginal masculinities, but crucially also the notion of *negotiation* which becomes an all-important gender strategy. The unstable nature of gender, as well as its relational and situational nature, allow the individual to assume and discard codes of behaviour as and when necessary. This inevitably leads to an interaction with other identities. Amongst the themes to be considered in this study are the ways in which masculinity engages with, and is influenced by, a series of other societal practices/institutions, namely: the family, sexuality, femininity, the ramifications of foreign (neo-)colonial influences on gender performance, perceptions of the self and generational tensions with regard to evolving gender roles and, finally, the use of religious traditions to control and/or police gender(-ed) behaviour.

This study will consider five francophone novels written by male authors in the post-colonial period, namely: Ousmane Sembene's *Xala* (1973), Rachid Boudjedra's *La Répudiation* (1969) and Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Partir* (2006), *L'Homme rompu* (1994) and *L'Enfant de sable* (1985).⁴⁴ There is a deliberate a-chronology to the order in which these texts are examined, due to the enquiry following the types of masculine positions depicted in the texts, rather than their year of publication. Sembene's *Xala* will be the first novel to be

⁴³ Peter Murphy, 'Introduction', in *Fictions of Masculinity: Crossing Cultures, Crossing Sexualities*, ed. by Peter F. Murphy (New York; London: New York University Press, 1994), pp. 1–17 (p. 1).

⁴⁴ Ousmane Sembene, *Xala* (Paris; Dakar: Présence Africaine, 1973); Rachid Boudjedra, *La Répudiation* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1969); Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Partir* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006); Tahar Ben Jelloun, *L'Homme rompu* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994); Tahar Ben Jelloun, *L'Enfant de sable* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985).

considered, despite not being the earliest to be published. Ousmane Sembene (1923–2007) is arguably Senegal's best-known filmmaker and writer and was frequently dubbed the 'father of African film'. Born in a fishing village in the south of the country in 1923, Sembene demonstrated his objections to colonialism in no uncertain terms very early on in his life by getting himself expelled from a colonial school for striking a French teacher. Perhaps his most famous literary works are *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960) and *Xala* (1973) although this is by no means the limit of his output.⁴⁵ His success as a film-maker was without parallel in Africa, and despite the fact that his films were made for rural, illiterate Senegalese people, they also conquered elitist Western film circles.⁴⁶ He was awarded special recognition at the Cannes film festival in 1982 and again in 2004. As a staunch equalitarian with Marxist leanings, the main themes of his work include colonialism, tradition, capitalism, corruption, patriarchy and the role of religion. His earlier work is characterised by a revolutionary optimism whereas his later work focuses on the corruption of African elites following independence, with *Le Mandat, précédé de Vehi-Ciosane* (1966) and *Le Dernier de l'empire* (1981) echoing many of the concerns present in *Xala*.⁴⁷

Rachid Boudjedra (b. 1941) – novelist, essayist and poet – can lay a strong claim to being amongst the most experimental of all Maghrebian writers. He was born in Aïn Beïda in Algeria and gained a degree in philosophy from the Sorbonne in 1965. Sharing Sembene's fiercely anti-colonial passions, Boudjedra became a representative of the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*) abroad. Since bursting onto the literary scene with his first novel *La Répudiation* in 1969, Boudjedra has won widespread critical acclaim and has published extensively. All of his fictional work is now available in both French and Arabic, a fact that Farida Abu-Haidar considers 'a major achievement for any writer, and a proof of the importance of Boudjedra as an author of both French and Arabic fiction'.⁴⁸ Boudjedra's writing style is highly complex and literary, and his narrative structures lend themselves to comparisons with writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and William Faulkner. His thematics are highly critical of political Islam and he has publicly spoken out against the FIS (*Front Islamique du Salut* – the Islamic Salvation Front), publishing *FIS de la haine* in

⁴⁵ Ousmane Sembene, *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (Paris: Le Livre contemporain, 1960).

⁴⁶ Sembene's film *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988) won the Special Jury prize at the Venice International Film Festival in 1998 and *Moolaadé* won the *Certain Regard* prize in Cannes in 2004.

⁴⁷ Ousmane Sembene, *Le Mandat, précédé de Véhi Ciosane* (Paris: Éditions Présence Africaine, 1996); *Le Dernier de l'empire* (Paris: Éditions l'Harmattan, 1981).

⁴⁸ Farida Abu-Haidar, 'The Bipolarity of Rachid Boudjedra', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 20 (March 1989), 40–56 (p. 40).

1994.⁴⁹ Amongst his other works are *L'Insolation* (1972), *L'Escargot entêté* (1977), and *Le Démantèlement* (1982).⁵⁰ Amongst Boudjedra's main themes are colonialism, corruption and the hypocrisy of traditional Algerian customs.

Tahar Ben Jelloun (b. 1944) was born in Fes in Morocco and originally trained as a psychotherapist. He has lived and worked in France since 1971 and his writing is heavily influenced by his knowledge of psychotherapy. Ben Jelloun's writing career has been illustrious and includes fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama, essays and children's books. He has received numerous awards for his work, most notably the prestigious Goncourt prize for the sequel to *L'Enfant de sable*, *La Nuit sacrée* (1987).⁵¹ Ben Jelloun's work is grounded in realism, exploring topics such as (im)migration, racism and evolving gender roles, but he is also described by some as a surrealist, his work therefore a curious mixture of the real and the surreal. His best known works include *Harrouda* (1973), *Les Yeux baissés* (1991) and *Le Premier amour est toujours le dernier* (1995)⁵² but arguably his best-known work, *L'Enfant de sable* (1985), is the novel that truly spring-boarded him onto the international literary stage, and since then his work has been published into a variety of languages, making him possibly the most exported of all North African writers.

These three authors have chosen to publish a significant amount of their work in French, in what is essentially the colonial language, an interesting strategy since each has anti-colonial leanings. Nevertheless, perhaps the most widely respected of non-metropolitan Francophone writers, Assia Djébar, writes in French in order to appropriate and reinvent the colonising language in terms of her own cultural heritage.⁵³ Her written French is frequently punctuated by Arabic words, and flows to a rhythm more reminiscent of colloquial Arabic than French. Critic Hélène Tissières considers the choice of French as the language of written transmission to be crucial, stating that: '[It] demonstrate[s] an act that is marked both by the fervent desire to share thoughts within a community and by the pain that any choice in a multilingual context causes'.⁵⁴ Thus, writing in French serves as the means by which authors can engage in discussion with others who may not share their language, be they fellow

⁴⁹ Rachid Boudjedra, *FIS de la haine* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1992).

⁵⁰ Rachid Boudjedra, *L'Insolation* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1972); *L'Escargot entêté* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1977); *Le Démantèlement* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1982).

⁵¹ Tahar Ben Jelloun, *La Nuit sacrée* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1987).

⁵² Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Harrouda* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1973); *Les Yeux baissés* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997); *Le Premier amour est toujours le dernier* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995).

⁵³ Nicholas Harrison, 'Assia Djébar: Fiction as a Way of "Thinking"', in *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World*, pp. 65–76 (p. 69).

⁵⁴ Hélène Tissières, 'Maghreb-sub-Saharan Connections', *Research in African Literatures*, 33:3 (2002), 32–54 (p. 33).

Africans or European and global interlocutors. Thus, it may be argued that Sembene, Boudjedra and Ben Jelloun write in French in order to stamp their own culture on the colonial psyche, by reaching a far broader audience. Indeed, their 'appropriation' of the coloniser's tongue serves to counter what Ouzgane and Morrell call the 'discursive creation of the white man's Other'.⁵⁵ By employing the Westerner's language for their own narrative purposes, each of these authors demands a recognition for their work that escapes orientalist demotion.

Nevertheless, a linguistic heritage is not the only factor uniting these three authors. Boudjedra and Ben Jelloun display, perhaps, a more natural affinity with each other given their shared Maghrebian – and therefore primarily Arab – roots.⁵⁶ Sembene could be considered as somewhat of an outsider in this study. Nonetheless, these texts complement each other for several reasons. All three countries share a common experience of colonialism, by France (as opposed to Britain, Belgium or the Netherlands). More importantly, however, they share 'an investment in a discourse that presents them as collectively victimized by "the West"'.⁵⁷ Senegal, like Morocco and Algeria, has suffered not only from French occupation in the past, but also the painful transition to independence which has resulted in profound disillusionment. Furthermore, like many African nations, these three countries presently feel the consequences of global capitalism acutely and therefore share the perception of 'victim' to which Morrell and Ouzgane refer.

Moreover, Ben Jelloun, Boudjedra and Sembene all hail from nations where the preeminent religion is Islam and they therefore share an Islamicate heritage.⁵⁸ El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye, Sembene's anti-hero, is particularly concerned with consolidating his masculinity within Islamic dictates. Although the interpretation and application of Islamic principles may differ from country to country, there seems little justification for excluding Sembene from a category purely according to the fact that he, and the population of his country, are black. Indeed, that would be to uphold racialised categories, the type of

⁵⁵ Morrell and Ouzgane argue that this 'othering' pathologises the African, and instils a belief in European superiority. Morrell and Ouzgane, 'African Masculinities: An Introduction', p. 10.

⁵⁶ It is imperative to note that in spite of Moroccan and Algerian state enthusiasm for an Arab identity, both countries have significant Berber populations. The extent to which they can be referred to as 'Arab countries' is therefore somewhat contentious. Nevertheless, both Morocco and Algeria appear to associate themselves more with other Arab nations in the Middle East than with sub-Saharan Africa (as does Egypt, indicating the slightly problematic relationship between Arabs and 'Africa').

⁵⁷ Morrell and Ouzgane, 'African Masculinities: An Introduction', p. 3. Morrell and Ouzgane also state: 'Such a discourse is itself fuelled by ongoing practices of "orientalism", which systematically devalue African cultural forms and expressions and fix the continent's people with an "othering" gaze', p. 3.

⁵⁸ It is worth noting at this point however the existence of *Islams*, according to geographic, cultural, political and a whole host of other specificities. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba emphatically argues: '[It] cannot be repeated often enough: there is no one Muslim society, but a multiplicity of social structures all claiming allegiance to Islam'. He asserts that differences can be attributed to 'folklore'. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Saqi Books, 1998), p. 104.

'traditional' category that this study seeks to transcend. Hélène Tissières discusses this issue in her persuasive article 'Maghreb-sub-Saharan Connections'. She begins by stating: 'The commonly applied division separating the Maghreb from sub-Saharan Africa gives rise to innumerable problems since it denies the many forms of intertwining influence that exist'.⁵⁹ Indeed, she quotes several influential writers and thinkers who underline the interwoven nature of North and sub-Saharan African cultures. In citing the likes of Frantz Fanon, Elikia M'Bokolo, Abdelkébir Khatibi and Edouard Glissant, Tissières emphasises the 'intercultural cross-fertilization' of North and sub-Saharan African cultures.⁶⁰ Therefore, placing a demarcation line between North Africa and the rest of the continent appears to ignore the 'exceedingly diverse' nature of 'Africa' in terms of religions, cultures, languages, climate, economy, political regimes and so forth.⁶¹ Conversely, it also neglects the common themes, realities, histories and cultural heritage that bind such diverse cultures together. For the fact of the matter is that El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye, due to his adherence to Islamic values, has more in common with his North African cousins than he does with certain other, 'darker' Africans.⁶²

A profound malaise haunts each of the five novels to be considered here, and the fictional men portrayed suffer from a variety of pathologies ranging from depression and anxiety to neurosis and/or drug dependency, not to mention a generally questionable emotional well-being. The theme of illness and of discontentment permeates all five texts in different ways, accompanying a set of recurrent themes. The first of these is disappointment with the post-colonial situation. Sembene's *Xala* focuses on the corruption and hypocrisy of post-independence African societies, and scathingly berates the failure of African nations to develop an authentic, African modernity. This failure is attributed to the ailing construct of the bourgeois man who thinks of nothing other than massaging his own male ego with the neo-coloniser lurking quietly in the background. *Xala* ultimately relates the disappointment of a stagnant society in the post-colonial era, and the omniscient narrator's sarcastic commentary ridicules hegemonic masculinity and exposes it, in the starkest of terms, as nothing more than a flamboyant masquerade. Boudjedra's *La Répudiation*, like *Xala*, also expresses grave misgivings *vis-à-vis* the post-colonial condition and the true extent of

⁵⁹ Tissières, 'Maghreb-sub-Saharan Connections', p. 32.

⁶⁰ Tissières, 'Maghreb-sub-Saharan Connections', p. 39.

⁶¹ Morrell and Ouzgane, 'African Masculinities: An Introduction', p. 1.

⁶² Nineteenth-century European historians denigrated sub-Saharan Africa as no more than a collection of barbarous tribes with no cultural, historical or developmental importance and, in doing so, established an imaginary line between 'lighter' North (and East) Africans and the 'darker' people of the rest of the continent. See Morrell and Ouzgane, 'African Masculinities: An Introduction', pp. 1–2.

liberation. In *L'Homme rompu* and *Partir*, generalised corruption exacerbates an already rapidly changing North African society, resulting in the erosion of traditional masculinity and the subordination of the Arab to the capitalist West. Each of the texts portrays a belief that poverty and injustice exist because of a post-colonial society's inability to cultivate a true independence from the colonial master.

Secondly, these five novels outline a concern that masculinity can only express itself through exercising dominance over women. The continued existence of patriarchy within established power dynamics is evident in Maghrebian and African literature more generally, yet in these five novels in particular this is questioned and used in order to portray the male as pathological and the traditional binary social formula of man/dominant and female/subservient as damaging not just to women, but also to men. Boudjedra's concerns lie with the hypocrisy and injustices of Algerian society in which the asphyxiating presence of the patriarch stifles the development of a vibrant identity for his male children, and relegates women to the margins of society.⁶³

This traditional binary of man/dominant and woman/subservient has, no doubt unsurprisingly, left its mark on fictional production. Indeed, Peter Murphy states: 'Literary representations of manhood have both relied on dominant cultural assumptions about masculinity and exposed the untenability of those assumptions'.⁶⁴ Without doubt, Islamicate traditions and culture(s) privilege the male, attributing to him many additional rights not available to women. Nonetheless, this does not necessarily mean that men are not subject to similar pressure to be what society deems they should be. Indeed, whereas many of these fictional male protagonists benefit from opportunities denied to their female counterparts, it does not necessarily follow that they have more freedom as gendered individuals. To this end, seeking a voice for women in opposition to a generalised category entitled 'men' merely upholds the notion of the female or the feminine as 'Other'. It ignores the fact that gendered identities and behaviours are extremely complex issues, involving not only men and women, their personality and upbringing, but also wider issues such as race, class, nationality and so forth. In addition, it neglects to consider that individuals are interpellated by a dominant system of ideology, with the result that in certain contexts, it may be women who most vehemently protect the *status quo* that victimises and disenfranchises them, not men.

⁶³ This is a recurrent theme in Maghrebian literature. Compare Driss Chraïbi's *Succession ouverte* for instance; Driss Chraïbi, *Succession ouverte* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1962).

⁶⁴ Murphy, 'Introduction', in *Fictions of Masculinity*, p. 6.

A more complex and problematised reassessment of fictional male protagonists does not represent an acceptance and justification of the patriarchal order nor the cruelties and oppression used to safeguard it. It merely recognises the complex constitution of gendered behaviour and identity, and in addition, does not consider male characters automatically as willing soldiers of the patriarchal order itself, but also as pawns within it. Fictional male characters can be seen as individuals struggling with the coercive (and foreclosing) interpellation by the implicit laws of ideology, mimicking, no doubt, the pressures exerted on individuals in non-fictional society. The concept of gender was born out of a desire to give women the world over a recorded and historical voice, a voice that was separate to the canon of men's *histories* that spanned not only centuries but crossed cultural boundaries too. Once more, we return to the notion of the universal, white, heterosexual, middle-class man to which *histories* usually refer, and we might note that this is but one 'type' of man. There are other masculine positions, and subordinate men may have had their personal histories ignored in a similar way to women. This deconstruction of masculinity is a project to which this study endeavours to contribute. By exposing 'men' not as a homogenous group, but as a collective of male individuals coerced into adopting particular, socially-acceptable identities and behavioural repertoires, it is hoped to show through fictional representation that men are as much individuals as women, and that they are subject to similar rules. Indeed, as Robert Connell puts it: 'There is a gender politics within masculinity'.⁶⁵

By problematising masculinity, this thesis seeks to outline recurrent manifestations of manhood in Francophone Maghrebian and West African literature, but also to identify the inherent contradictions of 'being a man'. Some of the fictional men to be examined here may embody a stereotype of normalised masculinity. Others may represent the antithesis of the 'real' man. Some characters may fluctuate between the two poles, or even position themselves somewhere inbetween. Indeed, as constantly evolving subjects that define themselves in relation to a host of other social forces, these characters represent a variety of positions *vis-à-vis* dominant norms of manhood. Robert Connell structures masculinity around four primary positions: hegemony, complicity, subordination and marginalisation.⁶⁶ Drawing on Connell's framework, literary critic Berthold Schoene-Harwood states:

This hegemonic configuration of masculinity is always bound to constitute an impossible, phantasmatic ideal that ultimately no man can live up to or fulfil. As a

⁶⁵ Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 37.

⁶⁶ Connell, *Masculinities*, pp. 76–81.

result, all flesh-and-blood masculinities must ineluctably find themselves in a position of either complicity, marginality or subordination.⁶⁷

That is to say, within the power structures that exist within masculinity itself, men's choices are limited. One must choose either to comply with socially idealised notions of what he should be and strive to attain, and then maintain these standards, or, if unable or unwilling to do this, he runs the risk of being dominated by other men, placing him in a position of subservience. The only remaining category is that of a total failure – either willingly or otherwise – to adapt to socially-sanctioned tendencies, whereupon an individual becomes totally emasculated and is consequently ostracised to a socially peripheral gender role. In the texts chosen for inclusion in this thesis, the protagonists represent men from all three of these categories and therefore display the various positions available to men in any society. While the male characters under examination here are not 'flesh-and-blood', they do nevertheless occupy the positions outlined by Connell *vis-à-vis* hegemony, whilst also demonstrating the careful manoeuvring, or negotiation, in which fictional men must participate in order to validate their masculinity.

In the first novel analysed in this study, El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye, the anti-hero of *Xala*, strives to maintain an outward appearance of manliness that is intrinsically linked to his status as a bourgeois businessman. His life is dictated by the need to comply with gender norms within the particular bubble of the post-independence business class. His determination to uphold that status requires a high degree of complicity with socially-induced behavioural norms. In *La Répudiation*, Si Zoubir asserts himself as the patriarch *par excellence* over his family and tribe, demonstrating a marked desire to be a 'real man', and to demand the privileges traditionally attributed to a man of his position. Like El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye, he therefore complies with the dominant social order. Furthermore, his legacy to his son means that Rachid cannot conceive of a stable masculine identity for himself outside of dominating and controlling others. For Rachid, rising to the top of the masculine hierarchy is not quite as simple, and despite his attempted complicity, Rachid eventually finds himself subordinated to stronger (masculine) forces. The main protagonist of *Partir*, Azel, finds himself subordinate to the foreigner as well as to various individuals within his own Moroccan community for the entire duration of the text. Rendered inferior in his own country due primarily to economic factors, his migration to Spain does little to change his position in a masculine hierarchy. Despite his various negotiations, he is unable to escape this lower-

⁶⁷ Berthold Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. xii.

ranking status. The same can be said of Mourad in *L'Homme rompu*. Starting out from a deliberately self-marginalising position, Mourad refuses to adopt the version of masculinity that dominates within his family and workplace by firmly dismissing any engagement with corrupt practices. Due to financial need, however, he does finally attempt to join the dominant masculine order but his lack of performative know-how and his continuing existential dilemma result in his being relegated to the category of subservience at the end of the novel. The final text in this present study, *L'Enfant de sable* sees the anatomically female Ahmed/Zahra unable to ever fit tidily into either a masculine or a feminine gender. The path to masculinisation is emphasised in the novel but it displays the protagonist's persistent but never wholly satisfactory engagement and re-engagement with societal discursive mechanisms. In a radical dénouement, Ahmed/Zahra rejects both masculinity and femininity and occupies a gender identity that defies his father's wishes and the binary model offered by society, thus becoming totally marginal but also subversive.

This study will therefore be divided into six chapters, and drawing on Connell's definition of masculine positions, it will consider different roles in relation to the dominant norms of being a man. The fluid nature of masculinity signifies that the male characters examined here may adopt one particular position in the male hierarchy, or they may change, flit incessantly between categories or stand in juxtaposition to the men around them. In the interest of structural clarity, however, this study will discuss the texts in relation to which position is most apparent in any one novel and which explains the a-chronology with which the novels are considered. Following a discussion of approaches to masculinity in chapter one, chapters two and three will therefore focus on the complicity of fictional men with the overarching order of masculinity. Chapter two will examine El Hadji's slavish alignment to hegemonic norms in *Xala*, whereas chapter three will analyse the construction of the masculine identity of the patriarch in *La Répudiation* in opposition to the subordinate and marginal status of his two sons. Chapters four and five will examine enforced subordination in *Partir* and *L'Homme rompu*. Finally, chapter six explores marginality, focusing on Ahmed/Zahra's subversion of the masculine order in *L'Enfant de sable*. As we will see, performing masculinity requires a perpetual negotiation of social influences and discourses, and therefore the protagonists analysed here may occupy more than one position, or even all three at different moments. This point, however, only serves to underline the fluidity of gender and the significance of the culturally constituted subject.

Approaches to Masculinity

Having established therefore that masculinity in French-language North and West African literature is in need of exploration, one must proceed to pose the all-important question: what is masculinity? This is a question to which no readily apparent answers exist, and which requires a double-layered response: firstly based on current Western gender theories and then, more specifically on Islamicate masculinity itself. In his pioneering anthropological survey of manhood, David Gilmore defines masculinity as ‘the approved way of being an adult male in any given society’.⁶⁸ For Miescher and Lindsay, masculinity can be defined as:

[...] a cluster of norms, values, and behavioral patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others. Ideologies of masculinity – like those of femininity – are culturally and historically constructed, their meanings continually contested and always in the process of being renegotiated in the context of existing power relations.⁶⁹

While certainly very accurate, this vague definition is of limited use in outlining the major characteristics of what we recognise to be masculinity.

Yet, despite this lack of succinct definition, critics generally agree on a number of distinct traits that can be commonly associated with what we term ‘masculinity’ and masculine identity. Surprisingly perhaps, many of these have direct equivalents in cultures far apart which are unknown or unassociated with one another, or at the very least equivalents that are recognisable. For David Gilmore, the use of ethnographic field data and secondary literature suggests something ‘almost generic, something repetitive, about the criteria of men-playing’, and he points to the tendencies and parallels that exist in male imagery the world over.⁷⁰ Gender constructions are primarily cultural and social mechanisms designed to help society function. Men’s so-called ‘tendencies’ towards certain behavioural traits are often exaggerated and/or encouraged by social or ideological belief systems pertaining to acceptable behaviour in any given society. David Gilmore argues that this need to behave in a socially sanctioned manner is a necessity in any society, stating: ‘I regard these phenomena

⁶⁸ David Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 1.

⁶⁹ Miescher and Lindsay, ‘Introduction’, in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, p. 4.

⁷⁰ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, pp. 2–3.

not as givens, but as part of the existential “problem of order” that all societies must solve by encouraging people to act in certain ways, ways that facilitate both individual development and group adaption. Gender roles represent one of these problem-solving behaviors’.⁷¹ He therefore regards gender roles, and masculine behaviours within them, as having a social function.

Stephen Whitehead and Frank Barrett concur with this view. In their introduction to *The Masculinities Reader*, they also point to adaption as an important element of masculinity. Adaption comes to represent how men learn – successfully or otherwise – to enact the gender role prescribed to them by society.⁷² They go on to claim that: ‘The nearest that we can get to an “answer” [to the question “what is masculinity”] is to state that masculinities are those behaviours, languages and practices, existing in specific cultural organizational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine’.⁷³ In his impressive study of patriarchy and its structures, *Masculine Domination*, Pierre Bourdieu concurs with this view by asking: ‘What is manliness, ultimately, but a non-femininity?’⁷⁴

This, however, still gives us no more than a nebulous explanation of masculinity, a fact summarised by Gilmore when he asserts that manliness is ‘an unresolved cryptogram or enigma’.⁷⁵ This is because, as Robert Connell points out, masculinity exists and functions within a much wider gender order, and one in which several differing and powerful influences are at work.⁷⁶ Masculinity, or masculinities, are above all fluid gendered identities which morph according to context. They are relational notions that adapt according to constructions of femininity, race and/or ethnicity, social class, labour-market relations, historical context, sexuality and so forth. In examining fictional constructions of masculinity in post-war North America, David Savran reminds us that both masculinity and femininity are ‘historically contingent, [and] always in the process of being reimagined and redefined

⁷¹ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 3.

⁷² Whitehead and Barrett, ‘The Sociology of Masculinity’, pp. 15–16.

⁷³ Whitehead and Barrett, ‘The Sociology of Masculinity’, pp. 15–16.

⁷⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p. 63.

Bourdieu’s study takes Kabyle culture as a framework with which the structures of patriarchy further afield may be theorised by arguing persuasively that this culture has preserved structures of ‘relatively unaltered practical coherence of behaviours and discourses partially abstracted from time by ritual stereotyping, represent[ing] a paradigmatic form of the “phallogocentric” vision and the androcentric cosmology which are common to all Mediterranean societies’. He therefore appears to support Gilmore’s assertion that there exists a significant and far-reaching similarity between masculine hegemonies and criteria which constitute masculinity in unrelated cultures. Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 6.

⁷⁵ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, pp. 5–6.

⁷⁶ Connell, *Masculinities*, p. xxi.

according to changing material conditions',⁷⁷ thus illustrating the complexity of defining the particular features of masculinity which are perpetually subject to modification. Judith Butler also theorises gender as a 'shifting and contextual phenomenon' which 'does not denote a substantive being but a point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations'.⁷⁸ Above all, the use of the singular 'masculinity' is misleading, and Whitehead and Barrett build a strong case that advocates the consideration of masculinities as 'plural, changing, and historically informed around dominant discourses or ideologies of masculinism'.⁷⁹ It is therefore necessary to recognise that masculinities are not singular or static, but multiple and organic. Nonetheless, for this very reason, configurations of gender are invaluable sources for reading a particular cultural climate and Savran argues that: 'A gendered identity, on account of its contingency, is of all identifications the one most subject to intensive social pressures, the most anxiety-ridden, the most consistently imbricated in social, political, and economic pressures'.⁸⁰ As sites reflecting ideological currents, Savran concludes that gender is 'the most sensitive barometer of culture'.⁸¹

The complex processes involved in being made into a man are discussed by David Gutterman in his article 'Postmodernism and the Interrogation of Masculinity', in which he underlines the importance of social discourses in the formation of gender(s).⁸² Reiterating current gender theory, Gutterman draws on a body of theory that developed under Foucauldian influence, arguing that people have little control over their persona, and maintaining that identity is something that someone does, and not necessarily what someone

⁷⁷ David Savran, *Taking it like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 8.

⁷⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 15.

⁷⁹ Whitehead and Barrett, 'The Sociology of Masculinity', p. 15. This echoes the fact that many feminists now speak of feminisms, rather than of one single, monolithic feminism.

⁸⁰ Savran, *Taking it like a Man*, p. 8.

⁸¹ Savran, *Taking it like a Man*, p. 8.

⁸² David Gutterman, 'Postmodernism and the Interrogation of Masculinity', in *The Masculinities Reader*, ed. by Stephen Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 56–71. The term 'discourse' has, by now, entered into academic rhetoric and become one of its key concepts. Foucauldian in origin, 'discourse' can be defined as a series of statements, utterances, signs and/or symbols that construct meanings. Foucault viewed discourse, therefore, as a system that both shapes and constrains our perceptions of the world, and Foucault himself emphasised the link between discourse and power relations repeatedly, seeing discourse as existing as a result of a complex set of social practices which attempt to keep particular discourses in circulation whilst attempting to silence others. He argued that established discourses provide the individual with a structure with which to interpret the world and its events, which, through that particular structure, assume a normality and an authority that is difficult to challenge. Therefore, a statement produced within a marginalised discourse lacks authority, or may seem incomprehensible to others. Though Foucault himself used the concept of discourse in relation to his thoughts on the production of knowledge, political economy and natural history, the term has been adopted by feminists and gender critics and has since become central to the interrogation of gender. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 1972); 'The Order of Discourse', in *Untying the Text: A Post-structuralist Reader*, ed. by R. Young (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 48–79.

is. This, he maintains, is a fact that underlines the 'cultural constitution of the subject'.⁸³ Thus, as others have noted above, masculinity (and gender in general) are sites of convergence in which social discourses merge and are imprinted onto the psyche of individuals who then perform the social script(s) with which they are branded.⁸⁴ Masculinity, therefore, can be seen essentially as sequences of performative acts, and crucially as 'not volitional but coercive'.⁸⁵

Indeed, if discourse provides a series of seemingly pre-ordained modalities for gender, then the parallel impact for identity, as another discursively constructed phenomenon, merits further consideration at this juncture. In recent decades, the very meaning of the term 'subject' has been questioned and destabilised. In a departure from the humanist understanding of the term, of the subject as an individual who possesses free will and who actively chooses his/her identity, thoughts and actions, subjectivity now tends to be viewed as a subject-in-progress, and as being constructed in discourse by the acts performed by the 'subject'. As Judith Butler points out, it is impossible to exist outside of the 'cultural matrix'⁸⁶ (by which she means the regulatory framework of society) and the dominant discourses that uphold it.⁸⁷ On this, she asserts:

To enter into the repetitive practices of [the] terrain of signification is not a choice, for the 'I' that might enter is always already inside: there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have.⁸⁸

Butler cites the heterosexual matrix as the vast discursive net within which human protagonists are trapped. Nevertheless, there maybe other matrices, all of which limit the subjective possibilities for agency. For Louis Althusser, for instance, the hegemonic discourses that govern, and foreclose, the individual's choices are economic in nature, rather than sexual or gendered, and Althusser speaks of an ideology which revolves around class-based relationships to production and exploitation.⁸⁹

Notwithstanding this alternative focus, the ideological system which Althusser describes is not dissimilar to Butler's conception. For Althusser, ideology is the circulation of discourses, ideas, ideals and images as a ready-made framework into which we are born and

⁸³ Gutterman, 'Postmodernism and the Interrogation of Masculinity', pp. 56–9.

⁸⁴ Gutterman, 'Postmodernism and the Interrogation of Masculinity', p. 59.

⁸⁵ Savran, *Taking it like a Man*, p. 8.

⁸⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 23.

⁸⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 42.

⁸⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 189.

⁸⁹ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971), p. 139.

in relation to which we ultimately live and think. Hegemonic assumptions take on the form of 'common sense', thereby embedding themselves all the more concretely into what are perceived as normative world outlooks.⁹⁰ In addition, it might be added at this point that these normative perception of existence do not reflect reality. Rather, Althusser maintains that they are 'allusions' to reality but that this imaginary reflection of reality, in fact, constitutes an 'illusion'.⁹¹ Nevertheless, these beliefs are buttressed by both Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA), which use force to police an individual's behaviour, and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), which rely less on force and more on insidious coercion.⁹² More crucially, he argues that individuals are *interpellated* as subjects by ideology. This hailing, or interpellation, Althusser explains, takes the form of the subject recognising his/her own place within ideology and, by virtue of this recognition, accepting that place. It therefore constitutes a submission to ideological norms. Even the unborn child is, in Althusser's terms, an 'always-already' subject, since it is 'appointed as a subject in and by the specific ideological configuration in which it is "expected" once it has been conceived'.⁹³ Thus, Althusser talks of 'ideological constraint and pre-appointment' with regard to the subject, who is only free in so far as (s)he can accept his/her submission to discursive hegemonies.⁹⁴ And therein, Althusser concludes, lies the ambiguity of the term 'subject', which pertains both to the free agency of the subject as independent author of its thoughts and deeds, as well as to its subjection to ideology. On this, he asserts:

The individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection "all by himself".* (Italics in original)⁹⁵

Further, he remarks: 'One of the effects of ideology is the practical *denegation* of the ideological character of ideology by ideology' (italics in original), thus alluding to the particularly efficient control of a system which covertly dictates the subject's individuality whilst (s)he believes him/herself to be acting out of free will.⁹⁶ The interpellative self-

⁹⁰ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 153.

⁹¹ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 153

⁹² Althusser maintains that the State Apparatuses only have meaning when considered in the optic of class struggle, where they are deployed to uphold class oppression and exploitation in the interests of the ruling elite. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 171.

⁹³ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 165.

⁹⁴ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 165.

⁹⁵ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 169.

⁹⁶ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp. 163–4.

formation of the subject, which appears to grant choice, in actual fact merely denotes the limited agency available to the subject and secures a subjection to a dominant ideology.

For Butler, drawing on Foucauldian notions of power, the status of 'subject' is reached by means of a series of limitations and regulations, and she maintains that: 'the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with those structures'.⁹⁷ Concurring to a large extent with Althusser's understanding of 'the subject', she notes: 'In effect, the law produces and then conceals the notion of "a subject before the law" in order to invoke that discursive formation as a naturalised foundational premise that subsequently legitimates that law's own regulatory hegemony'.⁹⁸ Therefore, as Althusser's notion of ideology renders itself invisible to its subjects, so 'the law' of Butler also undergoes a process of concealment in order to disguise its constructed nature. As a result, Butler observes, there exists a 'presocial ontology of persons who freely consent to be governed and, thereby, constitute the legitimacy of the social contract'.⁹⁹ Both Butler and Althusser assert that the notion of 'the subject', like gender itself, is less the innate core of a person, less the marker of a substantive being, and is rather the *practice*¹⁰⁰ by which the cultural constitution of 'the subject' is manifested. For, as Butler puts it: 'There is no self that is prior to the convergence or who maintains "integrity" prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field. There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very "taking up" is enabled by the tool lying there'.¹⁰¹

Following this logic, manhood also becomes an action and not a state; a 'doing' rather than a 'being', and gender is a key component of expressing and validating one's subjecthood, in line with David Gilmore's view, that masculinity is essentially a culturally authorised way of behaving – a psychological integration into a community and a culturally imposed phenomenon that individuals must conform to 'whether or not they find it psychologically congenial'.¹⁰² Pierre Bourdieu calls this a form of 'symbolic, [...] gentle violence' which ensures the individual's successful integration within the established order.¹⁰³ Gender roles, and more specifically, the male image, constitute a form of the

⁹⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 4.

⁹⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 5.

⁹⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 184.

¹⁰¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 185.

¹⁰² Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 3.

¹⁰³ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, pp. 1–2. Bourdieu also argues that exercising dominance, a central feature of masculinity, is 'not inscribed in a nature' but must instead 'be learned through a long labour of socialization' (p. 49).

sociocultural ideal of 'collective representation',¹⁰⁴ absorbed by the individual who, recognising his/her 'place' in the system, strives to *become* the ideal successfully.

Masculinity can therefore be viewed as a never-ending mechanism of identity validation. Whitehead and Barrett state: 'In this regard, there is no core, grounded, or fixed self, but a rather a fluid arrangement of multiple subject positions which together provide the means by which the individual achieves a sense of identity'.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, at the core of this reading are the notions of cultural discourses and of 'branding identities'.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Judith Butler notes that bodies can be viewed as 'passive recipients of an inexorable cultural law' and as a blank canvas on which cultural discourses may be transposed.¹⁰⁷ In this light, masculinity(-ies) simply provide dominant templates of behaviour that, once layered upon the 'naked' self, enable the individual to engage with hegemonic discourse(s) and to express an identity in a way that is socially congenial. Thus, prominent discursive scripts are enacted by an individual who expresses a socially comprehensible identity through performative acts.

Nevertheless, there is an important distinction to be made here. Coalescing over time to the point of invisibility, some acts eventually assume a normative status since they are viewed as an innate feature of being a man (men are tough and do not cry, men are the breadwinners, for example). Or, as Butler puts it: '[Gender constitutes] acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality'.¹⁰⁸ David Savran contends that: 'Gender is always an imaginary identification'.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, he observes that 'sexual dimorphism is itself not a "fact of nature" but a historical and social construction'.¹¹⁰ If gender is constructed, the constant revalidation and repetition of that gender becomes an urgent necessity. For, if not continually reaffirmed as a truth, the fiction of gender comes perilously close to collapse. Therefore, unconscious gendered behaviour, which is perceived as normative and is endlessly repeated in order to uphold the myth of its normality, is described by Butler as *performativity*. In contrast, one can also talk of *performance*, a term which in the Butlerian sense refers to a conscious performer of a behaviour which 'suggests a dissonance

¹⁰⁴ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Whitehead and Barrett, 'The Sociology of Masculinity', p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ Gutterman, 'Postmodernism and the Interrogation of Masculinity', p. 59.

¹⁰⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 173.

¹⁰⁹ Savran, *Taking it like a Man*, p. 8.

¹¹⁰ Savran, *Taking it like a Man*, p. 8.

not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance'.¹¹¹ Moreover, performance suggests the presence of an agent in a way that is not possible for performative acts. Citing drag as an example, Butler argues that performance can denaturalise sex and gender by exposing their fictional natures, stating: '*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency*' (italics in original).¹¹² To return to masculinity, performativity in particular plays an essential role in making men, by virtue of constituting the acts through which a man can be judged as having a coherent male identity, easily identifiable to others and compatible (or not) with dominant norms, and through which he can subsequently maintain (or fail to maintain) the status of 'man'.

Hegemonic masculinity

As has already been touched upon in the preceding section, what does emerge in the nebulous, often ambiguous category of masculinity is the existence of a certain notion of manhood that rises above all others to assume the position of the 'ideal'. Indeed, it is these hegemonic norms that guide normative discourse of manhood and which, ultimately, construct the framework against which all men are judged. Whilst we must remember the polymorphous nature of masculinity, and in doing so, note that there is no such thing as a permanent hegemonic 'type', we can, nevertheless, sketch a pattern of recurring hegemonic codes. These codes are collectively sanctioned by cultural ideologies at any given time or in any given place, thus giving rise to a constantly evolving notion of 'real' men, and of a commonly accepted version of masculinity that dominates and subordinates all others. Robert Connell's chosen term for this phenomenon is *hegemonic masculinity*, which is defined as: 'The configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women'.¹¹³ Berthold Schoene-Harwood prefers the equivalent term *patriarchal masculinity* and explicitly uses this term in the singular in order 'to highlight the insidious impact its inherent conceptual contradictions and inconsistencies continue to exert on the individuation and self-formation of both men and

¹¹¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 175.

¹¹² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 175.

¹¹³ Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 77.

their others'.¹¹⁴ Indeed, it was argued earlier that masculinity has frequently positioned itself as the default reference point against which femininity is judged. Within the complex hierarchy of masculinities, however, it is hegemonic masculine discourse that asserts itself as the normative referent against which all other masculinities are judged. Masculine roles may only be read in relation to the dominant standard, since even marginal or subversive masculinities are ultimately judged in relation to hegemonic ideals. Indeed, the linguistics critic Scott Fabius Kiesling asserts that: 'Men who resist or ignore these discourses are nevertheless in a *milieu* in which their practices are evaluated against the [dominant] discourses'.¹¹⁵ Therefore, it might be concluded that the long-reaching arm of hegemonic masculinity reaches out and impacts on everyone.

Scott Fabius Kiesling reminds us, however, that even hegemonic ideals of masculinity cannot be considered as a fixed set of rules. He argues:

'Hegemonic masculinity' has become so dominant a notion in the study of men and masculinities that it has lost many of the aspects that made it valuable in the first place. That is, rather than 'using hegemonic masculinity' to represent the fluidity, contestability, and variety of masculinities, many researchers have begun to use it simply as a replacement term for 'masculinity' or 'patriarchy', without specifying exactly what hegemonic masculinity entails in the specific context they are analyzing.¹¹⁶

Kiesling's emphasis on specific contextualisation is an important one and we might add at this point that there may be several hegemonic versions of masculinity circulating in a culture at any one time. Therefore, it must be borne in mind that idealised versions of masculinity are also subject to a particular set of pressures that vary according to geographic location, religion, political and economic factors, therefore underlining the chameleon-like nature of masculinity as a concept.

Feminist scholar Suzanne Hatty argues that men's speech often indicates omniscient thoughts, and that 'authoritative statements dispel [...] the legitimacy of another point of view'.¹¹⁷ That is to say, the ideology of dominant manhood empties other points of view of importance or validity. The voice responsible for relegating other points of view is in fact the voice of hegemony. Hatty argues that ideals of manhood are spread by the media and/or religion and that 'hegemonic masculinity is, then, the cultural manifestation of men's

¹¹⁴ Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men*, p. ix.

¹¹⁵ Scott Fabius Kiesling, 'Homosocial Desire in Men's Talk: Balancing and Re-creating Cultural Discourses of Masculinity', *Language in Society*, 34:5 (2005), 695–726 (p. 698).

¹¹⁶ Fabius Kiesling, 'Homosocial Desire in Men's Talk', p. 701.

¹¹⁷ Suzanne Hatty, *Masculinities, Violence and Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA; London; New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000), p. 58.

ascendancy over women'.¹¹⁸ Bourdieu argues that patriarchal norms are the '*product of an incessant (and therefore historical) labour of production*' (italics in original),¹¹⁹ a process that has been so successful that:

The strength of the masculine order is seen in the fact that it dispenses with justification: the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it. The social order functions as an immense symbolic machine tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it is founded.¹²⁰

Whilst these views, according to which hegemonic masculinity is definable by its domination of women and the feminine, are undoubtedly valid, what is not recognised in these particular quotations is that this same masculine identity asserts ascendancy over other categories of men too. The patriarchal, masculinist discourse that produces a hegemonic configuration is necessarily bound up with relationships with women, but it should be noted that an important feature of hegemony is its superior position in relation to other, less willingly complicit masculine identities also.

Dominant notions of manliness, in the form of hegemonic discourse, set very high standards and, as Bourdieu puts it, establish a 'system of demands which inevitably remains, in many cases, inaccessible'.¹²¹ Men must struggle to uphold the culturally idealised veneer of hegemony or risk being ostracised to the shameful category of the 'unmanly'. While the ultimate masculine identity bequeaths certain powers and benefits on some men, on another level men are, to an extent, imprisoned by notions of hegemonic manhood. Schoene-Harwood describes this as a 'disembodiment'.¹²² Men, he argues, end up penalised by the very 'discursive mechanisms' that are designed to empower them.¹²³ Some men are literally disenfranchised and become subordinate to their more 'manly' peers, or rather to dominant social ideologies and to those who internalise them more thoroughly. It could be argued at this point that even the stereotypical chauvinist has certain freedoms curtailed by his incessant need to perform hegemonic discourses and that 'everything thus combines to make the impossible ideal of virility the source of an immense vulnerability'.¹²⁴ On the dominant

¹¹⁸ Hatty, *Masculinities, Violence and Culture*, p. 117.

¹¹⁹ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 34.

¹²⁰ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 9.

¹²¹ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 50.

¹²² Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men*, p. ix.

¹²³ Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men*, p. ix. Making a similar point, Pierre Bourdieu states: 'Male privilege is also a trap, and it has its negative side in the permanent tension and contention, sometimes verging on the absurd, imposed on every man by the duty to assert his manliness in all circumstances'. Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 50.

¹²⁴ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 51.

fictional tropes of Western men in literature, Peter F. Murphy points out that misogynist literature does not simply benefit men, and therefore by extension the patriarchal order. Indeed, he argues that literature can victimise men as it victimises women, and claims that ‘an analysis of misandric nature of literature is long overdue’.¹²⁵ Therefore, despite privileging men against women, such highly-valued ideals actually restrict and objectify men too, a conclusion reached by the eminent Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi, who believes that under the traditional Muslim family set-up, ‘the self-fulfilment of men is just as impaired and limited as that of women’.¹²⁶ This is not to say that men can only occupy the role of victims and should be exonerated of their crimes and abuses of women. It is simply to draw attention to the fact that gender dynamics are far more complex than simplistic binaries along the lines of women (the abused) and men (the abusers). Masculine identities can therefore find themselves under similar pressures and constraints as their feminine equivalents.

In the West, masculinity has traditionally been perceived as a stable force, whereas femininity has been linked to notions such as illness, depression, instability and hysteria.¹²⁷ This is an assumption that has been questioned, rethought and ultimately dislodged as further research is carried out and the perceived link between femininity and instability, and manhood and stability, is gradually eroded. Whereas femininity was previously associated with, and frequently represented by, depression and hysteria, masculinity is currently and increasingly being compared by some critics to conditions such as high-functioning autism and Asperger’s syndrome, illustrating that paradigms of masculinity can also be pathology-inducing and harmful to the individual. For example, Schoene argues:

Whereas traditionally the masculine gender has been defined as incontestably rooted in the faculty of reason, in recent years masculinity has come to be seen increasingly as anachronistic, intolerably volatile, and in crisis. Many characteristically male traits, which used to constitute the gender’s strength and thus legitimize its hegemonic status, tend now to be recognized as symptoms of a variety of psychopathologies,

¹²⁵ Murphy uses the term ‘misandric’ as an antonym to ‘misogynist’, although not in the sense of hatred of men, but rather negative representations of men. See Murphy, ‘Introduction’, *Fictions of Masculinity*, p. 2.

¹²⁶ Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male/Female Dynamics in Muslim Society* (London: Saqi Books, 2003), p. 173.

¹²⁷ The psychologist Elaine Showalter, for instance, states that: ‘In the most obvious sense, madness is a female malady because it is experienced by more women than men. The statistical overrepresentation of women among the mentally ill has been well documented by historians and psychologists’. See Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830–1980* (London: Virago, 1987), pp. 3–4. She also argues that madness, even when experienced by men, is metaphorically and symbolically represented as feminine, therefore rendering it a ‘female malady’. There is, in the West at least, a very strong association between ‘woman’ and ‘madness’.

mental disorders and cognitive impairments, most notably Asperger's Syndrome or high-functioning autism.¹²⁸

In addition, Schoene asserts that patriarchal masculinity as 'an ideologically motivated gender construct [...] promotes a type of male subjectivity that displays conspicuous similarities to Asperger's Syndrome and high-functioning autism'.¹²⁹ Furthermore, he claims that autism stands in binary opposition to the traditionally female malady of hysteria: 'If hysteria lends itself to identification as a feminine falling apart of the self, then autism provides a perfect metaphor for the masculine self pulling itself together'.¹³⁰ There may not be as strong an association between women and mental instability in non-Western culture. Nonetheless, Schoene's observation is intriguing, since a marker of masculinity world-wide appears to be a staunch sense of autonomy that he likens to autism and Asperger's syndrome.

It is imperative to note that masculinity, as a discursive mechanism, is not a strictly male prerogative. If we accept the premise of masculinity(-ies) as being codes of behaviour assumed and enacted by the subject, then we must also accept that women may also, at times, be the bearers of ideologically masculine scripts.¹³¹ As we shall see in the following analyses, in some cases it is women who assume certain masculine roles, therefore giving rise to the assertion that women may also be 'masculine'. Indeed, Judith Butler argues that there is a 'radical discontinuity' between the body and culturally constructed genders, stating:

The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that 'men' and 'masculine' might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and 'women' and 'feminine' a male body as easily as a female one.¹³²

What Butler challenges here is the essentialist notion that gender and sex are one and the same. It is unhelpful to conflate the terms 'masculinity' and 'men' and to employ them as if

¹²⁸ Berthold Schoene, 'Serial Masculinity: Psychopathology and Oedipal Violence in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 54:2 (Summer 2008), 378–397 (p. 378).

¹²⁹ Schoene, 'Serial Masculinity', p. 379.

¹³⁰ Schoene, 'Serial Masculinity', p. 380.

¹³¹ Miescher and Lindsay also advocate a recognition of 'female masculinity' which they define as: '[The] attainment of positions or characteristics usually regarded as the preserve of men'. They argue that Africa in particular is a rich site that frequently provides examples of 'gender transcend[ing] biological sex', a point that seems to confirm Butlerian hypotheses. Miescher and Lindsay, 'Introduction', in *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, p. 5.

¹³² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 9–10.

they were one and the same thing, and more fruitful to consider masculinity as a subject-position open to both men and women.

Islamicate masculinity

It is important to note that the majority of the arguments and issues raised in the above section, whilst extremely illuminating, are predominately the product of Western criticism and Western academics (Fatima Mernissi being the exception). What, then, can we discern about dominant constructions of masculinity in an Islamicate context? In fact, there is scant material available, at least in European languages, that relates directly to masculinity in the Islamic world, although this has become a focus of study for a small number of academics who are diligently remedying the situation. Moreover, how relevant is theory developed for the analysis of men within Western societies to that of men in other societies? In his ethnographic study of masculinities all over the world *Manhood in the Making*, David Gilmore states in his introduction that masculinity is ‘a prize to be won or wrested through struggle’.¹³³ He also points to the fact that there is a common, cross-cultural notion that boys are *made* into men.¹³⁴ Of course, it would be extremely unwise to claim that constructions of manhood are the same the world-over, a point Gilmore fully appreciates. He does argue, however, that there exists an *ubiquity* of global (hegemonic) masculinities, where common trends and attributes tend to reoccur in societies and cultures that are totally isolated from one another.¹³⁵ This leads him to conclude that there is a recognisable phenomenon of global echoes, and to state that a ‘substantial similarity [can be found] panculturally in the traits ascribed to men and women’.¹³⁶

Therefore, can what Gilmore describes as such ‘striking resemblances between gender configurations around the world in unrelated societies’ help to justify the problematic relationship between Islamicate primary texts and Western critical literature?¹³⁷ Co-editor of the collected volume *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*, Emma Sinclair-Webb, attempts to answer this very point, by asserting that there is a need to ‘break down the sense that Middle Eastern societies have gender socialization

¹³³ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 1.

¹³⁴ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, pp. 14–15.

¹³⁵ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 3.

¹³⁶ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 10.

¹³⁷ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, pp. 10–1.

processes that are distinct and do not find comparable versions elsewhere'.¹³⁸ She rightly points out that paying attention to cultural differences and/or specificities does not necessarily mean that an entirely new logic must be used.¹³⁹ As Gilmore asserts, gender roles encourage individuals to behave in a way that allows society to function, and this is true of any society.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, Western theories of masculinities need not be seen as totally devoid of relevance, purely because they are rooted in a different cultural setting.

Furthermore, what, after all, is 'Western ideology'? On this point, Sinclair-Webb observes a widespread reliance on the term amongst scholars who rarely question what, in fact, Western ideology constitutes, and this, she argues, is to make a similar mistake. She comments: 'To illustrate the point from a reverse position, it could be added that to assume unproblematically that there is really something called "Western ideology" that gets imposed on non-Western societies is to fall into a similar trap'.¹⁴¹ Sinclair-Webb persuasively argues that we must not assume that social indoctrination is different in, or unique to, any predominantly Islamicate context. Having accepted masculinity(-ies) as concepts that are relational to other genders, races, ethnicities and sexualities, it may prove enlightening to apply deconstructional theories, Western or otherwise, to other cultures with a view to determining whether or not Islamicate constructions of masculinity are also subject to the same negotiations. *Imagined Masculinities* therefore deliberately engages with cultural stereotypes, its editors justifying this approach by arguing that to ignore stereotypes is, in effect, to downplay the significance of dominant cultural values.¹⁴² *Imagined Masculinities* therefore chooses to engage directly with these 'typical' constructs on the assumption that stereotypes spring from recurrent commonalities. The project of analysing Islamicate masculinities, and the fictional depictions that are supposed to represent them, therefore becomes a balancing act between a useful and meaningful analysis of 'typicality' and the pitfalls of orientalist interpretation.

Without doubt, it is problematic for an in-depth academic investigation into portrayals of Islamicate masculinity(-ies) to have relied on theory that is principally constructed around Western definitions of hegemony. Nevertheless, it constitutes one useful approach in the pursuit of defining Islamicate masculinity. The amount of research done on these fields in other languages is, unfortunately, uncertain and inaccessible to the researcher who does not

¹³⁸ Emma Sinclair-Webb, 'Preface' in *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*, ed. by Mai Ghousoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb, 2nd edn (London: Saqi Books, 2006), pp. 7–16 (p.10).

¹³⁹ Sinclair-Webb, 'Preface' in *Imagined Masculinities*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁰ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 3.

¹⁴¹ Sinclair-Webb, 'Preface' in *Imagined Masculinities*, p. 10.

¹⁴² Sinclair-Webb, 'Preface' in *Imagined Masculinities*, pp. 12–13.

read those languages. However, there are two points to be made in this regard. Firstly, as David Gilmore notes, while there are important differences between masculinities across the world, what can be underlined is the largely *ubiquitous* nature of masculinity.¹⁴³

Masculinities – and in particular hegemonic masculinities – are by no means universal, a point that must be heavily stressed. Nonetheless, there are very few cultures indeed that continue to be matriarchal, and patriarchal societies that bequeath men with social supremacy have consolidated themselves throughout most of the globe. Western critiques of masculinity can therefore serve as a useful theoretical springboard to aid the task of deconstructing Islamicate masculinity. Although criticism that is rooted within Islamicate culture(s) is limited, ‘borrowing’ theories from other criticism and applying them fruitfully to Islamicate masculinity may aid the process of deconstruction.

In both *Islamic Masculinities* and *Imagined Masculinities*, the two collections currently at the fore of masculinities studies in the Islamicate world, the editors and chapter authors also interpret masculinity(-ies) as a product of a plethora of factors.¹⁴⁴ Islamicate masculinity, like its ‘Western’ counterpart, is viewed as an unstable, constantly fluctuating identity that mutates from context to context, and sometimes even from conversation to conversation.¹⁴⁵ Islamicate masculinity then, it would seem, is no more fixed than any other type of masculinity. Neither can it be seen as a single outcome or as a single category. In *Imagined Masculinities*, masculinity is defined as a state brought about by an intricate combination of social class, labour market relations, ethnicity, individual experiences, family upbringing and peer relations.¹⁴⁶ Religion is also perceived as a significant discursive influence.

Bearing this last point in mind, it is of paramount importance not to overly attribute masculinity(-ies) in the Islamicate world solely to the doctrines of Islam. With studies on women in Islamicate contexts, it would be all too easy to fall into the trap of imposing

¹⁴³ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁴ *Islamic Masculinities*, ed. by Lahoucine Ouzgane (London; New York: Zed Books, 2006).

¹⁴⁵ Daniel Monterescu’s chapter on ‘Stranger Masculinities’ in *Islamic Masculinities* focuses on the Palestinian city of Jaffa and its status as a colonial ‘third space’. Monterescu carefully assesses the emergence of three apparent categories of masculinity in Jaffa; namely Islamic, liberal-secular and situational masculinity, but he also shows how Jaffan men can float between these three categories, employing different identities when it suits them best. He argues persuasively that the discursive fluidity of identities has become a coping mechanism for ‘postcolonial strangeness’ amongst Jaffan men, and his article is an excellent demonstration of the situational nature and the fluidity of gendered identity. See Daniel Monterescu, ‘Stranger Masculinities: Gendered Politics in a Palestinian-Israeli “Third Space”’, in *Islamic Masculinities* (London; New York: Zed Books, 2006), pp. 123–42.

¹⁴⁶ Sinclair-Webb, ‘Preface’, in *Imagined Masculinities*, p. 7. An important omission that should be added here is that of national and/or international relations (with the coloniser for example) as these too can bring about a profound effect on gender dynamics.

Western feminist versions of liberation, women's rights and so forth on Islamic women, and to unwittingly impose Western ideologies onto non-Western subjects. This would amount to nothing more than robbing the non-Western woman of subjectivity, in much the same way that patriarchal discourse has spoken for them in the past. This has been compared to yet another layer of imperialism – not military perhaps, but an arrogant belief that the ways of the West are superior and more civilised than those of other peoples and cultures. Likewise, an effort must now be made not to seek explanations for Islamicate manhood solely within the religion of Islam itself, a task made all the more difficult in the current political climate where certain strands of Western media tend to demonise Islam and to present it as a socially regressive religion.

Islamic Masculinities successfully manages to find other explanations for Islamic masculine traditions, whilst at the same time recognising and underlining the powerful influence of Islam, the Qur'an and Hadith, and other Islamic doctrine on gendered behaviour in countries heavily influenced by the Islamic religion. It would be true to say that, unlike other world religions whose influence on gender and sexual dynamics has gradually eroded, Islam continues to be the firm point of reference for the Muslim *umma* (community) and the link between religion and culture remains very strong indeed.¹⁴⁷ However, in spite of this fact, it is important to recognise that, as elsewhere in the world, there are a wealth of other factors that cooperate in moulding normative ideas and stereotypes of Muslim men. In Islamicate cultures, these result from a combination of influences – from the Qur'an, the Hadith and Islamic doctrine but also from cultural and sociological trends that predate Islam, as well as present-day social, cultural and political conditions. Once again, it should be reiterated that masculinity should not be considered a static phenomenon, but one that

¹⁴⁷ Indeed, Tunisian sociologist Abdelwahab Bouhdiba considers tradition to be at the very centre of Arabo-Islamic culture and asserts that this tradition is not subject to historicity. By contrast, Bouhdiba urges us 'not to be afraid of the non-historicity of Tradition'. He continues: 'On the contrary, a rigorous analysis of Islamic culture requires that we situate ourselves at the very heart of tradition and grasp it as a whole. For the overall corpus of the Quran, of hadith, of exegesis, of fiqh defines a total science ('ilm) whose purpose is to apprehend a non-temporal command defined by the *hudūd Allah* [boundaries (laws) of Allah].' He argues that tradition provides 'stereotyped forms of behaviour that at any given moment must be restored – at least as far as possible – in their entirety and in their original purity.' See Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, pp. 2–3. Fatima Mernissi supports this view, by underlining the continuing influence that *shari'a* (religious) law exercises in matters of family customs and sexuality. Referring to religious duties and family law, she notes: 'These have been, and still are, closely connected with religion and are therefore still ruled by *shari'a*'. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 22. Furthermore, she explains that *shari'a* provides quite detailed instructions to the believer on how to live their lives. *Shari'a* dictates every part of human life, from sexuality and male/female relations to providing a reference for economic, moral and ethical standards. Even personal hygiene is dealt with by *shari'a*, as well as matters of courtesy and good manners. The common English translation for *shari'a* – law – is therefore misleading since it constitutes an all-encompassing framework which guides Muslims in almost all aspects of life and behaviour. It is not surprising therefore that *shari'a* remains a formidable influence over gender norms. See Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 21.

constantly mutates and adapts in the same way as socio-economic, racial, and economic factors.

Moreover, it is important to note that what is termed 'Islamicate' masculinity is not the same in every predominantly Muslim society.¹⁴⁸ To reductively refer to 'Islamicate masculinity' without recognising that that is not a fixed or even clear-cut category would be akin to referring to 'Anglophone masculinity'. Are the accepted male gender identities of the South Walian coal-mining valleys automatically the same as those that pervade the City and other major financial institutions of London? Similarly, is the typical Geordie working-class man bound by the same gender rules as a Texan farmer? The answer is most certainly not, and one must strive to remember that equivalent comparisons also exist within the vast and diverse Islamicate world.

David Gilmore nevertheless claims that countries around the Mediterranean basin have a 'shared image of manhood', and he goes on to concentrate on Moroccan manliness, which he characterises as a deep commitment to personal honour and reputation as well as the earning of familial respect.¹⁴⁹ He therefore recognises the similar process of *becoming* a man. Gilmore's study focuses on Moroccan manhood in particular, but it also encompasses some of the traits that are recognisably 'pan-Muslim', and believing manhood to be a serviceable behaviour which needs to be publicly displayed.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, Gilmore underlines what he terms the 'theatricality' of masculinity. There is, he claims, an implicit but marked emphasis on being good at being a man (and not necessarily at being a good man).¹⁵¹ He argues that 'honor is about being good at being a man, which means building up and buttressing the family or kindred – the basic building blocks of society – no matter what the personal cost'.¹⁵² North African (Islamicate) masculinity is therefore heavily influenced by the importance of appearance, with genuineness and reality relegated to a secondary level.

It therefore remains to be asked, what dominant discursive norms of behaviour can be detected in an Islamicate context? Which templates of masculine identity can be pinpointed? Although we cannot make blanket assumptions, we can nevertheless draw on patterns that remerge repeatedly and recognise that certain criteria of masculinity may transcend situational particularities.

¹⁴⁸ Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 104.

¹⁴⁹ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 31.

¹⁵⁰ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 35.

¹⁵¹ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 30.

¹⁵² Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 43.

Rejection of Femininity and Male Ascendancy

One important marker for masculinity (in both Western and Islamicate versions) is that of *differentiation*, a term much used by Bourdieu, and this idea is displayed at its fullest in the relationship between dominant strains of masculinity and femininity.¹⁵³ Most gender critics agree that masculinist perceptions of the feminine and the female as Other are found at the core of masculine constructions. David Gilmore, for example, affirms that Moroccan men feel an urgent need to disassociate themselves from the feminine, and from environments and settings that are generally considered feminine since there exists a very real and recurrent fear of losing 'personal autonomy' to a domineering woman.¹⁵⁴ Whitehead and Barrett go even further, claiming that 'anti-femininity is at the heart of masculinity'.¹⁵⁵ This differentiation describes masculinity's insistence on viewing itself as a binary opposite of femininity, and is the first step towards masculinisation.

In his *Sexuality in Islam*, Tunisian sociologist Abdelwahab Bouhdiba writes in detail on the importance of purification rites in Arabo-Islamic culture. One of the principal sites or localities of the cult of purification is that of the *hammam*, the communal baths – a site which becomes symbolic of the segregation of men from women, and also of masculinity from femininity. More than simply a place to cleanse oneself, he suggests that the *hammam* becomes, in fact, the primary site for the severing of masculinity from the sphere of femininity, which, in gender terms, is perceived as polluting. When the young boy is no longer deemed a child and becomes an adolescent, he is suddenly expelled from the feminine space in which he has been totally immersed since his birth. Bouhdiba states:

What Arabo-Muslim has not been excluded from the world of naked women in this way? What Arabo-Muslim does not remember so much naked flesh and so many ambiguous sensations? Who does not remember the incident by which this world of nakedness suddenly became forbidden? We have been given more than a memory [...] For a boy the hammam is the place where one discovers the anatomy of others and from which one is expelled once the discovery takes place.¹⁵⁶

Indeed, the expulsion from the *hammam* is highly significant, and comes to represent the boy's sudden expulsion from the sphere of femininity and femaleness in general. Bouhdiba explains the significance of this banishment thus: 'A whole area of sexual life is organized

¹⁵³ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 25 and p. 49.

¹⁵⁴ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 50.

¹⁵⁵ Whitehead and Barrett, 'The Sociology of Masculinity', p. 23.

¹⁵⁶ Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 168.

around the hammam: the real and the refusal of the real, childhood and puberty, transition and initiation, are integrated in a kind of constellation of meanings crystallized in the hammam'.¹⁵⁷ The significance of the male banishment from the female *hammam* therefore marks the beginnings of a process in which Muslim men are required to continually repudiate femininity, underlining the necessity of differentiation for the Muslim male. Bouhdiba calls this the 'hammam complex'.¹⁵⁸ Whereas the male child's world had, until that point, been an almost exclusively female one, he is suddenly catapulted into the male world which actively denigrates femininity and female space. Bouhdiba argues that the world of women in the young male's psyche is transformed into a 'sub-world' and that woman herself is 'derealized'.¹⁵⁹ He summarises the process by attesting that 'from that moment on, he is trained to direct all his energies towards the cult of a life shared with other males and towards the systematic depreciation of femininity'.¹⁶⁰

Iranian critic Afsaneh Najmabadi concurs with Bouhdiba's reading. In her illuminating reading of the Arabo-Iranian 'Wiles of Women' tales, Najmabadi argues that in order to pursue a male future, the expelled boy must prove that he has left the female world firmly behind him. She states: 'To become a man, he has to prove that he has outgrown his ordinary contamination with womanliness, has ended his in-between-ness, through denouncing the woman's world, at times through becoming contemptuous of it or even hostile towards it'.¹⁶¹ In conclusion, she asserts: 'A boy becomes a man by repudiation, by disavowal of femininity'.¹⁶² Thus, a quintessential marker of masculinity is that of being free of the contagion of femaleness. From now on, the child will inhabit the public world, whereas his female counterpart is confined within the domestic sphere.

Moreover, a repetitive and systematic disassociation continues well into adulthood. The repudiation of womanhood is never entirely satisfactory and must therefore be perpetually re-enacted. The sociologist Fatima Mernissi's *Beyond the Veil* was, and still is, a work of profound significance. Although this study was originally published in 1975, it remains a central reference point for any understanding of male/female gender dynamics in Islamicate societies. Indeed, many of Mernissi's arguments still hold true over forty years later. In this highly informative and influential exploration of male-female dynamics,

¹⁵⁷ Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 169.

¹⁵⁸ Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 169. Pierre Bourdieu also emphasises the need to break free from the 'quasi-symbiosis' with the mother. Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁹ Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 169.

¹⁶⁰ Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, pp. 169-70.

¹⁶¹ Najmabadi, 'Reading "Wiles of Women" Stories as Fictions of Masculinity', p. 150.

¹⁶² Najmabadi, 'Reading "Wiles of Women" Stories as Fictions of Masculinity', p. 150.

Mernissi goes to the very heart of Islamic cultural heritage in order to outline the criteria of Islamic(ate) masculinity. She demonstrates that definitions of masculinity and femininity frequently remain rooted in *Shari'a* law and values that still heavily influence family and marital law.¹⁶³ In marked difference to Western concepts of women, Mernissi describes how Islamic notions of woman do not perceive her to be inferior to man. In fact, women are considered to be equal to men in terms of intelligence and sexual power, and therein lies their danger. Mernissi argues that 'men and women were and still are socialized to perceive each other as enemies'.¹⁶⁴

Traditions such as polygamy and segregation are therefore ways in which Muslim men have traditionally sought to safeguard themselves from the perceived threat of women. Mernissi claims that sexual segregation is one of the main pillars of Islam's control over sexuality, and one which prevents strong, loving relationships from developing between a man and a woman.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, going even further, she asserts that Muslim marriage can be expressed with the dichotomous master-slave formula, with love dismissed as a masculine weakness.¹⁶⁶ She adds: 'The institutionalized boundaries dividing the parts of society express the recognition of power in one part at the expense of the other'.¹⁶⁷ Any intrusion into the other space represents a challenge to the social order because 'it is an attack on the acknowledged allocation of power'.¹⁶⁸ Thus, men and women are discouraged from interacting with each other for any other reason than for procreation, leading to a society that is homosocially heteronormative by nature.¹⁶⁹ Polygamy too permits men to satisfy themselves

¹⁶³ Shari'a law no longer holds sway over policies involving tax, war and foreign policy, politics or penal law, where it has largely been displaced by more secular legal systems. It remains, however, the dominant referent for family and marital law and customs in the Islamic world. See Mernissi's *Beyond the Veil*, p. 22; Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito, eds., *Islam, Gender, and Social Change* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. xv and chapter 3; Bruce Dunne, 'Power and Sexuality in the Middle East', *Middle East Report*, 206 (Spring 1998), 8–11 (p. 10).

¹⁶⁴ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁵ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 95 and p. 107.

¹⁶⁶ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 174. Indeed, Mernissi even argues that loving a woman is 'popularly described as a form of mental illness, a self-destructive state of mind'. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 43.

¹⁶⁷ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 137.

¹⁶⁸ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 137.

¹⁶⁹ This contrasts with Western societies which, by and large, follow a pattern of heterosocial heteronormativity. Afsaneh Najmabadi, in her illuminating reading of the 'Wiles of Women' canon of tales puts forward a convincing argument that, in order to forge an adult male identity that repudiates femininity whilst also keeping homoeroticism at bay, these tales produce a masculinity that is an example of 'heteronormative male homosociality' which Najmabadi describes as: 'An ideal state in which a man could love and even desire another man without having sex with him, while having sex with a woman (to beget children) without loving or perhaps even desiring her'. Najmabadi, 'Reading "Wiles of Women" Stories as Fictions of Masculinity', p. 155. This view is also held by Mernissi who states that society encourages the male to maintain an 'iron grip' over his 'women and children' and that Muslim marriage is based on the assumption that social chaos (*fitna*) can only be averted by restraining the female's 'dangerous potential' by a 'dominant *non-loving* husband' (my emphasis). Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 167.

sexually whilst limiting the emotional investment in any one wife. In Islamicate heritage, the woman is therefore perceived as a source of potential instability, her sexuality perceived as an emasculating force. This intense fear and suspicion of woman can therefore translate as a further renunciation of woman, and of femininity. Mernissi claims that one of the 'distinctive characteristics' of Muslim sexuality is territoriality, a strategy of segregation designed to protect society from her destabilising and explosive sexual energy.¹⁷⁰ Men may therefore live in fear of the castrating woman who has the ability, it would seem, to deflate their masculinity. Consequently, Fatna Ait Sabbah states that the 'canons' of the ideal Muslim woman are silence, obedience, seclusion, spatial immobility and inertia.¹⁷¹ Islamicate versions of masculinity therefore strive to distance themselves from anything feminine and perpetually reassert their fidelity to the masculine influence.

Gilmore's insightful analysis of Moroccan manhood also concludes that domination of women by men is another important marker of Islamicate masculinity. Male ascendancy, and the resulting female subordination, is key to understanding gender dynamics in an Islamicate society, and the continual disavowal of femininity and of womanhood is a psychological side-effect of the need to dominate and subdue. Indeed, any man who is overly sympathetic towards women might risk blurring these lines and eroding masculine primacy. Moreover, Abdelwahab Bouhdiba contends that: 'Male supremacy is fundamental in Islam'.¹⁷² This is not because Islam is inherently misogynistic in any way.¹⁷³ Rather, this supremacy can be attributed to the fact that, along Islamic philosophical lines, the sexes are not believed to equal, but to be complementary. On a social level, this involves female subordination to male authority, pointing to a vision of masculinity that is unyielding, self-assured and above all authoritative.

Androcentric supremacy also stems from, and is upheld by, a belief that men are, as a rule, superior beings. Arno Schmitt puts it thus: '[Muslim] men considers themselves to be stronger physically, intellectually, and morally, and to be able to control instinct and emotion – unlike women, children, slaves, serfs, eunuchs, barbarians, hermaphrodites, and

¹⁷⁰ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 45.

¹⁷¹ Fatna Ait Sabbah, *La Femme dans l'inconscient musulman: désir et pouvoir* (Paris: Éditions le Sycamore, 1982), pp. 11–12.

¹⁷² Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 19.

¹⁷³ Indeed, Bouhdiba argues that the very opposite is true, and that Islam is a feminist religion. He attributes anti-women sentiment to 'socio-economic status' and 'socio-cultural situation'. See Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 116.

transvestites'.¹⁷⁴ One detects a hint of sarcasm in Schmitt's statement, yet his list of 'Others' does indicate the insular nature of Islamicate masculinity which seems intent upon isolating itself from the rest of society. He argues that commonly this female inferiority is sustained by ensuring that a wife's family is neither economically nor socially superior to that of the husband. He usually takes a wife considerably younger than himself and therefore is superior to her in age and experience.¹⁷⁵ In addition, he notes that whereas these privileges are often justified by a belief in man's innate supremacy, they are in fact no more than a product of his perceived superiority.¹⁷⁶ By actively orchestrating a situation whereby a sense of manliness will not be challenged, masculine norms reveal perhaps the extent of masculine insecurities. A striking isolation from women and other genders also reflects the urgent need to control other people, indicating the centrality of power to notions of manhood.

Islamicate Sexuality

This power dynamic – woman as subordinate and man as supreme – appears to be at its most potent in the domain of sexuality. Proving one's manliness through sexual prowess is an argument that reverberates again and again in the field of masculinity and men's studies (both Western and non-Western). Feminist critic Lynne Segal cites a common view among (Western) feminists when she argues that 'male sexual dominance is at the heart of all other power relations in society'.¹⁷⁷ Segal asserts that men have difficulty with their self-image, and she attributes this malaise to the centrality of sexual agency in the masculine identity, stating that: 'The social ties which bind masculinity with sexual adequacy, and sexual adequacy with penile potency, are drawn so tight as to allow little real room for manoeuvre and even less room for any comfortable, pleasurable way of experiencing their own bodies'.¹⁷⁸ Arthur Brittan also underlines the link between manhood and sexual prowess, noting: 'A man is only a man in so far as he is capable of using his penis as an instrument of

¹⁷⁴ Arno Schmitt, 'Different Approaches to Male-Male Sexuality/Eroticism from Morocco to Usbekistān', in *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies*, ed. by Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofers (New York; London: Harrington Park Press, 1992), pp. 1–24 (p. 2).

¹⁷⁵ Schmitt, 'Different Approaches to Male-Male Sexuality/Eroticism,' p. 3.

¹⁷⁶ Schmitt, 'Different Approaches to Male-Male Sexuality/Eroticism,' p. 3.

¹⁷⁷ Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (London: Virago Press, 1990), pp. 207–8.

¹⁷⁸ Segal, *Slow Motion*, p. 219.

power. It is a weapon by means of which he can subdue a woman'.¹⁷⁹ An active, almost predatory sexuality is therefore commonly believed to be a crucial factor in masculinity, the phallus rendered the instrument whereby ascendancy (over women) becomes possible.

A dominant strain of male sexuality in the Islamicate world shares this feature in that it is heavily reliant on sexual prowess. Pronounced sexual agency is another commonly accepted feature of Islamicate masculinity, not solely in Arab communities but throughout Africa also, a characteristic that Gilmore refers to as 'phallic predation'.¹⁸⁰ This, surely, is the manifestation of men's dominance over women at its most extreme. Gilmore also observes that sexual inefficiency, along with failing to be (come) economically self-sufficient, are further causes of emasculation in Muslim men.¹⁸¹ Prominent Egyptian feminist Nawal El Saadawi goes even further in her seminal *The Hidden Face of Eve*, first published in Arabic in 1977, and claims:

The males are let loose in search of sexual experience, in any form and no matter at what price, in an attempt to prove their virility and bolster their masculine pride, which are motives as strong as the satisfaction of sexual desire *per se*.¹⁸²

Thus, sexuality is not simply about satisfying sexual urges. It also takes on a far broader significance, that of consolidating a sense of virility. The sexual cementing of masculinity also relates to the subordination of women. In addition, practices such as repudiation and polygamy give the male child the impression from very early on that society revolves around his sexual desires and wishes, thus rendering masculinity a gendered identity preoccupied with its own satisfaction and embodiment.¹⁸³ Indeed, both Ruth Roded and Fatima Mernissi point out that the superior sexual prowess of the prophet Mohammed was seen as a sign of his excellence among men (an excellence still cited as exemplary today), therefore firmly underlining the necessity for active sexual agency amongst hegemonic Islamicate masculinity.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 47.

¹⁸⁰ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 40.

¹⁸¹ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 42. Suzanne Hatty argues that violence is not innate in men and that it always possesses a functional purpose. It cannot, therefore, be dismissed as pathological. See Hatty, *Masculinities, Violence and Culture*, p. 55.

¹⁸² Nawal El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, trans. by Sherif Hetata, 2nd edn (London: Zed Books, 2007), p. 48. Mernissi too points out that the Muslim man is socialised to expect full satisfaction and 'to perceive their masculine identity as closely linked to that satisfaction'. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 161.

¹⁸³ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 162.

¹⁸⁴ The prophet Mohammed reputedly had the sexual vigour of forty men. See Ruth Roded, 'Islamic Views on Sexuality', in *Women in Islam and the Middle East: A Reader*, ed. by Ruth Roded (London; New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1999), pp. 159–167 (p. 159); Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 117.

For a particularly enlightening view of normative pan-Islamicate sexuality, we might turn to studies of same-sex sexuality, which highlight a philosophy that has ramifications for Islamicate masculine sexuality more generally. Penetration is a central phenomenon to the dichotomised relationship of males and females in Islamicate societies. Bruce Dunne equates the sexual act with penetration and states that historically: ‘Sex, that is, penetration, took place between dominant, free adult men and subordinate social inferiors: wives, concubines, boys, prostitutes (male and female) and slaves (male and female)’.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, Dunne argues that adult males are socialised to achieve sexual pleasure through domination.¹⁸⁶ Sabine Schmidtke agrees with this analysis, asserting that: ‘Islamic civilization being essentially phallogocentric, the role of the penetrator in the sexual act is considered dominant and superior. His social respectability remains untouched by his sexual practice, regardless of the nature or gender of the object of penetration’.¹⁸⁷ We may therefore view male-female sexuality as an expression of power by which females (or other males) are subordinated by the sexually powerful male, and by the masculine weapon *par excellence*, the phallus.¹⁸⁸

Islamicate societies are heterosexist, that is to say, the normalised sexual dynamic is that of heteronormativity. Fatima Mernissi observes that the only viable and acceptable model of sexual relations that Islamic(ate) societies offer is that of the conjugal unit.¹⁸⁹ Abdelwahab Bouhdiba also insists upon the centrality of *nikāh* (lawful marriage) to the Muslim social order.¹⁹⁰ Anything outside this institutionalised sexuality is considered deviant and *haram* (unlawful). In addition, it constitutes a threat to the accepted social order of

¹⁸⁵ Dunne, ‘Power and Sexuality in the Middle East’, *Middle Eastern Report*, 206 (Spring 1998), 8–11 (p. 10).

¹⁸⁶ Dunne, ‘Power and Sexuality in the Middle East’, p. 10. Indeed, perhaps this may explain the disdain for masturbation in Islam, since in masturbation there is no object – no Other – and therefore nobody or nothing to dominate. On this point, Andreas Eppink states: ‘The sexual act of the active man is intended to make the object passive, to submit him. This seems to be true for North Africa as well. Masturbating – not submitting to some other person – is not manly; therefore “*kaffat*/masturbator” is a term of abuse’. This would appear to suggest that submitting and conquering the Other, and therefore acquiring power, is at the heart of male Islamicate sexuality. See Andreas Eppink, ‘Moroccan Boys and Sex’, in *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies*, pp. 33–42 (p. 35).

¹⁸⁷ Sabine Schmidtke, ‘Homoeroticism and Homosexuality in Islam: A Review Article’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 62:2 (1999), 260–266 (p. 260).

¹⁸⁸ On this point, sociologist Fatna Ait Sabbab asks eloquently: ‘Pourquoi un corps et un esprit de femme qui aspirent à ne pas être contrôlés, c’est-à-dire qui cherchent à s’affirmer comme une volonté autonome, mobilisent angoisse et méfiance chez le partenaire masculin et refroidissent son désir sexuel et son amour? Pourquoi un homme ne se désire-t-il pas un corps de femme qui se refuse d’obéir à sa seule volonté? Pourquoi un corps d’homme est-il embrasé par le désir de s’accoupler avec un corps de femme qui se déclare soumis et dominé? Quels liens y a-t-il entre désir et soumission?’ [*Why should it be that a female body and spirit that do not seek to be controlled, that is to say that seek to assert an autonomous will, provoke anxiety and suspicion in the male partner, extinguishing his love and sexual desire? Why does the man not desire the female body that refuses to be subject to his will alone? Why should it be that a man’s body burns with sexual desire for a female body that declares itself to be subdued and dominated? What links are there between desire and submission?*]. Ait Sabbah, *La Femme dans l’inconscient musulman*, pp. 17–18.

¹⁸⁹ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 108.

¹⁹⁰ Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 15.

masculine supremacy. In this light, despite its serious transgression of sexual mores, *zina* (fornication, illicit sexual relations) may be seen as what Bouhdiba terms a 'false *nikāh*' but crucially not as 'anti-*nikāh*'.¹⁹¹ In this sense then, it does not threaten the social order in any radical sense because it still recognises and upholds the fundamental 'complementarity' of male and female to each other, a notion that is at the very heart of Islamic philosophy; it is simply that it realises this complementarity outside the laws of God which renders it problematic and ultimately unlawful. Furthermore, Nicole Kligerman reminds us that by discouraging celibacy and allowing polygamy, the Qur'an reinforces the heteronormative sexual behaviour on which its philosophy is founded.¹⁹² Nevertheless, on a social and cultural level, the practices of polygamy and repudiation allow men to have the best of both worlds: to adhere to the principle of *nikāh* but to ensure a rather more liberal sexual gratification than that given to their wives.

Fatima Mernissi claims that during the *jahiliya* (a term denoting the times which predated the advent of Islam and which, according to Muslims, were characterised by barbarism and ignorance), sexuality was 'promiscuous, lax and uncontrolled' but that 'under Islam it obeys rules'.¹⁹³ Indeed, Mernissi goes on to assert that female sexuality has been harnessed and controlled in a civilising mission that keeps it in check in order to maintain social order. Nevertheless, she also argues that male sexuality has been spared this same 'civilising' process and, by consequence, now enjoys considerably more freedoms than its female counterpart. Above all, she identifies 'wish' and 'exchange' as pivotal concepts of male sexuality within the Muslim institution of verbal repudiation. According to Mernissi's reading, repudiation 'aims at ensuring a supply of new sexual objects, within the framework of marriage, to protect [the male] against the temptation of *zina*'.¹⁹⁴

In spite of the fact that Islamicate societies are fiercely heterocentric, to define masculinity only in heteronormative terms would, however, be to grossly oversimplify the complexity of masculinity as a gender construct. Same-sex sexual practices may not be sanctioned by Islamicate culture, but they nevertheless occur and the preceding discussion of institutionalised heterosexism strongly suggests homosexuality's marginalisation by hegemonic social norms. Whereas heteronormativity is the only approved way of practising

¹⁹¹ Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 30.

¹⁹² Nicole Kligerman, 'Homosexuality in Islam: A Difficult Paradox', *Malcaester Islam Journal*, 2 (Spring 2007), 52–64 (p. 54).

¹⁹³ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 46.

¹⁹⁴ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 49. *Zina* is the Arabic word denoting fornication, sexual relations outside of marriage or adultery. Mernissi herself defines it as 'illicit intercourse' (p. 58). It is considered a serious sin for Muslims.

sexuality in an Islamicate society, homosexuality, on the other hand, is not tolerated by Islamic doctrine. On this point, Bouhdiba states categorically:

Islam remains violently hostile to all other ways of realizing sexual desire [except through lawful heterosexuality], which are regarded as unnatural purely and simply because they run counter to the antithetical harmony of the sexes [...] Sexual deviation is a revolt against God.¹⁹⁵

What is so evident in Bouhdiba's statement above is the centrality of heterosexism to Islamic philosophy, and therefore by extension, Islamicate traditions. Homosexuality is interpreted not simply in social or cultural terms, but on religious and spiritual levels. Given that the family and sexuality remain the domain of Shari'a in most Islamicate states, this has had a trickle-down effect, colouring social perceptions also. It therefore heavily underlines the marginalised position of homosexuality, criminalising it as a challenge to godly dictates while firmly underlining the importance of active heterosexuality in normative discourse(s).

Having been neglected until quite recently, the existence of male-male sexuality and eroticism in Islamicate countries is now a site of enquiry for researchers and can offer significant enlightenment on heteronormative practices also. Indeed, one of the most striking contradictions in Islamicate sexuality is the firm denunciation of homosexual practices on the one hand, by the dictates of religion, and yet the embrace of homoerotic idolisation on the other, in a long history of Arab, Turkish and Persian literature. One of the possible reasons for its neglect in the past is its reluctance to identify itself.¹⁹⁶ Jeffrey Weeks suggests two main models of 'homosexuality', or same-sex male relations. He points to the Western version of a gay man identifying himself as homosexual. He is effeminate and defines himself as a 'non-man'. In Muslim countries however, a second pattern prevails, which regards male-male sexual relations 'without social obloquy' to the individuals in question, provided that they are the penetrators and that their partner is in some way less of a man (a boy for instance).¹⁹⁷ Indeed, despite criticisms levelled against it, one of the most striking conclusions in *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies* is the marked differentiation between the active, penetrating man and his passive, subordinated partner.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 31.

¹⁹⁶ In fact, 'homosexuality' or same-sex relations and its problematics are confirmed by the mere fact that more often than not, no equivalent term for 'homosexuality' exists in the languages of many Islamicate countries (colonial languages excluded). Schmitt, 'Different Approaches to Male-Male Sexuality/Eroticism', p. 5.

¹⁹⁷ Jeffrey Weeks, 'Foreword', in *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies*, p. ix.

¹⁹⁸ For Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, editors of the comprehensive work *Islamic Homosexualities, Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies* lacks scholarly vigour, amounting to no more than 'personal accounts by recent Western travellers relating their disappointing sexual encounters with Arabs and Iranians'. While Murray and Roscoe's assertion can be upheld, the work does, nevertheless, offer some

In essence then, the distinguishing factor between Western notions of homosexuality and their Muslim counterparts is that in Western tradition, *both* parties self-identify as 'homosexual'. In Islamicate variations, however, there is no emphasis on 'being homosexual'. Rather, the distinction lies with who is the *penetrating* partner, for it is only the penetratee that is regarded as shameful and unmanly in any way. In his chapter 'Moroccan Boys and Sex', sociologist Andreas Eppink argues that: 'The relation with a sexual object – boy, woman or "buggered one" – is a relation with an inferior; penetration is felt to be a manifestation of male power. Sex is essentially penetration'.¹⁹⁹ Desiring another man is not problematic in Islamicate cultures – indeed, it is even perceived as natural.²⁰⁰ The problem arises however when an adult male does not assume his masculinity by performing the role of penetrator. Phallic predation – a hallmark of masculinity – does not necessarily need to be directed at women. Dominique Robert states: 'The only form of homosexuality understandable to Orientals preserves the man-woman polarity in the form of man-youth (hard-soft, strong-weak, penetrating-yielding)'.²⁰¹ For a woman, then, it is perfectly natural to assume the passive, penetrated role, which doubles up as an expression of social status (i.e. subordinate), thus making a predatory sexuality a necessity for normative masculinity.

Modernisation and Globalisation

It is fair to say that hegemonic norms of masculinity and power dynamics are tightly and complexly interwoven with a firm disavowal of all things feminine and an assertive sexuality. Economic self-sufficiency is also central to the male sense of self. The traditionally masculine privileges bequeathed on men were, however, easier to attain – and indeed, to maintain – before the days of modernisation, which is now leading to some radical, and at times tremendously painful, readjustments in traditional, Muslim societies. It is becoming

important insights into the different conception of male-male sexuality in Muslim countries. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, 'Introduction', in *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*, ed. by Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (New York: London: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 3–13 (p. 10).

¹⁹⁹ Eppink, 'Moroccan Boys and Sex', in *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies*, pp. 36–7.

²⁰⁰ Both Arno Schmitt and Sabine Schmidtke emphasise that sexual attraction among males, and particularly desiring boys, is considered to be natural in both Islamicate societies and in Islam itself. See Arno Schmitt, 'Different Approches to Male-Male Sexuality/Eroticism', p. 6, and Schmidtke, 'Homoeroticism and Homosexuality in Islam', p. 260. Bouhdiba argues that homosexual attraction is considered as both disturbing and tempting by Islamic philosophy, its tempting nature suggesting its naturalness. Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 32.

²⁰¹ Dominique Robert, 'Arab Men in Paris', in *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies*, pp. 121–124 (pp. 123–124).

more and more difficult for men to achieve traditional, masculine recognition, leading Mernissi to claim that: 'Modernization [...] clearly appears to be a castrating phenomenon'.²⁰²

Modernisation and the freedom of women along Western lines clashes with many of the established norms of Muslim society and therefore symbolises what is, psychologically, an extremely potent and unsettling prospect for the Muslim world, since it becomes symbolic of a second *jahilya*, which is characterised in the Muslim psyche by moral decadence and general disorder. The acute fear of *jahilya* leads Mernissi to summarise current male-female dynamics in Muslim societies as: 'A period of anomie, of deep confusion and absence of norms'.²⁰³ This statement is as true today as it was in 1975, when *Beyond the Veil* was first published. Modernisation and freedoms gained by women are increasingly encroaching on men's traditional, and traditionally expected, privileges. In her work on the changing face of Arab society, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad surveys the changes in women's status and the implications of this for the rest of society. She states: 'It is clear that modernization in the Arab world has served to sharpen the conflict between traditional expectations of women and their role and the real demands of daily life in a developing society'.²⁰⁴ In doing so, they are causing a profound and deep-seated feeling of unease amongst Muslim men. The reason for this discontent is the continual assault on traditional ways of being male that modernisation represents. Ait Sabbah contends that the export of core materials and the changing face of the agricultural sector, along with high birthrates and the increasing use of (ever-improving) technology have resulted in what seems to be a crisis point for Islamicate masculinity, inhibiting job creation and exacerbating unemployment.²⁰⁵ Coupled with the changing status of women, many of the former securities of men are disappearing. A man, once sure of his ability to provide for his family, now faces losing his job, and potentially competing with a woman for another. For Ait Sabbah: 'Le chômage constitue l'affaiblissement du pouvoir d'achat des hommes et donc de l'autorité patriarcale' since 'la virilité dans la société musulmane patriarcale est définie en termes de puissance économique' [*unemployment constitutes a weakening of men's buying power and therefore also of patriarchal authority since virility, in patriarchal Muslim society, is defined in economic terms*].²⁰⁶

Economically under threat, men are also witness to another of the consequences of modernisation: the breakdown of social segregation. Whereas masculine privilege was

²⁰² Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 172.

²⁰³ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 97.

²⁰⁴ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, 'Islam and Gender: Dilemmas in the Changing Arab World', in *Islam, Gender, and Social Change*, pp. 1-29 (p. 8).

²⁰⁵ Ait Sabbah, *La Femme dans l'inconscient musulman*, p. 33.

²⁰⁶ Ait Sabbah, *La Femme dans l'inconscient musulman*, p. 33.

protected by confining women to the private, domestic sphere, even this cannot be taken for granted in the age of globalisation. Firstly, an errant wife roaming the public streets places her husband's masculinity in jeopardy.²⁰⁷ A woman in a perceived male, public space is also a threat to male power.²⁰⁸ Bruce Dunne argues that previously, social segregation was:

Legitimized in part by constructing 'male' and 'female' as opposites; women as emotional and lacking self-control, particularly of sexual drives. Female sexuality, if unsatisfied or uncontrolled, could result in social chaos (*fitna*) and social order thus required male control of women's bodies.²⁰⁹

Social segregation then, as Mernissi also notes, was paramount to the defence of patriarchal privilege and was used as a safeguard against unpredictable and menacing female influence. Thus, the female entry into the public space is perceived as an invasion, and as an 'erotic aggression' in a Muslim context.²¹⁰ According to Mernissi, it also embodies the 'humiliating situation in which [the man] perceives sexual desegregation and its effects as emasculating'.²¹¹

Nonetheless, the changing face of Islamicate society owing to the effects of modernisation and Western influence is increasingly laying bare a host of inconsistencies and contradictions. Fatima Mernissi reminds us that women's work (outside the home) remains a 'traumatizing' idea for many men who 'view women's work outside the home as an emotional mutilation, a symbolic castration, and whose very sexual identity, their sense of themselves as males, requires that they be the sole economic providers for the family in general and the wife in particular'.²¹² We can conclude that men and established configurations of hegemonic masculinity are suffering acutely from the different social shifts which are taking place. Modernisation is robbing men of one of the primary means by which they could assert their masculine status. As previously noted, a significant masculine value was attributed to man's power over women, a power that is maintained by sexual prowess on the one hand, but by the ability to provide financially (and enjoy female dependency) on the other. In a world where women are increasingly encroaching on masculine territory and space, are financially empowered and viewed as sexually aggressive, the average man finds himself more and more disorientated and unable to 'prove' his masculine worth in well-worn, traditional ways.

²⁰⁷ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 89 and p. 149.

²⁰⁸ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p.137; pp. 150–151.

²⁰⁹ Dunne, 'Power and Sexuality in the Middle East', p. 9.

²¹⁰ Ait Sabbah, *La Femme dans l'inconscient musulman*, pp. 33–34.

²¹¹ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 163.

²¹² Fatima Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory* (London; New York: Zed Books, 1996), p. 64.

More often than not, globalisation goes hand in hand with modernisation in North and sub-Saharan Africa, and this is also inextricably linked to gender. This becomes evident in Mernissi's conclusions on the effects of modernisation, as well as Kligerman's analysis of the impact of Western gay rights movements on homosexual communities in the Middle East. On an even broader level, the Islamicate masculine power pyramid can be slotted into a much wider masculine hierarchy of global proportions. In his article entitled 'Globalization and its Mal(e)Contents', Michael Kimmel outlines the emergence of a global hegemonic masculinity. The dramatic increase in the number of global institutions that now impact on virtually the whole world means that certain patterns of masculinity are becoming 'the dominant global hegemonic model of masculinity, against which all local, regional and national masculinities are played out and increasingly refer'.²¹³

Furthermore, Kimmel underlines that this global hegemonic masculinity is actually increasing the 'gendering of local, regional and national resistance'.²¹⁴ What this appears to indicate is that hegemonic masculinities that are perceived as 'native', or culturally authentic, are being sidelined and rendered subordinate to foreign (read Western) constructions of masculinity, which are then imported around the world. This represents a further problem for Islamicate men and demonstrates how complex and intertwined the subject of masculinity can be. On this point, Kimmel argues that so-called 'third world' men are being robbed of their perceived entitlements by men from the powerful, Western world and by the increasingly powerful global economy, and that, as a result: 'Efforts to reclaim economic autonomy, to reassert political control and revive traditional domestic dominance thus take on the veneer of restoring manhood'.²¹⁵ This ties in with Mernissi's view that the psychological consequences of modernisation cannot be underestimated and have led to an entrenched position whereby *Shari'a* becomes symbolic of a Muslim identity in a world where traditional ways of life are persistently being destabilised and replaced.²¹⁶ In relation to literary output, Frédéric Lagrange claims that modern Arab literature is actually shaded by doubt. The male is no longer the centre of the universe as he once was, and 'politically, economically and culturally challenged, his power, thus his virility, cannot be exerted as it

²¹³ Michael S. Kimmel, 'Globalization and its Mal(e)Contents: The Gendered Moral and Political Economy of Terrorism', *International Sociology*, 18 (2003), 603–620 (p. 605).

²¹⁴ Kimmel, 'Globalization and its Mal(e)Contents', p. 605.

²¹⁵ Kimmel, 'Globalization and its Mal(e)Contents', p. 605.

²¹⁶ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 23.

was in the age of certainties'.²¹⁷ Muslim men now live in an age characterised principally by uncertainty, and where traditional manhood is becoming increasingly destabilised as it clashes with the changing global scenery. Once all-powerful patriarchs, those subscribing to hegemonic norms of masculinity now find themselves increasingly challenged and, ultimately, subordinated by the anonymous but all-powerful global man.

In conclusion, whilst we must bear in mind that dominant masculine values vary and may not manifest themselves identically in every era, country or context, the preceding discussion does suggest at least three staple and relatively unchanging features of hegemonic templates of masculinity: a continually reconsolidated disassociation from femaleness and femininity; virility and sexual authority over a subordinate partner and finally, a financial ascendancy linked to social status and social influence. Were he to be successful in each of these categories, one might consider himself the embodiment of a 'real man'. This, in turn, leads us to question the effects of failure on men. This thesis will now examine the five novels under discussion here, in order to ascertain the possible effects of such principles in a rapidly changing world for those fictionalised men who fail to adhere to such revered values.

²¹⁷ Frédéric Lagrange, 'Male Homosexuality in Modern Arabic Literature', in *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*, ed. by Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb (London: Saqi Books, 2006), pp. 169–198 (p. 174).

The Great Pretender: Masculinity as Masquerade in Ousmane Sembene's *Xala*

Moi, je dis toujours si j'étais une femme, je n'épouserais pas un Africain. Il faut épouser un homme, et non pas un infirme mental.²¹⁸

[*I say if I were a woman, I would never marry an African. A woman should marry a man, not someone who is mentally ill.*]²¹⁹

Ousmane Sembene

Introduction

In the heart of the wealthy, bourgeois suburbs of Dakar resides the proud businessman, father and husband twice-over, El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye. El Hadji has acquired a place with the prestigious 'Groupement des Hommes d'affaires' and has two wives, each housed in her own luxurious villa, not to mention a troupe of children who want for nothing. Even his honorary title, El Hadji, an Islamic title denoting the completion of the pilgrimage to the sacred city of Mecca, illustrates his upward social mobility.²²⁰ Thus, in terms of the recurring criteria of hegemonic masculinity in the Islamic world, El Hadji is manliness personified. He is the epitome of the successful man, since his sexual prowess and reproductive skills are in evidence (he has eleven children), he enjoys a prominent social rank, and is more than capable of assuming the role of provider for not just one wife and her offspring, but two. Indeed, El Hadji's social rank is such that he believes he can afford the privilege of taking a third wife, in the form of a teenage girl many years his junior, with the sole purpose of completing his masculine image and quenching his sexual thirst for young flesh, once more echoing the criteria of the hegemonic male. His seemingly impressive

²¹⁸ Fírinne Ní Chréacháin, 'Si j'étais une femme, je n'épouserais jamais un Africain', *Peuples noirs, peuples africains*, 80 (1991), 86–93 (p. 88). An English version of this interview also exists: Fírinne Ní Chréacháin, 'If I Were a Woman, I'd Never Marry an African', *African Affairs*, 91 (1992), 241–247.

²¹⁹ My translation.

²²⁰ The pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca, commonly known as the Haj, is one of the five pillars of the Islamic faith. Given the length and breadth of the Islamic world, travel to Saudi Arabia is not always an easy task. In this case, a pilgrimage from Senegal is a significant undertaking and therefore, as in many cases, the Haj also becomes a measure of social status and wealth.

business acumen, high-ranking social status and adherence to Islamic values of manliness portray a man who has succeeded – El Hadji is the idealised man of post-colonial, middle class Senegal.

However, this is where the hero, or anti-hero, of the novel falls foul. From the point of his third marriage onwards El Hadji is afflicted with the *xala*, a Wolof term to denote the curse of temporary phallic impotence, an unexplained affliction that effectively robs him of one of his principal arms in his quest to consolidate the ultimate status of manliness. This impotence not only shatters El Hadji's impressive image, it also triggers a whole host of problems, all of which send El Hadji hurtling uncontrollably back towards his dubious past and ultimately expose his masculine image as a fabrication. He ends the novel bankrupt, socially discredited and abandoned by two of his wives. In *Xala*, Sembene presents us with a man who is initially emblematic of dominant values of masculinity but, moreover, with an example of an individual who is tenacious and dogged in his pronounced attachment to hegemonic ideals and who represents complicit masculinity in the extreme. The events of the novel depict the unravelling of his life, represented by his impotence and the bankruptcy which follows, and leading to his complete subordination within the bourgeois hierarchy of the novel.

Masculinity and Masquerade

El Hadji is a character that the reader never really gets to know, remaining a largely distant and two-dimensional entity throughout. Critic David Uro Iyam argues convincingly that El Hadji is designed as a representative of a certain group of people as opposed to an individual man, stating that: 'Sembene's main characters are types rather than individuals and mirror collective societal attitudes'.²²¹ Indeed, the frequent replacement of his name, El Hadji, by 'l'homme' [*the man*] in the narrative certainly appears to validate this view. The hegemonic masculinity presented to us in *Xala* is the identity of the sophisticated, bourgeois businessman who wields familial and financial power, as represented here by El Hadji. From the earliest lines of the novel, El Hadji is portrayed as having the status projected as ideal by Senegalese society, aligning himself firmly with the religious doctrines of Islam on the one hand, and enjoying social influence and status on the other. This identity is always expressed in terms of financial and material wealth, in responsibility and social status, in an individual's

²²¹ David Uro Iyam, 'The Silent Revolutionaries: Ousmane Sembene's *Emitai*, *Xala*, and *Ceddo*', *African Studies Review*, 29:4 (December 1986), 79-87 (p. 80).

authority and ability to acquire luxury commodities and to, supposedly, be working for the good of the country at large. Another important element of this identity is the 'acquisition' of women and wives, and possessing an active sexual prowess and ability to satisfy women sexually. El Hadji and his fellow bourgeois also pride themselves on what they perceive to be their success in having adopted modernity and having used it to their advantage without having discarded their *africanité*, their African-ness.

Xala opens with a scene of celebration at the newly-gained independence of the Chamber of Commerce (p. 7).²²² For the very first time, we are told, a Senegalese is appointed as President of the Chamber. His speech is self-congratulatory and jubilant, and provides a lucid insight into the self-perception of El Hadji and into the social discourse to which his male archetype adheres. As head of his entourage, the president's eyes twinkle gloatingly ('son regard brillait') (p. 8) [*His eyes shone* (p. 2)].²²³ He announces bombastically that today is a day of victory for the nation of Senegal:

'Depuis l'occupation étrangère, jamais nos grands-parents, ni nos pères n'ont eu à diriger la Chambre [...] Notre gouvernement, en me désignant à ce poste de haute responsabilité, fait un acte de courage, il manifeste en cette période de détérioration des termes de l'échange un désir d'indépendance économique. C'est un fait historique que nous vivons [...]'

Les applaudissements fusèrent de tous côtés, on se congratula victorieusement, très joyeux [...]

'Nous sommes les premiers hommes d'affaires de ce pays. Notre responsabilité est grande. Très grande! Nous devons nous montrer à la hauteur de la confiance de notre gouvernement. Afin de bien achever notre journée mémorable, je vous rappelle que nous sommes tous conviés au mariage de notre frère El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye. Si nous sommes pour la modernité, cela ne veut pas dire que nous avons renoncé à notre africanité.' (p. 9)

[*'Since the beginning of the foreign occupation no African has ever been President of the Chamber... In appointing me to this post of great responsibility our government has acted with courage and shown its determination to achieve economic independence in these difficult times. This is indeed an historic occasion [...]'*

They broke into applause, congratulating themselves on their victory [...]

'We are the leading businessmen in the country, so we have a great responsibility. A very great responsibility indeed. We must show that we can measure up to the confidence the government has placed in us. But it is time now to bring this memorable day to a close by reminding you that we are invited to the wedding of our colleague El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye. Although we are anxious to belong to the modern world we haven't abandoned our African customs' (p. 2)].

²²² Ousmane Sembene, *Xala* (Paris; Dakar: Présence Africaine, 1973). All subsequent quotations in French and page references relating to the French original will be parenthesised in the text.

²²³ Ousmane Sembene, *Xala*, translated by Clive Wake (London; Nairobi: Heinemann, 1976). All subsequent quotations in English and page references relating to the English edition will be parenthesised in the text.

As strongly insinuated by this quotation, a key quality of bourgeois masculinity is an unflinching belief in one's own significance. An impressive speech as it is, the president's rhetoric is pompous, pretentious and oozing with self-satisfaction. Its content is couched in the language of Senegalese political independence. However, the real focus here is the president, his cohort and their own validity. There is joyous applause, not for a break from the darkness of colonial days but rather in celebration of the listeners' own entry into the history books. They sit in awe of themselves and at their position as the very first generation of Senegalese businessmen to exercise an influence free from French intervention.²²⁴ The narrator exposes such guises with satirical commentary. The recurring term that opens the novel, 'les "Hommes d'affaires"' (p. 7) [*businessmen*] is placed in inverted commas – a visual marker on the page that immediately questions that status. Revealingly, when the president of the 'Groupement' refers to their status as 'les premiers hommes d'affaires' (p. 9) [*the leading businessmen*] (p. 2)], the *h* in 'hommes' is spelt with a lower case letter, indicating a deluded belief in their own status (the narrator always refers to the same phrase with inverted commas and a capital *h*, in order to satirically emphasise the vacuity of the term). In addition, they appear to revel in the burden of responsibility and duty placed upon their shoulders. However, their pledge to revive their nation's economy is an empty one and their self-importance, as well as their confidence in their independence from the colonial master, is misguided and self-deceptive. Moreover, at first, the president refers to 'our grandparents' but then decides to omit any subsequent female involvement in running the economy, by mentioning only 'our fathers', drawing attention to the masculinised nature of the group. Nevertheless, this single reference to fathers in the novel demonstrates the importance of the father figure to notions of manliness for, although their forefathers' struggle is appropriated by the Groupement in order to justify their own supposed part in decolonisation, it serves only to give them an air of credibility with which to mask their redundant role in this struggle.

El Hadji and his bourgeois companions have successfully convinced themselves of the burden of duty which they carry. They pride themselves on having embraced modernity whilst having kept their *africanité*. Nevertheless, their claims can be easily cast into doubt, since we are told that each of them is clad in good-quality English textiles accessorised by

²²⁴ As the novel progresses however, it becomes evident that the colonists' influence is still a significant force in Senegalese society.

gold watches, hardly the trappings associated with native Africa.²²⁵ In addition, the reference to El Hadji's wedding party suggests a clear group motto – if one works hard then one must play hard. The challenges of regulating and invigorating Senegal's economy are quickly forgotten when the opportunity to publicly display one's wealth and important status is presented. The significant process of the transition of power from the coloniser to the formerly colonised is put aside for the moment, in order to remind all members of the evening of celebration marking El Hadji's third marriage, signalling the superficiality of the ruling elite and further underlining the prominence of masquerade in bourgeois masculinity.

Masculinities critic Robert Connell argues that, on a world-wide scale, the decline of bureaucratic dictatorships in the West and of post-colonial socialism elsewhere in the world has led to the advent of a particular brand of masculinity that satisfies the needs of the ever-spreading capitalist and multi-national 'corporation'.²²⁶ He claims that this particular type of masculine gender has 'replaced older local models of bourgeois masculinity, which were more embedded in local organizations and local conservative cultures' and that '[this] more flexible, calculative, egocentric masculinity of the new capitalist entrepreneur holds the world stage'.²²⁷ The concept of the transnational business masculinity, a field of study that has only relatively recently come into focus, and is as yet scantily researched, does nevertheless appear to produce a gender 'distanced from the masses, a life of material abundance combined with a sense of entitlement and superiority'.²²⁸ Indeed, El Hadji and the other attendees of the Chamber seem to be aspiring to such a status. There is no mention in the president's speech of how they will manage the economy for the benefit of the average Senegalese citizen. Instead, the discussion alludes to more grandiose objectives revolving around governmental, national and centralised institutions and their own important role within them.

The narrator's pointed satire throughout these passages serves to debunk the group's proclaimed intentions and alerts the reader immediately to the fictitious nature of bourgeois

²²⁵ The film version of *Xala* offers an interesting comparison here. The opening scene depicts the group of businessmen entering the Chamber of Commerce, a grand and highly colonial building in style. All are clad in African clothes and there is powerful African drumming and traditional dancing outside to celebrate the event. Soon, the white occupiers of the Chamber are dismissed by the group. They leave, only to return promptly with several briefcases. By this time, the 'liberators' of the Chamber are clad in tuxedos and European-style suits. They accept the briefcases and in a moment of high irony the President talks of socialism as the viewer sees the briefcases opened by the members, each full of bank notes, money that the members gladly receive. Thus, whereas as the members entered as Africans (in appearance), they leave as Europeans with all the trappings of Eurocentric power, leaving via a red carpet specially rolled out to mark the occasion to occupy their chauffeur-driven Mercedes. *Xala*, dir. by Ousmane Sembene (Connoisseur Videos, CR192 VHS, 1974).

²²⁶ Connell, *Masculinities*, pp. xxii–xxiii and pp. 260–266.

²²⁷ Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 263.

²²⁸ Connell, *Masculinities*, p. xxiii.

economic mentality: 'La nomination d'un des leurs à ce poste de Président de la Chambre de Commerce les faisait espérer [...] Pour eux, c'était la voie ouverte à un enrichissement sûr' (p. 8) [*The appointment of one of their number as President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry gave them renewed hope [...] the road was now open that led to certain wealth*' (p. 1)]. Thus, the juxtaposition between the group's masquerade and the truth is clearly exposed. El Hadji and his peers are self-serving ambitionists, outwardly clad in the rhetoric of independence in order to pursue self-enrichment and public status. Their proud postures, 'la tête hautement levée' (p. 8) [*'head[s] held high*' (p. 1)], is yet a further marker of their vainglory. Moreover, El Hadji sports a gold wrist watch and, like his peers, has a Mercedes and chauffeur waiting for him at the end of the meeting, a detail that once more removes this circle of men from the realities of daily life around them as 'une rangée de voitures de marque les attendaient' (p. 10) [*a line of expensive cars was waiting for them*' (p. 3)].²²⁹ It also underlines the importance of 'looking the part', a mentality which is central to the construction of this particular brand of masculinity and which is reminiscent of David Gilmore's assertion that masculinity consists of *being good at being a man*, rather than being a good man.²³⁰

El Hadji's membership of this clique is further undermined by the narrator, who inserts details about his past. El Hadji was a syndicalist during the colonial era who later on built a business partnership with a Syrio-Lebanese individual and branched into foodstuffs, groceries, property and imports/exports. After independence, however, El Hadji 'fit le cavalier seul' (p. 11) [*he was able to set up on his own*' (p. 3)] and imported dried fish from the Congo. The disjuncture between 'cavalier' and the prosaic business of importing dried fish ridicules El Hadji, and this mockery continues as we are told that El Hadji is eventually pushed out of this market by a stronger competitor, who owned boats. The sarcastic commentary then notes that 'dynamique, il se retourna vers l'Europe avec des crustacés' (p. 11) [*He returned his energies towards Europe, with shell-fish*' (p. 3)]. El Hadji, the reader feels, is hardly dynamic and this only serves to puncture his inflated sense of masculinity further.

Indeed, even the shellfish business proves to be ruinous and El Hadji's role in the business and economic vitality of Senegal is, in fact, very limited indeed:

²²⁹ In the film, these expensive vehicles travel as a caravan, accompanied by a police escort and sirens.

²³⁰ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 30.

Faute de crédits bancaires et de soutien, il revenait à son point de départ. Mais, très connu, ayant une ‘surface’, le milieu industriel l’utilisa comme prête-nom moyennant quelques redevances. Il joua le jeu [...] Mais tous savaient la vérité... (p. 11)

[Lack of funds and inadequate financial backing obliged him to abandon this scheme. However, because he was well-known and had a certain standing in the business community, overseas investors paid him to act as a front [...] He played his various roles well [...] everyone knew what was really happening. (p. 3)]

El Hadji’s self-important image as a businessman is merely an illusion, with very little substance behind it. His status as a member of the “‘Groupement des Hommes d’affaires’” (p. 7) [“‘businessmen’s Group’” (p. 1)] seems to finally give him the recognition he feels he deserves, echoing Connell’s assertion and exhibiting the necessary theatricality observed by Gilmore.

However, the limitations to El Hadji’s status and prestige, and by extension that of the Chamber of Commerce, are glaringly evident. The Chamber’s proud assertions that, having ousted the colonial powers, they will energise the Senegalese economy, are again undermined: ‘Leur manque d’avoir bancaire avivait, aiguïsait un sentiment nationaliste auquel ne manquait pas quelque rêve d’embourgeoisement’ (p. 8) [‘Their exclusion from the banks had first stimulated then sharpened a nationalist feeling from which expectations of improved social status were not entirely absent’ (p. 1)]. Despite their self-congratulation, the narrative exposes the element of performance which masks fraudulent nationalists bent on lining their own pockets. In these early pages, post-colonial and bourgeois African men are portrayed as rapacious and manipulative pretenders with little true regard for Senegalese nationalism or patriotism.

The problematic hybridity of El Hadji and his colleagues is thus clearly signposted from the beginning of the text. El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye, we are informed, ‘était, si l’on peut dire, la synthèse de deux cultures. Formation bourgeoise européenne, éducation féodale africaine. Il savait, comme ses pairs, se servir adroitement de ses deux pôles. La fusion n’était pas complète’ (p. 12) [‘El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye was what one might call a synthesis of two cultures: business had drawn him into the European middle class after a feudal African education. Like his peers, he made skilful use of his dual background, for their fusion was not complete’ (pp. 3–4)]. The uneasy marriage between Western (imported) and African (native) culture is evident from the way El Hadji is dressed. On another level, his ambitions for wealth and prestige are focused upwards and outwards, rather than inwards towards his people, and betray a lust for the sophisticated image of the global businessman. El Hadji, as

representative of his peer group, also symbolises the delicate negotiation that is required between these two spheres, the Eurocentric and the African, in order to reap the best of both worlds.²³¹

The inconsistencies in El Hadji's masculine identity continue to appear and to deepen, particularly in relation to his private life. It is his ever-present need to prove himself in the eyes of society at large that ultimately and irrefutably exposes this. As the plot progresses, it becomes apparent that El Hadji is almost puppet-like, living a fully programmed life that conforms to social expectations of what a man in his position should be. He has even taken his first wife, Adja Awa Astou²³² on a pilgrimage to Mecca, but the reader is left in no doubt as to El Hadji's lack of real religious conviction. As he began to reap the benefits of his business dealings, he used his newly-acquired wealth to bolster his social status: 'Avec ses premières rentrées substantielles, en bon musulman – non-pratiquant – il emmena sa première épouse en pèlerinage à La Mecque' (pp. 11–12) [*'He was a good, albeit a non-practising Muslim, so on the strength of his growing affluence he took his first wife on the pilgrimage to Mecca' (p. 3)*]. The author again places a visual break between 'en bon musulman' and 'non-pratiquant' therefore forcing the reader to notice the oxymoron between 'in good Muslim fashion' and 'non-practising' by breaking up the natural flow of the sentence. One is left with the distinct impression that El Hadji cares little, if at all, for the tenets of the Islamic faith but manipulates them instead to his own advantage to and to further himself socially, moulding a certain masculine image for himself. This manipulation of the Islamic religion in order to cement masculine social superiority is the first of many such instances in this novel.

Mini-Empire and Subdual of the Female

Not content with using religion and monetary wealth in order to boost his upward mobility, El Hadji views his wives, including his soon-to-be third wife N'Goné, as status symbols. In the first mention of his wives, we are provided with nothing more than a dry list of particulars, underlining that fact that marriage for El Hadji is a deliberate and calculated move, designed to complete an exterior image, rather than a decision based on emotional,

²³¹ In a sense, El Hadji's character could be read as a mimic man, as theorised by Homi Bhabha. He and his peers are ethnically African and yet their tastes and morals, not to mention their fixation with imitating Western political and business classes, appears to mimic the models of the coloniser. One might interpret that within (post-)colonial discourse they position themselves as 'authorized versions of otherness'. Nevertheless, they never disturb the neo-colonialist regime. Homi Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 85–92 (p. 88).

²³² 'Adja' being the female form of the title 'Hadji'.

amorous or even practical factors. In addition, El Hadji's family set-up is depicted almost as his own, personal mini-empire, which functions as a fictional reenactment of the 'accumulat[ion] of symbolic capital through marriages' which Bourdieu argues 'function as investments leading to the creation of more or less extensive and prestigious alliances'.²³³ When asked by Laye, one of his fellows at the Chamber of Commerce meeting how many wives he now has, El Hadji replies: 'J'allais y venir, Laye! J'en suis à ma troisième épouse. Un "capitaine", comme on dit dans la populace. Nous sommes des Africains' (p. 10) [*I was coming to that, Laye. I have now married my third wife, so I'm a "captain" as we Africans say. [We are Africans after all!]* (p. 2)]. The significant inclusion of the term 'capitaine' suggests the acquisition of wives, and therefore of the female body, as an important marker of successful, hegemonic masculinity. The notable assertion of *africanité* at the end of the reply links this to concepts of African identity, perhaps betraying El Hadji's awareness of the conflicting alliances to which he tries to adhere; namely the exploitative role of 'Homme d'affaires' who collaborates with the neo-colonial order on the one hand, and a saviour of Senegal on the other.²³⁴

El Hadji refers to his first two wives absently and almost dismissively as 'mes deux autres épouses' (p. 10) [*my two other wives* (p. 3)], an attitude which labels them as nameless commodities rather than individual women. His 'kyrielle de gosses' (p. 12) [*string of progeny* (p. 4)] are referred to in a similar fashion, again as commodities rather than children to be nurtured and the reading of El Hadji's mini-empire is again upheld when the text states: 'Africain pratique, il avait affecté une camionnette au service domestique et au transport des enfants dans les différents établissements scolaires de la ville' (p. 12) [*Being a practical African, he had provided a mini-bus for their domestic use and to take the children to their various schools in town* (p. 4)]. The logistic feat of depositing his eleven children at their different schools is rendered no more than another chance for El Hadji to flaunt his wealth (by organising a minibus), again underlining the crucial role of appearance to dominant notions of masculinity.

His third marriage is also a premeditated, image-driven strategy: 'Cette troisième union le hissait au rang de la notabilité traditionnelle. En même temps, c'était une promotion' (p. 12) [*This third marriage raised him to the rank of the traditional notability; it represented a kind of promotion* (p. 4)]. Any mention of emotion or of mutual cooperation between men and women is absent and marriage functions as a business transaction to

²³³ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 98.

²³⁴ In the film, the members cry 'vive l'africanité!' as they are invited to El Hadji's wedding.

springboard El Hadji's political, social and business objectives. El Hadji's thoughts point to a male-female dynamic founded upon social cohesion but also, significantly, upon a rejection of romantic or companionable concerns. His third wife N'Goné, and women generally, are demoted to the level of '*symbolic instruments* of male politics' (italics in original).²³⁵ His wedding gifts to her consist of lingerie, bathing products, shoes, wigs (even a blonde wig) and crucially a new car coupled with a promise of 10,000 litres of Super petrol (p. 14). Yet, at no point is there a declaration of love for N'Goné. Her sole purpose is that of boosting El Hadji's public respectability, depicting a pronounced disassociation with women and their place as subservient to their husband. Notably, N'Goné's young age and her family's inferior social and financial status do not pose a threat to El Hadji's sense of manliness.²³⁶

This emotional detachment is not confined to the relationship between El Hadji and his wives. His offspring are also viewed with detachment. Most of his eleven children are not even mentioned by name. Those who are are portrayed as having a distant, if non-existent interpersonal relationship with their father, and view him solely as a provider of money, rendering his paternal role as decidedly limited. His transitory life means that they frequently do not see him for almost a week at a time (each wife's rotational *moomé*, the days that her husband will stay with her, lasts for three days) and he takes little interest in their upbringing unless they inconvenience him personally. His eldest daughter by his first wife, Rama, feels the full force of El Hadji's anger when she challenges his decision to take a third wife. Deeply resentful of her father's serial polygamy on principle but also after seeing the distress of her mother, Rama objects to his third marriage. El Hadji's reaction is swift. He hits her across the face so forcefully that she is left bleeding. Ready to strike again, he tells her: 'Ta révolution, tu la feras à l'université ou dans la rue, mais jamais chez moi' (p. 30) [*You can be a revolutionary at the university or in the street but not in my house. Never!* (p. 13)]. Happy to let Rama engage with more radical ideologies elsewhere, El Hadji does not tolerate any dissent within his own personal dominion, particularly when his manly authority is at stake, reflecting Victor Seidler's analysis of father-children relationships, on which he states: 'Fathers had a right to be obeyed, and women and children had to learn the discipline of obedience. For a wife or child to question the head of the family was already an act of disobedience'.²³⁷

²³⁵ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 43.

²³⁶ Schmitt, 'Different Approaches to Male-Male Sexuality/Eroticism', p. 3.

²³⁷ Victor J. Seidler, *Transforming Masculinities: Men, Cultures, Bodies, Power, Sex and Love* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 94.

Rama's protest against the third marriage serves to question her father's self-perceived entitlement and challenges his motive, that of enhancing social standing. El Hadji's reaction is an abrupt reminder of the obedience expected by the father figure, as outlined by Seidler. Following the confrontation, El Hadji decides that Rama has become too headstrong (for a female) and blames Adja for her leniency (p. 30). Indeed, later on in the text El Hadji considers marrying Rama off, perhaps to quell her resoluteness of spirit, and remembers that: 'Rama avait été la seule qui ait osé condamner cette union. Dommage qu'elle soit une fille! D'un garçon, il en aurait fait quelqu'un' (p. 142) [*Rama had been the only one who had dared oppose the marriage. Pity she was a girl. He would have been able to make something of her had she been a boy*' (p. 84)]. El Hadji appreciates the strength of character and intellect in his daughter but these qualities, evidently considered masculine, are rendered inappropriate in a female, illustrating the limitations of womanhood for men like El Hadji. Ironically, however, the novel relates that Rama grew up during the upheaval of the fight for Senegalese independence, a fight in which El Hadji himself took part as a trade unionist (p. 27). In a sense then, Rama's principled stance presents El Hadji with the ghost of his former self. His reaction can therefore be read as an acute sensitivity vis-à-vis his profound shift in values and the ideologically enslaved individual that he has become.

The paucity of emotional or interpersonal bonds between the sexes, together with the appropriation of the (sexual) female, merely functions to promote El Hadji's general image as a prime specimen of an African man. He presents himself as – indeed, believes himself to be – masterful and authoritative. Furthermore, he appears to embrace his African roots in this third wedding since: 'La coutume avait été respectée, mieux, on avait ressuscité l'antique règle' (p. 13) [*Ancient custom was being more than just respected, it was being revived*' (p. 4)]. Yet a closer analysis of this statement reveals anything but a confident relationship with African heritage. Intriguingly, it shows a reliance on traditional values that govern family life and/or marriage (whereas in economics and industry Western influences are gladly adopted). It is also an attempt to assert an African identity so enfeebled that ancient rules must be resurrected, thus alluding to the severe fracture between El Hadji's class of men and their native heritage. Indeed, the past participle *ressuscité* (resuscitated) implies the death of native culture amongst the bourgeoisie, indicating the perilous cultural tightrope that El Hadji must negotiate.

Nevertheless, it is not solely constructions of masculinity that rely on a mammonistic approach to marriage and male-female relations. During El Hadji and N'Goné's wedding party, the narrative presents a conversation between two of the female guests which is highly

illustrative of the workings of society. Two bourgeois women discuss El Hadji's desirability as a husband, and one concludes: 'Conditionnel ou pas, j'accepte d'épouser ce El Hadji même s'il avait la peau d'un caïman' (p. 14) [*Strings [attached] or not, I'd marry El Hadji even if he had the skin of a crocodile* (p. 5)]. This detail demonstrates that to outsiders at least, El Hadji's performance is convincing, since however unattractive physically or otherwise El Hadji may be, women of his social class would be attracted by his wealth and status.

Female Masculinity

Despite the initial and apparent strength of El Hadji as an embodiment of bourgeois values, the disparity between his public image and the real, private life of El Hadji is substantial. The *xala* – the curse of impotency that will shatter El Hadji's carefully cultivated persona – first manifests itself when El Hadji should be consummating his third marriage. The context of the marriage and its consummation is provoked by El Hadji's lack of agency, a consequence attributable to his slavish pursuit of an image that would be in accordance with dominant discursive scripts which forecloses subjectivity to a great extent. The tell-tale signs of El Hadji's problems are revealed before the marriage has even occurred, not in confrontation with another man – but with a woman. It is N'Goné's paternal aunt Yay Bineta, also known as la Badiène (the Badyen), who exposes the instability of complicit masculinity for the first time. El Hadji's decision to take a third wife, although presented as his decision in front of his colleagues and wives, is in fact not his decision at all. Contrary to the self-satisfied and confident persona he projects publicly, El Hadji is actually cornered into agreeing to marry N'Goné. Fírinne Ní Chréacháin-Adelugba's reading of the novel sees El Hadji as a buyer in a human market. Discussing the roles of the Self and the Other in the text, she states that in *Xala*: 'The relationship between Self and Other can be seen as that of buyer, seller and goods, with sex as the principal commodity'.²³⁸ In this light, El Hadji is the buyer, Yay Bineta the seller and N'Goné is the goods to be sold to the highest bidder. Ní Chréacháin-Adelugba's interpretation sees Yay Bineta as a character rather similar to that of El Hadji himself, and as a 'middleman' selling luxury commodities.²³⁹ However, seeing El Hadji as a buyer implies an agency that is not convincingly portrayed here, as a closer

²³⁸ Fírinne Ní Chréacháin-Adelugba, 'Self and Other in Sembene Ousmane's *Xala*', in *New West African Literature*, ed. by Kolawole Ogungbesan (London; Heinemann, 1979), pp. 91–103 (pp. 94–5).

²³⁹ Ní Chréacháin-Adelugba, 'Self and Other in Sembene Ousmane's *Xala*', p. 93.

examination of the passage reveals. In fact, Yay Bineta is a first-class manipulator, and her foresight is far superior to that of her male counterpart. She detects El Hadji's vulnerabilities from the very beginning and acts upon them, a point that Ní Chréacháin-Adelugba overlooks in her assessment.

Indeed, Yay Bineta is a challenge for any man. Her undeniable authority arguably confers upon her an air of masculinity. She fiercely upholds the cultural *status quo* that objectifies women, manipulating it and working within it for her own gain. She is ambitious, cunning, but also very capable. Her overbearing manner quickly drives her brother, referred to dismissively as 'le vieux Babacar', into submission (p. 16). Echoing Fatima Mernissi's premise, she could be seen as the dangerously cunning woman who threatens to destabilise the 'acknowledged allocation of power'.²⁴⁰ It falls to Yay Bineta to marry N'Goné off since her parents can no longer afford to keep her. In addition, having failed her 'brevet élémentaire' (p. 15) [*elementary certificate*] (p. 5)] twice and her liaisons with boys evidently causing concern to her family, it is viewed as necessary to marry her as soon as possible to prevent any potential scandal from erupting. Nevertheless, the possibility that N'Goné's future husband may be able to help the extended family financially is also a significant consideration (p. 18). As for la Badiène herself, she is a menacing character:

Pour comprendre cette femme, il faut connaître ses antécédents. Yay Bineta était poursuivie par la guigne, *ay gaaf*. Elle avait à son actif deux veuvages: deux maris enterrés! Et selon la rumeur publique des traditionalistes, elle se devait de faire son plein de morts: une troisième victime. Aucun homme ne se présenta de crainte d'être la prochaine proie. (p. 61)

[*In order to understand this woman one needs to know her background. Yay Bineta had always been hounded by bad luck, ay gaaf. She had had two husbands, both now in their graves. The traditionalists held that she must have her fill of deaths: a third victim [...] Because of her ay gaaf, men kept out of her way. (p. 35)*]

Yay Bineta is also described as 'dévoreuse d'hommes, incarnation d'une mort anticipée' (p. 61) [*a devourer of men, the promise of an early death*] (p. 35)] and once more men's habit of fleeing from her is emphasised. She is therefore clearly presented as castrating and above all, as an emasculating force, threatening the hegemony of the men around her.

²⁴⁰ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 137. According to Pierre Bourdieu, however, the 'weak' (women) do not have strategies effective enough to truly subvert the established order and must therefore use the dominant's own 'strengths' against them. The only way that Yay Bineta can hope to realise her plan is to adopt the patriarchal norms in which she is immersed and work within that masculinist framework. Ironically, as Bourdieu observes, this has 'the effect of confirming the dominant representation of women', in this case as dangerously cunning. Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 32.

As for El Hadji's third venture into matrimony, there is no insinuation that El Hadji has actively sought or even desired a third wife. In fact, it is Yay Bineta who introduces the possibility to El Hadji, who is passive and unsuspecting from the outset: 'Un matin, Yay Bineta habilla convenablement N'Goné. Elles se rendirent au magasin-bureau d'El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye. Yay Bineta et El Hadji se connaissaient de longue date. Sans autre préambule, Yay Bineta tâta le terrain' (p. 18) [*'One morning Yay Bineta dressed N'Gone in her best clothes and they went to El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye's shop, where he also had his office. Yay Bineta and El Hadji had known each other a long time. Yay Bineta immediately set to work to explore the lie of the land'* (p. 7)]. Following this initial encounter, N'Goné continues to frequent El Hadji's shop, apparently seeking employment but this is undercut by the narrator who states: 'c'était un alibi de la Badiène' (p. 19) [*'an excuse thought up by the Badyen'* (p. 8)]. With her rhetorical skills, Yay Bineta eventually succeeds in manipulating the unwitting El Hadji. She outmanoeuvres him because she possesses an astute awareness of the frailties of El Hadji's category of man, whose principal foible is the need to perpetually (re-)assert a sense of manliness that is grounded in authority over women and which is preoccupied by the perceptions of others. Yay Bineta's tactic *par excellence* is her questioning of this perceived authority:

'Tu as peur de tes femmes! Ce sont tes femmes qui décident, portent les pantalons chez toi? Pourquoi ne viens-tu pas nous voir? Ahan! Pourquoi?'
Orgueilleux, piqué au vif, son honneur d'authentique Africain froissé, El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye se devait de relever ce défi:
'Jamais, se disait-il, une femme ne lui dicterait sa conduite.' Pour prouver qu'il était maître chez lui, il raccompagna la fille chez ses parents. (p. 19)

[*'You're afraid of women! Your wives make the decisions, wear the trousers in your house, don't they? Why don't you come and see us? Hey? Why don't you?'* El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye was wounded in his pride. His honour as an African in the old tradition was being called into question. He was at last stung into taking up the challenge. 'No woman is going to tell me what to do', he said to himself. And so, to prove that he was master in his own house, he accompanied them to the home of the girl's parents. (pp. 7-8)]

Yay Bineta shakes El Hadji's belief in his own command over his personal, familial empire. She therefore also questions his sense of masculinity by doubting, or feigning to doubt, his ability to assert authority over his wives. His reaction is short-sighted and impulsive and he is evidently deeply disturbed by the insinuation that he has failed in his quest to be an authentic, African man. His sense of masculinity profoundly wounded, El Hadji, unawares, falls straight into the trap. The irony of this passage hardly needs to be stated. Yay Bineta's attack implies

that El Hadji cannot act autonomously of female influence. In his desperation to assert an image of patriarchal control over his wives, the discussion culminates in El Hadji doing exactly as Yay Bineta had planned, therefore submitting himself to a woman's wishes. Her astute engineering exposes the dominant bourgeois version of masculinity to be no more than a myth. In addition, her strategy problematises the widely-assumed and dichotomised power dynamic of Islamicate man as powerful and dominant, and woman as the antithesis, submissive and subservient.²⁴¹ For Yay Bineta's determined and ambitious onslaught appears to engage more with accepted masculine traits than with typically feminine behaviour. On the contrary, as the narrator puts it: 'El Hadji était mûr. La Badiène allait le cueillir' (p. 21) [*The fruit [El Hadji] was ripe. The Badyen was going to pluck it' (p. 8)*]. El Hadji is therefore revealed to be a pawn on Yay Bineta's chessboard, so caught up in his own perception of manliness to realise that his actions are easily predetermined and exploited.

In line with la Badiène's strategy, 'le glissement de l'homme se faisait doucement. Une mutation de sentiments s'opérait. Une habitude se créait. L'envie, le désir de cette éphémère grandissait' (pp. 19–20) [*The man slowly succumbed. A change in his feelings began to take place. He became used to her. He felt a growing desire for her' (p. 8)*]. El Hadji is portrayed not as a lustful womaniser but instead as a rather passive character in this particular situation by becoming the target of Yay Bineta's scheme.²⁴² He, in turn, visits the family home and takes N'Goné to cocktail bars frequented by the so-called 'Hommes d'affaires'. These bars, like the Chamber of Commerce itself, act as loci which bolster El Hadji's masculine image. The focalisation then shifts to the protagonist's thoughts: 'N'Goné, il faut bien le dire, avait la saveur d'un fruit, que ses femmes avaient perdue depuis longtemps [...] Entre ses deux épouses, l'exigence quotidienne de ses affaires, N'Goné était la paisible oasis de la traversée du désert, pensait-il' (p. 20) [*He had to admit it, N'Gone had the savour of fresh fruit, which was something his wives had long since lost [...] With his two wives on the one hand and the daily demands of his business life, N'Gone seemed to him like a restful oasis in the middle of the desert' (p. 8)*]. But, another revealing insertion betrays El Hadji's lack of subjective autonomy once again and the meaningless of the 'pensait-il' [*he thought*] in the previous quotation, since: 'Yay Bineta – La Badiène – tapie dans l'ombre,

²⁴¹ Ait Sebbah, *La Femme dans l'inconscient musulman*, pp. 11–12. Yay Bineta's persona also goes against the image of 'mother Africa', one of the two models of womanhood advocated by the *Négritude* movement. The African mother was a nurturing woman, incarnating and passing on the values of the ancestral world to younger generations. However, as David Murphy points out, 'the mother, in effect, perpetuates the situation whereby women occupy a largely submissive role'. David Murphy, *Sembene: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction* (Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 2000), pp. 130–131.

²⁴² This is not the general case, however, since other episodes point to his previous womanising tendencies.

dirigeait la manœuvre [...] Rien n'avait été négligé pour le conditionnement de l'homme. Telle une araignée, laborieusement, la Badiène tissait la toile' (p. 20) [*'Yay Bineta, the Badyen, kept discreetly out of sight, all the better to direct events [...] Nothing was omitted in the careful process of conditioning the man. The Badyen spun her web as painstakingly as a spider' (p. 8)*]. Once more, the element of masquerade is emphasised, with Yay Bineta quietly 'directing' events behind the scenes. If El Hadji is the one reading the script, then Yay Bineta is the autocue. Moreover, the usage of the noun 'conditionnement' [*conditioning*] signals the formative and functional nature of masculine identity, reminiscent of the discursive scripts to which gender critics so frequently allude. For la Badiène, El Hadji's manhood is merely a performance of well-understood masculine scripts, which can be manipulated by her for her family's gain.

Emboldened by the knowledge that her plan has nearly been achieved, Yay Bineta confronts El Hadji on the subject of marriage and once more questions his status as a true, African man. Indeed, compared to la Badiène, El Hadji is exposed as a bewildered fool and faced with her suggestion of marriage, all stoicism and authority that is key to manhood deserts him. El Hadji's naivety is striking: 'Jusqu'ici, pas une seule fois l'éventualité d'un mariage avec N'Goné n'avait effleuré ses pensées. Harponné par la Badiène, ses réponses furent vagues. Bafouillant, il invoquait ses deux épouses' (pp. 21–22) [*'The thought of marriage had until now never crossed his mind. He had been caught off his guard by the Badyen and could only splutter a reply in the vaguest terms. He must talk to his wives' (p. 9)*]. The language in this last quotation is telling. The sole explicit reference to Yay Bineta is a short, sharp clause in a quotation that is otherwise characterised by an almost ambling rhythm. In addition, words such as 'effleurer', 'vague' and 'bafouiller' evoke a nuance of taking time over something, or of a lack of direction and this lack of decisiveness is hardly a feature of masculine identity. The verb 'invoquer' is almost an admission of El Hadji's reluctance to make a decision, suggesting that such an important commitment in his own life is beyond his control. This is a significant juxtaposition with the violent, sudden and targeting action of Yay Bineta who 'harpoons' El Hadji, an innuendo that reiterated Yay Bineta's masculinity once more.

Once more, El Hadji plays right into Yay Bineta's hands as she scolds him for failing in his duties as a Muslim man:

N'était-il pas musulman? Fils de musulman? Pourquoi repoussait-il ce que Yalla souhaitait? Etait-il un tubab pour consulter ses épouses? Le pays avait-il perdu ses hommes d'hier? Ses hommes valeureux dont le sang coulait dans ses veines? (p. 22)

[*Was he not a Muslim? The son of a Muslim? Why did he try to evade Yalla's obvious wishes? Was he a whiteman that he must consult his wives? Had the country lost its men of yesterday? Those brave men whose blood flowed in his veins? (p. 9)*]

Yay Bineta explicitly links Islam and masculinity here. She views El Hadji's reticence as symptomatic of his failure as a strong, traditional African man and of his relegation to the status of a weakling *tubab* who is governed by his wives.²⁴³ Europeans are perceived as weak, presumably because they are not thought to dominate their wives so completely. Thus, the vision of masculinity displayed by Yay Bineta is one where men's complete supremacy over women is central. She also clings to this hegemony as a means of proving the superiority of African (Muslim) masculinity over that of the colonists by using religion as a means of upholding established gender dynamics. Her own undivided loyalty to the established patriarchal order, along with her assertive, determined and exploitative stance, demonstrate how women can also adopt masculine discourse and therefore, at least temporarily, *do* masculinity.

This perceived servitude to his wives' opinions clearly represents a potential loss of manliness for El Hadji and undermines his appearance as the masterful patriarch. Yay Bineta therefore has a castrating effect on him and curtails his powers of autonomous decision-making. Yay Bineta appears as the voice of ideology here, hailing El Hadji who, if he does not comply, risks being unrecognised by hegemony. Confronted by the bulldozing Badiène and her insistence on his marrying N'Goné: 'El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye céda par faiblesse' (p. 22) [*El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye surrendered out of weakness*' (p. 9)]. Clearly, El Hadji is no match for Yay Bineta and he ends up agreeing to a marriage he neither appears to want nor can afford simply to uphold a publicly projected front and retaining his place in society, masking the emasculated figure within.

Crucially, Yay Bineta keeps up the pressure following the wedding due to El Hadji's inability to consummate the marriage. Her frequent questioning represents an affront to El Hadji's already battered sense of virility, relegating him to the status of non-man by emphasising time and again his sexual impotence. She can therefore be seen as a masculine figure who challenges and ultimately triumphs over her male rival. She disgusts El Hadji precisely because she is an emasculating force (p. 104). Ironically, when El Hadji is finally able to consummate the marriage following his visit to the healer Serigne Mada, he is unable to do so because N'Goné is menstruating. His repugnance is once more directed at Yay

²⁴³ *Tubab* is a term used in Senegal and the Gambia to refer historically to the slave-master, but nowadays is attributed to any white person.

Bineta: 'Dressé comme un étalon, il affrontait la Badiène dans un duel muet. La répulsion latente qu'il avait pour cette femme, et qu'il avait toujours dominée, resurgissait avec violence' (p. 131) [*'Rearing like a stallion he confronted the Badyen in a silent duel. The latent repulsion he felt for the woman and which he had always kept in check welled up violently'* (p. 76)]. El Hadji here blames La Badiène for his deficient virility and unravelling masculinity as well as for interfering and for transgressing into his masculine privilege. Indeed, he goes so far as to believe that 'cette famille [celle de N'Goné] avait terni son honneur de mâle' (p. 134) [*'That family had damaged his male honour'* (p. 79)].

Yay Bineta is not the only woman who succeeds in checkmating El Hadji. His first wife, Adja Awa Astou, is portrayed by the text as a limp and passive character who turns to her religion as an escape when things go badly. El Hadji's second wife, Oumi N'Doye, is an entirely different proposition. She, like Yay Bineta, knows El Hadji's weaknesses and plays upon them to her own benefit. Oumi N'Doye realises that El Hadji wants nothing more than an easy life, and is often deliberately antagonistic. El Hadji, significantly less masterful than the image he projects to Yay Bineta, does little to curb his jealous, passionate second wife's attitude. Oumi openly challenges her husband: 'Debout, face à l'homme, elle parlait menaçante' (p. 34) [*'She stood facing the man, menace in her voice'* (p. 16)].²⁴⁴ This is hardly the behaviour to which El Hadji, a man insistent on his mastery and control over his own wives, would openly admit to being subjected. Oumi's antagonism is such that El Hadji, fearful of an impending defeat, often diverts the conversation in order to escape her vicious tongue. Threatened by the prospect of his second wife causing a scene at his wedding, El Hadji employs precisely this tactic and exclaims:

'Donne-moi à boire! J'ai très soif', dit El Hadji pour faire diversion.
'Il n'y a pas d'Evian dans la maison. (El Hadji ne buvait que de l'eau d'Evian). Veux-tu l'eau du robinet?' demanda Oumi N'Doye, moqueuse, avec un air de défi qui plissait les commissures de ses lèvres. (p. 34)

[*'Get me something to drink. I'm very thirsty,' said El Hadji to change the subject. 'There is no mineral water in the house.' (El Hadji only drank [Evian] mineral water.) 'Will you have tap water?' asked Oumi N'Doye in a mocking tone of voice with an air of defiance that wrinkled the corners of her mouth. (p. 16)*]

In marked contrast to the projected persona of the authoritative African husband that emerges as the ideal, dynamics between El Hadji and Oumi N'Doye reveal once more El Hadji's

²⁴⁴ Oumi's threatening and emasculating presence is all the more obvious in the film. As El Hadji picks her up for the wedding party, she speaks to him extremely forcefully and at one point, as he stands to assert authority, she even forces him physically to sit back down again.

vulnerabilities when faced with a strong woman. It is Oumi N'Doye who controls her husband, a point that again contradicts commonly-held assumptions on gender dynamics in Senegal. Indeed, Oumi stands in stark contrast to El Hadji's first wife Adja Awa Astou, who prides herself on her status as a perfectly obedient Muslim wife: '[Adja Awa Astou] voulait être une épouse selon les canons de l'Islam: les cinq prières par jour, l'obéissance totale à son mari' (p. 43) [*Her ambition was to be a wife according to the teachings of Islam by observing the five daily prayers and showing her husband complete obedience*']²⁴⁵. On another level, however, Oumi's defiant attitude again exposes the very real absence of any true subjectivity in El Hadji's dealings with others. He is ridiculed, challenged and manipulated by his wife into giving her her own way. El Hadji increasingly appears as spineless, enslaved to public enactments of societal expectation whilst losing all integrity and self-respect in private. Bullied by Oumi, El Hadji's complete lack of desire and/or ability to assert himself is underlined further. He is eager to portray an image to his work colleagues and to Yay Bineta as the proud, commanding and dominant man. However, in his personal relations with Oumi we see that the private El Hadji is actually positioned at the other end of the spectrum, revealing himself to be somewhat of a pushover. In particular, and humiliatingly for a man of his rank who defines himself as a 'capitaine', he allows himself to be badgered by women. Indeed, he is portrayed as being a puppet controlled by the needs and expectations of those around him. El Hadji's 'brand' of masculinity appears to hinge on his publicly-displayed importance in society, on his authority over women and on his supposed desire to create a different Senegal, even if these claims are without substance.

The Male Malady – Xala

El Hadji's entire downfall revolves around the onset of his *xala*, the symptoms of which appear suddenly and without warning, on the night of his third wedding. Tellingly, however, the effects of phallic impotence are not limited to El Hadji's sexual life. They also lead to a general impotence as El Hadji watches his life disintegrate around him. The phallic ineptitude caused by the curse in fact exposes a much wider and general incapacity, for El Hadji's *xala* becomes emblematic of his entire gendered identity, an identity that is fragile, passive and ultimately decadent. Bernth Lindfors, in his article 'Penetrating Xala', refers to

²⁴⁵ According to Fatna Ait Sabbah, the key elements of Muslim feminine beauty are silence, immobility and obedience. Adja Awa Astou can therefore be seen as the epitome of the perfect Muslim wife, whose definition of feminine beauty is, in Ait Sabbah's words: 'la manifestation de l'inertie' [*the manifestation of inertia*]. Ait Sabbah, *La Femme dans l'inconscient musulman*, p. 11.

El Hadji as ‘a rather blunt, even protuberant phallic symbol’ in that he rises and falls rather like a phallus.²⁴⁶ As we have already seen, El Hadji’s masculine image swells and deflates at an impressive rate in front of the assertive, insistent – and often female – characters in his life. His disastrous attempts to consummate his marriage to the young and tempting N’Goné also uphold Lindfors’s assertion, because the proud, self-trumpeting businessman is swiftly replaced with a shrivelled and fumbling middle-aged man hanging his head in shame. No longer the triumphant newlywed, El Hadji leaves under the shocked and disapproving stare of N’Goné herself, Yay Bineta and another prying female entrusted with establishing N’Goné’s virginity. The critics Fatima Mernissi and Ruth Roded both point to the prophet Mohammed’s sexual potency as evidence of his exemplary masculinity and note that Mohammed remains an important role model.²⁴⁷ Similarly, both Bruce Dunne and Andreas Eppink consider penetration as a manifestation of male power.²⁴⁸ All therefore suggest a strong link between (self-)perceptions of manliness and phallic potency. Thus, the xala serves as a means of shattering El Hadji’s masculinity. Furthermore, the critic S. Ade Ojo claims that for Sembene, the phallus is one of the two vulnerable centres of the male. He adds: ‘Pour l’homme africain, c’est le centre le plus vulnérable. Et dès que ce centre ne tient plus, l’homme africain perd son moi’ [*For the African man, it is the most vulnerable centre. And, as soon as it no longer functions, the African man loses his sense of self*].²⁴⁹

The vulnerability that Ade Ojo outlines here is particularly acute in El Hadji’s case, and is apparent above all during the wedding party. The sexually aggressive and predatory humour of El Hadji and his ‘type’ of man highlights an undercurrent that defines itself in opposition to femininity by its dominance over it. The ‘Groupement des Hommes d’affaires’ – those who previously had prided themselves on their *africanité* and their adherence to tradition – revel in what Western culture has to offer them, namely alcohol and debauchery. The language that is employed here to refer to the sexual act is extremely revealing, and El Hadji becomes an accomplice in the promotion of a vile and sexually war-like masculine ideology:

‘Tu te retires? Va consommer ta vierge’, l’accueillit insidieusement le Président du Groupement; l’haleine fétide, chancelant, il passa un bras au cou d’El Hadji et s’adressant aux autres d’une voix pâteuse: ‘Chers Collègues, notre frère El Hadji, dans un moment, va “percer” sa donzelle...’

²⁴⁶ Bernth Lindfors, ‘Penetrating Xala’, *International Fiction Review*, 24:1–2 (1997), 65–69 (p. 66).

²⁴⁷ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 117; Roded, ‘Islamic Views on Sexuality’, p. 159.

²⁴⁸ Dunne, ‘Power and Sexuality in the Middle East’, p. 10; Eppink, ‘Morrocan Boys and Sex’, pp. 36–37.

²⁴⁹ S. Ade Ojo, ‘Le “Xala” dans *Xala* de Sembène Ousmane’, *Ethiopiennes*, 5:1–2 (1988), 185–204 (p. 188).

‘Œuvre délicate’, renchérit le député à l’Assemblée nationale, en se levant péniblement de sa chaise. Après quelques rots empuantis, il poursuivit: ‘El Hadji, crois-le, nous sommes prêts à te porter secours’ (pp. 46–47)

[*‘Are you leaving now? Off to deflower your virgin!’ the President of the ‘Group’ greeted him with unsubtle innuendo. His breath smelt and he was unsteady on his feet. Putting his arms around El Hadji’s neck he addressed the others in a thick voice: ‘Friends, our brother El Hadji will be off in a minute to “pierce” his fair lady.’ ‘A delicate operation!’ contributed the member of parliament, rising with difficulty from his seat. After a string of smelly burps he went on: ‘Believe me El Hadji, we’ll gladly give you a hand’ (p. 26)*]

Any trace of N’Goné’s individuality is deleted as she is referred to as a faceless commodity and objectified in the form of a ‘virgin’ with the possessive pronoun ‘ta’ (‘your’) preceding her. El Hadji is patted on the back by his drunken and rather repugnant companions whose interest in the conversation constitutes a subtle form of male bonding. The ‘Groupement’ here collectively bolster the discourse of penile potency, indicating the prevalence of this ‘myth’ of masculinity. This banter provokes a strong reaction: ‘Oui, s’écrièrent les autres. Chacun y ajouta de son cru’ (p. 47) [“‘Yes, indeed!’” the others chimed in. Each added his bit’ (p. 26)]. This quotation points to the sexual conquest of women not simply as a cause for competition between males, but also as a site of a male bonding which takes the form of an exaggeration of sexual abilities and desires. Each is eager to urge El Hadji on but is quick to point out that they can do the job if he cannot. The images created by their drunken lechery are aggressive and mercenary. In addition, the chivalric imagery coupled with the very obvious phallic allusion of the verb *percer* (to pierce) portrays a masculine gender construction that aims to conquer – violently if necessary. El Hadji once more puts on a façade of capability and unchallengeable confidence.

Curiously, the group then begins to share personal advice on avoiding the *xala* with one another. The fact that impotence, or at least regular erectile difficulties, appears to be a well-known problem to the members, who all have their own preferred method of treatment, is intriguing. The significant mention of aphrodisiacs, referred to only as ‘le “truc”’ (p. 47) [*‘the “stuff”’ (p. 26)*], indicates an identity based on conquering and ‘piercing’ the female Other, but which is imperilled by the admission that these adherents of a hyper-masculine ideology are themselves not that potent after all. The result is a rather pitiful display of middle-aged drunken men who, mistakenly confident in their sexual potential, need a bit of help. They are rendered dangerously vulnerable by their own standards, illustrating the very real fragility of a complicit masculine identity that is based so overwhelmingly on phallic prowess.

The prophetic irony of this episode is realised as El Hadji, later on that evening, fails to assert the active sexuality expected of him not just by his peers but by Yay Bineta and N’Goné too, a detail amplified all the more by the emphasis on the white sheets which should prove the violent nature of male sexuality.²⁵⁰ Yay Bineta’s reaction, in heavy contrast to El Hadji’s quiet shame, is a shriek of horror. She exclaims: ‘On t’a jeté un sort [...] Je te l’avais dit! Toi et tes semblables, vous vous prenez pour des tubabs’ (p. 50) [‘Somebody has cast a spell on you [...] I warned you this would happen. You and your like take yourselves for Europeans’ (p. 27)].

The *xala* may indeed be a curse and an indicator of El Hadji’s dubious allegiance to his own African cultural heritage and his past crimes.²⁵¹ Nevertheless, on a secondary level it may also be symbolic of El Hadji’s dubious allegiance to himself. El Hadji appears not to think independently at all since his decisions are governed exclusively by what others – his colleagues, his wives and society at large – will think of him. His behaviour is dictated by the standards and expectations of others, with any ounce of independent thought severed from his actual behaviour. We saw a glimpse of this autonomy when El Hadji told Yay Bineta that he would consult his wives over the decision to take a third wife. This, rather than being seen as his personal instinct and preference to consult another human being, was instead interpreted as his failure to conform to the straightjacket of Senegalese, bourgeois masculinity. Perceived as a weakness, the flame of El Hadji’s identity was swiftly blown out as he sought to submerge himself forcefully once again in dominant ideals of bourgeois masculine identity. Thus, El Hadji is a subject in the second sense, that of being subjected to ideological norms that govern his existence and to which he adheres in order to be a subject at all.

However, the disparity between El Hadji’s public image and his real self is revealed explicitly with the onset of his *xala*, as is illustrated in the following quotation: ‘Ce matin, l’anéantissement était à son comble. Stupéfait, El Hadji n’éprouvait plus rien [...] Toute la

²⁵⁰ It is common in many Islamic societies to expect the deflowering of a virgin on her wedding night to be a bloody affair. The blood-stained white sheets are sometimes kept as proof of the bride’s virginity and are often inspected by both sets of parents in order to ascertain the sexual status of the bride before her marriage. There are, however, traditional procedures and techniques that women can use in order to circumvent any potential problem but the presence of blood is commonly accepted as proof of the tearing of the hitherto intact hymen.

²⁵¹ Most critics accept without question that El Hadji’s *xala* is the result of a curse placed on him by the beggar who confronts and humiliates him at the end of both novel and film. However, Thomas J. Lynn rightly asserts that this is never confirmed by the text and maintains that the perpetrator of, or reason for, the curse is never explicitly revealed. He argues instead that the beggar waits for his chance to wreak revenge on El Hadji but is only able to do so – and to create the impression that he is the source of the curse – once he finds out from El Hadji’s driver Modu that El Hadji believes he is afflicted with the curse. In addition, he states: ‘Sembène seems to provide abundantly strong evidence for both an occult and a psychological explanation of El Hadji’s affliction’. See Thomas J. Lynn, ‘Politics, Plunder, and Postcolonial Tricksters: Ousmane Sembène’s *Xala*,’ *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 6:3 (2003), 183–196 (p. 187).

nuit il avait veillé, le corps détaché du désir, les nerfs sans liaison avec son centre nerveux' (p. 51) [*'He felt numbed [...] All night he had stayed awake, his body separated from his desire, his nerves disconnected from his nervous centre'* (p. 28)]. His belief in his sexual invincibility destroyed, El Hadji takes the blow to his masculinity badly, so much so that the fracture between his public and his private self manifests itself in psychosomatic terms. The detachment of his nerves from their roots in the central nervous system betrays a man unable to exercise any real subjectivity but equally unable any longer to cling to the normative role to which he was publicly so attached. Having struggled for so long to maintain an appropriate hegemonic public image, El Hadji's body finally reveals the very real tensions within.

From this point in the novel, El Hadji never regains his successfully complicit masculinity. As many critics have argued, El Hadji slid into corrupt dealings where he fraudulently acquired and sold his own clan's land for his own financial benefit. Nevertheless, it is worth reminding ourselves at this juncture that formerly, El Hadji had been a genuine and passionate supporter of the revolution that would bring about the independence of his country and which would lead to social equality. However, Thomas J. Lynn argues that El Hadji's 'appropriation of his clan's land, his misuse of rice, his amnesia, his history of not repaying debts are all ways in which El Hadji symbolized the post-independence African middle class that wrested colonial privileges for itself while forgetting the needs of the rest of its nation – whose resources it used to gain power'.²⁵² It would seem that somewhere along the way, El Hadji lost his clear convictions and became corrupted when he joined the ranks of a new social class that took up the reins left hanging by the coloniser. The subsequent breakdown that the *xala* provokes suggests that El Hadji had lost the capacity to think independently and to form any individual opinion that does not fit in with the criteria of this new bourgeois class, whose ideology is without doubt self-promoting and detrimental to the nation at large. Thus, having by now lived a life of lies, El Hadji plunges to new depths and the *xala* exposes the tensions of leading a deceptive life.

El Hadji's enslaved mentality, a product of his interpellation by the bourgeoisie and which is characterised by a determination to live up to public expectations rather than personal preference, is again highlighted when he ponders what to do regarding his situation. Having married N'Goné, he remains sexually impotent with her, as indeed he is powerless regarding his own future. He searches for any way to rid himself of the shame of this marital

²⁵² Lynn, 'Politics, Plunder, and Postcolonial Tricksters', p. 192.

misadventure. However, all of his escape routes are considered with other people's reactions in mind:

'Aimait-il N'Goné? Interrogation nébuleuse. Il pouvait se séparer d'elle sans douleur [...] La répudier, c'était porter atteinte à sa dignité de mâle. Quand bien même il aurait pris cette décision, il lui aurait été impossible de la traduire en acte. Que dirait-on de lui? Qu'il n'est plus un homme' (p. 53)

[*'Did he love N'Gone? The question brought no clear answer. It would not upset him to leave her [...] To repudiate her now would hurt his male pride. Even if he were to reach such a decision he would be incapable of carrying it out. What would people say? That he was not a man' (p. 29)*].

El Hadji is still entirely preoccupied by how he is viewed by society and his peers, that is to say, with retaining his place within the system. His public image overrides any subjective inclination. The *xala* therefore signals the overwhelming pressure of El Hadji's complicit gender strategy. By striving to maintain a hegemonic gendered identity, he never truly addresses his own wishes, a point that has led to a much broader impotence on his part. Rather than clinging to his political and revolutionary principles, El Hadji allowed himself to be led astray into the ambitious and self-serving world of the bourgeoisie. Similarly, El Hadji has gradually discarded his own genuine feelings and needs in favour of living a life that will satisfy public opinion. He cannot even decide whether he loves his new wife, an indecision that, by its very nature, suggests that he does not. However, he will not divorce her due to the effects this would have on his external appearance indicating an individual fully programmed to comply with gender dictates.

El Hadji's psychological afflictions emerge at this point for the first time, but they recur with frequency for the duration of the novel. His misery is manifested both physically and sexually. El Hadji is described as 'hagard' [*haggard*] (p. 51) and as 'affreusement déprimé' (p. 53) [*terribly depressed*]. Moreover, we are told:

El Hadji souffrait atrocement de son *xala*. Cette amertume s'était muée en un complexe d'infériorité devant ses pairs [...] Cette infirmité – peut-être passagère – le rendait incapable de toute communication avec ses employés, ses femmes, enfants et homologues. (p. 75)

[*El Hadji suffered greatly from his xala. His bitterness had become an inferiority complex in the company of his peers [...] He could not endure the asides, the way they laughed whenever he went past, the way they stared at him. His infirmity, temporary though it might be, made him incapable of communicating with his employees, his wives, his children and his business colleagues. (p. 43)*]

El Hadji's *xala* violently exposes him as the topic of local gossip and mockery. In short, in being ridiculed in this way El Hadji's position within the dominant masculine group – the

bourgeois clique – is imperilled greatly. The hegemonic masculine ideology of the novel requires power, status and superiority. El Hadji's inadequacy, not to mention his total (self-induced) isolation, as noted in the quotation, suggests El Hadji's exile from the normative masculinist system.

The theme of polygamy runs strongly through the entirety of the novel, and this theme serves only to accentuate the depth of El Hadji's loneliness. On the theme of polygamy, David Murphy asserts that:

In fact, the polygamous situation is experienced by many men as a daily burden that causes them a great amount of anxiety. The Senegalese man takes on second and third wives in order to fit in with traditional social patterns, but often finds that this places him under a lot of strain.²⁵³

In 'fit[ing] with traditional social patterns' we can assume that the polygamous situation serves as a means of enacting established norms of manhood. In relation to *Xala*, we might ask ourselves, where can El Hadji go without being scrutinised? During his depression and despite his wealth and standing, there is nowhere where El Hadji can go to feel at home and at ease, or indeed where he can escape the all-penetrating eye of society. He has no home of his own to speak of; his villas are viewed as the territory of his wives. The portrayal of his first wife, Adja Awa Astou, is pathetically servile, and yet even here, his first wife's passivity renders El Hadji ill at ease. In the villa of his second wife, he has to face the pressure from the now sexually hungry Oumi N'Doye, who makes no attempt to hide her frustration. The narrator tells us that these nights with his second wife are times of persecution, nights of 'supplice' – of torture (p. 100) due to his inability to perform sexually, and by extension, to perform masculine discursive scripts. On one occasion, El Hadji feels Oumi's breath on his face and her hands searching his body. Unresponsive, he is 'amoindri dans sa dignité de mâle' (p. 114) [*ashamed in his dignity as a man* (p. 66)]. Oumi remains 'tenant le sexe de l'homme amorphe' (p. 114) [*holding the penis of the amorphous man*].²⁵⁴ Tellingly, the adjective in this last quotation follows the noun 'homme', indicating El Hadji's paralysis as a man, and not simply his penile impotence. The polygamous situation that El Hadji uses to consolidate his masculinity, in actual fact, works against him, contributing to his downfall and accentuating his psychological problems.

In the newest villa, that of N'Goné, the young bride eagerly awaits the consummation of their marriage, with the threatening and emasculating figure of Yay Bineta looking on. In

²⁵³ Murphy, *Sembene: Imagining Alternatives in Film and Fiction*, p. 104.

²⁵⁴ My translation.

the office also, people are beginning to queue up and wait to speak to him demanding payment for services, deliveries or labour. It becomes evident that El Hadji has nowhere to hide and that even a simple siesta becomes an impossibility: 'Où [allait-it]? Chez la troisième? La deuxième? Chez la première, l'unique villa où il serait bien. Réflexions faites, il serait encore mieux à l'hôtel' (p. 106) [*'Where [could he go]? At his third's? His second's? His first's, the only villa where he would get any rest? On second thoughts he would do better to go to a hotel'* (p. 61)]. El Hadji makes his way to his usual hotel and is greeted by its Syrian owner, in the traditional Muslim fashion, 'lui tendant les deux mains à la mode musulmane' (p. 106) [*'with hand outstretched in the Muslim way'* (p. 61)]. The Syrian tells the anti-hero: 'Ici, c'est ta maison' (p. 107) [*'Here you are at home'* (p. 61)]. Again, El Hadji is invited into another discourse – this time not the proud assertion of African superiority over the *tubab*, but the brotherhood of pan-Islamism. The reality is that, for El Hadji, the transitory, impersonal and emotionally empty hotel room is the only place where he is free from scrutiny. Raymond Schenkel, in his study of sexual dysfunctions amongst Senegalese men, points to problems of integration with the wider community:

Ils se sentent affectés dans leur santé et handicapés dans leur vie sociale [...] Tous, en plus, ressentent une difficulté à s'adapter dans leur vie sociale et familiale. Ce sentiment est vif et ressenti comme insupportable. Nous pouvons parler sans crainte d'une pathologie de l'adaption.²⁵⁵

*[They feel their health is affected and that they are socially handicapped [...]
Furthermore, all experience a difficulty in adapting in their social and familial lives.
This feeling is vivid and perceived as unbearable. We can talk without any doubt of a
pathology of adaption.]*

Earlier, El Hadji took his polygamous status to be an expression of his success as a bourgeois man. Nevertheless, performing authorised masculinity induces an emotional and psychological pathology. As Mernissi asserts, polygamy is an institution that inhibits men from investing emotionally in any single woman. This point is certainly upheld in *Xala* where El Hadji is unable to forge any meaningful relationships with women, and more importantly, with his wives. His polygamous lifestyle begins to highlight his loneliness, particularly as he is increasingly ridiculed by his peers. Withdrawing to the impersonal privacy of an empty hotel room, El Hadji certainly seems to suffer from a degree of the pathology that Schenkel describes. The air-conditioning in the room, neutralising the stifling heat, points to El Hadji's

²⁵⁵ Raymond Schenkel, 'Le Vécu de la vie sexuelle des Africains acculturés du Sénégal, à partir de notions d'impuissance et de puissance sexuelle', *Psychopathologie Africaine*, 7:3 (1971), 313–386 (p. 371).

disassociation with his native country. Ironically, his mini-empire of three wives and eleven children can be seen as burdensome, exacerbating El Hadji's isolation.

El Hadji's interpersonal relations, particularly with his wives, demonstrate an acute emptiness of sexual/marital relationships. They are relations where manhood is characterised by clumsy sexual conquests and ultimately by a starvation of love and human warmth. El Hadji himself recognises this following an encounter with N'Goné:

Cette banale causerie, qui n'avait rien d'élevé ni de subtil, révéla à El Hadji qu'avec N'Goné il n'avait construit que sur du sable. Lui non plus n'avait pas de riches conversations, fines, délicates et spirituelles. Ce type d'êtres dans notre pays, cette 'gentry' imbue de son rôle de maître – ce rôle de maître commençant et se limitant à équiper la femelle et à la monter – ne goûtait nulle élévation, nulle finesse dans la correspondance verbale avec leur partenaire. (pp. 109–10)

[This banal chatter, which had nothing elevated or subtle about it, made El Hadji realize that with N'Gone he had built on sand. Not that he himself had much in the way of fine, delicate, or witty conversation. In our country, this so-called 'gentry', imbued with their role as master – a role which began and ended with fitting out and mounting the female – sought no elevation, no delicacy in their relations with their partners. (p. 63)]

El Hadji tentatively begins to recognise the vacuity of his relations with his wives, an assertion supported by the fact that the text uses the pluperfect tense for 'he had built on sand'. He also starts to detect the superficiality of his complicit breed of man. There is an implied consciousness in this apprehensive quotation that suggests an awareness of not only the illustrious façade of the bourgeoisie but also the futility behind that largely fictional image. The deprivation of human warmth and of fulfilling sexual/marital relations is an important revelation to El Hadji. The privileged layers of Senegalese society, where consumerism and status are the priorities, reveal that interpersonal human relations are rendered secondary or, indeed, non-existent.

El Hadji's attention is drawn again to the emotional void and meaninglessness of his marriages:

Effectivement, il disposait de trois villas, de trois femmes, mais où était réellement le 'chez lui'? Chez chacune il n'était que de passage [...] Il n'avait pour lui, nulle part, un coin pour se retirer, s'isoler. Avec chacune, tout commençait et s'achevait au lit [...] Cette révélation lui laissa un arrière-goût de regret. (p. 129)

[In effect, he had three villas and three wives, but where was his real home? At the houses of the three wives he was merely 'passing through' [...] He had nowhere a corner of his own into which he could withdraw and be alone. With each of his wives everything began and ended with bed [...] it left him with an after-taste of regret. (p. 75)]

Here, El Hadji regrets the absence of any meaningful personal, emotional and spiritual intimacy in his relationships for he does little more than go through the motions that are sanctioned by his peer-group, who adhere to an ideology whereby phallic potency as a means of subduing the female is a bedrock of virility. His manhood, his identity, his social status and even his *africanité* are skin-deep and built on lies and contradictions that are perilously close to collapse.

Irreconcilable Hybridity and the Quest for *Africanité*

The dénouement of *Xala* depicts the total collapse of El Hadji's gendered image and his relegation to the position of subordinate masculinity. By the final scene of the novel, he is left bankrupt, abandoned by two of his wives and their children, expelled from the 'Groupement des Hommes d'affaires' and is facing an unpleasant court case for the disappearance of funds under his responsibility. The final humiliation is the climactic scene where a group of social misfits, led by a beggar, enter his house and suggest that he take his clothes off and submit to being spat on. The only wife who does stay with him, Adja Awa Astou, has done so not out of love, support or concern but in order to carry out what she perceives to be her duty as a humble and obedient Muslim wife. Oumi N'Doye, realising there is nothing left to extract from El Hadji, disappears from his life, shortly followed by N'Goné, Yay Bineta and N'Goné's siblings (who were living with her in the villa bought by El Hadji). El Hadji is left with nothing but the glaring truth: he has no significant or meaningful bonds with anyone and his own, previous words ring truer than ever before – he has constructed everything on sand (p. 109).

The beggar is a significant character. Tellingly, his first appearance occurs a day or so following El Hadji's marriage to N'Goné, as the humiliated man ponders who might be responsible for the curse. His description in the narrative is highly revealing:

Le mendiant faisait partie du décor, comme les murs sales, les vieux camions transportant de la marchandise. Le mendiant était très connu à ce carrefour. Le seul qui le trouvait agaçant était El Hadji. El Hadji, maintes fois, l'avait fait rafler par la police. Des semaines après, il revenait reprendre sa place. Un coin qu'il semblait affectionner. (pp. 54–55)

[The beggar was part of the décor like the dirty walls and the ancient lorries delivering goods. He was well-known in the street. The only person who found him irritating was El Hadji, who had had him picked up by the police on several

occasions. But he would always come back weeks later to his old place. He seemed attached to it. (p. 30)]

As the narrative states, the beggar is part of the decor of post-independence Senegal, a constant presence that offsets the pretensions of the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, his position at the crossroads functions as a double-layered description, for not only is he constantly present at the crossroads outside El Hadji's shop, but more generally the beggar is a constant presence at the juncture between the colonial era and the 'new' Senegal. The beggar also functions as the collective moral conscience of Senegalese society. His presence therefore serves as a permanent and explicit reminder of the inadequacies of the political system, which explains the annoyance he causes El Hadji, himself emblematic of the ruling elite. The beggar threatens their moral superiority to govern by disclosing the oppression to which they are party.

El Hadji's emotional sterility as well as his sexual impotence are merely additional, more intimate displays of the barrenness of the entire Senegalese bourgeoisie. Indeed, Bernth Lindfors claims that most critics view El Hadji's 'sexual impairment [as] operat[ing] metonymically to signify a much larger systematic malfunction in the political economy of postcolonial Africa'.²⁵⁶ The corruption and futility of El Hadji's class should be related to a wider interpretation of hegemonic masculinity in postcolonial Senegal as a sick and waning construct of manhood, guilty of occupying the empty chair left behind by the coloniser.

El Hadji is a 'character' in the real sense of the word. He is complicit with the dominant gender order to such an extent that, ironically, he ceases to be a man of flesh and blood since he relinquishes any humanity and becomes a social construction on the most basic level. Critic Aly Khery N'Daw remarks that El Hadji is representative of a class of people who are 'des résidus de l'impérialisme' [*the residue of imperialism*].²⁵⁷ Despite the ambitious pretensions of El Hadji and his fellow 'Hommes d'affaires', they are in fact, in the words of Abanime: '[des] hommes de paille pour l'ancien colon' [*straw men of the former coloniser*].²⁵⁸ Once his dream is shattered, El Hadji reluctantly recognises this fact. By the end of the novel, the truth is undeniable not just to the reader, but to El Hadji himself. The same men who pose as the 'gentry' of Senegal and masquerade as successful, independent entrepreneurs are, in fact, powerless.

²⁵⁶ Linfors, 'Penetrating *Xala*', p. 65.

²⁵⁷ Aly Khery N'Daw, 'Sembene Ousmane et l'impuissance bourgeoise', *Jeune Afrique*, 694 (Avril 1974), p. 20.

²⁵⁸ Emeka P. Abanime, 'Le Symbolisme de l'impuissance dans *Xala* d'Ousmane Sembène,' *Présence Francophone: Revue Littéraire*, 19 (1979), 29-35 (p. 32).

Nevertheless, El Hadji's sexual problems, which are by now the topic of gossip and are public knowledge, expose his masquerade and by doing so, threaten those associated with him. Group dynamics reappear here as a strong force as the members of the 'Groupement' cling together for safety. As in the opening passages of the book, as well as at the wedding itself when members of the Chamber of Commerce stood united and boastful, towards the end of the novel El Hadji – humiliated and broken – becomes a liability and the 'Groupement' is quick to react. El Hadji hears that an emergency meeting has been called and that it is rumoured that he will be the focus of the meeting (p. 143). Incensed, he decides to confront the President but, symbolically, his Mercedes is being washed and he is obliged to travel by taxi.

The President's attitude is decidedly cooler than previously in the novel when he showed concern for El Hadji's predicament and even suggested remedies. This time, he merely remarks that El Hadji might have rung before descending on him. El Hadji gets straight to the point: 'Pourquoi suis-je l'objet d'une réunion' [*Why am I the subject of a meeting?*]. The president's retort is immediate: 'D'abord, où en es-tu avec ton *xala*?' (p. 144) [*First, have you been able to do anything about your xala?* (p. 85)]. The President's swift change of subject immediately disarms El Hadji, who is reminded once more of his failings as a man and his recent demotion in the masculine hierarchy. Indeed, one might even wonder if the President were in some way implicated in the curse. El Hadji's business record is, after all, chequered and the President's reply here could suggest a conspiracy to oust El Hadji, who is by now a liability, in order to preserve the social superiority of the Chamber.²⁵⁹

Moreover, the President goes on to give El Hadji a business lesson, allying himself all too clearly with Western influences: 'En affaire, il faut avoir la maîtrise saxonne, le flair américain et la politesse française' (p. 144) [*In business you must have the Englishman's self-control, the American's flair, and the Frenchman's politeness* (p. 85)]. He also lists his points by using the Italian 'primo' and 'secondo' (p. 145) demonstrating to what extent his aspirations are directed outwards towards Eurocentric economics rather than an African-evolved economy. He can therefore be read as condescending towards his own country which is not deemed capable of developing its own 'business' culture without imitating Western models. Furthermore, the President suddenly distances himself from the 'Groupement', denoting himself an 'arbitre' (*arbitrator*) (p. 145), a clear strategy of self-preservation should El Hadji's disgrace infect the Groupement irretrievably. This tactic is clearly understood by

²⁵⁹ In addition, the impotence first appears on El Hadji's wedding night, after having taken the aphrodisiac recommended by his Chamber of Commerce peers.

El Hadji, who recognises the scenario for having imposed it on others. He is made a scapegoat for the problems of the 'Groupement'.

In the meeting itself, one member in particular, Kébé, declares: 'Pour la moralité – notre moralité – El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye doit être exclu de notre famille' (p. 152) [*For our honour's sake, El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye must be expelled from our group*' (p. 91)]. Described satirically as 'un gars au teint de banana mûre, le visage long' (p. 152) [*a man with skin the colour of a ripe banana [and] a long face*' (p. 91)], Kébé corrects himself in this last quotation. The disparity between 'morality' and the Groupement's definition of the word is once more rendered all the more obvious by the dashes which function as visual signposts. Thus, the concept is commandeered by Kébé, its etymological meaning modified to suit corrupt post-colonial bourgeois ideology. El Hadji, Kébé argues, 'tarnishes' the Chamber (p. 153). Another member, Diagne, echoes this view by claiming 'notre groupement se doit de se blanchir de cette tache noire' (p. 154) [*Our group has a duty to clear itself of this [black] stain*' (p. 92)]. In protectionist mode, the Groupement collectively distances itself from El Hadji by proclaiming concern for the well-being of the people (p. 154) and leaves El Hadji's feeling like 'un abcès sur un organisme sain qu'il fallait vider' (p. 154) [*an abscess which had to be lanced*' (p. 92)]. This last quotation alludes to El Hadji's mental and physical state, portraying him as a contagion. The urgency with which El Hadji must be removed from the Groupement betrays the fragile foundations upon which the group is built. For despite their outward confidence and pretension, the members are all too aware of the precariousness of their complicit position.

The verb of importance in this episode, *désolidariser* (to dissociate), appears four times as El Hadji is mercilessly rejected and banished from the Groupement whose only hope in avoiding its own downfall is his expulsion. This is not purely an exile from the Chamber of Commerce, however, but ultimately represents a disembodiment from dominant ideals of bourgeois masculinity. Flushed out by the Groupement, El Hadji hits back:

Nous sommes des culs-terreux! Les banques appartiennent à qui? Les assurances? Les usines? Les entreprises? Le commerce en gros? Les cinémas? Les librairies? Les hôtels? etc., etc., etc. De tout cela et autres choses, nous ne contrôlons rien. Ici, nous sommes que des crabes dans un panier. Nous voulons la place de l'ex-occupant. Nous y sommes. Cette chambre en est la preuve. Quoi de changé, en général comme en particulier? Rien. Le colon est devenu plus fort, plus puissant, caché en nous, en nous ici présents. Il nous promet les restes du festin si nous sommes sages. Gare à celui qui voudrait troubler sa digestion, à vouloir davantage du profit. Et nous?... Culs-terreux, commissionnaires, sous-traitants, par fatuité nous nous disons 'Hommes d'affaires'. Des affairistes sans fonds. (pp. 155–156)

[We are a bunch of clodhoppers. Who owns the banks? The insurance companies? The factories? The businesses? The wholesale trade? The cinemas? The bookshops? The hotels? All these and more besides are out of our control. We are nothing better than crabs in a basket. We want the ex-occupier's place? We have it. This Chamber is the proof. Yet what change is there really in general or in particular? The colonialist is stronger, more powerful than ever before, hidden inside us, here in this very place. He promises us the left-overs of the feast if we behave ourselves. Beware anyone who tries to upset his digestion, who wants a bigger profit. What are we? Clodhoppers! Agents! Petty traders! In our fatuity we call ourselves 'businessmen'! Business men without funds. (pp. 92–3)]

El Hadji's reading of the situation is both astute and accurate. The bourgeoisie are as redundant and powerless as they are useless in terms of working for the good of the country precisely because, out of selfishness and lack of community spirit, they perpetuate colonialism. But this new brand of colonialism – neo-colonialism – is more subtle than the visible and military occupation of the past. El Hadji and his fellow bourgeois are guilty of embracing and imitating Western and colonial lifestyles, and fail to assert and pursue genuine Senegalese interests in a manner fit for the new era of independence. Indeed, even El Hadji's business, imports and exports, hardly touches African production lines. His products are wrapped in plastic and tinfoil, signalling the trappings of a globalised capitalist economy. His secretary-saleswoman (*secrétaire-vendeuse*) Madame Diouf regularly uses air-freshener to neutralise the odours of vegetables – the produce of African earth, a detail which also underlines the disjuncture between a proud but aloof global economy of which El Hadji strives to be a part, and the earthy and natural produce of Africa. In this alone, the bourgeoisie fail to serve their nation and the act of thieving from their fellow citizens compounds their betrayal. Enslaved by Eurocentric ideology, they show a marked disdain for their country of origin.²⁶⁰

One of the most significant eccentricities of the central protagonist is his refusal to drink anything other than Evian bottled water. He even uses Evian to wash his car and fill up its radiator, a behavioural trait that is almost farcical. Symbolically, during his brief stay with the healer Serigne Mada, El Hadji is a total misfit and his uneasy allegiance to his African heritage is betrayed by a Western appearance which stands in stark juxtaposition to the ultra-traditional healer. Desperately thirsty, El Hadji declines to accept the water that is offered to him. Water is a life-giving force without which few people would survive for more than a few days, and this life-giving liquid comes directly from the earth and from Africa itself. El

²⁶⁰ In another significant comparison, the film version sees El Hadji asking the Chamber if he may make his speech in Wolof. He is told that he cannot, and that French is the official language of the meeting.

Hadji's refusal to drink clean and pure African water represents a refusal of his African origins. It is also a further sign of his imitation of the former coloniser, a point that signals a desire to integrate himself into Eurocentric cultural discourse and reject his African roots.

El Hadji therefore flitters between African and Western, traditional and modern, public and private and finally authentic and false, unable to reconcile a series of dualistic binaries. Furthermore, when he does engage directly with native African cultural customs, he does so solely in order to bolster an image. His manipulation of Senegalese traditional customs does not assert a genuine *africanité*. It is for this reason that El Hadji's plans for greatness fall flat. His expulsion from the 'Groupement des Hommes d'affaires' means that his peers escape to continue profiteering because they fiercely close ranks. By designating El Hadji as their scapegoat, they succeed in maintaining an image that is unsullied by El Hadji's humiliating emasculation. Their survival is, nevertheless, a precarious one.

Harriet Lyons argues that West African folklore and mythology can serve to enlighten interpretations of literature and, in particular, of *Xala*. She notes that West African mythology abounds in examples of 'tricksters' who are lustful and greedy, with regard to food and/or women, and who are usually punished with 'actual or symbolic emasculation'.²⁶¹ She draws attention, in particular, to the hyena-man myth, a canon whereby 'impotence is attributed ironically to desire for all the trappings of powerful masculinity'.²⁶² According to this legend, a stranger vows to kill a hyena-man who is terrorising the village. He agrees to kill the beast on the condition that he will inherit the village chief's office and wives. His lust for power, as recompense for killing the hyena-man, is finally curtailed by an emasculation in the form of permanent impotence.²⁶³ Indeed, as Lyons argues convincingly, El Hadji offers a modern example of the power-hungry and lustful stranger. She also asserts: 'The *xala* itself is impotence suffered as a result of greed and abuse of male sexual privilege'.²⁶⁴ The stranger's lust for power and status in the fable stands in obvious parallel to El Hadji, whose masculine identity was built upon (unsubstantiated) status, wealth and sexual prowess. His demise therefore represents his failed normative masculine discourse, reflecting Schoene-Harwood's statement that all 'flesh-and-blood' men are unlikely to fulfil the 'phantasmatic' ideals of

²⁶¹ Harriet D. Lyons, 'The Uses of Ritual in Sembene's *Xala*', *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne des Etudes Africaines*, 18:2 (1984), 319–328 (p. 323).

²⁶² Lyons, 'The Uses of Ritual in Sembene's *Xala*', p. 323.

²⁶³ For a fuller account of the hyena-man tale, see Lyons, 'The Uses of Ritual in Sembene's *Xala*', p. 323 and Geneviève Calame-Griaule and Zidonis Ligers, 'L'Homme-hyène dans la tradition soudanaise', *L'Homme*, 1:2 (1961), 89–112.

²⁶⁴ Lyons, 'The Uses of Ritual in Sembene's *Xala*', p. 323.

hegemony.²⁶⁵ It is perhaps through El Hadji's emasculation that Sembene challenges the rapacious and power-hungry ideology of the ruling classes that has established itself firmly in (fictional) Senegal since independence.

The text does, nevertheless, offer examples of masculinity that are harmonious and do appear to reconcile successfully the binary oppositions that cause El Hadji so many problems. Rama's fiancé Pathé, for instance, emerges as symbolic of the modern Senegalese man, particularly with Rama at his side. Pathé is a doctor, is professional and educated, embracing positive elements of Western developments but crucially, without rejecting or regarding his native culture condescendingly. Whereas El Hadji is never explicitly portrayed as speaking anything other than the colonial language of French, Pathé and Rama speak Wolof together.²⁶⁶ Moreover, Pathé's first appearance in the text is at work, finishing his shift to meet his fiancée. Significantly, he changes into Senegalese clothes and sits quite happily as Rama drives him to a café. Even more revealing, his relationship with Rama is based on equality and mutual appreciation, rather than the objectification of women as occurs elsewhere in the text. He does not align himself, as his prospective father-in-law does, with the exploitative forces at work in society – with polygamy, male superiority over the female, with the coloniser and his legacy or with the less appealing trappings of Western cultural heritage. He therefore represents the antithesis of El Hadji – a new template for a masculine identity fit for the nation's future; an African masculinity that embraces femininity, modernity and tradition. Pathé and Rama are clearly portrayed as the optimistic future of Senegal, loyal to their traditions but open to necessary cultural evolution.

El Hadji's chauffeur, Modu, is another example of a positive image of manhood in *Xala*. Described as 'bon homme de la terre' (p. 107) [*a down-to-earth sort of man*' (p. 62)], Modu can happily and easily relate to all factions of Senegalese society. It is the loyal Modu who suggests one final attempt at solving El Hadji's impotence with a renowned healer whom he knows, Serigne Mada. The narration of the journey to visit Serigne Mada is steeped in rural, rustic imagery in which El Hadji stands out as a highly marginal figure. The Mercedes is unable to negotiate the roads to Serigne Mada's house, echoing El Hadji's inability to relate to the setting in which he finds himself. The pair have to take a horse-drawn cart in order to reach the healer and while Modu happily strikes up a conversation with its

²⁶⁵ Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men*, p. xii.

²⁶⁶ Sembene's linguistic interplay is much more evident in the film, where El Hadji is rarely portrayed as initiating a conversation in Wolof. With his daughter Rama, his estrangement from his native country is rendered all the more obvious as he speaks to her in French and she always answers in Wolof. The 'Groupement' too choose to communicate only in the colonial language.

driver, El Hadji remains pointedly isolated and regarded as a figure of curiosity by his fellow citizens (p. 119). Moreover, he is further removed from the context by the repeated remark 'c'est quelqu'un d'important' (p. 119) [*'it is someone important'* (p. 68)]. El Hadji struggles with the heat, sweating profusely: 'Les effleuves de chaleur, montant en vapeur vers un ciel vide, torturaient ses yeux non accoutumés' (p. 120) [*'the waves of heat rose in a misty vapour to the empty sky, torturing his eyes that were unaccustomed to it'* (p. 69)]. His rejection of the water and couscous offered to him at the healer's house, along with his depreciation of the sights and sounds of rural life, all underline his fracture with the rest of the Senegalese people. Whereas earlier in the text El Hadji differentiated himself from the *tubab*, establishing his superiority over the Western Other, in this context El Hadji is himself seen as Other: 'L'accoutrement de tubab faisait d'El Hadji un étranger et un fortuné' (p. 121) [*'his European dress meant that El Hadji was a stranger and a man of wealth'* (p. 69)]. Modu acts as El Hadji's mouthpiece in this unfamiliar context and illustrates the ease with which Modu can mediate the dissimilarity between El Hadji's bourgeois milieu and Serigne Mada's rustic world. El Hadji's marginalisation in this particular context reveals a profound inflexibility, indeed, a failure to engage with any other context outside of the class and gender ideology that predominates in the rich suburbs of Dakar.

Back in the capital, El Hadji's final humiliation constitutes the closing scene of the novel. A motley crew of lepers, beggars, cripples and other individuals ostracised and regarded with contempt by the dominating bourgeoisie enter Adja Awa Astou's villa. A leper tells him: 'Tu es une maladie infectieuse pour nous tous. Le germe de la lèpre collective' (p. 186) [*'you are a disease that is infectious to everyone. The virus of a collective leprosy!'* (p. 111)]. Significantly, however, the beggar who so irritated El Hadji previously and whose song recurrently punctuates the text, tells him that his *xala* can be cured. In order for this to happen, he is told he will have to strip naked and be spat on by the group. Tellingly, El Hadji volunteers himself accepting his subordination to those he would previously have considered his social inferiors. The African water rejected by El Hadji previously is regurgitated and spat back at him. As Thomas J. Lynn points out, being spat on, particularly in African cultures, renders the victim worthless, underpinning his subordination. Nevertheless, the ritual can also be seen as a process of cleansing that in Lynn's words 'neutralises the evil that is responsible for the unworthiness'.²⁶⁷ El Hadji, now exposed as decadent on almost all levels, appears to have been given a second chance which he tentatively chooses to take.

²⁶⁷ Lynn, 'Politics, Plunder, and Postcolonial Tricksters', p.193.

The text had already begun to offer slight hints that El Hadji had begun to recognise the worthlessness of his way of life. In the novel's finale, he submits to his punishment without complaint. As Lynn comments: 'El Hadji's rehabilitation [is] not only as a man in a sexual sense, but also as a true human being'.²⁶⁸ On a gendered level however, he relinquishes the dominant ideals of masculinity and his complicit positioning to which he clung for so long. In this respect, the spitting scene can be read not just as a moral or social cleansing, but also as a gendered disinfection. The domineering masculinity to which El Hadji sought to adhere, which required financial influence, masculine authority and social rights and prestige over others, is cast aside as El Hadji willingly submits to being spat on by a band of individuals marginalised by his former masculine ideology. This final incident marks El Hadji's severing from gendered middle class norms and his acceptance of a subject position outside of the dominant criteria of bourgeois manliness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, El Hadji's masculinity is predominantly a masquerade in which inner integrity and dignity have been replaced by superficial and ultimately unfounded wealth and power. He is afflicted not simply by the *xala* but by the sickness of irreconcilable hybridity. He becomes a perpetual misfit straddling the divide between personal business ambitions and patriotic duties. He proves unable to fully commit to serving his nation in a constructive way, intent as he is upon enacting (neo-colonial) discourses which constitute bourgeois masculinity in the novel. The pursuit of meaningful and egalitarian human bonds for which he fought pre-independence has been abandoned for an image that is based on authority over others. This conformist attitude leads him towards a polygamous lifestyle that outwardly confirms his status as a successful bourgeois man, and yet this is one of the principal factors that leads to his vacuous inter-personal relations with women, and therefore also his loneliness. Indeed, viewing polygamy as an institution which protects the male from overly close relations with women indicates how polygamy serves to perpetuate a disassociation from the female but also to emphasise male virility. In *Xala*, however, El Hadji's dilemma is attributable to the requirements of hegemonic masculinity, leading us to question to what extent complicity with dominant formulations of masculinity benefits men.

²⁶⁸ Lynn, 'Politics, Plunder, and Postcolonial Tricksters', p.193.

El Hadji's ailments are not manifested solely on a physical level, but also in emotional, and psychological ways. In line with Althusserian and Butlerian logic on 'the subject', he demonstrates no significant independent subjectivity throughout the majority of the novel, and instead assumes a heavily regulated identity that is complicit with masculine normativity. Aspiring to an exemplary paradigm of bourgeois masculinity, El Hadji becomes a hollow vehicle ripe for gendered, ideological imprint, foreclosing any meaningful agency. His anxiety and nervous depression signal a self that is trapped within a subjecthood which he himself actively seeks but which render him subjected at the same time. This leads to a situation in which public perceptions override individual morality and individual well-being. More than simply an unhappy individual, the fictional El Hadji is a caricature of the ruling elite in post-independence Senegal. Sembene's satire challenges the insidious impact of (gendered) bourgeois identity by revealing its frailties and hypocrisies, but also by deflating its influence. Understood in the novel as a self-serving, egocentric and harmful phenomenon, the hegemonic male is dethroned and deflated morally, socially, economically and sexually. El Hadji's masquerade is shattered and he is unceremoniously demoted to a position of complete subordination.

Rebellion and Renegotiation in Rachid Boudjedra's *La Répudiation*

Introduction

Whereas the main masculine subject position explored in *Xala* was that of complicity, with El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye utterly devoted to becoming the discursively authorised of man that circulates within his bourgeois environment, *La Répudiation* portrays several contrasting masculine subject positions. The patriarch Si Zoubir is comparable to, if not far more fearsome than, El Hadji, and he is also intent on maintaining the pretence of domination and stoic, self-asserted control over himself, his family and his tribe. His formidable persona is intermittently deflated by the author, his mental state also illustrating the disparity between his public image and private turmoil at certain times. Thus, like El Hadji, Si Zoubir is emblematic of a type of man that has answered the interpellative call and who actively engages in complicity with normative gender in order to bolster his public status. Nevertheless, in contrast to El Hadji, Si Zoubir's status is never really in question. His sons, by contrast, represent very different masculine positions. Both sons suffer acutely from the cruelty exerted on them by their father. Indeed, more than simply unhealthy paternal-filial relations, the text actually portrays the sons as being in direct competition with their father for masculine supremacy. Rachid hesitates at first, but later attempts to compete with his father and appropriate his dominant hold. Later, however, he finds himself subordinated to several forces in society, not simply his father. His older brother, Zahir, is a far more disruptive character, rejecting the gendered order that his father represents and bringing about his expulsion from that order. *La Répudiation*, therefore, offers examples of a complicit stance towards normative masculinity, as well as subordinate and marginalised roles in the form of the two sons. It therefore provides a fascinating depiction of negotiations of masculine identity.

La Répudiation was a scandalous text when it was first published in 1969. It deals in detail with many of the topics considered taboo by other North African authors, containing graphic sexual content, as well as tackling issues that many Algerians would prefer to avoid entirely. Furthermore, *La Répudiation* is often seen as a heretical text, in that it appears to directly criticise traditional Islamic values, a view obviously shared by others since Boudjedra has had the rather dubious honour of having a *fatwa* decreed against him. Unlike

in *Xala*, the narrative focus of *La Répudiation* lies not with the father, but with Rachid, second son to Si Zoubir and a woman only ever referred to as Ma (mother). Nevertheless, the father figure is absolutely central to readings of the novel. Kenneth Harrow argues that 'Boudjedra allegorizes [Rachid's] personal struggle, thus elevating the angry, sad history of his family to the level of a national metaphor of oppression'.²⁶⁹

The character of Si Zoubir, therefore, is the embodiment of oppression, both within the family hierarchy but also because he, like El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye, is symbolic of the repressive regime that followed the foreign occupation of Algeria. Having borne several children and having, seemingly, been a faithful wife, Ma is suddenly abandoned at the age of thirty, and is condemned to live out the rest of her days in a lonely, asexual existence. We hear little about the daughters of Si Zoubir and Ma, since Rachid and his older brother Zahir constitute the main focus of the text, which has no clear-cut, chronological progression to speak of. It jumps back and forth, the flashbacks echoing the son-narrator's haunting hallucinations. The text takes the form of the narration of Rachid's childhood and adolescence to Céline, his French lover. Zahir, who is homosexual, embarks on a passionate and destructive affair with alcohol, and eventually dies, to his father's relief and delight.²⁷⁰ Rachid fares a little better, but spends periods of time in a mental institution due to his hallucinations and delusions, struggling to be recognised within the ideological system or, indeed, to maintain a degree of sanity.

Masculinity and The Patriarch

The act that gives this novel its title, the repudiation of Rachid's mother, functions as a kind of Pandora's box, for, once Ma is repudiated, all morality and common decency within the family and tribe appear to disintegrate. It is a tragic and saddening act by the formidable patriarch of the tribe, Si Zoubir. The mother resigns herself to this fate with considerable stoicism and dignity. Shaking in response to her husband's damning declaration, his wife struggles not to faint, whereas bestial and apathetic: 'Le père continue à manger, très lentement comme à son habitude. Pour lui, tout continue à couler dans l'ordre prévisible des

²⁶⁹ Kenneth Harrow, 'Metaphors for Revolution: Blood and Schizophrenia in Boudjedra's Early Novels', *Présence Francophone*, 20 (1980), 5-19 (p. 6).

²⁷⁰ It is worth remembering here the arguments put forth by Jarrod Hayes, who claims that there are no equivalent terms or categories for hetero/homo/bi-sexual in North African society. Jarrod Hayes, 'Approches de l'homosexualité et de l'homoérotisme chez Boudjedra, Mammeri et Sebbar', *Présence francophone*, 43 (1993), 149-180 (p. 151). However, it seems less problematic to use the term in the context of *La Répudiation* due to the fact that the term is used explicitly in the novel.

choses. Il prend plaisir à mastiquer en rythme sa viande'²⁷¹ [*'Our father continues eating, very slowly as usual. For him everything continues to flow in the foreseeable order of things. He enjoys his rhythmic chewing of the meat'*].²⁷² Such a momentous decision, one that will haunt his wife and children for the remainder of their lives, appears to be of little consequence to Si Zoubir. Described as rhythmically chewing on his meat, Si Zoubir's animalistic characterisation underlines his indifference. His total lack of human warmth or empathy is startling, to say the least. The 'ordre prévisible' outlines to what extent Si Zoubir's view of order is alienated from reality. It points ironically towards the *disorder* that will ensue. As if to further highlight the mundanity of his declaration, Ma pathetically awaits his next command: 'Elle attend un ordre' (p. 34) [*'she expects an order'* (p. 36)].

The pathetic reality of life with Si Zoubir is a depressing combination of indifference and emptiness, but above all submission:

Elle se déshabille en silence et très lentement, comme on va à l'échafaud [...] Trente ans. Si Zoubir lui caresse vaguement le pubis [...] Un spasme banal! La communication presque évidente devient bâclée. Prise. Elle aurait passionnément hurlé, mais seul un soupir d'aise s'échappe de la bouche de mon père [...] Un peu de sperme sur la cuisse de Ma atteste l'acte-rot [...] Il faudrait s'habiller et quitter la chambre. Le père dort déjà. (pp. 34–5)

[*She undresses in silence and very slowly, as if going to the gallows [...] Thirty years old. Si Zoubir vaguely caresses her pubic region [...] A mere common spasm! Almost self-evident communication is botched. Taken. She herself would have cried out in passion but a mere sigh of relief escapes from my father's mouth [...] A little sperm on Ma's thigh bear witness to the belch-act [...] She will have to get dressed and leave the bedroom. Father is already asleep.* (p. 36)]

Si Zoubir's sexual performance amounts to nothing more than copulation, devoid of intimacy, passion or love, a point that again underscores his lack of humanity and portraying him as a man fully socialised to expect sexual satisfaction.²⁷³ Boudjedra's use of the conditional tense here cruelly juxtaposes what *may* have been with the disappointing reality that is. Thus, the dominant masculinity displayed here is expressed by sexual prowess at its crudest. The rather formal, perhaps even clinical term 'sperme' aptly illustrates the limitations of Si Zoubir's sexual performance since it is just that; a cold and clinical act of sex with little, if any, consideration for his wife. The female body is reduced to a receptacle,

²⁷¹ Rachid Boudjedra, *La Répudiation* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1969), p. 33. All subsequent quotations in French and page references relating to the French original will be parenthesised in the text.

²⁷² Rachid Boudjedra, *The Repudiation*, trans. by Golda Lambrova (Colorado Springs, Co.: Three Continents Press, 1995), p. 35. All subsequent quotations in English and page references relating to the English edition will be parenthesised in the text.

²⁷³ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 95.

and the anonymity of the wife, referred to only in relation to her status as a mother, appears to validate this.²⁷⁴

In addition to the pathetic sexual servility to which the female is subjected in the above quotation, masculinity's total ascendancy over the female is exemplified a few pages later as Ma's life is turned upside down by the unchallengeable desire of her husband:

La répudiation est inéluctable: ainsi en a décidé mon père [...] Si Zoubir a le bon Dieu de son côté, aussi a-t-il laissé tomber très calmement la phrase qui condense son désir de prendre une deuxième femme. Ma, elle n'a rien. Divinité médiocre qui se contente de justice marginale! [...] Ma ne s'y trompe pas, elle sait qu'il faut rester digne et se faire à l'idée de l'abandon [...] et Ma, quoique fraîchement répudiée, reste soucieuse du bien-être de Si Zoubir. (p. 35)

[Repudiation is inevitable: so be it: father has decided [...] Si Zoubir has the Lord on his side, which is why he casually let slip the sentence hinting he wished to take a second wife. Ma for her part has nothing. What a paltry divinity to be satisfied with such marginal justice! [...] Ma makes no mistakes, knows she must remain dignified, get used to the idea of being abandoned [...] and Ma, though she has been freshly repudiated, remains concerned with the well-being of Si Zoubir. (pp. 36–37)]

The syntax at the beginning of this last quotation is significant, because it presents the father's decision as an absolute truth. Indeed, it is clear from this passage that marriage within Boudjedra's fictional Algerian society is merely a replacement term for sexual slavery and domestic drudgery. The final humiliation, after having left Si Zoubir to sleep in peace, is Ma's insistence on tending to his every need and ensuring his well-being. Boudjedra presents this almost as a legal argument – 'Si Zoubir avait le bon Dieu de son côté' [*'Si Zoubir had the Lord on his side'*] and 'Ma, elle n'a rien' [*'Ma [...] has nothing'*], followed closely by 'justice marginale' [*'marginal justice'*]. This legal terminology is continued when the narrator relates: 'Pour répudier Ma, Si Zoubir se fondait sur son bon droit et sur la religion: sa femme, elle comptait sur l'abstraction des formules magiques' (p. 37) [*'In repudiating her Si Zoubir was merely making use of his legal and religious rights, while for her part his wife was counting on the abstraction of magic formulae'* (p. 38)]. Thus, masculinity aligns itself with reason and law, whilst femininity is relegated to the ambiguous sphere of the occult, demonstrating the normalisation of masculinity by religious and cultural customs, starkly juxtaposed with the marginalisation of femininity. In line with Islamicate customs, Si Zoubir is firmly in control, his sense of complicit masculinity bolstered by the subjugation of his (repudiated) wife.

²⁷⁴ It could also be argued that the son's narrative is another way of objectifying the female. Indeed, not only does she remain nameless and exploited by her husband, although Ma's repudiation forms the central reference point of the novel, she herself is almost entirely excluded from the debate, appearing only fleetingly and never given an opportunity to express herself. Thus, she is doubly marginalised by a masculine narrative that focuses on masculine reactions to her abandonment.

Michelle Bakdache-Laygues argues that the religious rituals that appear to give the novel its structure are in fact indicative of a 'régime de la virilité triomphante du héros' [*a regime of the triumphant virility of the hero*].²⁷⁵ Emphasising the highly masculinised nature of these rituals, she adds:

La figure du père renvoie à *l'archétype du monarque dominateur*. La société islamique est une société patriarcale où l'homme exerce sur la famille toute entière une autorité sans borne. C'est le père qui égorge le mouton; le massacre d'animaux cornus étant exaltation et appropriation de la force. Par la verticalité du geste meurtrier, il affirme son pouvoir, sa puissance, sa virilité. (Italics in original)²⁷⁶

[*The figure of the father refers to the archetype of the dominating monarch. Islamic society is a patriarchal society in which man exercises limitless authority over the entire family. It is the father that cuts the sheep's throat, the slaughter of horned animals representing an exalted appropriation of strength. Through the vertical position of the murderous gesture, he asserts his power, his strength and his virility.*]

Bakdache-Laygues's statement echoes those of Mernissi and Bouhdiba regarding the primacy of the male in the family unit. Fatherhood is a status designed to subdue, by violent means if necessary. Si Zoubir is the all-powerful patriarch whose brutal repudiation of his first wife is synonymous with her metaphorical death. His position of slaughterer-in-chief during the various religious rituals symbolises his wider sphere of power over his family and tribe, and therefore the metaphorical slaughter of his wife, and, later on, his sons. Bakdache-Laygues underlines the parallel between animal sacrifice and women's sexuality – the knife symbolises the phallus, and the bleeding wound of the animal the sexually ravished female body.²⁷⁷ She concludes: 'la mort violente de l'animal est liée à l'idée d'une mort lente des femmes' [*The violent death of the animal is linked to the slow death of women*],²⁷⁸ thus echoing Eva L. Corredor's interpretation of Ma's repudiation as a 'living death'.²⁷⁹ Ma is the first victim sacrificed to satisfy the sexual whims of an ageing patriarch.

Furthermore, this exhibition of masculinity – a performance in the most obvious sense which is expressed through the act of slaughtering the sheep at Eid – underlines the inability of Rachid and his brother Zahir to internalise their father's masculine script adequately. The two brothers are greatly troubled by the disturbing display of blood, violence and the

²⁷⁵ Michelle Bakdaches-Laygues, 'Le Rite sacrificiel et le mythe d'Abraham dans *La Répudiation* de Rachid Boudjedra', in *Mythe-rite-symbole: 22 essais littéraires*, ed. by Gilbert Cesbron (Angers: Université d'Angers, 1985), pp. 351–364 (p. 352).

²⁷⁶ Bakdaches-Laygues, 'Le Rite sacrificiel', p. 355.

²⁷⁷ Bakdache-Laygues, 'Le Rite sacrificiel', p. 356.

²⁷⁸ Bakdache-Laygues, 'Le Rite sacrificiel', p. 356.

²⁷⁹ Eva. L. Corredor, '(Dis)embodiments of the Father in Maghrebian Fiction', *French Review*, 66 (1992), 295–304 (p. 297).

convulsing animal in the throes of death, and reject the narrative of masculinity paraded by their father out of sheer repugnance. However, as Kenneth Harrow points out, the mutilation of the sheep appears as a 'test' of the sons' manliness, a manliness that can only be acquired by reneging on a sense of humanity.²⁸⁰ Indeed, the narrator relates that his uncles 'exigeaient de nous un comportement serein et un maintien viril et il n'y avait de place pour aucune mièvrerie, pour aucun chancellement' (pp. 202–203) [*demanded we behave with calm and manly restraint and there was no room for any simpering, for any faltering* (p. 159)].

Nevertheless, their aversion invites the women's mockery in the form of sarcastic remarks and a rather cruel insistence that they touch the warm flesh of the freshly slaughtered animal (p. 203). Kenneth Harrow argues that: 'In the children's own weakness and in their father's rejection of them, they saw themselves relegated to the ranks of the women, and ultimately to the position of the sheep'.²⁸¹ Their horror at the ritual played out before them indicates that both sons fall at the first hurdle in the process of becoming a man by refusing the hailing of the event and, in turn, not qualifying as men within that system, placing them instantly in a position of dubious masculinity. Thus, even at such a young age, they find themselves positioned in direct opposition to their own father, the head of the tribe who so fully embodies the principle of dominating, aggressive and uncompromising masculinity.

Upon repudiating his first wife, Si Zoubir's attentions turn towards a fifteen-year old girl, named Zoubida (literally 'Cream of Butter'). There is a strong implication in the text that this marriage is conceived on the part of Zoubida's family out of financial necessity, the female body once more offered in sacrifice to please a masculine desire. In the Biblical myth of Abraham, the patriarch is ready to sacrifice his son to prove his love for and belief in God. In *La Répudiation*, a struggling family sends their daughter to the altar to ease their poverty.²⁸² In parallel to the situation of N'Goné in Sembene's *Xala*, the young female here becomes the target for male sexuality, her body appropriated by the male for sexual gratification but also in order to enhance social prestige. As is the case with El Hadji's third wife, the financial plight of Zoubida's family results in them trading their teenage daughter in return for the prospect of one less mouth to feed and a significant dowry. In a further parallel, the choice of bride ensures that masculine superiority cannot be challenged by a wealthier or more influential family.

²⁸⁰ Harrow, 'Metaphors for Revolution', p. 6.

²⁸¹ Harrow, 'Metaphors for Revolution', p. 7.

²⁸² 'Zoubida, achetée à quinze ans par mon père' (p. 123) [*Zoubida, purchased by my father at the age of fifteen*] (p. 101), 'la mère de Zoubida avait besoin de l'argent' (p. 124) [*Zoubida's mother needed money*] (p. 102).

The representation of this second marriage, and in particular the wedding night, is disturbing and is a clear parallel to the bloody slaughter of the sacrificial lamb:

Noces drues. La mariée avait quinze ans. Mon père, cinquante. Noces crispées. Abondance de sang. Les vieilles femmes en étaient éblouies en lavant les draps, le lendemain. Les tambourins, toute la nuit, avaient couvert les supplices de la chair déchirée par l'organe monstrueux du patriarche. (p. 64)

[*Harsh wedding. The bride was fifteen years old. My father was fifty. Tense wedding. Plenty of blood. The old women were dazzled by it as they washed the sheets the following day. Throughout the night the sound of the drums had drowned out the torments of the flesh rent by the monstrous organ of the patriarch. (p. 57)*]

Marriage here is chiefly characterised by blood and violence, and as Bakdache-Laygues suggests in the quotation above, it mirrors the slaughter of animals in a show of authoritative virility. Indeed, this description bears more resemblance to a rape than to conventional sexual relations. Even the tambourines act as drums of war. The staccato sentences highlight the sinister aspects of this union. The use of the adjective 'ébloui' to describe the reactions of the old women washing the marital sheets following the savage consummation of the union is revealing. The verb *éblouir* can be translated as 'dazzled' or 'blinded' but it does not particularly indicate any negative connotation. This is telling, since it would seem that Si Zoubir's ferocious sexual performance is greeted with acceptance, or perhaps even admiration, indicating the violent nature of male heteronormative sexuality. Zoubida's first sexual experience is comparable to bloody torture ('les supplices'), and of the tearing of skin by a phallus reminiscent of a knife, an allusion to the slaughter of animals. Indeed, Si Zoubir's ferocious consummation of the marriage underlines his dominating intentions, though in a far more aggressive way than El Hadji in *Xala*. Whereas El Hadji's failure to fulfil his marital duties signals his failure to adhere to dominant notions of masculinity, for Si Zoubir there is no room for such faltering virility. Male sexuality in this particular context, therefore, is positioned in stark opposition to femininity, which is clearly perceived as a force meriting violent subdual. Much later, Rachid denounces his father's perverse and rather sadistic sexuality when he wonders how many times he has stumbled across his father raping young girls in rags, luring them into his shop with a few coins and exploiting their poverty in such appalling fashion (p. 242).

The female body is therefore transformed into, and perceived as, the quarry of a proud and brutal heterosexual masculinity. Si Zoubir is hostile, raging and bloodthirsty, and the phallus-as-knife is a clear attempt by the author to render masculinity pathological. For Si

Zoubir is depicted as not simply subduing a passive female, but also symbolically murdering her, thus alluding to the extreme violence perpetuated against women to which Gilmore refers.²⁸³ The institution of marriage is constructed in a sacrificial light, echoing Bruce Dunne's assertion that adult males are socialised to receive sexual pleasure through dominating their partner.²⁸⁴

Sexual prowess, along with a rather violent sexuality, is part of an image that Si Zoubir strives to maintain:

Le nouveau marié restait invisible pendant de longues journées et, lorsqu'il réapparaissait, il aimait exhiber surnoisement des cernes d'homme comblé, suggérant des orgies interminables. En fait, il était conscient de faire l'amour à une gamine et cette idée perverse l'excitait par-dessus tout. (p. 65)

[*The new bridegroom remained invisible for days on end and, when he did reappear, enjoyed artfully displaying the shadows under the eyes of a man whose desires are completely fulfilled, suggesting interminable orgies. In fact he was aware that he was making love to a juvenile and this perverse idea was what excited him above all else. (p. 58)*]

As was the case in *Xala*, women exist largely to be appropriated by men, to satisfy male desire but also to consolidate a public image of masculinity. Clearly, stamina plays an important role in Si Zoubir's sexuality, a point supported by the fact that Si Zoubir eagerly consumes honey to ensure that he is still up to the job and still capable of 'sexual assertiveness'.²⁸⁵ *La Répudiation* depicts sexual prowess as a principal feature of manhood, as outlined by sociological scholarship.²⁸⁶ Initially, Si Zoubir is aroused and excited by the prospect of sleeping with a virgin, and the quotation insists in particular upon Zoubida's status as a young girl ('une gamine'), and her youth and inexperience are therefore symptomatic of her vulnerability. This underlines the notion of sexual territorialisation as well as Si Zoubir's need to feel powerful, and his desire for unproblematic vehicles which will permit him this sense of power. By choosing a very young wife, Si Zoubir's satisfaction is guaranteed since she will not have been 'conquered' by any other man and allows him to bolster his own sense of masculine achievement by her inexperience and defencelessness. Thus, Zoubida's unfortunate status as second wife merely reiterates the view that women in *La Répudiation* are dehumanised and relegated to the status of object, whose sole purpose is

²⁸³ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 40.

²⁸⁴ Dunne, 'Power and Sexuality in the Middle East', p. 10.

²⁸⁵ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 40.

²⁸⁶ Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 40; Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 117; Roded, *Women in Islam and the Middle East*, p. 159. This point seems equally important in Western masculinity(-ies) too. See Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion*, pp. 207–208.

that of pleasing the male (or indeed, whose only significance is in serving the male purpose, as can be found in the narrator's own story for instance). Si Zoubir audaciously insists that his first wife will help prepare for his second wedding, regardless of her feelings on the matter. Masculinity then, for Si Zoubir at least, is built upon the sub-class of people – read women – rendered available for his use and convenience who are powerless to challenge their exploitation.

Si Zoubir's actions are sanctioned by religious law and in essence, he has done nothing wrong as his actions are complicit with normative enactments of manliness. However, Boudjedra here strongly criticises the inadequacies of a religious and social system that, in seeking to prevent *zina*, actually perpetuates an acute injustice of which women are the sacrificial victims.²⁸⁷ Institutions such as polygamy and repudiation, as Mernissi argues, were designed to prevent the return to *jahiliya*. Their objective was to civilise and maintain social order. Mernissi herself, despite drawing attention to the fact that Islam as a religion 'affirm[s] [a] potential equality between the sexes',²⁸⁸ describes women as a 'supply of sexual objects', an apt description of Si Zoubir's sexual conquests in *La Répudiation*. Si Zoubir sits, knife in hand, at the head of a society with a social order – and a socially sanctioned ideal of masculinity – built upon female subjugation condoned by both religion on the one hand, and cultural customs on the other.

Si Zoubir, as an Algerian patriarch *par excellence*, highlights the significance of Islamic customs by the patriarchal order. Indeed, he echoes El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye in that respect, since he refers to Islamic dictates in order to justify his actions. Nevertheless, it could be argued that Si Zoubir goes further than El Hadji, by manipulating these practices so openly. He is first mentioned in the text during the fasting month of Ramadan, which is both ironic and significant: 'Le père se rangeait-il? Certainement, mais pour un mois seulement, juste le temps de donner son dû à Dieu et de se laisser de sa nouvelle femme; ensuite, il reprendrait ses siestes orgiaques avec ses autres maîtresses' (p. 24) [*Was father settling down? Certainly, but only for a month, just long enough to render to God his due and to tire of his new wife; then he would resume his orgiastic siestas with his other mistresses*' (pp. 27–28)]. In fact, it is not insignificant that Boudjedra names this character 'Si Zoubir', a name that could be translated as 'Mr Prick'. He is therefore the personification of an active and

²⁸⁷ Indeed, Mernissi also grapples with this question: 'The somewhat ridiculous aspect of repudiation did not escape Allah himself, who warned the believer entrusted with the power to break the marital bond with a mere spoken formula not to make 'the revelations of Allah a laughing-stock (by your behaviour).' (Brackets in the original). Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 50.

²⁸⁸ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 19; Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 116.

insatiable sexuality. Clearly, religious observances are but token gestures for Si Zoubir, who spends the rest of the year flouting the less appealing societal (and religious) laws that would govern his existence. Even the possession of a new wife does not suffice: 'Mon père, au fond, n'était qu'à demi avalé par le sexe de sa jeune femme' (p. 85) [*My father was in fact only half consumed by the sexual organs of his young wife* (p. 73)]. This exciting new conquest of a young girl is but a fleeting thrill. There are textual references to his many mistresses, so numerous in fact that the narrator does not deem it necessary to mention them all by name. Even during the wedding night itself, his mistresses bemoan Si Zoubir's long absences (presumably to consummate the marriage). The fact that they are invited at all might raise an eyebrow, but it is nevertheless indicative of a social order portrayed as a total moral vacuum over which Si Zoubir presides.

Moreover, on another level, Si Zoubir's sexual prowess and hunger for fresh conquests are tightly intertwined with a ravenous sexual appetite. In Boudjedra's text, heteronormative sexuality has a much more concrete and sinister role – that of acquiring and consolidating power. The enforced sexual subordination of women to men is rendered an empowering feature, allowing men to consolidate authority, not simply over women but over each other too. The link between the bloody sacrificial rituals of Islam and women's menstrual blood signals a gendered dynamic that is necessarily hierarchical and power-thirsty. Male heterosexuality is thus much more than sexual. It is political and central to the social order used to build and maintain a network of useful social contacts.

For instance, one of Si Zoubir's mistresses is French, and he uses his affair with her in order to learn and perfect his French, a move that ultimately consolidates his position as head of the tribe:

Très vite, le père domina la langue française et, comme il était déjà versé dans la langue arabe, son autorité sur la tribu entière devint écrasante. Les oncles, eux, rampaient et n'osaient élever la voix; d'autant plus que le père s'était arrangé pour rafler tout le capital de la famille en pactisant, au moment voulu, avec l'autorité coloniale. (p. 75)

[*Father rapidly mastered the French language and as he was already well-versed in Arabic his authority over the entire tribe became crushing. The uncles crawled before him and didn't dare raise their voices; especially since father had managed to clean out all the family capital by colluding with the colonial authorities. (p. 66)*]

Significantly, it is by engaging with the colonial language, and thereby with colonial discourse and influence, that Si Zoubir cements his place as supreme dictator over the tribe, his authority described as 'crushing'. Indeed, his influence is such that his brothers 'crawl' at

his feet in a subservient manner indicative of their subordinate role. Si Zoubir, by contrast, is revealed to be the epitome of the hegemonic male. Corredor states that he:

[...] learns French from his French mistresses and thus gains increasing power and so-called 'respectability' in town. He partakes in the windfalls of post-colonialism by playing the game of the new capitalist 'liberators' and their corrupt ways of running the city.²⁸⁹

Corredor's assertion is upheld when it is later revealed that Si Zoubir wins a lawsuit against a French man for running over one of his sisters, thanks to the fact that the judges are all French but, significantly, also all friends of his (p. 207). He therefore exercises a considerable amount of influence, due to his carefully chosen allegiances.

Therefore, Si Zoubir is a calculating character and a sophisticated negotiator.

Following Algeria's liberation from the colonialists, his position changes radically as he aligns himself with the Secret Members of the Clan ('les Membres Secrets du Clan' [p. 214]), independence forces fighting French control but oppressing the Algerian population with the ferocious zeal of Islamic fundamentalism following the country's independence. Indeed, by this point of the novel, Si Zoubir appears to have integrated himself fully with these anti-French forces, and profits from their tyranny because they incarcerate and interrogate Rachid, who knowingly comments: 'Ma mère, ne recevant pas de mes nouvelles, ameuterait Si Zoubir qui serait très heureux de me savoir entre les mains de ses amis et ne ferait rien pour intervenir en ma faveur et me faire libérer, lui, membre influent du Clan' (pp. 221–222) [*my mother, if she heard no news of me would rally Si Zoubir who would be delighted to know I was in the hands of his friends and do nothing to intercede in my favour to get me released, influential member of the Clan though he was* (p. 173)]. Thus, Si Zoubir is somewhat of a Machiavellian character, constantly repositioning himself in line with different discursive and cultural forces in order to seize the best deal. He reveals himself to be opportunistically self-mutating, his masculinity, despite possessing some stable and constant features, readily modified to adapt to new situations.

Boudjedra's portrayal of hegemonic Algerian manhood presents us with a figure whose (mis)use of religious safeguards actually creates a broader, endemic disorder. Si Zoubir is hypocritical and egotistic. He rules a community in which lust, debauchery, violence, greed and pride are all behavioural norms. His selective use of the religious dictates of Islam signals his changing allegiances but it also emphasises a masculine identity that is

²⁸⁹ Corredor, '(Dis)embodiments of the Father', p. 298.



not fixed and which is capable of mutation when required. He is also indicative of the rapacious, tyrannical and hypocritical ruling classes of Algeria in the early post-colonial era.

The effects of alienation from the father figure are felt keenly by both Rachid and Zahir, not simply following his abrupt departure from their day-to-day lives, but throughout the narrator's life.²⁹⁰ It is the theme of fatherhood that reveals the side-effects of a chameleon-like masculinity. Robert Connell believes the father figure to be one of the principal means by which the 'social reproduction of hegemonic masculinity' is possible since male children identify readily with the father.²⁹¹ Rachid, the son-narrator, tells us: 'La rupture avec le père était totale: il ne venait plus à la maison' (pp. 38-9) [*The break with father was total: he no longer came to the house* (p. 39)]. Si Zoubir's masculine determination and control, which is in accordance with hegemonic masculine criteria, is problematised by his destabilising effect on the entire family. Rather than being the strong head of the family, as he likes to perceive himself, Si Zoubir's character can, in this instance, be interpreted as invoking a far-reaching disorder. He is both present and absent, a fact underlined by the next quotation:

Ma était mortifiée par l'ingérence de Si Zoubir dans sa vie intime; le patriarce réalisait ainsi une victoire totale. Après avoir répudié sa femme, il la mettait devant le fait accompli de son autorité permanente et, du même coup, il nous plaçait nous, ses enfants, dans une situation impossible. Entre nous, il disposait une barrière d'hostilité qu'il s'ingéniait à consolider. Effarés, nous allions nous abîmer dans cette lutte difficile où les couleurs ne sont jamais annoncées: la recherche de la paternité perdue. (pp. 40-1)

[*My mother was mortified by the interference of Si Zoubir in her private affairs; thus the patriarch achieved total victory. After having repudiated his wife, he faced her with the fait accompli of his permanent authority, and in doing so he placed us, his children, in an impossible situation. Between us he established a barrier of hostility which he did his best to consolidate. Aghast, we were about to plunge into that difficult struggle where the rules were never openly stated: the search for the missing father. (pp. 40-41)*]

This notion of absence and presence exemplifies Si Zoubir's control over his brood. Despite having rejected his former wife and her children, his influence is felt constantly. Indeed, Si Zoubir becomes omnipresent, if not physically then by virtue of his authority. Moreover, he deliberately reinforces a sense of hostility, perhaps realising that by cultivating hatred he

²⁹⁰ Tellingly perhaps, we are told nothing of Si Zoubir's daughters, reiterating once more the androcentric nature of the narrative.

²⁹¹ Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 122.

might weaken any oncoming rebellion. He emerges as the unshakeable master and yet, simultaneously, as a lost father, with this loss being underlined by the alliteration in the final sentence of the quotation.

With the family unit left decimated by Si Zoubir's departure, it is Rachid himself, though merely a child, who seeks to assume the role of patriarch: 'Depuis le départ du père, j'avais pris sa place dans l'énorme alcôve. J'avais dix ans et comprenais beaucoup de choses' (p. 39) [*After father's departure I had taken his place in the enormous alcove. I was ten years old and understood a great deal* (p. 39)]. This quotation begins to build a sense of Rachid feeling the need, as a son, to fill the space left at his mother's side by Si Zoubir. On the other hand, it also indicates a need to assume a defined, masculine role for himself similar to that of his father and, therefore, one that is culturally acceptable but that was forbidden to him while his father was present. This masculine identity can only exist through controlling others and through predatory sexuality. Rachid becomes what Hédi Abdel-Jaouad calls the 'sexual guard dog' of the female members of the family, bolstering his own sense of masculine honour by ensuring the sexual virtue of the female members of his entourage but also by submitting women to masculine will.²⁹²

This assumption of the masculine mantle coincides with what appears to be some form of mental breakdown for Si Zoubir, one of the earliest hints of a troubled masculine identity in the novel. Despite his complicit and confident performance of the role of patriarch, Si Zoubir is, like El Hadji, racked with insecurities. It is the attempt by his son to replace him as family patriarch that troubles him profoundly:

Seulement, il se méfiait de nous. Il nous trouvait des faces de traîtres et d'assassins [...] Livrés à nous-mêmes, nous aurions organisé les pires complots. Il se sentait déjà persécuté! Nous lui sucions son sang, son argent et sa vie [...] Il était alors lamentable et nous avons vite pitié; nous regrettions même nos mauvaises intentions. (p. 85)

[*Yet he was suspicious of us. He felt we had the mien of traitors and assassins [...] Left to our own devices we would have plotted dreadful schemes. He already felt persecuted! We were sucking his blood, his money and his life [...] At such times he became pitiful and then we felt sorry for him; we regretted our evil intentions. (p. 73)*]

His iron grip over his subjects loosening, Si Zoubir senses a threat to his status. His paranoia is clearly detectable in his rants, in which he claims that his sons are bleeding him of his money and life. Ironically, Si Zoubir appears to be as traumatised by his act of repudiation as

²⁹² Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, "'Too Much in the Sun': Sons, Mothers, and Impossible Alliances in Francophone Maghrebian Writing', *Research in African Literatures*, 27 (Fall 1996), 15–33 (p. 18).

his children. Words such as pity, persecution, traitors, assassins and plots indicate the depth of his anxieties, perhaps produced by his guilt. They are also words that one might associate with monarchs, leaders and the bearers of power, at the pinnacle of any social order and with the plots designed to remove them from that position. His breakdown unleashes acute and pathological fears, in which he begins to fear for his life. Referring to the Qur'an, he terrorises his sons with blows and by telling them of the hellfire that awaits them. His sons' response to his 'soliloque aberrant' ['crazy soliloquy'] is described as: 'Nous tremblions. Supplions. Hurlions que nous l'aimions [...] Nous ne le reconnaissons plus (p. 86) ['We trembled with fear. Pleaded with him. Shouted we loved him [...] We no longer recognised him' (p. 74)].

The emerging portrayal of fatherhood and paternal/filial relations is not only disturbing, but totally pathological in its nature. The father is obsessed and delusional, citing the interference of sorcery and curses cast on him by a jealous wife, and therefore again rendering woman as Other and marginal. Verbs such as *craigner* (to fear) and *étouffer* (to suffocate) accentuate the anguish, and the inclusion of *l'enfer* (hell) is a strong indication of his disturbed mental state. His transfer of blame for his situation onto his former wife, whom he designates as a syphilitic whore, is a pointed example of his hypocrisy, for ironically, if indeed Ma were to be suffering from syphilis, he would certainly have been the carrier (p. 86). From the occult, he quickly moves on to quoting the Qur'an. The 'en réalité' abruptly cuts through the delusional nature of his rants, underlining the imaginary and hallucinatory nature of his anguish. His fracture from reality and his increasing isolation emphasised even more by the insinuation that Si Zoubir is now becoming somewhat of an outcast, his own employees leaving, eager to escape his alarming outbursts. The latter parts of this quotation in particular portray the mounting urgency and desperation with which his children attempt to appease their father. The short sentences containing simply a subject pronoun and a verb or a sole verb, climaxing in a verb without the usual subject pronoun, reflect the frantic and increasingly desperate fear of his offspring.

Here, Boudjedra presents us with a pitiful yet still tyrannical figure in meltdown. Si Zoubir clearly feels under siege, to the point that he fears for his life. In contrast, his children are terrified of him. In short, the cruel brute who so callously repudiated his wife has transformed into an unstable but raging tyrant, shaken by a threat to his supremacy. Si Zoubir does not express any affection or love for his children at any point in the novel. Indeed, in this respect he resembles a fairly two-dimensional character, too absorbed in creating and upholding an image and in demonstrating self-determination, ambition and power to

experience emotional empathy for others. Now, trapped in a spiral of mental and emotional anguish, he vents his frustrations on his children, with lashings of verbal and physical abuse. Si Zoubir's disturbed mental state appears to be a direct consequence of dominant expressions of manhood, his children left with the dismaying conclusion that their 'échec était virulent' (p. 87) [*'failure had been so acute'* (p. 75)]. Therefore, one of the most pivotal role models in the boys' lives despises them, and offers only obstacles to nascent masculine identity. With no real friendships, love or genuine human warmth, Si Zoubir falls foul of the suffocating parameters of the role of patriarch, and complicity is once more depicted as an asphyxiating strategy that provokes a high degree of anxiety, and perhaps even an echo of the autism-like symptoms of hegemonic masculinity.²⁹³

The effect of this total disintegration of paternal/filial relations does not end here. Indeed, the toxic hatred spouted by Si Zoubir towards his children is mutual: 'La haine nous lincinait; nous voulions le tuer, l'abattre sur-le-champ, avant même qu'il eût quitté sa berluve venimeuse; mais nous n'y pouvions rien: il était trop gros pour nos corps chétifs' (pp. 86–7) [*'Hatred transfixed us; we wanted to kill him, to murder him forthwith, even before he emerged from his poisonous fit, but we could do nothing: he was too large for our puny bodies'* (p. 74)]. *La Répudiation* portrays a relationship where survival becomes the main goal for Rachid and his brother, regardless of their own feelings towards their father. Both are quick to employ any behavioural tactics at their disposal in order to protect themselves – physically and symbolically – from Si Zoubir's abusive tirades, as this following quotation demonstrates: 'Nous voulions rire avec lui, pour lui faire plaisir et manifester ainsi notre soumission totale au chef incontesté du clan, mais nous hésitions de crainte de le vexer' (p. 87) [*'We wanted to laugh with him, to please him, thereby showing our total submission to the head of the clan but we hesitated out of fear of angering him'* (p. 74)]. Significantly, demonstrating an acceptance of Si Zoubir's dominance and their own subservience in the familial hierarchy appears as the only way of securing personal safety, particularly in light of his formidable physical presence: 'Il fallait alors jouer la comédie, se repentir pour pouvoir repartir loin du père, allégorique, somme toute, et insaisissable, malgré la terreur et les violences dont nous étions victimes dès qu'un contact quelconque s'établissait entre nous' (p. 87) [*'Then we had to playact, feign repentance so as to be able to start anew leaving father far behind, allegorical when all was said and done, and elusive, despite the terror and hurt we suffered as soon as any kind of contact was established between us'* (p. 75)]. Si Zoubir's

²⁹³ Schoene, 'Serial Masculinity', p. 379.

fixation with consolidating unquestioned authority over his brood leads even his children to profess total submission. The allusion to 'jouer la comédie' (*to playact*) echoes gender theory and its emphasis on performance, and highlights the sometimes theatrical aspect to gender roles, including those of children.

The family dynamics depicted in *La Répudiation* are a microcosmic representation of a weakening despotic dictatorship. Indeed, Eva L. Corredor, in her study of fatherhood in Maghrebian fiction, argues that the most difficult part of the post-independence democratisation of North African states is the:

over-coming of pre-colonial traditions dictated by the Koran and epitomized by the autocratic position of the patriarch. This embodiment of power in the father figure lingered on well beyond the gaining of national autonomy and the Westernization of cities. To sons and daughters of Arabic fathers, the father's body constituted the immutable rock to which they were chained by their culture and tradition [...] often unable to integrate themselves within their own families and societies.²⁹⁴

This certainly seems to be the case here, as Si Zoubir fears a bid to oust him from his position by the younger generation, and their budding identities are stifled partly by fear, and partly by his overwhelming and abusive presence, thus preventing their integration within their own family, as Corredor asserts.

Si Zoubir's mood swings and incoherent rages are contagious. Zahir himself begins to show the neurosis that will ultimately lead to his own death, by choking on his own tears and by succumbing to nocturnal bouts of unprovoked hysterical laughter (p. 88). In response to their father's persistent denigration and physical violence, the brothers begin to prey on insects, torturing and killing them in a disturbing reflection of their own abuse. Pitifully, the narrator adds: 'Le calvaire des animalcules durait peu, par rapport à ce que nous endurons dans le magasin de Si Zoubir' (p. 90) [*The torture of the tiny creatures did not last long compared with what we endured in Si Zoubir's shop* (p. 76)]. Bruised and battered – literally and figuratively – by a father whose sense of self is so tightly bound to his power over others, the boys begin to emulate the behaviour, their lowly status in the established order reflected in their choice of victim.

Their father's pathological personality and behaviour epitomise the broader, disjointed representations of manhood in the text. He is bent on control, power and domination, whether physically, sexually and/or socially. Indeed, Si Zoubir does not engage in any relationship which does not contain a clear dichotomy of exploiter/exploited. His entire being is geared towards conquering: conquering a woman sexually and subordinating

²⁹⁴ Corredor, '(Dis)embodiments of the Father', p. 295.

her to his desires and convenience; gaining authority and control over the tribe in general; and, lastly, in commanding the subordination of the lesser members of the tribe in the form of his repudiated children. He is devoted to personifying hegemonic ideals, and the fact that Islamicate masculinity is so closely linked to notions of power and masculine authority means that he is incapable of engaging in any dialogue which he cannot ultimately control. It is a sad and distressing portrayal of family dynamics, the blame for which lies, for Boudjedra at least, at the heart of Algerian cultural and religious traditions.

Hatred of the Feminine

Whilst Boudjedra clearly outlines some of the inadequacies concerning Algerian culture and Islamic dictates on individuals within a society, *La Répudiation* can by no means be considered a feminist text. Both Zahir and Rachid, to varying degrees, internalise misogynist discourse in order to negotiate their way through life. In particular, they recoil from femininity, adopting a deeply ambivalent attitude towards woman and their bodily functions, thus echoing the need for perpetual disassociation from females as discussed by Abdelwahab Bouhdiba and Afsaneh Najmabadi.

It is above all Zahir who regards women with neurotic fear and disgust but for both sons, the principal object of repulsion is menstrual blood. Zahir is troubled in particular, exclaiming at one point: 'Jamais femelle ne toucha main d'homme' (p. 25) [*No female shall ever touch a man's hand!*] (p. 28)]. Zahir here refers to *females* but then to *men*, dehumanising women and normalising men, an attitude that bears resemblance to Si Zoubir's marginalisation of women with regard to religious law. In one of the few references to one of their sisters, which is revealing in terms of Zahir's pathological hatred of women, Zahir shouts at Saïda:

'Fous le camp, tu me désoles!, car il l'aimait, disait-il; mais il ne pouvait pas supporter cette attitude fataliste vis-à-vis du sort qui fendait les femmes du bas-ventre jusqu'aux fesses. 'Cinglé, mon frère!' disait Saïda, 'cela ne te plaît pas que je puisse m'accepter telle que je suis!' (p. 25)

[*'Piss off, you make me sick!' Because, he said, he liked her but could not stand this fatalistic attitude to the curse cutting women in half from their belly to their bottom. 'You're crazy, my brother!' retorted Saïda, 'you don't like me being able to accept myself as I am!'* (p. 29)]

Saïda appears as a confident character, largely unaffected by her brother's indignation and certainly unwilling to accept his categorisation of her as somehow dirty by virtue of being

female. Just prior to this quotation, she is described as smelling of blood. Female genitalia are described as a *sort*, a word which can, amongst other things, be translated as a curse or a spell. However, Saïda's rebuttal shows a woman secure in her female status. She rejects Zahir's misogynist categorisation outright. In doing so, she highlights the irrationality of the hatred of femininity that has been adopted by her brother. In referring to Zahir as *cinglé* (mad), Saïda also underlines the illogical nature of her brother's repulsion and alludes to his mental insecurity, of which his fearful abhorrence of the feminine is a significant part.

However, this suspicion towards women's bodies does not simply take the form of sibling arguments or banter. Zahir's deep-running aversion is the subject of his diary entry (*carnet de Zahir découvert dans un tiroir, après sa mort*, pp. 104–105) [*Zahir's notebook discovered in a drawer, after his death*, pp. 86–88], in which he states that his self-induced vomiting is a reaction to his inability to comprehend menstruation. It is at this point that he refers to his discovery of blood-stained rags at the age of eight. He is struck by his aunt who finds him standing there staring. Zahir recounts that this was the first time that he vomited and writes:

Dans mon enfance, je rêvais de morceaux stagnants de saleté qui attiraient un grand nombre de mouches et de bestioles avides de sang féminin. Je rêvais aussi que toutes les femmes étaient mortes et qu'elles étaient parties en ne laissant pour toute trace de leur existence que cette puanteur. Depuis cette rencontre avec l'intimité féminine, j'ai considéré les femmes comme des êtres à part, porteurs de plaies redoutables qui attirent les cafards [...] (p. 105)

[*In my childhood I dreamed about stagnant hillocks of filth attracting large numbers of flies and insects greedy for female blood. I also dreamed that all the women were dead and departed leaving only that stench as the sole trace of their existence. Ever since I discovered that intimate side of femininity I have considered women as separate beings bearing formidable wounds which attract the cockroaches [...] (p. 87)*]

In this passage, woman and blood represent death and disease. Women are defined as the putrid carriers of plague, inviting insects with their impurity and contaminating presence. It is a striking image, when we consider that women may also be considered the givers of life by virtue of their reproductive and gestational capacity. Blood is evidently also a life-giving force, indeed, one which carries life around the body. Nevertheless, Zahir's interpretation is one of fear, suspicion and repugnance. His second dream in particular suggests a pathological distrust of women. That their only mark on the world might be stench and foulness indicates the extreme limitations of the female condition to his mind, a condition in which the body is perceived as female and abject. This polarisation of the male and the female – the male as

healthy and alive, the female indicative of death and disease – indicates the extent of the rupture between the masculine and the feminine in his mind and one can sense an echo of the Cartesian Split at work. The overarching theme of the novel, the repudiation itself, might at first suggest a rapprochement with the feminine as Rachid and Zahir rally around their mother in anger and empathy, but this, as indicated by Zahir's diary entry above, does not appear to be the case. Indeed, male-female dynamics appear to be strained even further.

Although Rachid himself does not internalise this anti-woman discourse to the same extent as his brother, a distinct discomfort is certainly expressed. In the early part of the novel, it is Rachid's liaison with Céline that forms the basis of the representation of the female body. Despite these detailed and explicit images, there is a sense of an underlying but notable distaste for the female form. Indeed, we know rather little about Céline the person, her character overwhelmingly portrayed in terms of the sexual act and the body. During the first pages of the novel for instance, Rachid's description of Céline's body merits analysis:

La femelle jaillie de sa propre sève laissait apparaître, en écartant les jambes, une chair tuméfiée et saccagée jusqu'à la rougeur d'un fouillis obscur et grave [...] laissant ma chair dans une cécité totale [...] son sexe bavait sur mes jambes un liquide épais et collant, coulant de l'atroce tuméfaction où j'aimais pourtant m'engloutir [...] prête, dans sa certitude de femme atteinte par la plus grosse horde, à engloutir l'immensité globale [...] elle fulminait sous l'exiguïté de sa propre adulation, voulant tout à coup tout absorber à travers son sexe. (pp. 10–11)

[*The female sprung from her own sap, by parting her legs revealed her flesh swollen and ravaged until it had become a sore red mess [...] leaving my own flesh totally blind [...] a thick sticky liquid dribbled onto my legs from between her thighs, flowing from the atrocious swelling in which I still loved to plunge [...] prepared, with the confidence of a woman breached by the seething horde, to swallow up its vast entirety [...] she raged at the narrowness of her own adulation, suddenly wanting to absorb everything through her sex. (p. 18)*]

Céline is clearly an active – demanding – participant in the sexual act, with reference made to her female energy (*sève*) and her angry utterances (*fulminer*). Nevertheless, the passage is distinctly impersonal and generalised, referring to 'the female' rather than to Céline herself. Indeed, the sexual female and female genitalia here are presented as all-encompassing and all-devouring, the verbs *engloutir* and *absorber* underlining this appropriating nature. Céline wants to absorb everything (*tout absorber*), to engulf everything (*engloutir l'immensité globale*), including her partner who is a willing target. The female sexuality displayed in this passage is confident and self-assured. Faced with this enveloping force, Rachid describes himself as initially blinded. His reaction is to use adjectives such as swollen (*tuméfié*) and

devastating (*saccagé*), obscure (*obscur*) and deep (*grave*), dreadful (*atroce*) and, elsewhere in the passage, greasy (*poisseux*). These rather negative adjectives appear in tandem with nouns such as mess/confusion (*fouillis*) and swelling (*tuméfaction*), and verbs such as to dribble (*baver*) and to ravage (*dévaster*). The language employed here by the narrator signals an underlying aversion to female sexual energy, but also to the female body itself and alludes to the aggressive sexuality between the two characters throughout the novel.²⁹⁵ Indeed, it echoes what Fatna Ait Sabbah terms ‘un vagin-vampire’ (*a vampiric-vagina*), the sexually omniscient and castrating woman who haunts the Muslim (masculine) subconscious and reminds the man of:

[Un monde où] l’homme est fragile et les femmes solides. Un univers où le vagin est le siège d’énergies sans cesse renouvelées et le pénis est sans force et sans pouvoir. C’est l’homme qui se meurt de l’envie de pénis, un pénis féminin tel que le veut la femme, tel que le veut l’omnisexuelle.²⁹⁶

[A world in which man is fragile and women are solid. A universe in which the vagina is the seat of incessant energies that are continually renewed and where the phallus is weak and powerless. It is the man who dies of penis envy, a feminine penis as the woman – the sexually all-powerful woman – desires it.]

The sexual imagery used to describe Céline, and Rachid’s consequent unease, suggests that he perceives her to be a castrating force. In stark contrast to Rachid’s mother or cousins, for instance, Céline underlines potential female sexual power and, therefore, the prospect of the male’s phallic inadequacy. She therefore questions one of the quintessential pillars of male supremacy, explaining perhaps Rachid’s ambivalence.²⁹⁷

In later passages (which are chronologically prior to this but included later in the narrative), Rachid’s apprehension reappears, this time in his accounts of his sexual relations with his step-mother Zoubida. During one of their encounters, Zoubida interrupts their rendezvous in order to breastfeed her crying baby in the adjoining room. The narrator tells us: ‘Elle revenait dégoulinante du liquide lacté qu’elle essayait en vain d’arrêter. Je me rappelais les seins malingres de la petite cousine et mon odieuse peur du lait se réalisait’ (p. 119) [‘[She] returned dripping with milky liquid she was unable to stop. I remembered the feeble breasts

²⁹⁵ Fatima Mernissi outlines an acute awareness of potential female sexual power in Islam and notes that it is considered a force to be harnessed and controlled because it is deemed as threatening and destabilising. She refers, for example, to the mythic Aisha Kandisha of Moroccan culture; the castrating female *par excellence* who is a repulsive female demon possessing a predatory and ever-hungry sexuality. See Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, pp. 42–43. She also states: ‘The entire Muslim social structure can be seen as an attack on, and a defence against, the disruptive power of female sexuality’ (p. 45).

²⁹⁶ Ait Sabbah, *La Femme dans l’inconscient musulman*, p. 100.

²⁹⁷ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 42. Mernissi attributes male fear of sexually insatiable women to their ability to induce *fitna* and destabilise patriarchal norms of power.

of my little cousin and my hateful fear of milk overcame me' (pp. 97–98)]. Echoing Zahir's paranoid loathing of menstrual blood, Rachid describes the leaking breast milk as 'l'hémorragie blanche' (p. 119) [*the white haemorrhage*],²⁹⁸ another image of pathological physicality that seems to be grounded in a dualism in which the female is read solely in terms of the body and Kristevan conceptualised abjection. He asks himself: '(Fallait-il tuer le bébé de Si Zoubir pour en finir avec la calamité?)' (p. 119) [*'(Would I have to kill Si Zoubir's baby to put an end to this disaster?)'*] (p. 98)]. The disquiet *vis-à-vis* the feminine body and its functions is once again erected like a wall, preventing any meaningful and cooperative dynamic between the male and the female. This anti-feminine philosophy acts as a barrier, preventing both Rachid and Zahir from engaging in dialogue with the female, isolating them within the hierarchy of misogynist masculinity and compounding their identity problems even further. Their internalisation of this polarisation of the sexes suggests a nascent masculine identity also founded upon dominating the (object) female.

Furthermore, in relation to male/female dialogue, Hédi Abdel-Jaouad argues that: 'The self-realization of the Maghrebian son-as-writer comes, more often than not, at the expense of the mother, his objective ally, in his struggle for male dominance over the father'.²⁹⁹ Abdel-Jaouad's assertion is certainly upheld in *La Répudiation*. Rafika Merini concurs, asserting: 'The mother who remains as nameless as she is powerless, is the woman whose odyssey the writer will manipulate to convey metaphorically his own feelings of helplessness, frustration and despair sprung from a common background'.³⁰⁰ Therefore, in denying his mother and his sisters any space for female expression, Rachid is guilty of engaging with (dominant) male and masculine ideologies. Both brothers appear to empathise with their mother, but their feelings towards her are not free of ambiguity. Rachid even exclaims at one point: 'Lamantable, ma mère! Je ne lui adressais plus la parole et je la haïssais, bien que cela pût profiter à Si Zoubir' (p. 64) [*'Pitiful, my mother! I no longer spoke to her and hated her, though this might have been to Si Zoubir's advantage'*] (p. 58)]. Religious and societal discourses here force Rachid to regard his mother as being so pathetic that it incites a hatred towards her, indicative of the gulf that remains between male and female and an estrangement that is symptomatic of male exploitation of the female. He is therefore guilty of conforming to the misogynistic discourse espoused by his father, a point that indicates his attempted complicity with dominant masculinity.

²⁹⁸ My translation.

²⁹⁹ Abdel-Jaouad, "'Too Much in the Sun'", p. 19.

³⁰⁰ Rafika Merini, 'Women in a Man's Exploration of His Country, His World: Chraïbi's *Succession ouverte*', in *Studies of Women in African Literature* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1986), pp. 45–61 (p. 46).

The haunting and recurrent theme of the foetus also appears to support this reading of ambivalence towards femininity. A foetus, of course, has no identity to speak of, having not yet been severed from its mother and thrust out to lead an independent existence. It is not yet a baby, nor a child, but simply a foetus. The foetus therefore exists in union with the maternal. Indeed, Hédi Abdel-Jaouad asserts that *regressus ad uterum* is a recurring theme in Maghrebian literature, and that the search for the mother as an 'immutable' image is a 'male search for Maghrebian authenticity'.³⁰¹ For Eva L. Corredor, the foetus symbolises a recovery of the self after a reversal of life, in order to secure a re-birth.³⁰² At the beginning of the narration Rachid states that he is: 'Heureux d'avoir échappé au traquenard et réalisé le miracle de ma propre négation et de ma propre fuite devant moi-même' (pp.11–12) [*Pleased as I was to have avoided the trap and have achieved the miracle of my own negation and my own flight from myself* (p. 19)]. This self-negation then functions in tandem with the notion of the foetus, indicating a desire to (re)write the self, liberated from the restrictive and damaging discourses of society. On another level, however, the foetus also confirms the undeniable truth that the male is necessarily linked to the female. The urge to kill this link therefore points once again to the 'systematic depreciation of femininity'.³⁰³

Supplanting the Patriarch

Situated in stark contrast to the compliant Si Zoubir, who embodies hegemonic ideals of manhood, his two sons initially occupy the position of subordinates. They are mocked by their family for their repugnance at the slaughtering of the sheep and repeatedly derided by their father. Moreover, there are three brief references to Rachid's subjugation to adult male sexuality in the novel, which indicates another facet of his subordination (p. 57; p. 194; p. 210). The two brothers develop quite different coping mechanisms. Zahir plunges into a vicious, almost masochistic cycle of alcoholism that eventually leads to his death, choosing to revolt against the established order. Rachid, on the other hand, tackles his father directly by remaining within accepted norms of behaviour. Their attendance at secondary school ('le lycée', p. 93) means they become the focus of the hostility of their extended family who sense an impending threat. Whilst this is a source of great pride to his family on the one hand, on the other: 'Nos oncles nous haïssent justement pour cette promotion, gage de rupture

³⁰¹ Abdel-Jaouad, "'Too Much in the Sun'", p. 24.

³⁰² Corredor, '(Dis)embodiments of the Father in Maghrebian Fiction', p. 299.

³⁰³ Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, pp. 169–170.

définitive d'avec la paysannerie riche et semi-féodale' (p. 93) [*'our uncles hate us precisely because of this enhanced status, proof of the definitive break with the rich semi-feudal peasantry' (p. 79)*]. The educational opportunities afforded to the brothers signal a danger for the extended family who are already subordinate to Si Zoubir, and who interpret it as a threat to their rank. The shifting power dynamics caused by this upward social mobility are underlined. Si Zoubir is a self-made success but Rachid and Zahir, afforded superior educational opportunities, threaten to exert an even firmer grip on the tribe.

If we consider Si Zoubir's family as a perverse microcosm of a hierarchical, feudal society, then Si Zoubir's paranoia *vis-à-vis* his sons, as well as the extended family's resentment towards them, can be read as emerging out of the fear of being supplanted by the younger generation. Eva L. Corredor asserts that Si Zoubir perceives his sons 'as rivals to the father's authority and, most of all, as threats to his ageing sexual prowess'.³⁰⁴ Furthermore, they represent a threat to the social organisation. This challenge to fatherly authority is manifested in its most extreme form by Zahir. Michelle Bakdache-Laygues refers to Zahir as 'le chef de la rebellion contre le père et contre l'ordre établi' [*the leader of the rebellion against the patriarch and the established order*].³⁰⁵ Zahir's revolt manifests itself through his fantasies of killing his father and, tellingly, of killing 'the foetus': 'J'étais décidé à tuer le père... J'ai été à la villa, mais je n'ai pas pu accomplir mon acte car Zoubida dormait dans le grand lit avec Si Zoubir et le foetus dormait dans Zoubida. Je n'ai pas pu...' (p. 102) [*I had decided to kill father... I went to the villa but couldn't do it because Zoubida was asleep and the foetus was asleep inside Zoubida. I wasn't able to do it...* (p. 85)]. The foetus, a recurring preoccupation emblematic of the problematic disavowal of womanhood, is an abstraction which Zahir in particular takes to heart. It becomes his obsession, as if the death of the foetus would erase all trace of Si Zoubir's genetics, thereby rescuing the tribe from his suffocating grip. However, Zahir is no murderer. Unable to actively bring about the demise of his loathed father, he continues to drink heavily. His predisposition to incoherent rants, murderous intentions, drunkenness and hysterics are joined by another pathological behavioural trait – he is also bulimic:

Zahir était souvent malade. Lorsqu'il gardait le lit, il se trifouillait le fond de la gorge avec ses doigts pour essayer de vomir. Il disait qu'en réalité il cherchait son âme et essayait de s'en débarrasser. Il arrivait rarement à ses fins. (p. 103)

³⁰⁴ Corredor, '(Dis)embodiments of the Father', p. 298.

³⁰⁵ Bakdaches-Laygues, 'Le Rite sacrificiel', p. 352. My translation.

[Zahir was often ill. Whenever he stayed in bed he tickled the back of his throat with his fingers to try to throw up. He said what he was really doing was looking for his soul to try to get rid of it. He was rarely successful. (p. 86)]

Zahir's 'soul' in this excerpt is a difficult image to interpret, but can possibly be read as a manifestation of his self-loathing brought about by his failure to discard the femaleness which he loathes so vehemently, being trapped as he is in a female body that is in binary opposition to the (male) mind. Conversely, still traumatised by the brutality suffered at his father's hands, his bulimia can be interpreted as self-mutilation that symbolises a radical form of rebellion – that of a total rejection of the established order that Si Zoubir embodies. Frantically searching for his soul, Zahir tries (unsuccessfully) to physically purge himself of his childhood memories and, in a sense, his femaleness. Whereas alcohol serves as an escape, his bulimia indicates the depth of Zahir's anxieties and, perhaps, his urgent need to expel the female within.

Whereas the role of aggressive heterosexuality in the text is clearly dominated by a dichotomy of exploiter/exploited and the acquisition of the female body as a key to masculine power, the portrayal of Zahir's homosexuality presents a radical departure from the premise of (hetero)sexuality and power. With his profound disgust towards women's bodies, Zahir's sexual preferences lie with his own sex, a fact that renders him highly marginal with regards to established norms of masculinity. Indeed, Boudjedra suggests a psychoanalytical cause for Zahir's rejection of the feminine, which ultimately, leads Zahir towards undermining socially accepted norms of masculine behaviour. Whereas Rachid actively attempts to subvert generational dynamics of power by sexually conquering Si Zoubir's new wife, Zahir fails in his attempt to kill the father and therefore, to challenge his power, thus sealing his fate as subordinate within the masculine hierarchy. One possible reading of this would be that Zahir, by contrast, fails to resolve the oedipal complex, a phenomenon which, according to Freudian logic, could result in neurosis and homosexuality. Thus, it could be argued that Zahir fails to consolidate a masculine identity for himself that is in line with the prominent societal discursive scripts that surround him, a point which pushes him towards intentionally seeking out a more marginalised identity.

Although not explicitly sexual, Zahir's relationship with Heimatlos [*homeless*], his Jewish, European physics teacher, is certainly problematic, and it illustrates Zahir's renunciation of gender norms. It is representative of Zahir's total rejection of femaleness, which he perceives to be abject and polluting. It is also, however, symbolic of his rejection of normalised, dominant strains of masculinity which are founded exclusively upon

heterosexuality. On this point, the critic Jarrod Hayes states: 'Dans son désir de tuer le père et par sa simple présence en tant qu'homosexuel qui refuse de participer à un système d'hétérosexualité obligatoire, Zahir témoigne l'échec du pouvoir qui ne réussit pas à tout maîtriser et sa présence à l'intérieur du récit doit alors être éliminée' [*In his desire to kill the father and by his simple presence as a homosexual who refuses to partake in an obligatory system of heterosexuality, Zahir is proof of the failure of power that cannot master all and his presence within the text must be eliminated*].³⁰⁶ To take Hayes's point one step further, however, it is not simply masculinity as heterosexuality that Zahir rejects, but the entire basis of social cohesion, since heterosexuality is the fundamental principle of masculinity and the primary means by which individuals can exercise power over others. Unable, or unwilling, to enter into the masculine battle arena, where power acquisition and dominance over others is the key goal, Zahir attempts to assert an identity for himself on the periphery of social influence by allying himself with a man who can also be considered marginalised in several different respects. Homosexuality, if indeed one can refer to it as such, is harnessed in order to express an outright rejection of hegemonic masculine norms. It becomes a tool of rebellion and demonstrative of Zahir's unwillingness, or inability, to conform to dominant notions of manhood. Whereas Heimatlos is a living incarnation of his own name, Zahir becomes homeless in the sense that he completely alienates himself from the behavioural and sexual norms of the society in which he was born, and banishes himself to the periphery, or indeed, the bottom of societal hierarchies. On the other hand, he chooses to engage in a same-sex relationship not codified by established dynamics of power. As Hayes suggests, he therefore presents a destabilising threat to the highly (hetero)sexualised masculine regime upheld by the likes of Si Zoubir.

His demise, induced by heavily excessive drinking, merely reiterates his status of loss and alienation. Indeed, on a narrative level, his death is viewed as a deliberate narrative act by Hayes, who asserts that: 'Le fait que l'homosexuel soit tué dans l'imaginaire hétérosexuel exprime peut-être un désir hétérosexuel que l'homosexualité n'existe pas, un désir de l'anéantir. En fait, tandis que l'homosexualité de Zahir ne se révèle qu'à la p. 103, on apprend qu'il va mourir à la p. 104' [*the fact that the homosexual is killed off in the heterosexual imagination expresses perhaps a desire that homosexuality does not exist, a desire to annihilate it. In fact, while Zahir's homosexuality is revealed on p. 103, we learn that he is to*

³⁰⁶ Hayes, 'Approches de l'homosexualité et de l'homoérotisme', p. 163.

die on p. 104].³⁰⁷ With his rebellion quashed, his ending is a sad consequence of his brutal and unjust treatment at the hands of a father who colludes with societal gender(ed) scripts and illustrates their inability to accommodate difference of any sort.

If we consider what we know of Zahir and Heimatlos's relationship, there is in fact very little to go on. We know that their physical relationship has not gone beyond caresses (p. 105). We are told, however, in a passage from Zahir's diary that: 'Heimatlos est comme moi: il n'aime pas le sang des femmes, et c'est pour cette raison que nous nous aimons' (p. 104) [*Heimatlos is like me: he doesn't like women's blood and that is why we love one another* (p. 87)]. At first glance, this appears an unconventional reason to fall in love with somebody. Nevertheless, if we consider women's blood to be closely linked with the notion of sexuality and control in the novel, then this appears an enlightening quotation. Furthermore, if we accept Michelle Bakdache-Laygues's premise that sexuality in the text has a parallel with the bloody sacrifice of animals, then sexuality, or to be more specific, *heterosexuality* can be interpreted as a form of terrorising women, and as a means of safeguarding the hierarchical *status quo*.³⁰⁸ Menstrual blood becomes representative of the gendered social order, and its rejection then becomes symptomatic of a rejection of that very order. Zahir and Heimatlos's relationship then can be read as a refusal to accept social norms. Tahar Ben Jelloun observes that: 'L'homosexualité, quand elle n'est pas doublée d'une pratique hétérosexuelle, reste considérée comme une transgression par rapport à l'ordre établi'.³⁰⁹ Therefore, Zahir's preference for male partners, along with his heavy drinking, are both clear renunciations of Islamic values.³¹⁰ Thus, through the character of Zahir, Boudjedra once again challenges the traditional tenets of Islam and Algerian culture.

Following Zahir's death, there is little grief or sorrow, with the possible exceptions of Ma and Zoubida. Indeed, Si Zoubir himself revels in his death, greeting it with a mixture of relief and delight: 'Le père, transfiguré de joie, dansait autour de l'éternel coffre-fort; il haïssait son fils aîné depuis la répudiation dont personne ne s'était jamais remis' (p. 152) [*Father, transfigured with joy, danced around the eternal safe; he had hated his eldest son ever since the repudiation from which no one had ever recovered* (p. 122)]. Zahir, a totally marginal character in almost every sense, has an incredibly destabilising effect on both Si Zoubir but also the tribe at large, his non-compliant behaviour serving only to remind all of

³⁰⁷ Jarrod Hayes reminds us that homosexuality and alcohol are two of the taboos of Islam. Hayes, 'Approches de l'homosexualité et de l'homoérotisme', p. 163.

³⁰⁸ Bakdache-Laygues, 'Le Rite sacrificiel', p. 356.

³⁰⁹ Tahar Ben Jelloun, *La plus haute des solitudes: Misère sexuelle d'émigrés nord-africains* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), p. 70.

³¹⁰ Hayes, 'Approches de l'homosexualité et de l'homoérotisme', p. 162.

the chaotic effect unleashed by his father's dubious morality. His marginal gender identity is summarised in the text as:

Un homosexuel invétéré, adorateur de juifs et fumeur de kif, mort dans une ville étrangère [...] la mort de mon frère n'était que la conséquence normale des actes du clan qui se préparait déjà à une vengeance longtemps attendue; Zahir n'était que la victime expiatoire d'une violence obligatoire qui allait se déverser sur la contrée et n'épargner personne. (p. 152)

[[an] inveterate homosexual, worshipper of Jews and smoker of kif, who had died in a foreign city [...] The death of my brother was merely the natural consequence of the acts of the clan already preparing itself for a long-awaited vengeance; Zahir was merely the sacrificial victim of inevitable violence which was going to unfurl across the entire country sparing no one. (p. 122)]

An isolated drunkard, homosexual, drug addict and perceived as inappropriately sympathetic towards Jewry, Zahir is in many ways the antithesis of the idealised Algerian man. This is in response to the overbearing weight of heteronormative masculinity, an identity epitomised by his father and which triggers Zahir's extreme reaction. It is this subversion that threatens his father so much, to the point that he fears Zahir above all others (p. 153). Significantly, in this particular scene Rachid mocks the views of his tribe, sarcastically qualifying them as morally upstanding and laying the accusation of debauchery at his brother's feet alone. He labels Zahir '[une] victime expiatoire' – a scapegoat – of the tribe, calling to mind the ritual of sacrifice as theorised by René Girard.³¹¹ Girard's premise is founded upon a phenomenon whereby a society will attempt to purge itself of its collective sins by electing a scapegoat, who is usually a marginal figure or somewhat of an outsider, and earmarked for sacrifice. The process culminates in the often bloody sacrifice of the unfortunate individual who assumes these collective sins and pays accordingly. The result acts as a process of catharsis that appeases the members of the given society, who can deflect attention from their own wrongs by focusing on somebody else's.³¹² Notably, Girard states that this sacrificial vengeance, in developed cultures, is often played out in literature, thus rendering Jarrod Hayes's argument that Zahir is forcibly eliminated by the (heterosexual) narrative particularly pertinent.³¹³ Therefore, as Suzanne Hatty argues, the omniscient voice of hegemony – in this case, the voice of Si Zoubir – manages to dispel the rebellious criticisms of the Other, his son, explaining his joyous reaction to Zahir's death.³¹⁴ Furthermore, the scapegoat mechanism

³¹¹ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (London; New York: Continuum, 2005).

³¹² Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 8.

³¹³ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 4–9.

³¹⁴ Hatty, *Masculinities, Violence and Culture*, p. 58.

which functions on a narrative level swiftly diverts attention away from the powerful and onto the weak, crushing any revolt against hegemonic definitions of manhood.³¹⁵

Rachid's Complicity

Zahir, whose brutal subordination by his father had left him miserable, hysterical, bulimic and incessantly resorting to the escapism of alcoholism, illustrates the powerful and pathology-inducing influence of gender dictates. While Zahir slowly kills himself through alcohol abuse, Rachid's strategy is less extreme but reveals his initial attempts to be complicit with existing patterns of masculine behaviour. Whereas Zahir dreamt of bringing about the literal death of his father, for Rachid, Si Zoubir's death will be a metaphorical one, '[un] meurtre symbolique,' [*a symbolic murder*] in the words of Charles Bonn.³¹⁶ Rachid tells us: 'Mon amour [pour Zoubida] coïncidait avec mon éveil politique' (p. 115) [*My love [for Zoubida] coincided with my political awakening*] (p. 95)], a remark not without profound relevance, for Rachid's political awakening must surely be his understanding of the power dynamics at work around him and his recognition of the self-serving and repressive tactics of the merchant classes who now control Algeria. Through sexual rivalry with his father, Rachid's vying for alpha male status is manifested through sexuality. On a broader, secondary level, however, it expresses Rachid's realisation that the dynamics within his own family are but a reflection of the broader political grasp of the coloniser on the one hand, and of the suffocating grip of the Algerian bourgeoisie and the Islamic fundamentalists on the other. Rachid's strategy stands in stark contrast to his brother's, who refused to collude with the *status quo* by seeking a marginal gender. Rachid, by contrast, chooses to challenge the social order from within. He tells us: 'Entre le père inexpugnable et sa femme entrouverte, j'étais pris en tenailles' (p. 116) [*I was caught in a pincer grip between the unassailable*

³¹⁵ Furthermore, Zahir dies in France and so that his body can be buried following Islamic customs it is brought back to Algeria by ship. However, the crane transferring the coffin from the ship to land gets stuck in mid-air and leaves Zahir's body hanging for a significant amount of time in an advanced state of decomposition and reeking heavily. This fact is interpreted by Rachid as the final humiliation imposed on the rebellious son and could be seen as another narrative attempt to invalidate Zahir's revolt: 'En effet l'humiliation était l'unique issue pour un retour au sein de la divinité, courroucée par tant de maladroites accumulées en vingt-cinq ans de vie aventureuse' (p. 157) [*Indeed humiliation was the only way to return to the bosom of divinity, enraged by so many misjudgements accumulated over twenty-five years of an adventurous life*] (p. 125)].

³¹⁶ Charles Bonn, 'La Répudiation, ou le roman familial et l'écriture-espace tragique', *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 22 (1976), 175-180 (p. 176).

father and his [half-open] wife (p. 96)].³¹⁷ The one-word labels attributed to Si Zoubir and Zoubida make an interesting comparison: Si Zoubir is impenetrable, or unassailable – a pillar of strength and assertiveness. Zoubida, by contrast, is hesitant and unsure; literally half-open. Masculinity is therefore portrayed as assertive and sure, with femininity as hesitant and vulnerable. Rachid, like his father, regards women as simply a means to an end. Unable to confront and challenge his father openly, Zoubida is rendered an open door, the only weakness in Si Zoubir's armour, reducing her to no more than a pawn in a masculine political power struggle. The 'political awakening' to which Rachid refers, therefore, must surely be the realisation of the constant struggle for influence and ultimate supremacy that is such an important factor in the construction of masculinity of the text, but also in society around him more generally.

It is through Zoubida that Rachid metaphorically displaces his father and attempts to oust him from his position of unquestionable authority amongst the masculine ranks of the tribe. His comment on this is highly significant: 'A nouveau, enfant-roi, je la pénétrais' (p. 125) [*Once more, king-child, I penetrated her* (p. 102)]. In a clear reworking of the Oedipus myth, Rachid responds to oedipal rivalry by asserting himself as the sexual partner, and in the context of this novel, 'owner' of his step-mother. In dethroning the father, Rachid at last gains a narcissistic value for his own masculine identity which, as a child, had no firm point of reference following his mother's repudiation and his father's neglect. Si Zoubir's sense of masculinity, as we have seen, is almost entirely founded upon the subordination of women. Rachid, however, dismisses his father as 'un vieillard affaibli par la prostate et par ses maîtresses' (p. 124) [*only an old man weakened by prostate and mistresses* (p. 102)]. His very identity is built upon his possession, and conquest, of female bodies. Zoubida, as surely Ma before her, became an object in Si Zoubir's possession. She was used as a tool to bolster Si Zoubir's sense of virility. Her body became territory, conquered by the ravaging patriarch whose phallus sought so brutally to ensure her subjugation. Zoubida's affair with her step-son deflates Si Zoubir's puffed up sense of masculine pride somewhat since his virility is seriously diminished if the women who uphold it choose to abandon him in favour of another patron. Rachid, despite his sympathy for his mother and her ordeal, can therefore stand charged with complicity with the *status quo* of male/female relations, employing existing codes of conduct to compete with his father and rival. There is then not simply a

³¹⁷ The English edition of the novel renders this sentence 'I was caught in a pincer grip between the unassailable father and his gaping wife'. However, 'entrouvert' usually means half-open, and not wide open as the present participle 'gaping' suggests.

sexual gratification in seducing Zoubida but, as Eva L. Corredor points out, a psychological pleasure also – that of assuming a significant role within the accepted social order.³¹⁸ Nevertheless, Rachid and Zoubida's affair remains of little impact since it is never found out. It therefore remains in the realm of symbolism, and fails to occasion any firm change in the familial hierarchy.

Rachid's Subordination

Zahir having been eliminated from the text, Rachid is left alone, carving out his own masculine identity from within the web of discursive influences. His search for a hegemonic masculine identity, however, will require a negotiation with, and a triumph over, several powerful forces at work around him. His previous lack of masculine subjectivity, due to the eclipsing effect of the patriarch, results in a mental state which is difficult not to interpret as worryingly unstable. Rachid's failed revolt against his father results in his subordination to the more general forces around him. Moreover, although Rachid has seen himself as a 'child-king', supplanting his father in his own bed, his inability to perform the sexual act with other women, and therefore his failure to subdue the female, do nevertheless point to his failure to enact the discursive script of dominant masculinity. Rachid is unable to consummate the sexual act with one of his cousins in the tribe (p. 52). Later, he relates his humiliation at experiencing temporary impotence with a prostitute who is eager to finish their business as quickly as possible in order to see her next client (p. 135). Furthermore, he frequently alludes to his desire to rape women – even those he denigrates as ugly and old; a violent and subduing act in the extreme that may well be an attempt to assert his sense of virility, by now battered by his sexual misadventures. His lacking sexual prowess therefore threatens to relegate him to a subordinate masculinity, as it did with El Hadji in *Xala*.

In the final sections of the novel, the son-narrator relates his arrest by the 'Membres secrets du Clan' (*Secret Members of the Clan*) who are represented as the mercenary and brutish henchmen of the ruling classes following the so-called liberation of Algeria. In fact, they are later referred to by Rachid as 'voyous protecteurs des nouveaux empires' (p. 222) [*louts protecting new empires*] (p. 173)]. Bursting into Rachid's room early one morning, they sift through his numerous books, struggling to read their titles and destroying them in irritation, an act that Rachid interprets as their desire to announce unequivocally their

³¹⁸ Corredor, '(Dis)embodiments of the Father', p. 298.

presence (pp. 213–214). This ‘destruction méthodique’ (p. 213) [*systematic destruction*] is a form of aggression designed to express a superiority over Rachid, underlining the members’ all-powerful command over their detainee. Getting increasingly impatient with the large number of written works in his possession, Rachid believes that this irritability is due to their shaky literacy, as his books ‘les obliger à épeler’ (p. 215) [*oblige them to spell*] (p. 168)] and cause their eyes to glaze over (p. 215). Indeed, Rachid appears to be aware that he, as a highly literate and widely-read individual, poses a threat to the members, whose intellectual abilities are so much inferior. Moreover, they persist in talking to Céline as if to goad Rachid, forcing her to pronounce the name of her ex-lovers in order to humiliate him and ‘pour s’en gausser des minutes durant, galvanisés par leur victoire facile’ (p. 216) [*gloat[ing] for minutes on end, galvanised by their easy victory*] (p. 169)]. In a similar vein to Rachid’s desire to supplant his father as Zoubida’s sexual partner, in this passage the Members are keen to allude to the fact that Rachid is not the only one to have possessed Céline. The female body once more becomes a sexual vehicle used by men in order to compete with one another, underlining its status as territory and male sexuality as territorial.

There is also an element of masquerade in the members’ hard-man image. They attempt to create an impression of multilingualism, speaking a pidginised language that Rachid describes as ‘ce dialecte arabo-berbéro-franco-espagnol qu’il appréciaient par-dessus tout, ayant ainsi l’impression d’être polyglottes et très versés dans les langues universelles’ (pp. 215–216) [*Arabo-Berbero-Franco-Spanish dialect they appreciated above all else since it gave them the impression of being polyglots well versed in universal languages*] (p. 169)]. Nonetheless, despite the delusions of the clan members, even Céline is alarmed by their ‘pauvreté mentale’ (*mental poverty*) (p. 217). Unable to compete intellectually, they resort to brute force in order to dominate. Due to the fear and strain of the situation, Rachid and Céline are suddenly overcome with hysterical laughter, at which point the members start shouting, pull out their guns and whisk Rachid off for interrogation. By openly ridiculing them, the lovers apparently expose a real vulnerability in terms of their lack of education, unceremoniously deflating the Members’ perception of superiority. The sudden outburst by the Members can therefore be read as a need to crush this challenge to their power and influence.

Rachid’s interrogation by the Clan members takes the form of a series of bewildering conversations revolving around mundane details; the shape of his room, his bed, his window. Indeed, at no time do the interrogators produce any accusation or charge against him. Nevertheless, the cross-examinations lead to a total mental breakdown for Rachid, who

eventually longs to be tortured and forced to disclose his political opinions, and even to be taken out and shot by his captors, just in order to be able to see a purpose to his detention. He recalls that he 'les suppliais [...] j'avouais tout ce qu'ils voulaient, faisant tout pour ne pas les contrarier' (p. 224) [*'begged them [...] admitted anything they wanted, did everything I could not to annoy them'* (p. 175)]. This quotation echoes the younger Rachid's frantic despair faced with his father's rage, and the seemingly pointless and never-ending questioning literally drives him mad. The previous quotation illustrates his broken, subordinate status compared with that of his torturers.

As the foot soldiers of the oppressive and corrupt regime following in the footsteps of the French colonials, the Members succeed in overpowering and, ultimately, subduing the aspirant Rachid who is left to stagnate in his mental anguish. Suffering from a stress fracture to the skull, hallucinations and nervous fatigue, summarised by the phrase '[m]es paupières définitivement plissées, mortes avant ma mort totale' (p. 231) [*'eyelids closed forever, dead before my total death'* (p. 180)], Rachid ends up totally broken by the hyper-masculinised regime around him, at the pinnacle of which sits his father, Si Zoubir. Indeed, he even suspects his father as the individual behind his imprisonment. The final blow to Rachid's abortive attempt to challenge the status quo is not simply his impaired, or questionable, sanity, but his infantilisation, for following what he terms as 'éclatement nerveux' (*nervous collapse*), he resigns himself to Céline's care, stating: 'J'étais alors irrémédiablement livré à Céline, auprès de laquelle je savais retrouver des attitudes d'enfant' (p. 236) [*'I was irrevocably abandoned to Céline and with her could revert to the position of a child'* (p. 184)].

Céline's role in *La Répudiation* is ambiguous and possibly not limited to that of lover. Indeed, at times it is impossible not to consider her his psychiatrist, and Charles Bonn argues that she even functions as a double of the mother figure, a view certainly upheld by the above quotation.³¹⁹ Furthermore, Céline also represents the coloniser, rendering Rachid doubly disenfranchised since she not only symbolises French colonialist discourse but because she is also female, a point that calls into question Bonn's reading of the narration as 'son récit libérateur' [*his liberating narrative*].³²⁰ For Céline, Algeria is exotic and Rachid himself even refers to her as 'doublement étrangère, par son sexe et par sa langue maternelle' (p. 29) [*'doubly alien because of her gender and mother tongue'* (p. 31)]. He alludes to this again when he states: 'Il aurait fallu, cependant, m'armer de courage et d'esprit de décision pour

³¹⁹ Bonn, 'La Répudiation, ou le roman familial et l'écriture-espace tragique,' p. 175.

³²⁰ Bonn, 'La Répudiation, ou le roman familial et l'écriture-espace tragique,' p. 175.

me marier avec elle et lui imposer la loi de mon pays qu'elle continuait à considérer comme une sorte de paradis terrestre' (p. 12) [*I should however have steeled myself to be brave and decisive, married her and imposed the law of my country which she continued to consider some kind of earthly paradise*' (p. 19)]. His remark that he would have needed courage to marry Céline refers to the effort required to tame – to subjugate – a foreign woman to his own masculine authority. Moreover, he accepts his own place within the order of his country but tacitly also his inability to conquer Céline, who therefore highlights his lack of authority. The independence, freedom and autonomy of foreign women is puzzling and troubling for a man who has sought to become a patriarch in his father's example. Rachid withdraws from the challenge and tellingly states: 'Non! puisque je ne pouvais pas la malmener, je préférais me soumettre à sa loi et me donner ainsi le sentiment de mon propre échec' (p. 14) [*No! Since I could not ill-treat her I preferred to submit to her rule and thus give myself the sense of my own failure*' (p. 20)]. Rachid's reference to his own failure here is surely his admission of his deficient masculine status, as defined by the notions of masculinity circulating around him. Unlike his father who effortlessly possesses and subjugates women, Rachid cannot exercise this same authority. His mental afflictions also rob him of any authority or credibility, and so his failure can, in fact, be read as his failure to enact a suitable masculine identity.

Rachid's inability to exercise any significant influence over Céline, not to mention authority, is partly due to her reasons for being in Algeria in the first place. He states that European girls like Céline move to Algeria, determined to help render literate a recalcitrant population. They therefore come voluntarily, suggesting a freedom and agency that is not available to most Algerian woman. Faced with hostility, however, they end up living in exclusive quarters of the city, amongst other privileged Europeans (p. 174). These European girls converge on Algeria, seemingly preying on the colonialist/colonised dichotomy between the countries. Arriving with good intentions, they soon tire of the real, day-to-day difficulties of fulfilling their goals and deliberately estrange themselves from the community they came seeking to help. The former colony is therefore exploited by the foreigner in order to purge themselves of their own guilt for having a better chance in life but also, and significantly, to reinforce a perception of cultural superiority which clashes violently with the male supremacy sought by the Algerian men who lust after them. The fact that they quickly end up moving to wealthier areas occupied mostly by foreigners undermines their good intentions and reinforces imperialist discourse. In this case, it also demotes the Algerian male to a role of irrelevance, therefore denying him the masculine power to which he believes he is entitled.

As his lover, Rachid's childhood memories are of interminable fascination to Céline. Time and time again, she implores him: 'Parle-moi de ta mère' (p. 16) [*Tell me more about your mother*' (p. 22)], described by Charles Bonn as her 'phrase-leitmotiv'.³²¹ On a superficial level, this fixation is the curiosity of a young European girl who is largely ignorant of Algerian customs. On a secondary level, however, Céline's French origins hint at an imperialist factor. The cruel tale of repudiation provides a certain shock-value and she greedily devours every detail. Indeed, Céline is accused of wanting to empty Rachid of his memories of childhood and adolescence:

Elle me voulait proie, mais pas n'importe quelle proie; elle me voulait vivant et ne rêvait que de me prendre mes souvenirs, non pour en faire quelque chose mais afin de m'épuiser à travers mon parable intarissable et stérile, me vider de la substantifique folie. (p. 16)

[*She wanted me as prey, but not as any prey; she wanted me alive and dreamed only of taking from me my memories, not so as to make something of them but in order to consume me through my inexhaustible sterile chatter, to empty me of the very substance of my madness. (p. 22)*]

This particular quotation echoes Farid Laroussi's notion of 'deterritorialization through imperialism'.³²² Not only does Rachid and Céline's relationship echo that of the coloniser/colonised, it also represents a triumph of the foreign woman over the native man. There is no cathartic gain to be had for Rachid, since the impetus of relating his memories lies with the French lover.

Céline's incessant probing duplicates the mundane but unending questioning of the Clan Members, whose interrogations drove Rachid to the brink of insanity. In particular, her leitmotiv 'parle-moi encore de ta mère' [*tell me more about your mother*] continues to haunt the reader and to suggest that it is more than simply orientalist curiosity at the heart of her questioning. Revealingly, Rachid tells us: 'Les jours où je ne savais plus rien de moi, Céline aimait me faire parler de mon adolescence' (p. 179) [*On the days I no longer knew anything about myself Céline liked to make me talk about my adolescence*' (p. 141)]. In addition, we are told: 'Elle m'aidait à reconstituer les événements qui avaient précédé ma rencontre avec

³²¹ Bonn, 'La Répudiation, ou le roman familial et l'écriture-espace tragique,' p. 175.

³²² Farid Laroussi cites the example of Algerian women's writing in the 1990s and its explosive popularity in France as an example of 'deterritorialization through imperialism'. He argues that Algerian socio-political conditions were challenged by this literature, but that the 'origin of the discourse' was in metropolitan France. This writing therefore came to symbolise and reinforce an image of French enlightenment compared with the perceived barbarism of Algerian culture. Thus, the writing was emptied of its real meaning, which was usurped in order to bolster French self-perceptions of civilisational superiority. See Farid Laroussi, 'When Francophone Means National: The Case of the Maghreb', *Yale French Studies*, 103 (2003), 81-90 (p. 88).

le Clan' (p. 184) [*she helped me reconstitute the events which had taken place before I had come into contact with the Clan' (p. 145)*]. This persistent probing on Céline's part and even more so her act of *helping* Rachid to piece together his past forces the reader to ask him/herself who she really is and what her real agenda might be. Following his incarceration and with memories of his traumatic childhood lingering, Rachid himself is left totally disorientated in a rapidly degenerative mental state. It is therefore plausible to read Céline as a colonial figure, feeding off Rachid's story in order to persuade herself of her country's own supremacy. Not content to simply consume the narration, she begins to rewrite it, robbing him of any masculine subjectivity or authenticity at all and reducing her lover once more to a position of subordination, this time subjugated to the female, foreign Other.

Furthermore, during certain parts of the narrative, Rachid, by now delusional and prone to extreme but convincing hallucinations, has to ask himself whether he has imagined the entire story (p. 141). His sanity and memory are once more questioned:

Comment ai-je fini par échapper au Clan? Je ne l'ai jamais su. Céline, certainement pour me faire oublier cette pénible histoire, disait que ce n'était là que le fruit d'une imagination fertile [...] Avais-je inventé toute cette histoire? elle disait en soupirant que c'était là une vieille affaire, mais ne répondait ni oui ni non à ma question très précise (p. 232)

[*How did I succeed in escaping from the Clan? I never found out. Céline, certainly to make me forget this upsetting business, said it was merely the fruit of fertile imagination [...] Had I invented the whole thing? She said with a sigh that it was something long past but would not give a yes or no answer to my very specific question. (pp. 180–181)*]

Thus, Rachid's bewildered and ambiguous relationship with reality underlines the extent of his failure to adopt a masculine person in line with society's exigences. In this passage, Céline holds a certain power over Rachid, appearing to know yet doing little to enlighten her disorientated lover. She is also described as being 'sensée parlant à un malade' (p. 232) [*like [...] a sane person talking to a mental patient' (p. 181)*]. Thus, Rachid is portrayed as at her mercy and profoundly vulnerable, the very opposite of his father.

A few pages later, Rachid relates an episode that occurs during one of his stays in the mental asylum in which, along with the other patients at the hospital, he suffers the indignation of being 'interviewed' by people who appear to be students or journalists. The experience is one of utter humiliation, as they are examined like animals in a zoo, provoking 'la fièvre des infirmiers exaspérés de nous voir nous donner en spectacle' (p. 145) [*the agitation of the nurses exasperated to see us putting on an act' (p. 116)*]. There is no mention

of any forewarning of the meeting, nor any request for patient consent, indicating the abusive treatment of the mentally ill by their guardians. Thus, Rachid is victimised by the 'sane' population sanctioning the abuse of those labelled as 'insane'. This is presented by the text as amounting to a violation: 'De longues discussions s'ouvraient à même la nudité totale de notre pensée' (p. 145) [*lengthy discussions began, subjected to the total nakedness of our thoughts*' (pp. 115–116)]. Thus, Rachid, along with others, is rendered vulnerable due to mental and emotional nakedness. He once more threatens rape, a twisted desire to rehabilitate himself in terms of acceptable gender norms. However, he is reminded that all patients are administered with bromide, causing impotence and rendering his threat empty (p. 144). This humiliation, the denial of one of the bedrocks of masculinity, seems to cement Rachid's positions within subordinate layers of manhood. Far from the assertive and controlling man he sought to be, Rachid is objectified and abused in the most extreme sense, demoted to the category of the mentally unhinged.

Tellingly, Céline appears to play a part in this harassment. During his stay at the hospital, Céline is the only person to visit him. In addition to her visits, and her presents – flowers and books – she also gains permission to occasionally discharge Rachid. During these weekends, Céline continues to extract information from him by focusing on his childhood and adolescence, a fact that objectifies Rachid. The narrator himself comments on this: 'Je la [Céline] soupçonnais de tout savoir et d'être de connivence avec le médecin qui ne croyait pas à ma sincérité' (p. 146) [*I suspected her of knowing everything and being in league with the doctor who did not believe I was telling the truth*' (p. 116)]. Moreover, her comings and goings are of little assurance to Rachid, who states: 'Elle était venue et repartie sans m'apporter les certitudes exigées par mon état mental' (p. 147) [*She had been and gone without offering me the certainties required by my mental state*' (pp. 117–118)]. With her habit of 'jumping' on details (p. 146) Céline drains Rachid of his memories for her own gain, with little if any genuine view to helping him. His entire past is brought into question, and his identity is on the brink of non-existence – Céline merely exacerbates and perpetuates his suffering, and appears as an emasculating force. In doing so, she stands as a clear symbol of Algerian objectification at the hands of its colonial masters, emptying authentic testimony of any empowering element for the Algerian by interpreting it solely in relation to their own agenda. This is hardly the dominant model of masculinity performed by Si Zoubir, who would never allow himself to be at the mercy of doctors, students or, indeed, a (foreign) woman, indicating Rachid's subordinate position within the hierarchy of masculinity at the end of the novel.

Conclusion

La Répudiation is a novel in which the pressures of masculine interpellation can be seen at their fullest, and the wrangling for dominant positions is expressed in one family unit, microcosmic of society at large. Algerian women are completely sidelined, their existence effectively governed in Althusserian terms by ideology and various ISAs. With regard to masculinity, the iron fist of the father stamps out any independent or competing identity, since masculinity is so tightly bound to power and authority in this text. Providing a parallel with El Hadji, Si Zoubir is entirely complicit in a normative version of masculinity though, unlike El Hadji, his authoritative position never really seems under threat. Si Zoubir carefully negotiates his way through the web of intertwining and, at times, conflicting discourses of his society. With a good dose of ruthlessness and hypocrisy he manages it. Zahir, who represents a threat to the established order by virtue of his difference, is perceived as such an unsettling force that he is marginalised entirely, and is even written out of the narrative. For Rachid, however, his attempt to mount a challenge to the system from within remains unsuccessful. His severe mental and psychological anguish, his unreliable virility and his dependence on the foreign female Other, not to mention his instability, signpost his suffocation by more powerful men who become subjects by virtue of their complicit role. Rachid's hesitancy with regard to recognising his place in ideology means he does not ultimately qualify for subject status as Althusser would perceive it. He is therefore discredited, with the label of 'mad' attributed to him and finds himself subordinated by the end of the novel, conquered by those who prove to be more 'masculine' than he.

'Servants by Day, Lovers by Night': Exile and Subordination in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Partir*

Introduction

Partir is a novel of exile, the hopes and disappointments of migration, and, above all, the loss of masculine identity. The events of the novel are relayed on two main sites: initially in the Moroccan border town of Tangiers and later on in the fashionable city of Barcelona. Thus, it is set in a cross-cultural, multi-racial context that straddles two continents: Europe and Africa, and two civilisations: Christian and Muslim. However, it is not so much the different religious heritage separating the two worlds that concerns Ben Jelloun. Rather, the main focus of the text rests upon the symbolic demarcation line between the 'developed' and globalised Western world and the 'undeveloped' non-Western world. These two sites, Tangiers and Barcelona, cruelly juxtapose the bleak life of Morocco with the wealthy and promising life of a European city; a phenomenon that gives rise to a variety of competing discourses that appear to offer masculine consolidation. In spite of these discourses, however, the protagonist remains trapped. He is emblematic of the traumatic relationship between the Arab and the Western Other. His fading subjective validity mirrors his lack of sexual impetus, recalling Frédéric Lagrange's claim that Arab culture frequently expresses trauma through representations of sexuality.³²³ Left with no room to manoeuvre, Azel's sense of masculinity is gradually eroded, leading to his isolation and eventual death. Weary of the day-to-day humiliation of being dependent on his female relatives, he longs to cross the Strait of Gibraltar and lead a life of prosperity in Spain. Watching the many corpses that are washed up on the shore, he realises that emigrating illegally is not a long-term answer. Instead, he meets a Spaniard, Miguel, and agrees to assume the role of his lover in return for legal papers.

In chapter one, we saw El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye slavishly falling in line with conformist visions of what a man should be within his particular social milieu, that is to say the bourgeois political and economic classes, until being forced to assume a subordinate position at the end of the novel. In *La Répudiation*, Si Zoubir also clings to a public image of

³²³ Lagrange, 'Male Homosexuality in Modern Arabic Literature', p. 187.

himself that is assertive, powerful and therefore considered to be suitably masculine, securing for himself a place at the head of his tribe. However, his sons, Rachid and Zahir, undertake more complex negotiations with masculine identity and it is with these two characters that the protagonist of *Partir*, Azel, can be most easily compared. Azel is a young, unemployed graduate with few prospects. Stagnating in Tangiers, he represents a significant proportion of Moroccan men. For, as for Rachid and Zahir, the lack of room for manoeuvre for Azel is highly evident, and he never manages to consolidate an adequate sense of masculinity for himself, a point that forces him into a position of subordination within the gender hierarchy portrayed in the novel. Thus, while Azel seems to embrace the implicit norms of masculinity, he cannot enact them as fully or as successfully as El Hadji (for a time) or Si Zoubir for instance, due to the subservient role into which he is forced by the nature of the globalised Western world. Relegated to a role of inferiority *vis-à-vis* an aggressive and disdainful 'first' world, and humiliated by this subordination, the (im)migrant man in *Partir* is unable to exercise power over others and is condemned to a lower status, which has profound effects on constructions of masculinity.³²⁴

Misery, Poverty and the Crisis of Arab Identity

The young Moroccans whom we encounter in *Partir* are forced into a situation whereby they cannot meet the social expectations of hegemonic masculinity. The opening chapters of *Partir* are full of scenes of despair and gloom, but this general pessimism is also present throughout the novel. It is not solely norms of masculinity that stagnate amidst this general dejection. Women too bear the brunt of economic exploitation and the corruption that ensues. Nevertheless, it is notable that the women depicted are not as acutely affected as their male counterparts, whose sense of self is more tightly tied up with labour activity, financial autonomy and exercising power. Traditionally associated with more servile and subordinate roles, women do not appear to suffer to the same extent, because their feminine identity does not hinge on constant (re)validation by means of dominance and assertiveness. For the male characters, however, the inferiority imposed upon them by social and economic exploitation is a more potent threat. Hegemonic masculinity, frequently expressed through subordination

³²⁴ Nawal El Saadawi dislikes the term 'third world' intensely, and argues that it is hierarchical. Her interpretation of the term does appear to be shared by Ben Jelloun in this novel, since *Partir* portrays a world in which a global hierarchy is in evidence. Sophie Smith, 'Interview with Nawal El Saadawi (Cairo, 29th January 2006)', *Feminist Review*, 85:1 Political Histories (March 2007), 59–69 (p. 62).

of the Other, becomes impossible in a country where higher and mightier forces subject even the aspiring Moroccan male to a level of submission.

Even before his departure for Spain and the subsequent breakdown of his masculine identity, Azel is already struggling to uphold what we might term a hegemonic masculine gender. Unable to provide for himself, let alone his family, he suffers the humiliation of relying on his sister for financial support. Kenza, like many others, is exploited. She is paid badly, primarily due to the fact that her employer considers her to be learning or training (p. 31).³²⁵ She does well, however, not to fall into the same trap as other young girls, many of whom prostitute themselves to wealthy businessmen in order to subsidise their meagre wages.

These opening passages offer an interesting fictional glimpse into life in impoverished, non-Western societies. Moroccan men congregate in cafés bemoaning their stagnation, lost in a hashish-induced reverie (p. 11). The only option here, it would seem, is to gaze towards the Spanish coast in the hope that an answer to one's problems will be delivered from an economically richer country. Thus, the hopelessness of Moroccan men is clearly underlined from the beginning of the novel. They are robbed of their autonomy and self-sufficiency – two notions that are at the heart of Islamicate masculinity – by their poverty and are forced to look to a richer nation for hope of a better life, thus highlighting the unequal power dynamic between North African countries and the so-called 'developed' world. Lalla Zohra, Azel's mother, remarks: 'Je connais mon fils, il ne peut pas rester en place, il ne peut pas se contenter d'une vie où il est entretenu par une femme, même si c'est sa sœur, il a de la fierté et je sais qu'il est en train de tout faire pour partir là-bas en Espagne' (p. 62) [*I know my son, he cannot stay in one place, he cannot accept being supported in this life by any woman, even his sister. He has his pride, and I know he's busy doing everything to go over there, to Spain*] (p. 56).³²⁶

Fatima Mernissi, in her discussion of the effects of globalisation and modernisation on Muslim sexual dynamics, uses the term 'castration' to refer to the impotence of Muslim men in the current world climate. Both Mernissi and Fatna Ait Sabbah observe the frustration affecting Muslim men who can no longer refer to traditional patterns of masculinity.

Improving technological efficiency and female competition for work are two such reasons for

³²⁵ Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Partir* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006). All subsequent quotations in French and page references relating to the French original will be parenthesised in the text.

³²⁶ Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Leaving Tangier*, trans. by Linda Coverdale (London: Penguin Books, 2009). All subsequent quotations in English and page references relating to the English edition will be parenthesised in the text.

such disorientation. They also compound the frightening reality of changing expectations or roles of men and women.³²⁷ Here, it would seem, are prime examples of men made victims of the process of symbolic castration.³²⁸ The text also contains a number of references to the economic assault by European nations, again underlining the powerful influence of global economics on gender roles. Languishing in cafés and on the streets, in socially-underachieving bachelor communities, the initial portrayal of masculinity indicates the paralysis to which Mernissi refers. Unemployment, modernisation and neo-colonial economics render the male reliant on female maintenance, overturning the very premise on which hegemonic ideals of manliness are built.

Not only is life in Tangiers depicted as miserable and depressing, but the image of death frequently reappears. Azel is haunted by the image of his dead cousin Nouredine who drowned after the boat carrying him (and plenty of others) illegally to the Spanish coast sank:

Comme dans un rêve absurde et persistant, Azel voit son corps nu mêlé à d'autres corps nus gonflés par l'eau de mer, le visage déformé par l'attente et le sel, la peau roussie par le soleil, ouverte au niveau des bras comme si une bagarre avait précédé le naufrage. (p. 13)

[As if in an absurd and persistent dream, Azel sees his naked body among other naked bodies swollen by seawater, his face distorted by salt and longing, his skin burnt by the sun, split open across the chest as if there had been fighting before the boat went down. (p. 5)]

In a sense, the mutilated bodies washing up on the shore merely mirror the symbolic mutilation of living men. The haunting images, nevertheless, serve as a constant reminder of the perilous process of emigrating illegally.

When Azel is finally offered a job, he refuses because: 'Son désir d'émigrer était plus fort que tout' (p. 26) [*his longing to emigrate [...] was simply overwhelming*] (p. 19)].

Indeed, in the words of the governor of Tangiers: 'Le Maroc perd sa sève, sa jeunesse!' (p. 28) [*Morocco is losing its strength, its young people*] (p. 21)]. In effect, the governor's words here echo Ben Jelloun's own statement back in 1977, when he asserted that: 'Le grand capital continue de vider méthodiquement la terre de son sang le plus précieux: les hommes' [*Financial capital continues to methodically empty the land of its most precious blood: men*].

³²⁹ The exodus of the younger Moroccan generation is a direct consequence of the paralysis

³²⁷ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 96; Ait Sabbah, *La Femme dans l'inconscient musulman*, p. 33. Also see Ahmed, *Women and Islam*, p. 8.

³²⁸ For more on Mernissi's theory of 'symbolic castration' see: Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, pp. 165–177.

³²⁹ Ben Jelloun, *La plus haute des solitudes*, p. 7.

of the nation. Men that fail to live up to the social ideal of family patriarch, social status, a successful job and financial security begin to consider migration as the only remedy.

The pitiful state of Morocco is, in part, due to Western encroachment in the form of global capitalism. The Spanish are quite prepared to exploit Morocco, as indeed are other wealthy nations. Chapter twelve is devoted to the story of Malika, Azel's neighbour before his departure for Spain, who works in a factory in Tangiers, preparing prawns for export to Europe. Her story emphasises not simply the domestic corruption of Morocco and its effect on the population, but also highlights the insidious impact of globalisation. Not having been able to study properly at school, she is forced to forgo further education by her father who finds her employment in a Dutch factory peeling prawns flown in from Thailand and destined for the European market. The girls are paid a pittance for their labour (p. 100) and Malika suffers from numerous work-related illnesses brought on by the dangerous conditions in the factory. She eventually succumbs to her bronchial illness and, despite paying for expensive antibiotic drugs imported from France, she ends her life as 'encore une victime des crevettes' (p. 181) [*'another victim of those shrimp' (p. 177)*].

Furthermore, Spanish incursion into Moroccan sea territory is common. Malika's brother-in-law is also a direct victim of foreign intervention. A fisherman, '[il] n'aimait pas beaucoup les Espagnols. Il racontait qu'ils étaient racistes, méprisaient les *Moros* et pillaient les côtes marocaines en pêchant avec des filets non réglementaires' (p. 102) [*'[he] didn't care much for the Spanish, whom he accused of being prejudiced against los moros, and of pillaging the Moroccan coasts by fishing with illegal nets' (p. 96)*]. The conclusion suggested by these textual details points to an international relationship characterised heavily by a notion of hierarchy within which a dichotomy of exploiter/exploited is firmly located, and the Moroccans referred to derogatorily as Moors. The fear and antipathy towards those from the economically poorer North Africa merely aids the process of exploitation by dehumanising the Moroccan population to the point of dissolving any scruples that would question their exploitation.

The loathing that is manifested and which renders North Africans Other in Eurocentric eyes subordinates the North African population. This subordination, however, provokes what is depicted by the text as a crisis of Arab identity brought on by the humiliation of Arab peoples by Western labour markets and globalised economies. Ben Jelloun suggests that this denigration is not an entirely new dynamic. While filling out a Spanish visa application form, Azel is asked about his grandfather's name. Azel remembers that during the Spanish civil war, his grandfather 'avait fait partie des soldats rifains enrôlés

de force par Franco' (p. 70) [*'had been one of the Riffian soldiers forcibly conscripted by Franco' (p. 65)*]. The narration then cuts back immediately to the application form that Azel was completing and its reference to 'ocupación actual' [*current occupation*], alluding to Azel's current employment status. The play on the Spanish word *ocupación* forces the reader to consider Spain's historically problematic attitude to North Africa, as well as pointing to current economic neo-colonisation. However, whereas the grandfather was forcibly conscripted, Azel's desire to migrate appears to be more voluntary in nature and yet he feels compelled to leave his country behind in search of a better life in Spain. In a sense, he does not have much choice in the matter if he is to be the man he seeks to be. This reflects the more implicit presence of neo-colonialism in contemporary Morocco, rather than the much more direct and tangible presence of colonialism in the past.³³⁰

The economic hardship of everyday life is exacerbated by the economic corruption and the population is doubly disenfranchised, by global economic factors on the one hand, and by home-grown hypocrisy on the other. KENZA's employer, a surgeon, apparently earns in one day what his staff earn in a year (p. 31). Nonetheless:

Ça ne l'empêchait pas de faire ses cinq prières, de programmer la visite des lieux saints au printemps et un pèlerinage tous les deux ans. Pour toute intervention chirurgicale, il se faisait régler d'avance en espèces. Il était aussi réputé pour la dextérité de ses mains que pour sa rapacité. On racontait même que pour l'amour de l'argent il avait trahi son meilleur ami. (p. 31)

[[That] didn't prevent him from praying five times a day, visiting the holy places each spring, and making a pilgrimage every two years. Before each operation, he demanded payment in advance, in cash. He was as famous for his greed as for his surgical skills. People even said that for love of money he had betrayed his best friend. (p. 24)]

The acute discrepancy here between the outwardly projected image of the good Muslim who prays and goes on pilgrimages, and the avaricious, ruthless pursuit of monetary wealth, emphasises the fact that Morocco is just as victimised by its own people as it is by Western, capitalist interference and points to the tension between what the country is and what it perceives itself to be. This corruption filters down and is a major influence on the inert and ailing masculinity of the exploited (male) population.

³³⁰ Indeed, globalisation here is presented as a continuation of past (French) colonialism, only in a mutated (and not specifically French) form. On this but with a focus on North African immigrants already in France, Ben Jelloun states: 'La violence coloniale d'hier se perpétue aujourd'hui de manière encore plus pernicieuse, puisqu'aux exigences du besoin (chômage dans les pays d'origine) s'ajoute la coopération complice des bourgeoisies locales' [*The colonial violence of yesteryear is perpetuated today even more perniciously, since need (unemployment in the country of origin) is coupled with the complicit cooperation of the native middle classes*]. Ben Jelloun, *La plus haute des solitudes*, pp. 7–8.

With all these obstacles facing the younger generation, it is little wonder that their sense of masculinity is severely undermined. Arab identity as a whole is portrayed as castrated and subordinate to modern-day Western civilisation. Significantly, at their first real meeting, Azel introduces himself to Miguel by his full name, Azz El Arab (p. 49) and provides a translation – Azz El Arab, we are told, means ‘the pride/the glory of the Arabs’ (‘la fierté, la gloire des Arabes’) (p. 49). This is one of only two occasions when Azel is referred to by his full name, a fact not without significance. During the same conversation, he recounts his father’s staunch support for Gamal Abdel Nasser, the president who overthrew the Egyptian monarchy in 1952 and drove out European colonisers. In doing so of course, Nasser ignited a nascent Arab nationalism and is still associated by many with Arab sovereignty and, above all, dignity. Asked whether the meaning of his name is not a burdensome encumbrance, Azel replies: ‘Mon père était un nassérien, un nationaliste passionné par le monde arabe. Malheureusement, le monde arabe est aujourd’hui en bien mauvais état; moi aussi, d’ailleurs’ (p. 49) [‘*My father supported Nasser and was a nationalist with a passionate interest in the Arab world. Unfortunately, the Arab world of today is a shambles. So am I, by the way*’ (p. 43)]. The direct parallel made in this quotation between the malaise of the Arab world and his own bad state underlines Azel’s function as symbol of a broader malady. The erosion of Azel’s masculine identity can therefore be read as a microcosm of the broader subordination of non-Western societies to the will of the capitalist West. From this brief reference to the deceased father, we learn that he was a nationalist and desirous for a proud, assertive Arab nation to stand up to foreign interference. Azel’s self-identification as a mess, and therefore his (and the Arab world’s) failure to do this, suggests that he has failed to live up to the hopes of his father. This inability to fulfil paternal expectations is indicative of another element of his ineptitudes and once again suggests that Azel is comparable to his rather menial grandfather.

The allusion to the malaise in the Arab world is evoked implicitly throughout the novel by the ambivalence of Azel’s name. There are two possible Arabic sounds that can only be rendered by the use of the letter ‘a’ in French, namely ا (alif) and ع (‘ain). The sound ع (‘ain), a sound that comes from deep in the throat, does not exist in French. Its closest equivalent sound would be ‘a’. The process of transliteration obscures the two sounds, which are conflated into one single letter. Miguel comments on the difficulty of pronouncing Azz El Arab (Azz and Arab both being pronounced and spelt with ‘ain/ع in Arabic), and Azel tells him his friends call him Azel because it is simpler. Ben Jelloun therefore employs the French language to play on Arabic meanings by providing two alternative interpretations of the

protagonist's name; in the first instance the full version of the name, Azz El Arab (عز العرب) with 'ain) meaning 'glory of the Arabs'³³¹ but secondly the shortened, 'simpler' version used throughout the novel which appears to be the Arabic word for 'isolation' (عزل). With the exception of this and one other occasion, Azel's name is consistently shortened, which appears to underline his alienation from a dominant social order. This linguistic interplay is therefore a strong indicator of a perceived crisis of Arab/Moroccan identity, an identity that is usually grounded in a rigid Muslim social order that endorses masculine superiority. It is also a system coming under increasing pressure from the Western, 'modernised' world.

Discourses and Negotiations of Masculinity

Amidst the hardship and perception of masculine inadequacy, certain strains of dominant masculinity do emerge. Tellingly, these templates all revolve around a binary structure and insist upon a certain masculine script consolidating itself through subordinating the Other either sexually, economically or even morally. The first negotiation of masculinity is that of the sexually dominant male and the appropriation of the female body, embodied by Azel's 'friend', the womanising and somewhat ironically named El Haj who constructs a whole theory to justify the sexual exploitation of women. El Haj belongs to a class of man, primarily businessmen, who enjoy a good time at parties where young girls are plentiful and trade sexual favours for money. We know that he is wealthy, enjoys life and is physically repulsive: 'El Haj était aussi repoussant physiquement qu'Azal était séduisant' (p. 33) [*El Haj was as physically repulsive as Azal was attractive*] (p. 26)]. His supposed virility is undercut by the fact that he has no children, and the narration explicitly makes it known that he cannot due to his *own* infertility (not that of his wife), a fact that seems to deflate his self-professed sexual prowess somewhat.

El Haj serves as a symbol of corrupted morality. For men of his ilk, women are completely objectified and are subordinated to predatory male sexuality. He desires women who are initially available, servile to his whims and who can be dismissed as easily as they are summoned, reasoning:

En vrai, on [les hommes] cherche quoi? On cherche à passer du bon temps avec de jolies frimousses à qui on file quelques billets à la fin de la soirée, t'es pas enchaîné, t'es pas engagé, tu seras jamais cocu. (p. 34)

³³¹ For Arabs, this phrase is commonly associated with the 'Golden Age' of Arab conquest and with the spread of Islam and Arab culture. Notably, Iberia was a significant territory in the extended Arabo-Islamic world and its once-Arab status is still remembered.

[Really, what are we [men] looking for? We're looking to enjoy ourselves with pretty little sweeties to whom you slip a few bills at the end of the evening: you're not tied down, you're not committed, you'll never be two-timed (pp. 27–28)]

As demonstrated by this quotation, for El Haj and the masculine discourse to which he adheres, women are not deemed worthy of any emotional investment, and the transitory nature of male-female relations which do not bind men to one woman is an essential requirement, rendering (female) disposability a key factor of this version of masculine sexuality. Thus, El Haj aligns himself firmly with the notion of rampant male sexuality and endorses the consolidation of normative masculinity by means of phallic potency which, according to critics, is central to Islamicate masculinity.³³²

According to El Haj's treatise, there are only two aims to seeing a woman (p. 34). The first of these is to make her a wife by marriage as recommended by societal ideology, a status that El Haj appears to find ensnaring. The second is to render her a mistress, available for sexual use. However, both options are unsatisfactory for El Haj, who bemoans the burdensome investment in the woman in question – financial or otherwise. Rather, his focus is on the permanent satisfaction of the male libido for which he requires a constant stream of new objects of desire.³³³ He tells Azel: 'Le changement, mon cher, c'est la clé du désir permanent' (p. 35) [*Change – it's the key to permanent desire, my friend!*] (p. 28)]. Aware of Azel's unspoken disapproval, El Haj continues:

T'es pas d'accord, tu vas me parler de la misère, de l'exploitation, du vice, de la morale, de la condition de la femme, de droit, de justice, d'égalité et même de religion [...] mais laisse-toi vivre et profiter de ta jeunesse. (p. 35)

[*I know you don't agree, you're going to lecture me about poverty, exploitation, vice, morality, the status of women, justice, equality, privilege, even religion [...] but let yourself live, and enjoy your youth*] (p. 28)]

El Haj's understanding of male sexuality constitutes an almost total annulment of the value of woman as a living being. It shows a complete disregard for females as anything other than objects for male sexual gratification, thus also illustrating the complete estrangement of masculinity from femininity. The above quotation represents a list of commendable humanist concerns, all swept aside and rendered secondary to El Haj's interpretation of the idea of *vivre*, living, thus betraying the limitations of the notion for men of his type. El Haj

³³² Dunne, 'Power and Sexuality in the Middle East', p. 50; El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, p. 31; Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 40; Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 95.

³³³ This echoes Mernissi's conclusion, that male sexuality has not been 'civilised' to the same extent as women's in Islamicate cultures. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, pp. 46–49.

symbolises a masculinity in which human relations are fleeting and transitory, and a system of values based on (mutual) exploitation where man and woman are alienated from each other, pointing to a lack of dignity for both sexes.

Nevertheless, El Haj is at least astute enough to recognise the innate misogyny of his argument and hastily seeks to camouflage this behind a pseudo-feminist rhetoric. He justifies the exploitation by claiming: 'Et de toute façon ce sont toutes des cas sociaux, et nous, on les aide!' (p. 35) [*And besides, they're all social cases. And us? We're helping them!*] (p. 28)]. It is notable that El Haj thoroughly embraces the term of 'cas sociaux' (pp. 34–5) [*social cases*] and clings to it as a way of justifying his lifestyle, which capitalises on (women's) financial hardship. El Haj's manipulation of the truth nevertheless represents patriarchy's attempt to put a positive spin on something that is ultimately indefensible. However, with so many young girls willing and eager to take part in the *soirées*, and with the ready collusion of Khaddouj, 'la qawada' (*madam*) who 'recruits' suitable candidates (p. 34), El Haj's masculinist thinking is easily upheld by women who collude with this ideology.

Continuing his misogynist oration, El Haj claims that they are 'libérées' (p. 35) [*liberated*] (p. 28)]. Lacking any sexual taboos or proscriptions, he argues that these girls are actually freed of the suffocating dictates of societal norms. He neglects to consider that they are enslaved by the objectifying discourse which he himself promotes and which permits 'sexual liberation' solely in relation to male gratification. He gleefully tells Azel: '[Elles] se mettent à l'aise et te font comprendre que non seulement elles sont disponibles mais qu'elles ne sont là que pour toi!' (p. 35) [*They relax and let you know that not only are they available but that they've come there only for you!*] (p. 28)]. Thus, El Haj's sense of virility is bolstered by being the sole focus of subservient female attention. He is, at once, both a morally corrosive influence and a figure of ridicule, relishing the female attention but oblivious, perhaps deliberately, to the fact that he too is being manipulated by girls who seek to supplement their meagre incomes by massaging the phallogocentric male ego.

Many of these girls – the 'social cases' – are in love with Azel (pp. 35–36). Indeed, it is little wonder, given that Azel stands in marked opposition to the hideous El Haj. Whereas he desires the attention and eventual succumbing of the female, Azel strikes up a relationship with one of the girls, Siham. Described as the eldest, Siham and Azel embark on a friendship primarily based on conversation. It is only following this nascent friendship that the relationship becomes sexual, and: '[Azel] était heureux mais sentait la fragilité de ces émotions. Ce soir-là, il fit l'amour avec Siham' (p. 37) [*He was happy, but sensed the fragility of such emotions. That evening he made love with Siham*] (p. 30)]. The contrast

between this last quotation and El Haj's attitude towards women could not be greater. Azel's recognition of his own feelings, and crucially of his own 'fragility', stands in marked juxtaposition with the emotionally retentive El Haj. The expression of the sexual act is of a romantic nature, suggesting a more loving and embracing attitude to sex and women. The use of this phrase, which is accompanied by the preposition *avec* in French, implies a mutual and inclusive act and not the degrading and exploitative dynamics to which El Haj is more accustomed. Nevertheless, this does underline Azel's failure to adhere to dominant masculine norms, which are based exclusively on subordinating another. By refusing to partake in this domineering discourse, Azel distances himself from the core of dominant masculine values.

An alternative way of performing masculinity and of acquiring power and dominance in the society depicted in *Partir* is by engaging in corruption and criminality. Al Afia, the head of a people-smuggling gang, profits from the despair and hardship surrounding him. He is wealthy, lives in an immense mansion, has two wives who are subdued to such an extent that they are never seen in public. His primary occupation is smuggling *kif* (hashish). Nevertheless, Al Afia's greed extends beyond this: '[Le trafic du kif] ne lui suffisait pas, il remplissait donc tous les quinze jours de vieilles embarcations de pauvres bougres qui donnaient tout ce qu'ils avaient pour passer en Espagne' (p. 19) [*Since kif trafficking wasn't enough for him, every two weeks he filled some old boats with poor bastards who gave him everything that they had to get to Spain*] (p. 11)]. He is a menacing character, described as 'le caïd, le terrible, le puissant, l'homme silencieux et sans cœur' (p. 16) [*the caïd, the local gang leader, fearsome and powerful, a man of few words and no heart*] (p. 8)]. Nicknamed Al Afia (the fire) because he burns the incriminating identity documents of those he smuggles, he is presented as a rapacious businessman who demands exorbitant sums of money for his services. He remains untroubled by the dubious morality surrounding his 'occupation' or the deaths attributable to him.

Azel's objection to him is also personal, for having paid to leave Morocco, his departure was cancelled and Azel was not reimbursed. Al Afia is therefore a miserly and indifferent attitude to the additional suffering caused by his greed despite the frequent tirades against him from the furious Azel. Azel's cousin, Noureddine, was also one of his victims and was drowned when the heavily overloaded boat organised by Al Afia, seeking to maximise his profit by taking on too many passengers, capsized. The decomposing bodies of the dead – abandoned to their fate by both Al Afia and the Spanish authorities – wash up on the shore, serving as a stark reminder of the inequality and exploitation wrought on Moroccans not just by the Westerner but by their own people.

Al Afia's image is built upon the exploitation, and therefore the enforced subordination, of those around him. During one of his outbursts, Azel tells others to look at Al Afia, shouting:

Regardez ce gros ventre, c'est celui d'un pourri, regardez sa nuque, elle montre assez combien cet homme est méchant, il achète tout le monde, normal, ce pays est un vrai marché, ouvert vingt-quatre heures sur vingt-quatre, tout le monde se vend. (p. 17)

[*Look at that fat belly, a crook's belly, and that neck, it really shows how bad this man is – he buys everyone, of course, this country is one huge marketplace, wheeling and dealing day and night, everybody's for sale. (p. 9)*]

Al Afia's social and economic power is consolidated all the more each time a new customer requires his services. Azel deplures the societal conditions that allow individuals like Al Afia to prosper and emphasises the hierarchy of criminality which feeds off the misery of the disenfranchised. Once again, however, Azel's principled stance is easily dismissed since Al Afia does not force people to leave, as El Haj does not force girls to attend his parties. He merely aids the process, while benefiting from it. Azel is acutely aware of the damaging influence of corruption on his country, declaring: 'Dans notre pays bien-aimé, la corruption, c'est l'air que l'on respire, oui, nous puons la corruption' (p. 18) [*In our beloved country, corruption is the very air we breathe, yes, we stink of corruption' (p. 10)*]. Ironically, Azel has studied law in a country that appears to have no respect for legal protocol. His hope was to work for his uncle who ran a law firm. His uncle loses his business, however, a fact that Azel attributes to his resistance to corruption (pp. 21–22). In the dog-eat-dog world of the novel, Al Afia offers a blueprint for successful masculinity, based on the exploitation of his own people. This exploitation colludes, in an indirect way, with their oppression by the richer West, by benefitting from it. Azel's position *vis-à-vis* Al Afia, symbolic of the criminal and corrupt hierarchy, is commendable, but his opposition to it once more points to his isolation from dominant strains of masculinity.

Thirdly, and in addition to the heightened exploitation of women and wide spread criminality, the discourse of religious fundamentalism offers another space for the consolidation of hegemonic masculine trends. References to the 'recruteurs' (*recruiters*) pervade the text and they appear to be active not only in Tangiers but also amongst the immigrant community in Barcelona. In chapter three, Azel comes face to face with one such individual, and the link between a generalised lack of dignity and political Islam is clearly underlined. Indeed, this has parallels with *La Répudiation*, where political Islam was held up as the only discourse that could counter colonial rhetoric. Although *Partir* is set in a post-

colonial context, a similarity exists nevertheless through its setting in Tangiers, where the effects of neo-colonialism threaten the nation's self-governance. The goal of the political Islamists, it would seem, is to give the Moroccan population what it wants: 'Nous savons ce que la population désire: vivre dans la dignité' (p. 24) [*We know what the people want: to live in dignity*' (p. 17)]. What Islamic extremism appears to offer, however, is a return to puritanical Islamic values based on patriarchal supremacy. This promoter, despite being a highly-educated man who is rational and has devoted significant time and energy to his philosophy, is nevertheless undermined by the narrator. Firstly, he has a nervous tic (p. 23). He appears to suffer from the physical, perhaps psychosomatic symptoms of a nervous problem because we are told: 'Il clignait nerveusement des yeux tout en se mordant la lèvre inférieure' (p. 23) [*[he was] blinking nervously while he chewed on his lower lip*' (p. 15)]. Azel regards this discourse with disdain, ridiculing the recruiter by imagining him running across the desert naked (p. 23). The final deflation of this particular individual appears to be that despite all of his promises, his canvassing and his assurances that the Islamists can save Morocco, Azel imagines him for a second time naked in a *hammam*, 'entre les mains d'un masseur' (p. 26) [*between the hands of a masseur*].³³⁴ The discourse of political Islam is thus ridiculed and rejected by Azel for its hypocrisy.

Nevertheless, the narrative does reveal the nature of the very real allure of political Islam for languishing and symbolically castrated young men. Stagnating in a country decaying in corruption and exploitation and unable to 'do' manhood in a way that is socially acceptable, young North African men are portrayed as vulnerable to religious orthodoxy, and Islamic fundamentalism is, for some, a viable option. Azel's friend Mohamed-Larbi was one such man, taken in by the optimism and (self-)determination of the Islamists:

[Azel] recommença à se poser des questions sur la brusque disparition de Mohamed-Larbi, un copain vraisemblablement recruté par des islamistes. C'était impossible, répétait pourtant le père de Mohamed-Larbi. Son fils, affirmait-il, était un mécréant, il ne faisait pas le ramadan, se saoulait souvent, c'était même un drame pour la famille et les voisins. Justement, lui expliquait un officier de police, c'est exactement ce genre de type qui les intéresse. (p. 29)

[*He began wondering once again about the abrupt disappearance of Mohamed-Larbi, the friend who had probably been lured into some Islamist group, although the young man's father kept saying that was impossible. His son, he insisted, was a nonbeliever who did not observe Ramadan and often got drunk, in fact his drinking was a dreadful burden for the family and their neighbours. Exactly, a policeman had explained. That's just the type of guy who interests the Islamists. (pp. 22–23)*]

³³⁴ My translation.

The police officer involved in the investigation of Mohamed-Larbi's disappearance remains undeterred by his father's protestations and verbalises the intrinsic link between the culture of corruption and the increasing influence of Islamist extremism:

L'allié principal des islamistes c'est la corruption qu'ils prétendent combattre, c'est grâce au bakchich qu'ils arrivent à tromper la vigilance de la police des frontières. Ton fils réapparaîtra un jour, barbu, tu ne le reconnaîtras pas, il aura changé, alors préviens-nous, tu rendras service à ton pays... (p. 30)

[*The Islamists' main ally is the corruption they claim to be fighting, because it's thanks to the baksheesh that they manage to slip past the border police. Your son will turn up one day, [bearded], and you won't recognize him, he'll have changed, so let us know, and you'll be doing your country a great service... (p. 23)*]

Mohamed-Larbi, however, does eventually reappear and migrates to Europe where he stays with his uncle Sadek in Brussels. Sadek is described as 'pas plus musulman qu'un autre' (p. 91) [*he hadn't been a particularly observant Muslim*] (p. 85)]. The cultural isolation of the immigrant community in Brussels leads Sadek to believe that Islam is the culturally authentic and unifying force that the community needs. When Mohamed-Larbi joins him, he also attends nightly meetings to read the Qur'an and listen to the preaching of an Egyptian 'alim (Muslim scholar). This 'alim, however, projects the cultural differences between Muslims and non-Muslims as an insurmountable clash of civilisations (pp. 94–95), emphasising the pathological nature of Western society which is deemed sick and contaminating. Above all, the 'alim insists on the need to maintain 'la supériorité absolue de l'homme sur la femme' (p. 94) [*the absolute superiority of man over woman*] (p. 88)] and to resist 'la propagande occidentale qui cherche à anéantir le pouvoir masculin' (p. 94) [*Western propaganda seeking to destroy masculine power*] (p. 88)]. Islamist extremism is depicted as a cult with transnational links, and there are *Frères* (Brothers) in a variety of countries ready and willing to support their colleagues. The portrayal of extremism can therefore be read as a brotherhood – a masculine community of solidarity, determined to reinstate traditional values that promote male ascendancy.

In his article 'Globalization and its Mal(e)contents', Michael S. Kimmel states that 'gender becomes one of the chief organizing principles of local, regional and national resistance to globalization, whether expressed in religious or secular, ethnic or national terms'.³³⁵ He argues that: 'Efforts to reclaim economic autonomy, to reassert political control and revive traditional domestic dominance thus take on the veneer of restoring manhood'.³³⁶

³³⁵ Kimmel, 'Globalization and its Mal(e)contents', p. 604.

³³⁶ Kimmel, 'Globalization and its Mal(e)contents', p. 605.

Moreover, displacement and migration on an unprecedented scale, as well as downward social mobility, have led to men feeling embittered and resentful of privileges deemed theirs but of which they are now deprived.³³⁷ Thus, Kimmel asserts that the rise of extremist movements such as white supremacists and Islamic fundamentalists can be explained as an attempt to 'restore that unquestioned entitlement, both in the domestic sphere and in the public sphere. They are movements not of revolution, but of restoration'.³³⁸

Particularly in the culturally alien cities of Brussels and Barcelona, this dissatisfaction with, and fear of dissolving gender frameworks is expressed in *Partir* as a return to cultural authenticity (*al-'asala*) via political Islam. Indeed, one of the stories that so shocked the '*alim* is the police questioning of a Muslim man for hitting his daughter:

'La police de ce pays n'a-t-elle pas convoqué il y a seulement quelques jours un de mes amis, un homme vertueux, pour lui demander de s'expliquer sur les coups qu'il avait donnés à sa fille aînée qui lui désobéissait? Elle voulait sortir le soir, maquillée et prête à n'importe quelle aventure! Que Dieu nous en préserve! Vous rendez-vous compte qu'ici on punit un père de famille parce qu'il veille sur la vertu de sa fille?' (p. 94)

[*'A few days ago, did not the police of this country summon a friend of mine, a virtuous man, to find out why he had beaten his disobedient eldest daughter? She had wanted to go out for the evening wearing makeup and ready for who knows what! God forbid! Do you realize that here they punish a family man for protecting his daughter's virtue?'* (p. 88)]

What appears so unsettling for the '*alim* is the disintegration of traditional patriarchal values. On a first level, the 'virtuous man' faces interference from an outside institution (the police). No longer the unquestioned master of his household, his role is demoted by the higher authority of national bodies – and in this particular case, a national body that is deemed to be foreign – who make him explain his actions and reveal a dispersal of patriarchal power. Secondly however, he faces a revolt against his authority from within, and from the daughter who seeks to subvert and challenge his rule, and in doing so inadvertently rejects the man's right to power and control over his familial subjects.

This distance that has emerged between what may be seen as an authentic construction of masculinity and the reality of being an Arab man in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries therefore pushes some individuals towards an entrenched position in which they can enact the role perceived to be theirs. Moreover, this position also allows them to demand the privileges to which they feel they are entitled. It is perhaps significant, therefore,

³³⁷ Kimmel, 'Globalization and its Mal(e)contents', p. 605.

³³⁸ Kimmel, 'Globalization and its Mal(e)contents', p. 605.

that Mohamed-Larbi's name means 'Mohamed the Arab', since for some characters in the novel, the return to Islamic orthodoxy represents a rejection of Western values and a reassertion of manhood along Islamic lines. With few other viable ways of asserting a male identity, Ben Jelloun outlines the attraction of religious fundamentalism, which not only functions as a protestation against westernisation and modernisation, which are perceived as morally and culturally corroding. It also assumes the veneer of rehabilitating a broken manhood and reasserting traditional patriarchal ascendancy. Marginalised and stripped of masculine worth in mainstream society, Mohamed-Larbi and others like him rediscover a sense of masculinity in the closed and hyper-masculine community of political Islamism.

The main protagonist, Azel, rejects all of the discourses analysed in the preceding sections. Indeed, the novel's title is a clear sign of the importance of emigration for the book. For Azel, a representative of any young man of his generation, emigrating becomes the single most important goal of his life, a veritable obsession. Indeed, the thought of leaving Morocco dominates his life to the extent that he himself muses on the origins of the obsession: 'D'où venait cette idée [de quitter le Maroc]? Pour quoi était-elle si têtue, si violente?' (p. 27) [*'Where had the idea [of leaving Morocco] come from, and why was it so tenacious, so violent?'* (p. 20)]. Furthermore, he asks himself: 'Quitter le pays. C'était une obsession, une sorte de folie qui le travaillait jour et nuit. Comment s'en sortir, comment en finir avec l'humiliation?' (p. 23) [*'Leaving the country. It was an obsession, a kind of madness that ate at him day and night: how could he get out, how could he escape this humiliation?'* (p. 15)].

From this wretched existence emerges 'le virus du départ' (p. 43) [*'the virus of departure'* (p. 37)]. Indeed, life in Europe is perceived as some sort of utopia where all problems cease to exist. Azel at one point even expresses the desire to be one of the freight containers full of designer clothes, and to be deposited 'sur une terre de liberté et prospérité' (p. 39) [*'in a land of prosperity and freedom'* (p. 33)]. However, the Spanish view the Moroccan pretenders with neurotic fear. From the outside, Moroccan men are dehumanised and treated as nothing more than a virulent plague by the Spanish authorities, who demonstrate no real consideration or humanity towards them. In truth, the obstructive mechanisms put in place by the Spanish authorities suggest that Moroccan immigrants, legal or otherwise, are viewed as a contagion. For instance, constantly updated security measures are installed in order to prevent the Moroccan infiltration of Spanish soil:

L'Espagne venait très récemment d'installer le long de ses plages un système de surveillance électronique, avec infrarouge, armes automatiques, ultrason, ultra tout...

[...] Avec cet attirail, les flics espagnols étaient maintenant capables de tout prévoir dès qu'un Marocain émettait le plus petit désir de traverser le détroit de Gibraltar. (p. 41)

[Spain had recently installed an electronic surveillance system along its beaches, with infrared and ultrasound equipment, ultra everything, along with automatic weapons... [...] With that paraphernalia, the Spanish cops were now able to foresee everything as soon as a Moroccan showed the slightest inclination to cross the Straits of Gibraltar. (pp. 34–35)]

Spain and its Guardia Civil are therefore portrayed as fighting a battle against the influx of unwanted immigrants and the above quotation reads more as if they were seeking to repel an enemy or a plague than impoverished human beings desperately searching for a better life. Siham herself had once managed to get as far as the Spanish coastline, only to be met with the Guardia Civil 'camouflés comme en temps de guerre' (p. 36) [*'in camouflage, as if they'd been at war'* (p. 29)], a point which supports this reading.

In addition, according to the newspaper article from which Azel learns of this new policy, the Spanish authorities will henceforth have access to all the personal details of the potential offender; his/her name, age and details of his past (p. 41). Indeed, for the moment it appears that the new measures are a success, for we are told, with more than a hint of sarcasm: 'Au moindre soupçon, les lumières de la Guardia Civil s'allument, les appareils détectent le candidat à l'immigration qui sera refoulé avant même qu'il quitte la maison' (p. 41) [*'At the slightest suspicion, the lights of the Guardia Civil pop on and the electronic gear detects the would-be emigrant, who will be turned back before he even leaves his house'* (p. 35)]. The Spanish policy of dehumanising potential immigrants reflects a hierarchical slicing of the world and its people into two categories, the haves and the have-nots, the rich/powerful/superior and the poor/powerless/inferior. Those who do not originate from the Western world and who attempt to penetrate it are regarded with contempt and repelled with the utmost urgency. Regarded with such hostility and disdain, the Moroccan can never hope to be considered equal, not to mention powerful in this context. This derision therefore also functions as a subordinating force and undermines the Arab/Muslim and his status as the personification of social superiority. In this violent clash with Western civilisation, the Arab unconscious which had hitherto presided over and dominated women, concubines and slaves suddenly finds itself in a similar position of social inferiority, rendered passive by the foreign, more powerful Other. Azel pursues his Spanish dream only to find that his oft-imagined idyllic European life will forever remain out of reach and will, eventually, efface his already ailing sense of masculine worth.

Sex as Power

The sexual act takes on a vast significance in *Partir* and is central to many of the relationships portrayed in the novel. It appears to embody several different principles. In the first instance, sex is about power, as it was in both *Xala* and *La Répudiation*, confirming on a fictional level the premise put forward by sociological and gender critics. This power is expressed through sexual agency and most potently through being the active, penetrating partner. On one level, sexual potency serves as a bedrock of masculine identity and the urge to conquer women sexually, with the phallus as the means to do this, reinforces and bolsters masculine identity. Nevertheless, the sexuality explored in *Partir* is equally concerned with male-male relations, for, as we shall see, there is a sexual battle going on between men. Miguel's status as wealthy Spaniard adds a further, telling dimension to representations of power and sex. The sexual act therefore comes to represent traditional expressions of social supremacy between not only women and men or men and men, but also between Maghrebian men and the foreign Other.

The critic Nicole Kligerman reminds us that same-sex sexuality is explicitly condemned by Islam and that there is little flexibility on the issue.³³⁹ She also argues that in medieval Islamic societies: 'Homosexual relationships reinforced dominant and subordinated roles already present in society. Homosexual relationships followed traditional gender and power patterns; boys played the passive role (emulating the woman), while adult males asserted their power by receiving sexual pleasure through domination'.³⁴⁰ Bruce Dunne supports this view, by arguing that young male partners who took on a passive role in the (sexual) relationship merely echoed the established order of men's domination and women's subordination.³⁴¹ These traditional, historical configurations, however, appear to have changed little, a fact that leads Dunne to assert that even in contemporary Morocco, homosexuality between a youth and an adult carries little stigma since it is perceived as a reflection of the accepted hierarchical structures of society.³⁴² Furthermore, and key to reading masculinity in *Partir*, Kligerman underlines the centrality of dominance in male-male relations in Muslim countries, asserting that engaging in homosexual activities does not

³³⁹ Kligerman, 'Homosexuality in Islam', p. 53.

³⁴⁰ Kligerman, 'Homosexuality in Islam', p. 55.

³⁴¹ Bruce Dunne, 'Homosexuality in the Middle East: An Agenda for Historical Research', *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 12 (1998), 1-18 (p. 3).

³⁴² Dunne, 'Homosexuality in the Middle East', p. 4.

necessarily identify an individual as homosexual provided that the individual in question is the 'active' partner.³⁴³ Nevertheless, whereas being the active partner in a male-male relationship could simply be considered as unproblematic, Dunne goes even further by claiming that in Morocco, Egypt and Turkey, the act of penetrating another man actually imparts a status of 'hyper-masculinity'.³⁴⁴ We can deduce, therefore, that the link between penetration and power and/or social status is a close one in the Islamic world regardless of the sex of the penetrated partner.

Furthermore, according to Frédéric Lagrange, the formerly rich tradition of homoerotic literature no longer exists in current-day Arab literature.³⁴⁵ He outlines three main ways of representing same-sex sexuality in Arab literature. Firstly, the homosexual act is portrayed either in neutral terms or explicitly as an act to be condemned. Secondly, homosexuality becomes symptomatic of a profound malaise. Finally, and most revealingly perhaps, homosexuality in Arab literature is currently emblematic of a traumatic relationship with the Other, who is usually a Westerner.³⁴⁶ Lagrange claims that 'literature often displaces the shock of the encounter with the West into the arena of sexuality'.³⁴⁷ The trope of the homosexual man, or at least the man who engages in same-sex relationships, has taken on a new meaning – the Arab man who finds himself politically dominated may react in an attempt to dominate sexually. He concludes that today, Arabs are 'even on a metaphorical level of sexuality, the victim of the Western phallus'.³⁴⁸

Therefore, Moroccan masculinity in *Partir* appears to revolve not solely around what we may refer to as heteronormative practices, but rather hinges on the assumption of the active and dominant sex roles which can be employed symbolically to reflect current political power stratifications. For Azel at least, his affair with Miguel is purely about the practicalities

³⁴³ Kligerman, 'Homosexuality in Islam', p. 57.

³⁴⁴ Dunne, 'Power and Sexuality in the Middle East', p. 10.

³⁴⁵ Frédéric Lagrange, 'Male Homosexuality in Modern Arabic Literature', in *Imagined Masculinities*, p. 170. Stephen O. Murray, for instance, asserts that there existed a 'quasi-religious sanction' for pederasty in medieval mystic writing, and particularly in Sufi writings. Homoerotic portraits of 'the beloved' – always a pre-pubescent boy – have a long history in Arabo-Persian culture in particular. See Stephen O. Murray, 'The Will Not to Know', in *Islamic Homosexualities*, pp. 14–54 (pp. 22–24). Also see Jim Wafer, 'Vision and Passion: The Symbolism of Male Love in Islamic Mystical Literature', pp. 107–131 and Stephen O. Murray, 'Corporealizing Medieval Persian and Turkish Tropes', pp. 132–141 in the same volume. Dominique Robert points out, however, that it is forgotten all too often that the body of old oriental poetry to which Lagrange is referring here was in fact about the love of boys, not men. Not yet adults themselves, young boys may be equated with women and in this sense then, it merely expresses a reflection of the configuration of sexuality akin to the prevailing heteronormative model (i.e. man/dominant and woman/subordinate). See Robert, 'Arab Men in Paris', pp. 123–124.

³⁴⁶ Lagrange, 'Male Homosexuality in Modern Arabic Literature', p. 170.

³⁴⁷ Lagrange, 'Male Homosexuality in Modern Arabic Literature', p. 187.

³⁴⁸ Lagrange, 'Male Homosexuality in Modern Arabic Literature', p. 189.

of obtaining a permanent Spanish visa, a fact that is not portrayed as problematic in itself by him or by his family and friends.³⁴⁹ However, the protagonist is incessantly haunted by the notion of being *zamel*, a derogatory slang-term used to denote the passive, penetrated partner in a male-male relationship. Arno Schmitt notes that North African (Arabic) vocabulary reflects a sharp separation between penetrator and penetratee.³⁵⁰ Both *zamel* and *attaye* can be translated as ‘someone who gets bugged’.³⁵¹ We could interpret Azel’s anguish then as his publicly recognised failure to exercise the penile power so deeply embedded in notions of masculinity. The longer the relationship goes on, the more this notion of ‘sexual castration’ and submission causes distress to Azel.³⁵²

Arno Schmitt argues that there exists an important distinction that must be made when considering male-male sexual relations in Islamicate societies. This ‘decisive line’, he argues, lies between keeping the relationship secret, and society declaring its knowledge openly. Thus, he states: ‘As long as nobody draws public attention to something everybody knows, one ignores what might disrupt important social relations’.³⁵³ Therefore, we might read Azel’s discomfort at being named *zamel* as recognition of his (self-induced) exile from the cult of hegemonic masculinity. Recalling Bruce Dunne’s assertion that sex/penetration occurs between ‘dominant, free adult men’ and their ‘subordinate, social inferiors’, we might deduce also that Azel, in persevering with the relationship, has, in Dunne’s words, ‘[given] up [his] claims to membership in the dominant male order’.³⁵⁴ Embarking upon a same-sex relationship becomes a primary means by which Azel is marginalised as a man.

The preoccupation with who is the ‘dominant’ or ‘penetrating’ member of any relationship is explored in chapter six in a scene depicting the institutionalised brutality of the Moroccan police. During a period of ‘cleaning-up’ drug dealers and crime generally, the state

³⁴⁹ Although gay marriage was legalised in Spain in 2005, it is never put forward as a possibility in *Partir* and the reader is inclined to conclude that such a contract, which would shrine Azel’s status in law, would be utterly unacceptable to him.

³⁵⁰ Schmitt, ‘Different Approaches to Male-Male Sexuality/Eroticism’, p. 13.

³⁵¹ Both *zamel* and *attaye* indicate a man who allows himself to be penetrated anally and convey contempt and shame. They could alternatively be translated as ‘he who offers his arse’. See Schmitt, ‘Different Approaches to Male-Male Sexuality/Eroticism’, p. 18.

³⁵² Asifa Siraj, in her study of the problematics of forging a Muslim identity for homosexual men, clearly underlines the importance of heteronormative gender roles in Islamicate cultures. In her article, she traces how homosexual men attempt to negotiate a space that allows them to be both homosexual and Muslim. It would seem, however, that this is a task doomed to failure without new interpretation and consideration of Islamic doctrine. Even were Azel to identify with a homosexual identity (along Western lines), it seems implausible that the forging of a sexual third space would be possible for him. See Asifa Siraj, ‘On Being Homosexual and Muslim: Conflicts and Challenges’, in *Islamic Masculinities*, pp. 202–216.

³⁵³ Schmitt, ‘Different Approaches to Male-Male Sexuality/Eroticism’, p. 7. He therefore echoes what Stephen Murray terms ‘the will not to know’. Murray, ‘The Will not to Know’, p. 37.

³⁵⁴ Dunne, ‘Power and Sexuality in the Middle East’, p. 10.

flexes its muscles in order to appear to be tackling crime. The goal is to protect Morocco's image abroad, and there is little concern for the real reasons for crime or, indeed, in finding and punishing its real perpetrators. Instead, the mission is a performative exercise designed to create an impression, rather than to solve the issue. Azel unfortunately gets caught up in a raid and is dragged to a police station for interrogation, in spite of his innocence.

In this episode, penetration becomes a measure of virility. Frustrated by a lack of any useful answers in spite of their physical brutality, the police resort to attacking Azel with the ultimate insult, *zamel*, a derogatory term to denote the passive partner in the male-male sexual act. They insist on knowing who penetrates whom in Azel's relationship with Miguel before proceeding to rape him. Here, the sexual act cannot represent anything other than dynamics of power and dominance, as illustrated by the policemen's insults:

Prends, *zamel* [...] t'as un joli cul, le cul d'un intellectuel [...] tiens, prends, salope, putain, oui, c'est comme ça que tu fais avec le chrétien, il se met à plat ventre et tu le nourris, nous aussi on te nourrit et tu vas aimer, tu en redemanderas jusqu'à ce que ton cul devienne une passoire, une vraie gare [...] tu pleures, comme une fille tu pleures, dis-moi, dis-nous que tu pleures de plaisir. (p. 58)

[*Take this, zamel, pansy, little scumbag, you've got a cute ass – an intellectual's ass [...] bitch, slut, yes this is what you do with the Christian, he gets on his belly and you stuff him, well we're stuffing you and you're going to love it, you'll beg for more until your butt becomes a sieve, a real train station [...] you're crying, you're crying just like a girl, tell me, tell us that you're sobbing with pleasure.* (p. 52)]

This attack is the ultimate violation. The language is sadistic and it emasculates Azel, portraying him as a little girl: soft, young, vulnerable, sexually passive – in short, the very opposite of what we would traditionally term 'masculine' in either Western or Islamicate culture.³⁵⁵ In addition, traditionally misogynistic insults such as 'bitch' and 'whore', indicating women who allow themselves to be penetrated, are used to underline Azel's powerlessness and his subservience to his attackers. A notable linguistic feature here is the use of the verb *nourrir*, to feed or to nourish. Again, by employing this verb, an idea of dependence and vulnerability is evoked, which in this scene clearly signposts the dominance and successful overpowering of the victim by the attackers. Even more sadistic is the implication that Azel is enjoying the violation; that a masochistic enjoyment can be gained by being raped and being rendered totally submissive and at someone else's mercy. The idea of

³⁵⁵ Bearing in mind the commonly-accepted definition of Islamicate masculinity as a perpetual demonstration to other men that one is no longer 'contaminated' by the feminine, the police's insults are a further attempt to undermine Azel's masculine gender.

begging for more would indicate a complete acceptance and obedience and completes the feeling of power felt by the rapists. It also transforms the rape from a brutal violation to a masochistic need on the victim's part, relinquishing any blame on the (male) perpetrators.

Nicole Kligerman argues that male rape is a very powerful and oft-utilised tool in Muslim societies and that overpowering a man sexually, and thus robbing him of his virility, is seen as more effective than killing him. Homosexual rape, she argues, is institutionalised in many Islamicate societies and is a widespread means of repression because it denies the victim his virility.³⁵⁶ Furthermore, Gianni de Martino argues that the notion of 'making a *tuisa*' in Moroccan culture is, in fact, the label for group buggery. In this context, he argues that 'the *zamel* functions as a glue for the group [...] It is a collective phallic appropriation of the arsehole and a "sacrifice" of the *zamel*'.³⁵⁷ In light of both Kligerman and de Martino's assertions, this vicious attack firmly relegates Azel to the passive role by designating him as womanly. It denies him masculinity and therefore by default an accepted place in society. At the same time, it reaffirms the masculinity of the attackers, tightening masculine bonds by conferring upon them a 'hyper-masculinity' by virtue of their overpowering another man. Ben Jelloun also notes this hyper-masculine property, arguing that active homosexuality is sometimes seen as 'une preuve supplémentaire de puissance sexuelle' [*an additional proof of sexual puissance*].³⁵⁸ Azel is therefore abruptly and cruelly expelled from the central, dominant world of the masculine. Unable to exercise any power over others, he is violated and forced to submit to another masculine will. This deprives him of his status as a man, and in the clearest terms possible, renders him a subordinate figure.

The theme of dominance in male-male relations is developed further in the novel via the relationship between Miguel and Azel which represents a triple-layered delineation of power dynamics, because Miguel is male, foreign and Other by virtue of his sexuality. Significantly, the backdrop of Azel and Miguel's first meeting in Tangiers is another bleak and depressing portrait of Moroccan life where prostitution is rife. Young girls financially ease their way through each day by being at the beck and call of rich men, attending their parties and sleeping with them for a few dollars. Yet, we are told: 'Pour Azel, elles ne se prostituaient pas, elles étaient juste des "cas sociaux"' (p. 34) [*Azel did not consider them prostitutes, but simply "social cases"*] (p. 27)]. The phrase 'social cases', first used in the novel by El Haj, is a significant one since it evokes the desperate and helpless situation which

³⁵⁶ Kligerman, 'Homosexuality in Islam', pp. 57–58.

³⁵⁷ de Martino, 'An Italian in Morocco', in *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Countries*, ed. by Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer (New York; London: Harrington Park Press, 1992), pp. 25–32 (p. 27).

³⁵⁸ Ben Jelloun, *La plus haute des solitudes*, p. 69.

leads to prostitution. Indeed, Azel even describes *himself* as a 'social case', effectively equating himself with the girls who attend the parties of which El Haj is so fond by defining himself as a twenty-four-year old unemployed graduate with no money, no car and, by extension, no prospects. Even his education, a degree in law, has not helped him. Not only is he prevented from gaining a job and therefore financial autonomy, but he also perceives his lack of material possessions as a hindrance in romantic terms:

Pour lui [Azel], tomber amoureux était un luxe, d'autant qu'à Tanger il n'y avait pas de lieu où emmener une fille ne serait-ce que pour prendre un verre. Il fallait une voiture, de l'argent, une situation. Tout ce que les étrangers avaient et qu'il n'y avait pas dans cette ville. (p. 33)

[To him, falling in love was a luxury, especially since there was nowhere else to take a girl in Tangiers, even just for a drink. You needed a car, money, a job. Everything that foreigners had and he did not, in this city (p. 26)]

Nevertheless, Azel hopes that emigrating will bring about a radical change in his circumstances. In his letter addressed to his native land, he writes:

Je suis prêt à changer, prêt à vivre libre, à être utile, à entreprendre des choses qui feront de moi un homme debout, un homme qui n'a plus peur, qui n'attend pas que sa sœur lui file quelques billets pour sortir, acheter des cigarettes, un homme qui n'aura plus jamais affaire à Al Afia, le truand, le salaud qui trafique et corrompt, qui ne sera plus le rabatteur d'El Haj, ce vieillard sénile qui tripote les filles sans coucher avec elles. (p. 73)

[I'm ready to change, ready to live free, to be useful, to attempt things that will transform me into a man standing on his own two feet, no longer afraid, no longer dependent on his sister for cigarette money [...] who won't ever again have to deal with that corrupt drug-dealing bastard Al Afia, or be the flunky of that senile old fart El Haj, who feels up girls without bedding them. (p. 67)]

Clearly, Azel falls short of his own masculine standards and rejects his subservient role *vis-à-vis* his sister, Al Afia and El Haj. His reference to being ready to live freely and for a transformation into an upstanding man confirms this sense of inadequacy and failure. His general paralysis therefore serves to underline his sense of ineptitude.

The circumstances of the initial encounter with Miguel again allude to Azel's social, sexual and therefore also, by default, masculine vulnerability. During one of his altercations with Al Afia, Azel confronts him for his parasitical misappropriation of his victims' misery. Azel's impassioned speech exposes the exploitative and corrupt forces at work in his society. However, rather like Mourad in the next chapter, honesty and integrity do not seem to count for much in the Morocco of Ben Jelloun's fiction. There is no space for such niceties and

principled stances. On this occasion however, Azel oversteps the mark and denounces Al Afia as *zamel*:

[II] le qualifia de 'zamel', c'est-à-dire d'homosexuel passif. La honte suprême! Cet homme si puissant, si bon, se mettrait à plat ventre pour se faire sodomiser! C'était trop, le petit avait dépassé les limites. Il fallait lui donner une bonne leçon. (p. 21)

[He called him zamel, a passive homosexual. The ultimate shame! A man so powerful, so good, lying on his belly to be sodomized! That was too much, the little jerk had gone too far. A serious lesson was in order. (p. 13)]

In this quotation, the mere suggestion of Al Afia, a so-called 'powerful' man, bowing down to another man and allowing himself to be penetrated is seen as an affront to his masculinity. It is the supreme insult, an insult that is evidently interpreted as being totally emasculating that strips an individual of all his putative masculine traits. Reiterating the view that penetration is power, Al Afia cannot allow himself to be qualified as *zamel*. Azel ends up receiving a severe beating from Al Afia's henchmen and is left for dead on the pavement.

It is at this point that Miguel first appears, almost as a knight in shining armour. He takes Azel to his large house in an affluent area of the medina to look after him. This meeting is significant, since here Azel is made vulnerable by both the abrupt dismissal of his moral standpoint and by his beating. Thus, as the young female prostitutes are dependent on their rich clients for money, Azel becomes reliant on Miguel for his personal safety, and notably for his future prospects. Miguel, in turn, recognises an opportunity and takes it. In a passage where Ben Jelloun employs a focalisation technique in order to offer a monologue expressing Miguel's thoughts, we are told:

Alors pourquoi vouloir arracher Azel à son monde et le faire venir chez lui, en Espagne? Au départ, Miguel voulait aider Azel. Ce n'est qu'après l'avoir vu et revu qu'il comprit qu'une aventure ou même une histoire sérieuse était possible. Chaque fois que Miguel forçait un homme à entamer avec lui une histoire, il le regrettait, mais cela ne lui déplaisait pas de souffrir et de se plaindre dans sa solitude. Il aimait la peau mate des Marocains, leur maladresse, mot qu'il utilisait pour parler de leur ambiguïté sexuelle. Il aimait leur disponibilité, qui marquait l'inégalité dans laquelle les liens se tissaient. Ainsi, tantôt domestique le jour, tantôt amant la nuit. (pp. 46-47)

[Why, then, did Miguel want to tear Azel from his own world to take him home to Spain? At first, he wanted to help Azel. Only after seeing him a few times did he realize that a fling or even a serious affair was possible. Whenever Miguel forced a man to become involved with him, he regretted it, but he found a kind of perverse pleasure in feeling lonely and sorry for himself. He loved the 'awkwardness' of Moroccan men, by which he meant their sexual ambiguity. He loved the olive sheen of their skin. And he loved their availability, which marked the inequality in which the relationship was formed, for the lover by night was thus the servant by day. (pp. 40-41)]

Miguel is described as *forcing* men into relationships with him and the ‘each time’ is a strong indication that this is habitual. The verb *forcer* carries a strong meaning, implying a physical demand on an unwilling individual. The mention of ‘ambiguïté sexuelle’ [*sexual ambiguity*] is a curious inclusion, indicative perhaps of Miguel’s belief that all Moroccan men are available.³⁵⁹ It also suggests, however, a certain complicity or, at least, a perception that Moroccan men are open to Western advances. Indeed, he points to their ‘availability’ as one of the things that attracts him to them. By this, we can read sexual availability, an availability that is a product of the inequality between rich and powerful Europeans and their poorer, North African counterparts, a point of which Miguel is undoubtedly aware. The mention of this inequality strongly suggests the dichotomised relationship between Westerners and Moroccans, a dichotomy in which Westerners come out on top.

Moroccan men are clearly objectified in the above passage, and are rendered objects of the colonial gaze and colonial desire, in a telling departure from the traditional trope of exotic and oriental women who have traditionally been stereotyped by colonial ideology in this way. The clearest indication here of Miguel’s perceived superiority over Azel is his final conclusion, namely that Moroccan partners can act as servants by day, and lovers by night, an unambiguous allusion to the power dynamics present in sexual roles in the novel. Here, sex is not an act to be shared by mutually respecting, loving or desiring partners, but a form of currency, a service to be carried out for the colonial master. Miguel does not challenge this exploiter/exploited power dynamics, hinting at his manipulative intentions and once more consigning Azel to a position of inferiority and submission.

This suggestion of sexual colonialism is upheld in a significant insertion that follows this passage, namely a statement by a Moroccan caretaker who describes an American couple who live in his apartments. He claims: ‘Ces gens-là, ils veulent tout, des hommes et des femmes du peuple, des jeunes, en bonne santé, de préférence de la campagne, ne sachant ni lire ni écrire, les servant le jour puis les niquant la nuit’ (p. 47) [*That type, they want everything, men and women from the common people, young ones, healthy, preferably from the countryside, who can’t read or write, serving them all day, then servicing them at night*’

³⁵⁹ This may constitute a cultural misunderstanding, or misappropriation on the part of Miguel and his Western friends. Dance critic Anthony Shay echoes the sociological premise of Nicole Kligerman when he states that Western gay men often uphold a romantic notion that the Middle East is ‘an environment accepting of homosexuality and a utopian gay paradise’ because, critically, they ‘confuse gay or homosexual identity with homosexual activity or behavior’. Anthony Shay, ‘The Male Oriental Dancer’, in *Belly Dance: Orientalism, Transnationalism, and Harem Fantasy*, ed. by Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2005), pp. 51–84 (pp. 51–52).

(p. 41)]. The near-exact repetition of Miguel's thoughts – that Moroccan partners can act as servants by day and sexual partners by night – is hardly coincidental and strongly implies a collective and well-established view of Moroccans as objects of colonial servitude on the one hand, and colonial desire on the other. "Those people", for which we can read "Westerners", again objectify Moroccans, rendering them no more than sex objects to be used at will. A particularly disturbing detail here is the preference for ignorant and uneducated servants who would be pitifully unaware of their exploitation. And yet, Azel is distinct from the uneducated individuals who would sleepwalk towards subdual. We know that he is educated, astute and painfully aware of the varying forms of exploitation around him. This indicates masculinity's lack of room for manoeuvre in the novel – all the options available are exploitative in some way.

Both Miguel and Azel enter into this arrangement in the knowledge that each is using the other. Miguel decides on his bait – a Spanish visa and the hope of a new life. In turn, Azel will provide sexual favours. He therefore accepts the role of non-man, equating himself with the woman who submits to the more powerful man. This relationship therefore takes on a dichotomy of dominance and submission. Exploitation is a key component of the relationship, and yet defining the exploiter and the exploited remains difficult. Azel needs Miguel. His obsession with migrating to Spain can only be fully and permanently realised legally and with Miguel's help. Miguel, in turn, profits from Azel's desperation. In this respect, the arrangement has parallels with the relationship between a pimp and a prostitute, another instance where the lines are blurred and we might wonder who is really being exploited. Miguel is fully aware that Azel has no sexual or emotional interest in him, and yet he perseveres with the affair. All he can really offer Azel is financial stability, which is exchanged for sexual favours. In this respect, Azel accepts a position of inferiority in order to gain something, reflecting Arno Schmitt's assertion that most sexual contact between Westerners and Muslims follows a well-established Eastern formula of 'man/non-man'.³⁶⁰ Morocco appears to be a country heavily under the economic and political influence of foreign, Western powers. The Westerner is therefore able to prey on the economically and socially impotent North African, and a strong connection is made here with neo-colonial economics. Azel's situation therefore echoes the paralysis suffered by his country at the hands of past colonial powers when occupied Morocco was obliged to cooperate with imperial rulers and colonial discourses to its detriment.

³⁶⁰ Arno Schmitt, 'Sexual Meetings of East and West: Western Tourism and Muslim Immigrant Communities', in *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies*, pp. 125–129 (p. 127)

Condemned to the periphery of accepted gendered behavioural norms by his own society, Azel's masculine deflation continues once he moves to Spain. Chapter fourteen represents another assault on Azel's already broken virility, in which Miguel organises a fancy-dress party to celebrate their anniversary, the theme of which is 'L'Orient en rose' [*The Rose-tinted Orient*].³⁶¹ Miguel, frustrated by, and resentful of, Azel's continued interest in women, deliberately humiliates him. Having been locked in a room, Azel is then ordered to dress as a female oriental dancer and Miguel introduces the obedient Azel to his guest in colonial terms:

Mes amis, je suis heureux de vous présenter ma dernière conquête: un corps d'athlète sculpté dans le bronze, avec en supplément un chouia de féminité. C'est un étalon rare; il a fait des études mais connaît aussi les bas-fonds de Tanger, la ville de tous les bandits et de tous les traîtres; Azel, bien sûr, n'est ni un bandit ni un traître, il est simplement un très bel objet, un objet de toutes les tentations. Voyez donc sa peau magnifique! Vous pourrez le toucher. Faites la queue, mais surtout ne vous bousculez pas, il est là, il ne va pas partir. Caressez-lui la hanche, par exemple, et retenez bien vos pulsions. Il est à moi, et pas question qu'on le dispute! (pp. 112–3)

[My friends, I am delighted to present my latest conquest to you: the body of an athlete sculpted in bronze, with a piquant soupçon of femininity. Quite a stud! Educated, but familiar as well with the underworld of Tangier, that city of bandits and traitors. Neither bandit nor traitor, of course, Azel is simply a most beautiful object, an object to tempt every eye. Just look at his magnificent skin! You may touch it. Get in line, but don't push, he's right here, he's not going anywhere. Run your hand along his hip, for example, and do restrain your impulses. He belongs to me, and I won't have any fighting over him! (pp. 106–107)]

This introduction, along with the oriental dance performance that follows it, is yet another emasculating humiliation for a man already exiled from hegemonic manhood. Miguel's words here are revealing, as they evoke several different images which all result in objectification on some level. Dubbed as a 'conquest' and as a 'beautiful object', the traditional woman-as-object-of-the-male-gaze formula is turned on its head and proves that gender relations cannot be seen in polarised male versus female terms, as here, it is a man being bullied and dominated by other men. The reference to a stallion alludes to the image of buyers examining a horse's teeth before purchase, but furthermore Azel's animalisation is a neo-colonial objectification of the Moroccan male as born to be exploited, and in this context sexually so. The fact that the guests are allowed to touch evokes images of cattle being sold to the highest bidder. Not only does Azel become the object of fellow men, but secondly, he also becomes an object of a group of men who are, as homosexually-identified men, socially

³⁶¹ My translation. In Linda Coverdale's translation, this is rendered 'The Orient: Think Pink', p. 105.

marginalised themselves by the hegemonic ideals of manhood in both their own society and that of Azel, a fact that represents another severe attack on his virility. To be humiliated by a masculine group already sidelined by dominant gender ideology represents a severe emasculation, rendering Azel twice-removed from societal ideals. On a third level, he becomes the object of the gaze of foreign, European men. Curiously, Miguel expresses the fact that he is there for the duration of the evening with the verb *partir*. If we read Azel's desire to leave Morocco as his need to leave his subordinate status behind him in order to pursue a more complicit masculinity, then this episode exposes the various and interweaving layers of exploitation that solidify his subordinate gender identity, and Miguel's comment suggests that renegotiating his masculinity is not possible.

On the topic of individuals banished from the dominant masculine order, both Arno Schmitt and Bruce Dunne comment on the existence of the role of the *khawal* in Arab culture. The *khawal* was commonly assumed to submit to others and to allow himself to be sodomised.³⁶² He was, therefore, automatically shunned from mainstream society due to his role as a 'non-man' (allowing himself to be penetrated by another) but was accepted in the role of public performer, usually as a dancer but also as a singer and/or prostitute. Therefore, Miguel's deliberate plan for the party – to force Azel to dress up as an oriental (female) dancer and to perform – strongly points to Azel's destroyed masculinity and to his subordinate and marginalised status by portraying him in the role of *khawal*. For, if we are to accept the premise that sex is an expression of man subordinating non-man, then Azel's relegation to the status of non-man functions as a mirror, indicating the subdual of the Moroccan to the foreign (Western) Other.³⁶³

³⁶² See Schmitt, 'Different Approaches to Male-Male Sexuality/Eroticism', p. 6 and Dunne, 'Power and Sexuality in the Middle East', p. 11. Anthony Shay also comments that 'like their female counterparts, professional male [oriental] dancers were widely and correctly perceived as sexually available'. Shay, 'The Male Oriental Dancer', p. 55. Shay notes that the professional entertainer often came from 'the very lowest layers of society' because 'such a despised occupation was avoided by all but the most desperate'. This too appears to underline Azel's inferior status within the context of this episode. Shay, 'The Male Oriental Dancer', p. 62.

³⁶³ Dance critic Stavros Stavrou Karayanni traces colonial attitudes towards male oriental dancers in detail and underlines their 'long and strongly felt presence' in Middle Eastern and Asian cultures: Stavros Stavrou Karayanni, 'The Dance of Extravagant Pleasures: Male Performers of the Orient and the Politics of the Imperial Gaze', in Stavros Stavrou Karayanni, *Dancing Fear and Desire: Race, Sexuality, and Imperial Politics in Middle Eastern Dance* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), pp. 67–97 (p. 77). Karayanni argues persuasively that the female oriental dancer presented a threat to European mores, by virtue of the seductive movements she performed. In relation to the male dancer, he asserts that this threat was amplified even further. He states: 'Passion and desire engaged in their magnetic courtship dance on the colonial field would cease to be heterosexual, turning, instead, homoerotic. In the eyes of the travellers, male performance was similar to the [female] ghawazee's in technique and style except that their gender posed a far more formidable threat to European ethics' (pp. 76–77). Thus, the male dancer, who occupied a liminal position in terms of sexuality and gender, destabilised established expressions of European desire. For, he concludes: 'Acknowledg[ing] the male

Consigned to the status of 'non-man', Azel nevertheless attempts to reinstate his masculinity by submitting others to his will as this, it would seem, is the primary means of masculine consolidation offered in the novel. In attempting to exercise power over another individual, however, Azel merely reiterates his marginalisation *vis-à-vis* normative masculine hegemony. His relationship with Siham represents an abortive attempt to assert the phallic power so necessary to masculine identity. At first, while still in Morocco, Azel has a both sexual and sensual relationship with Siham. His unwillingness to assume the domineering role, however, is already apparent. Having slept with Azel, Siham refers at length to Sheikh Nafzaoui's *Le Jardin parfumé*, and attempts to arouse her lover once more.³⁶⁴ Her subsequent command to be penetrated anally however unsettles Azel. The wording of this demand is perhaps significant: 'Elle lui ordonna de la prendre par-derrière' (p. 38) [*she told him to penetrate her anally*] (p. 31).³⁶⁵ Upon hearing her command, Azel promptly loses his erection. Faced with a confident, demanding female sexuality, he is unable to perform (and therefore to 'be a man'), pointing to his demasculinisation.

However, following his rape and his degrading relations with Miguel, Azel suddenly becomes permanently physically impotent, indicating his generalised, symbolic impotence, not unlike that of El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye in *Xala* or Rachid in *La Répudiation*. In Azel's case, his relegation to 'non-man' status calls his sexuality into question:

Ah, si ma mère me voyait! J'ose à peine y penser. Comment lui dire que son fils n'est pas un *attaye*, un donneur, un homme qui se met à plat ventre, une paillasse, un traître, un renégat à son identité, et à son sexe? (p. 89)

[*Oh, if my mother were to see me... I can hardly bear thinking about it. How can I tell her that her son is just an attaye, a faggot, a man who crawls on his belly, a cheap whore, a traitor to his identity, to his sex? (pp. 83–84)*]

This physical impotence is therefore the physical manifestation of Azel's impotence regarding his own future life. The above quotation clearly enunciates the vital link between sexual agency and masculine identity. His inability to get an erection suggests his (sexual)

dancer as an emblem would also acknowledge him as a "designated repository of sexuality" in which the Western male tourist was investing desire. To replace the ghawazee with the khawals [...] would be representing a masculinized West that penetrates a male Orient – nothing less than an act of sodomy' (pp. 96–97). Although Miguel and his guests, as homosexually-identified gay men, have no need to fear the homoerotic desire that Azel as a *khawal* might provoke, Karayanni's premise of the penetrated male Orient does, nevertheless, ring true in this particular episode.

³⁶⁴ *The Perfumed Garden*, or *Le Jardin parfumé* in French, is a fifteenth century Arabic erotology manual written by Sheikh Mohamed ibn Mohamed al-Nafzaoui.

³⁶⁵ Though 'par-derrière' does not necessarily indicate anal penetration in particular, Linda Coverdale has chosen to translate it thus. This is a translation with which I would agree, given the ambiguity of Azel's sexual activities with Miguel in the novel more generally. It can be read as another example of Ben Jelloun's playful use of words to indicate a double meaning.

passivity elsewhere in his life. This in turn calls into question his sexuality and with it, his entire masculine identity for, immediately following this quotation, Azel thinks of his mother and imagines her assuming: 'Son fils est viril, il fait l'amour à une femme, à un homme' (p. 89) [*'Her son is virile [...] he makes love to a woman, to a man...'* (p. 84)]. Here, virility is understood as the capability to penetrate, regardless of the sex of the person penetrated. Indeed, Azel assumes that his mother considers him to be hyper-masculine, by virtue of his conquest of not just female bodies, but male bodies too. His perception here, namely that his mother would be proud of her son's potent masculinity, only serves to sharpen his sense of inadequacy.

The initial stages of Azel's relationship with Siham seem promising. He appears to have an affectionate and sensual relationship with a woman who is understanding, considerate and above all non-judgemental about his temporary impotence. Yet, intriguingly, in order to remedy this perceived loss of identity, Azel begins to pay regular visits to a prostitute, Soumaya, in the hope of reasserting his sexuality, and through it his sense of virility. In chapter thirteen we are told: 'Azel prit la décision d'aller au bordel au moins une fois par semaine. C'était pour lui une question importante [...] il tenait absolument à entretenir sa sexualité avec des filles maghrébines' (p. 104) [*'Azel resolved to go to the brothel at least once a week. This was an important decision for him [...] He felt he absolutely had to keep up his virility with the North African Arab girls'* (p. 98)]. Prostitutes, by definition, sell their bodies and their sexual services. This necessarily renders the prostitute submissive within the framework of the particular transaction.³⁶⁶ Thus, his impotence could be read on two levels: firstly, as symbolic of his transgression into passive sexuality considered unmanly, and secondly, as a violation of the unwritten code that women are not to be invested in emotionally.³⁶⁷ Azel's choice to go to a prostitute, rather than to a lover, seems to suggest that sex is loaded with codified meanings in which exercising power over other individuals is a means of solidifying personal, gendered identity. The ability to get an erection and to use it seems to be a measure of virility, echoing again the view that penetration is power. The fact that Azel never manages to re-establish his masculinity via

³⁶⁶ This echoes Najmabadi's assertion of a homosocial heteronormativity, as if Azel is attempting to salvage any remaining masculinity he has by resorting to traditionally accepted sex roles by frequenting a woman for whom he has neither love nor any particular desire. Najmabadi, 'Reading "Wiles of Women"', p. 155.

³⁶⁷ Mernissi also claims that Islamic concepts of female sexuality discourage heterosexual love, which is deemed threatening to the (male) believer's allegiance to Allah. In addition, she argues that segregation is just one of the principal means by which Muslim society seeks to prevent significant emotional bonds between men and women. See Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 19 and p. 107.

sexuality (because Soumaya is stricken with hepatitis) only serves to signal his permanent exclusion from the hegemonic order.

Azel's marginalised status as non-man is compounded by the stark contrast between him and his sister, Kenza. When Azel initially approaches Miguel on the issue of possible emigration, he hopes that leaving Morocco will allow him to serve a useful function in life. His hopes are defined as: 'Partir. Renaître ailleurs [...] Courir sur le sable en criant sa liberté. Travailler, réaliser, produire, imaginer, faire quelque chose de sa vie' (p. 50) [*'Leaving. Being reborn elsewhere [...] Running along the sand shouting out your freedom. Working, creating, producing, imagining, doing something with your life'* (p. 44)]. Azel's primary desire then is to be useful but, moreover, to be active in all senses. Indeed, in a self-reflective passage, Azel remarks: 'Je ne suis jamais tombé amoureux de ma vie, c'est une infirmité, une chose que l'on m'as apprise, l'amour c'est bon pour les femmes. Les hommes, eux, doivent être forts, inébranlables, enfin, tous ces genres de clichés' (p. 87) [*'I've never fallen in love in my life: it's an infirmity, something I was taught – that love was something for women. Men, well, they're supposed to be strong, unshakeable, you know, all those clichés'* (pp. 81–82)]. Azel's vision of manliness in this quotation appears to be emotionally retentive, fiercely independent and rational. The allusion to love as a malady signifies the self-determination and unshakeable logic of the male which claims to be above such trivial and compelling emotions.³⁶⁸

Hegemonic notions of being a man therefore comprise assertiveness, self-sufficiency, activity – be it work-related or sexual – and above all of a stoic view of the world and an unflinching command over one's life. Azel is incapable of this collection of behavioural traits, even at the beginning of the novel. His sister therefore stands in marked juxtaposition to her brother, as her pro-active attitude towards life renders her more masculine than he. She succeeds in engineering a situation whereby she can move (legally) to Spain by marrying Miguel. Once there, she is also able to establish a life for herself quickly, something which Azel is unable to do. Kenza secures a job for herself with the Red Cross, as well as a part-time job dancing in a Middle Eastern restaurant. Significantly, at first glance this detail would appear to suggest an embodiment of the exotic view of oriental women. However, this is dispelled by the narrator who refuses to categorise Kenza as Other or as object. Indeed, it seems rather to underline a harmonious affinity with her Arab heritage, another factor that differentiates her from her brother whose portrayal as a *khawal* only served to underscore his

³⁶⁸ This echoes Mernissi's understanding of loving a woman in an Islamicate context as 'mental illness'. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 43.

problematic gender identity. She copes well with the cultural transition that she has to make in order to succeed in Spain. Again in marked juxtaposition to her brother, she builds and maintains meaningful relationships with those around her in Spain. Her marriage to Miguel, despite being nothing more than a false but practical necessity, actually paves the way for a blossoming friendship between them where later on they unite in concern for Azel.

Miguel had initially expected that Kenza's presence would provide a level of stability for her brother and would render Azel 'plus fiable, plus maîtrisable' (p. 119) [*more manageable, more trustworthy*] (p. 113)]. This alone underlines Azel's unpredictability compared with his sister's stability. Furthermore, as Azel's masculine collapse increases in velocity, Kenza's masculinity is underlined: 'Kenza s'adapta très vite. Elle parlait espagnol, ce qui l'aidait dans sa recherche de travail [...] Elle était décidée à se débrouiller toute seule. Il n'était pas question d'être une nouvelle charge pour Miguel' (pp. 141–142) [*Kenza adjusted fairly quickly. She spoke Spanish, which helped her look for work [...] She had decided to make her own way, determined not to be a new burden for Miguel*] (p. 137)]. Indeed, Miguel goes as far as telling Kenza: 'Tu es le Maroc de demain, ce sont les femmes qui feront bouger ce pays, elles sont formidables' (p. 142) [*You are the Morocco of tomorrow [...] It's the women who will get this country moving, they're incredible*] (p. 137)]. In contrast, having been given a job by Miguel, perhaps out of sympathy, Azel promptly wastes the opportunity by not just failing to do his job but by stealing and defrauding his employer. This last quotation, in which the productive potential of women is emphasised, is immediately followed by the fact that Miguel has just found out that Azel has not even been opening the gallery that he was assigned to manage, accentuating the contrast between Kenza and Azel all the more. Kenza's energy, determination to cope and her open-mindedness all result in an acute inferiority complex for her brother, '[qui] était de plus en plus tendu, et évitait de se retrouver seul avec sa sœur' (p. 142) [*he avoided being alone with his sister and was increasingly on edge*] (p. 137)]. Azel's awareness of his sister's dynamism merely serves to diminish his own, or rather to make him painfully aware of his own (masculine) inadequacies. He is eventually dismissed from his post, triggering periods of dependency on alcohol and generally pathological or, at the very least, unpredictable behaviour. He has no relationships of any emotional or positive value to speak of, since the social circle around him offers him only harmful and degrading relations. Even the few meaningful relationships he develops at the beginning of his new Spanish life quickly dissolve as his depression deepens, leaving him socially ostracised and isolated. The painful truth for Azel is that his sister is more of 'a man' than he.

In *Beyond the Veil*, Fatima Mernissi argues convincingly that the effect of modernisation on sexual politics in the Islamic world has been profound.³⁶⁹ Due to the increased education and improved literacy of women, and also to the economic difficulties faced by the majority of Moroccan families, women are increasingly working outside of the family home and are thus 'transgressing' into public spaces traditionally perceived as being 'male'.³⁷⁰ This is certainly true of *Partir*, where it is Azel's sister and his mother who bring in the money before his departure for Spain, an issue that causes him a huge amount of shame. His mother, in desperate attempts to put food on her family's table, crosses the border every day to return from Ceuta with products that she can then sell on. This valiant effort to (illegally) earn a living again highlights the figurative paralysis of her son.

Mernissi argues that whereas formerly the Moroccan man's supremacy was total, encompassing not only sexual but economic power, men now feel what she terms a 'castration' that is a direct consequence of psychological and social colonisation in the form of modernisation and globalisation.³⁷¹ This perceived castration manifests itself when Azel attempts to control his sister's behaviour and who she sees. In chapter twenty-five, Azel appears at Kenza's door unshaven and drunk. On seeing her Turkish lover Nâzim, Azel spouts a series of incoherent and racist remarks. As Kenza tells him that she does not want to be spoken to, nor have her lover referred to, in that way, Azel tells her: 'D'accord, mais je ne supporte pas qu'il te touche' (p. 178) [*Fine, but I won't put up with him touching you*' (p. 174)]. Outside Morocco, and away from her society's stringent value system, Kenza seizes the chance to live her own life and rejects this attempted policing of her personal and above all sexual life. Azel's remark is nevertheless revealing. As a young man from an Islamicate culture, Azel perceives female relatives as vehicles for his (masculine) honour.³⁷² With Azel utterly unable to build his own reputation, he transforms his honour (or manliness) into Kenza's responsibility by focusing on her sexual purity. An act of sheer manipulation, Azel attempts to coerce his sister into acting in a sexually appropriate way so as to bolster his own fractured identity.

³⁶⁹ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, pp. 11–24 and pp. 165–177.

³⁷⁰ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 153.

³⁷¹ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 172.

³⁷² Mernissi claims that male honour is inextricably linked to and embodied in women's sexual behaviour, arguing that the concepts of honour and female purity 'link the man's prestige in an almost fatal way to the sexual behaviour of the women under his charge'. See Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 161. Nawal El Saadawi corroborates this view, stating: 'A man's honour is safe as long as the female members of his family keep their hymens intact. It is more closely related to the behaviour of the women in the family than to his own behaviour'. El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, p. 47.

The stitches holding Azel's fractured identity together are then ripped open when Kenza tells him: 'C'est ça, parle de notre mère! J'en connais une qui serait bien triste si elle voyait ce qu'est devenu son fils chéri' (p. 178) [*"That's it, drag [...] our mother [into this]. I could think of one mother who would be crushed if she saw what's become of her beloved son"* (p. 175)]. This reference to his mother represents a breaking point for Azel, and his response is one of a man in anguished desperation:

Tout ça est de ta faute! On aurait pu rester ensemble, ne jamais se quitter, être unis comme les doigts d'une main. Mais toi, tu as magouillé pour quitter le pays et la famille et maintenant tu te laisses aller à la débauche! Un Turc qui nique ma sœur, comment veux-tu que je supporte ça! (p. 178)

[It's all your fault! We could have stayed together, like the fingers of a single hand, but you, you worked up this scheme to leave the country and our family and now you're going to the dogs! A Turk fucking my sister – how do you expect me to stand that! (p. 175)]

Azel's outburst is symptomatic of his spiralling identity crisis, shelling out blame to others but refusing to acknowledge any of his own faults. Having totally destroyed every last shred of what he perceives to be socially respectable manliness in himself, Azel's last resort is to rely on his sister's reputation, honour and ultimately sexually purity to have any hope of getting close to the elusive ideal of hegemonic masculinity. Having already been demoted to the category of non-man, Azel once more fails to 'submit' another to his will or desire and Kenza's robust answer leaves him with nothing else on which his masculinity can lean.

When Azel eventually leaves Miguel and ventures out in a truly independent fashion, he trawls the streets of Barcelona surrounded by drug-dealers on the one hand and Islamic extremists on the other. By this point, Azel is totally isolated – and deliberately so – from everyone. He then, once more, comes across an Islamist recruiter. His emotional weariness is by now apparent:

[A Tanger] la première fois, il avait encore la force de se défendre contre ce genre de discours politique destiné à l'embrigadement. Aujourd'hui, il était fatigué, et espérait confusément réussir à tirer profit d'une façon ou d'une autre des propositions que ne manquerait pas de lui faire le recruteur. (p. 232)

[That [first] time [in Tangiers], he'd still had the energy to defend himself against this kind of seductive political come-on. Now he was tired, and hoped in some confused way to take advantage somehow of whatever propositions this man would surely offer him. (p. 228)]

Azel's vulnerability here leads the recruiter to evoke conflicts past and present in order to stoke up a desire for the humiliation of the Arab nation to end. He speaks to Azel of the

Israeli/Palestinian conflict as well as the expulsion of the Moors from Spain during the reign of Isabella and Ferdinand. The strategy is an attempt to rekindle patriotic passion and to demand the restoration of Arab pride. The recruiter's lecture however reaffirms the lack of space for men such as Azel. The recruiter states:

J'aimerais t'inviter à nous rejoindre pour la prière du soir [...] si par hasard un jour tu as envie de rencontrer des compatriotes qui ne sont pas ni des trafiquants ni des déchets de la société, viens voir ce que nous construisons, ce que nous préparons pour l'avenir de notre pays. (p. 233)

[I would like to invite you to join us for the evening prayer [...] if some other time you happen to feel like meeting some compatriots who are neither drug dealers nor the dregs of society, come see what we're building, what we're preparing for our country's future. (p. 229)]

The recruiter himself outlines the only apparent options for Moroccan men – to be drug-dealers, social undesirables or to join the fundamentalist cause. A shrewd operator, he demonstrates the efficiency of Islamist rhetoric and propaganda. He recognises that, stripped of his allegiance to the dominant masculine order, Azel is isolated and, above all, alone. The recruiter therefore offers Azel membership of a group that seeks to reassert fierce religious and masculinist cultural norms. In a sense then, he provides Azel with the means of reasserting his own broken masculinity.

Following this meeting, and in a parallel to the scene in which he gets caught in a police raid and is raped in Morocco, Azel's final textual appearance is as a detainee of the Spanish police. Taken for questioning, Azel realises his time may be up, for not only is he by this point illegal (due to failing to renew his visa) but he is also in possession of hashish. The similarity between this episode and his arrest by the Moroccan police before his departure for Spain is not coincidental. Whereas his rape at the hands of the Moroccan officers illustrated as his overpowering by others in the male hierarchical order, this occasion sees Azel bargaining and offering his services as a police informant, trading information on fundamentalist groups in exchange for not being deported. Nonetheless, we are told: 'Il sauva sa peau mais vendit son âme' (p. 237) [*'He saved his skin but sold his soul'* (p. 233)]. He therefore becomes servile not just within the masculine order, but to the neo-colonial Other once more.

Conclusion

Azel's death is described in two sentences, which create a memorable impact: 'Azél était par terre, la gorge tranchée, la tête dans une flaque de sang. Comme un mouton de l'Aïd-el-Kébir, les Frères l'avaient égorgé' (p. 248) [*'Azél was on the floor, his throat cut, his head in a pool of blood. The Brothers had slaughtered him like a lamb sacrificed for Aïd el-Kebir'* (p. 245)]. Azel's merciless murder illustrates the intolerance of extremist religious discourse towards any undermining or outside threat. Yet, it also demonstrates Azel's inability, or in this case, unwillingness to adhere to this particular brand of masculinity and underlines his unsuccessful negotiation. Indeed, the entire novel can be seen as a series of negotiations for a man who struggles to shake off his subordinate status. He is comparable to Rachid in *La Répudiation* in this sense, since neither character is given much room in which to manoeuvre, their masculinity suffocated by the forces at work around them. For Rachid, these exist in the form of his father and his lover, not to mention the thuggish members of the Clan. Azel, on the other hand, is repressed by a generalised stagnation that is symptomatic of the West's asphyxiating grip on the global economy. This all-pervasive influence gradually seeps through the pores of Moroccan society, causing the injustice and corruption that symbolically castrate Moroccan youths.

At first, paralysed by the economic condition of his country, Azel looks to Spain as a remedy. Indeed, emigrating becomes the means through which he can answer the interpellative call he hears and where the conditions can be met for him to accept his place within the ideology that hails him. Nonetheless, his involvement with Miguel renders his attempts to secure a more acceptable masculine image impossible, their personal liaison coming to represent the broader traumatic and highly problematic relationship between the Arab world and the West. At the end of his short life, and having negotiated with the enemy, the Westerners and perceived colonisers, by becoming a police mole, Azel is unable to become a member of the Spanish order. In attempting to do so, however, he alienates himself from yet another of the Moroccan masculine discourses available to him, that of religious fundamentalism. His expulsion from this particular group echoes El Hadji's expulsion from the 'Groupement des Hommes d'affaires' in *Xala*, indicating to what extent membership of a group is crucial for successful, complicit constructions of masculinity. His lonely death, which contrasts ironically with the meaning of his name – glory of the Arabs – serves as a poignant reminder of his highly subordinate status as a man.

Broken in: Repositioning the Masculine Self in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Homme rompu*

Introduction

Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Homme rompu* (1994) was inspired by the novel *Corruption* written by Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1954). Set in an Indonesian town, Toer's novel describes the hardships and injustices suffered by everyone in a nation riddled to the core by corrupt practices. Ben Jelloun remodelled the structure and plot of Toer's novel to suit a particularly Moroccan context in *L'Homme rompu*.³⁷³ Surprisingly, and in spite of Ben Jelloun's appeal amongst critics and readers alike, this particular text has attracted little if any real attention from critics. Nevertheless, *L'Homme rompu* is revealing in its portrayal of constructions of masculinity and gender dynamics. The central character of *L'Homme rompu*, Mourad, differs from many of the other masculinities under scrutiny in this study. Chapters two, three and four focused on protagonists whose sense of masculine self was closely bound to socially-induced values and who displayed a dogged determination to dutifully perform the hegemonic ideologies of masculinity forced upon them by cultural norms. Both Rachid in *La Répudiation* and Azel in *Partir* never manage to perform a normative gender, and their unsuccessful engagement with ideals of masculinity serves to underline their subordination. Mourad, by contrast, does not strive to be the man society thinks he should be. Indeed, Mourad is deliberately uncooperative at the beginning of the novel, and refuses to enact established notions of manhood in a conventional manner. Furthermore, and in contrast to the more naïve Azel in *Partir*, Mourad is very aware of the process of gender normativity to which he refuses to subscribe.

Magda Ibrahim, one of the few critics who have published on this novel, claims that we know hardly anything about our hero Mourad, a point with which I must disagree.³⁷⁴ It is certainly true that *L'Homme rompu* is a novel of mundane and daily details. However, Mourad's internal thought processes presented to us throughout the text allow us the privilege of a very deep insight into the protagonist's psyche. By way of his inner turmoil and

³⁷³ The English-language edition of Tahar Ben Jelloun's novel is also called *Corruption*.

³⁷⁴ Magda Ibrahim, 'Le système des personnages dans *Corruption* de Pramoedya Ananta Toer et *L'Homme rompu* de Tahar Ben Jelloun', *Présence Francophone*, 66 (2006), 230–247 (p. 234). Ibrahim's article does not engage directly with an analysis of the text, but focuses instead on comparing the characters of *L'Homme rompu* and its sister novel *Corruption*.

dilemmas, upon finishing the book the reader gains an acute knowledge of Mourad's consciousness. It is this continual self-questioning that opens up masculinity to scrutiny and reveals the positioning of Mourad's gender identity in relation to conformist views of masculinity. The real strength of this novel for the present study is Mourad's journey from a deliberately peripheral figure, widely considered a failure of a man, to a direct attempt at joining the mainstream masculine order, and therefore his attempt at becoming complicit with hegemonic norms. His perilous negotiation(s) between gendered scripts leads to an existential predicament that reveals the full extent of hegemony's influence over the individual.

Despite its critical neglect, one study that has engaged in depth with this novel is Shonu Nangia's doctoral thesis, entitled 'Male-Female Relations in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Homme rompu* and *La Nuit de l'erreur*'.³⁷⁵ Nangia's study is cemented in a feminist approach to gender relations and there is a lack of emphasis on masculinity *per se*. It is therefore hoped to consider *L'Homme rompu* this time round by exploring masculinity in depth, and by doing so considering gender relations as inherently interconnected. This also demands a recognition of the fact that gender is not synonymous with 'feminine' or 'feminist' alone but that it also incorporates a deconstruction of masculinity. Mourad is an example of the dangers of referring to all fictional male characters as masculine brutes who victimise both women and their male peers for their own gain. He is instead a creation designed by the author to demonstrate that it is not solely women who reject powerful phallogocentric discourses, and that, in addition, it is not only men who perpetuate the patriarchal agenda.

The Discourse of Corruption: Notions of Masculinity in the Workplace and in Society

One of the most striking aspects of this text is its representation of the insidious effect of corruption on all sections of society. It is revealing, then, that normalised manhood in *L'Homme rompu* is largely measured in terms of financial wealth³⁷⁶ which, in this case, is dependent on an engagement with corrupt practices. The two phenomena in *L'Homme rompu* are therefore tightly interlaced, since engaging in corruption becomes one of the few means

³⁷⁵ Shonu Nangia, 'Male-Female Relations in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Homme rompu* and *La Nuit de l'erreur*' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Wayne State University, 2003). Nangia has also written an article specifically on *L'Homme rompu*: Shonu Nangia, 'Female Subordination in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Homme rompu*: A Macrolevel Analysis', *Tropos*, 19–37 (2003)

<http://www.fci.msu.edu/TROPOS/2003/Nangia_2003.pdf> [accessed 3 July 2009].

³⁷⁶ Fatima Mernissi argues that masculinity and economic wealth are intrinsically linked, and states that Moroccan legislature 'reactivates traditional patterns of self-esteem whereby a man's prestige depends on his wealth'. She also perceives male authority to be 'traditionally embodied in [an] ability to provide for their families'. See Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 171.

by which the men of the text are able to perform a certain (gendered) brand of behaviour, corrupt practices serving as the financial means by which performing hegemonic manhood becomes possible. In his survey of Moroccan state policy on tackling corruption in recent years, Guilain Denoeux argues that: ‘As recently as 1995, corruption was still a forbidden subject in Morocco’.³⁷⁷ Denoeux asserts that until that point, corrupt practices, which held significant influence over all facets of daily life, were usually referred to as ‘non-ethical behaviour’ in order to bypass the unacceptable but more accurate term ‘corruption’.³⁷⁸ In spite of the troubling connotations of the term for Moroccans and, in particular, Moroccan policy makers themselves, Ben Jelloun does not shy away from this and loudly proclaims the term throughout his novel which was published just at the end of the period to which Denoeux refers, in 1994. The importance for us here is the closely interwoven nature of ‘being a man’ and corruption. The novel presents two different stances on monetary wealth and with it, two sides of the cycle of corruption. Firstly, there are those such as Mourad himself who struggle to make ends meet and claw their way back from crippling debt, whilst being determined to live an honest and law-abiding life. The other includes characters such as the scrupleless Haj Hamid, who feed off the ‘*économie parallèle*’ (p. 33)³⁷⁹ [‘*parallel economy*’ (p. 16)] and have no financial difficulties to speak of.³⁸⁰

The novel is initially narrated by an omnipresent third-person narrator, before suddenly turning to a first-person narration on page 19. The autodidactic narrator gives the reader the earliest descriptions of Mourad the man. He is described as an educated man and an engineer: ‘C’est un poste important et très envié. Son titre exact est pompeux: “*Sous-directeur de la planification, de la prospective et du progrès*”’ (p. 11) [‘*It’s an important and much envied position and it comes with a pretentious title: Deputy Director of Planning, Prospects and Progress*’ (p. 2)]. However, this promising description is immediately undercut by the mention of a meagre salary, and exposes the highly educated Mourad as struggling to uphold even a humble and unambitious life: ‘Avec son salaire modeste il fait vivre sa famille, paye la scolarité des enfants, le loyer de la maison et subvient aux besoins de sa mère. Il n’y arrive pas. Il vit à crédit grâce à l’épicier’ (p. 11) [‘*On his modest salary he*

³⁷⁷ Guilain Denoeux, ‘The Politics of Morocco’s “Fight Against Corruption”’, *Middle East Policy*, 7:2 (February 2000), 165–189 (p. 168).

³⁷⁸ Denoeux, ‘The Politics of Morocco’s “Fight Against Corruption”’, p. 168.

³⁷⁹ Tahar Ben Jelloun, *L’Homme rompu* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994), p. 10. All subsequent quotations in French and page references relating to the French original will be parenthesised in the text.

³⁸⁰ Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Corruption*, trans. by Carol Volk (New York: The New Press, 1995). All subsequent quotations in English and page references relating to the English edition will be parenthesised in the text.

supports his family, pays the rent and his children's school expenses, and also provides for his mother. But he can't make ends meet. He lives on credit, thanks to the grocer' (p. 2)]. As we saw with Azel in *Partir* for instance, the fact that no job opportunities for graduates exist points to economic hardship on a national scale. Mourad is, nevertheless, immediately portrayed as inferior or lacking in some way by the omniscient narrator, since he is unable to provide for his family, a fact that cuts to the core of his identity as a man. Mourad's failures to be a man in the way that the society around him conceives of manhood are underlined by his wife, for he tells us that his situation is: 'Classique. Je le sais et même si je l'oublie, Hlima, ma femme, me le rappelle' (p. 10) [*'classic I know it, and even if I forget, there's my wife. Hlima will remind me'* (p. 2)]. Mourad's economic inadequacies are directly attributable to his unwillingness to participate in dishonest practices.

Mourad is reminded constantly of the glaring contradiction between his 'pompous' job title and his miserable pay packet not just by his wife, but at the workplace too. As a bureaucrat, Mourad's place of work is a government office responsible for the authorisation of construction contracts. It is in this very environment – the office – that the particular hegemonic norms of masculinity to which Mourad is subject are felt most acutely. Mourad's colleague, Haj Hamid, happily accepts bribes or 'commission' as it is referred to in the text, to push paperwork through the authorisation process. Haj Hamid initially appears as, and is frequently mistaken for, Mourad's senior in the office. He lords it over Mourad as if Mourad were his 'subalterne' (p. 61) [*'subordinate'* (p. 33)]. He is confident, assertive and sure of his ability to get the required result for his private fee. It is only later, in fact, that we are explicitly told that Mourad is Haj Hamid's line manager. Haj Hamid dresses well, wears expensive but excessively sweet perfume, reads the daily press, goes to the mosque every Friday and portrays himself as everybody's best friend. We are told however that Haj Hamid is the 'le contraire de l'homme cultivé' (p. 13) [*'the antithesis of the cultivated man'* (p. 3)] and furthermore, the very opposite of Mourad. Nevertheless, masquerading behind the material trappings of wealth, Haj Hamid's image is a persuasive weapon, making him comparable to El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye in *Xala*.

The performative element of Haj Hamid's behaviour is again underlined by his intense interest in the daily newspapers. Indeed, Mourad wonders how he manages to spend so much time reading papers that are so lacking in substance (p. 13). He even entertains the notion that Haj Hamid does not read them at all, by stating: 'Il fait semblant. Il se donne des airs' (p. 13) [*'maybe he's only pretending, putting on an act'* (p. 3)]. He appears as a friend to the *chaouchs* (errand boys) at the office, charitably donating his children's old clothes to them

and asking after their health. On Fridays, he wears an all-white djellaba and attends the mosque, priding himself on his religious piety. However, Haj Hamid's morality is skin-deep, for Mourad knows that he frequently abuses his trust by tricking him into authorising plans. Haj Hamid is also a serial-adulterer and womaniser who possesses his own apartment where he often engages in orgies (pp. 194–5). Indeed, the honorary Islamic title Haj is employed as it was in *Xala* and in *Partir* in order to highlight the hypocrisy and masquerade of this character. Haj Hamid, with his holidays to Europe and his pilgrimages to Mecca, is image-driven and illustrates the centrality of theatricality to gender and to appearing as 'un homme bon' (p. 15) [*'a good man'* (p. 5)].

Furthermore, the Director of Mourad's office is another example of an individual voluntarily embracing corruption for his own gains, although he is not as crass a personality as Haj Hamid. The Director (who remains unnamed) is initially described as a cultured man who gently chastises Mourad for what he deems to be a lack of pliancy, frequently giving him "une leçon de souplesse" (pp. 31–2) [*"a lesson in flexibility"* (p. 15)]. Mourad, who is well-known for his rejection of corrupt practices, is unable to betray his own principles and accept bribes in order to authorise certain projects if they do not adhere to the necessary criteria. The Director tells Mourad frequently that rigour is necessary but that a little pliability makes no odds and the conversations usually end in laughter. On one particular occasion however, the Director is not quite as friendly and clearly views Mourad's obstinacy as detrimental to his own gain and sits Mourad down in order to convert him.

The construction of the Director's speech merits attention. It begins with emphasis on Mourad's pitiful salary, a point on which he also concludes his argument (p. 32 and p. 34). He then launches into his speech which adds a gendered dimension to his rhetoric: 'Nous sommes entre hommes, entre amis. J'ai du respect et de l'estime pour vous' (p. 32) [*'This is between men, between friends. I have respect and esteem for you'* (p. 15)]. The Director therefore constructs his oratory within the framework of a masculine collective, or a brotherhood, with shared aims rather like the 'Groupement des Hommes d'affaires' in *Xala*, or indeed the religious extremists in *Partir*. As Mourad admits, he believes he hears what his superior says, although he also states that it is his expression that speaks silently to him (p. 32), giving the Director's speech a very real feel of 'discourse' as Foucault conceptualised it. The main argument of the Director's lengthy lecture is the importance of the notion of *adaptation*, and crucially, of appropriating a certain role which here refers to accepting and participating in fraudulence: 'Il faut donc s'adapter' (p. 33) [*'You have to adapt'* (p. 15)].

In his article 'Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State', Akhil Gupta states that:

The discourse of corruption turns out to be a key arena through which the state, citizens, and other organizations and aggregations come to be imagined. Instead of treating corruption as a dysfunctional aspect of state organizations, I see it as a mechanism through which 'the state' itself is discursively constituted.³⁸¹

Gupta argues that 'public culture' becomes a space in which citizens seek to rationalise and ultimately to attribute meaning to the concept of 'the state', and believes that 'analyzing the discourse of corruption draws attention to the powerful cultural practices by which the state is symbolically represented to its employees and to citizens of the nation'.³⁸²

By analysing the Director's discourse through the optic outlined above by Gupta, the attraction of corrupt practices becomes clearer. By insisting upon the poor pay offered by the state, the Director blurs the boundaries of the issue by suggesting that 'flexibility' is to be expected. Indeed, in the Director's mind, the state even actively expects self-compensation where the state itself cannot provide: 'L'Etat le sait, comme il sait que l'intelligence humaine a des recours pour compenser les manques' (p. 33) [*The state knows it, just as it knows that people have ways of compensating for what they lack* (p. 15)]. Moreover, the Director justifies his point of view by asserting that:

Ce que vous [Mourad] placez sur un plan moral et que vous appelez corruption, moi je l'appelle une économie parallèle, elle n'est même pas souterraine, elle est même nécessaire. Je ne dis pas qu'elle est bonne, je dis qu'il faut faire avec et cesser de confondre compensation et vol. (p. 33)

[*What you [Mourad] are placing in the realm of morality and what you call corruption I choose to call a parallel economy – it isn't even underground, it's a necessity. I'm not saying it's good, I'm just saying we have to live with it and stop confusing compensation with theft.* (p. 16)]

Furthermore, the Director contrasts the widespread, and yet relatively small-scale corruption in Morocco – the 'compensation populaire' (p. 34) [*compensation for the people* (p. 16)] – with the unjustifiable avarice of European politicians who redirect immense funds to untouchable Swiss bank accounts – 'la grande corruption' (p. 34) [*large-scale corruption* (p. 16)]. Indeed, he believes that fraud can possess 'une dimension humaine' (p. 34) [*here it happens on a human [...] scale* (p. 16)]. The language used in this well-constructed lecture

³⁸¹ Akhil Gupta, 'Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State', *American Ethnologist*, 22:2 (May 1995), 375–402 (p. 376).

³⁸² Gupta, 'Blurred Boundaries', p. 385.

is significant; European politicians are ‘mafieux’ [*mafia-like*]³⁸³ whereas Moroccan corruption is ‘artisanale’ (p. 34) [*traditional*].³⁸⁴ The use of the adjective ‘artisanal’ nevertheless conjures up the image of a craft used to help otherwise disenfranchised people. It also reminds us of Gupta’s suggestion that corruption should not simply be dismissed as an unappealing reality but as a significant insight into the construction of ‘the state’ in the collective mind.

The engagement with corruption is not free of gendered connotations however, since the Director locates his sermon within a supposed masculine fellowship, where men will grease the wheels not simply for immediate personal benefit but for the smooth-running of the ‘parallel economy’ generally and with future peer relations in mind.³⁸⁵ Mourad knowingly presents himself as a thorn in the Director and Haj Hamid’s side: ‘Je sais que ce qu’ils appellent “la machine” ne marche pas avec des gens comme moi. Je suis le grain de sable qui s’y introduit et la fait grincer’ (p. 19) [*I know that what they call “the machine” doesn’t work with people like me. I’m the grain of sand that gets inside and makes it squeak’ (p. 7)*]. Read in gendered terms as the intertwining of the economic order(s) and masculinity, Mourad’s attitude amounts to a refusal to engage with dominant (masculine) ideals. In fact, what Mourad cannot, or is not willing, to do is internalise and perform an acceptable gendered behaviour within this particular context. He refuses to participate in fraudulent practices for personal wealth as well as rejecting the external trappings of affluence (sweet perfume, holidays and pilgrimages, clothes) and the predatory and exploitative sexuality deemed befitting of a bourgeois man. His status as a ‘grain de sable’ [*grain of sand*], which is of course minute but nevertheless troublesome, renders him a largely negligible yet extremely annoying influence – both in terms of the parallel economy but also within a predetermined masculine order – for his very presence exposes the whole system and threatens to undermine it. When El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye becomes a liability to the Groupement in *Xala*, he is discredited publicly and flushed out in order to preserve the credibility of the group. Mourad, on the other hand, is intensely annoying precisely because he positions himself willingly outside the discourse of corruption, therefore limiting what those like Haj Hamid and the Director can do to neutralise the threat he poses. Therefore, Mourad displays an apparent subjectivity at this point in the novel by his rejection of office-based dictates that would

³⁸³ My translation.

³⁸⁴ My translation.

³⁸⁵ At no point is there any mention of female participation in the alternative economy, therefore suggesting its masculine nature.

control his behaviour. The 'machine' could therefore be read as having a double meaning: firstly, as an alternative economic order but secondly, as a particular gendered order.

Revealingly, there are no female figures of prominence in Mourad's office. The only women in the work-related arena occupy the subordinate role of secretary. There are two of these mentioned in the text. The first is portrayed as a kindly but easily dismissible middle-aged woman named Lalla Khadija who spends most of her time gossiping on the phone. Her behaviour is not questioned, and is tolerated to the point that the only action taken is to install a new phone that beeps when there is a call waiting to alert her to that fact. The second secretary, Doukkali, who replaces Lalla Khadija, is a far more unsettling presence for the likes of Haj Hamid. Young, conscientious, efficient and signalling the Morocco of tomorrow, she is a threatening presence in the highly masculinised office. Viewed with acute suspicion, this second secretary highlights the desire of men such as Haj Hamid to keep the workplace and its administrative machinery a male-only territory.³⁸⁶ This desire, in the novel at least, is not a product of any strict Islamic principle, but in order to protect male benefit and to allow for the manipulation and breaking of laws for (male) financial gain to continue undisturbed. Doukkali explains that she left her previous job due to sexual harassment and has taken her former employer to a tribunal, a fact that very nearly leaves Haj Hamid speechless (p. 146). Youthful and correct, she threatens to undermine the 'old boys' club' feel of the office, and risks putting a stop to the less than legal dealings taking place. This does, however, reflect sociological views of public space in the Muslim world as male, and of female encroachment on public territory as threatening. Haj Hamid's disbelief at Doukkali's legal proceedings therefore implies that her presence in a public, and therefore male space, is perceived to signify her acceptance of sexual advances.³⁸⁷ There is, perhaps, a parallel here with Azel, whose intense discomfort with his sister's fluid movement in public space, since both women can be seen as transgressing into territory formerly recognised as male-only.

³⁸⁶ Indeed, Mernissi also notes that the administrative machine of the state is a 'male space *par excellence*'. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 146.

³⁸⁷ A woman walking in the streets unchaperoned by a suitable male or an older woman (perceived as asexual due to her age) is interpreted as both offensive and sexually provocative, because she destabilises the male nature of public space and defies the traditional 'allocation of power'. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 137. On this point, Fatima Mernissi relates an anecdote which demonstrates this very principle at work. A female Palestinian freedom fighter is standing at a border performing her duty as a sentinel, machine-gun over her shoulder. A Lebanese civilian spots her and approaches her in order to make sexual propositions. At the woman's irritated rebuff, he becomes angry and asks her: 'How do you expect me to believe that any woman who stands out in the street all night has any honour?' The woman turns and points her gun at him, stating: 'I am here in the street soiling my honour to defend yours because you are unable to do it yourself'. See Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 145.

Mourad deliberately positions himself in opposition to Haj Hamid and others like him. There are other characters in the text who share his convictions, but their influence is limited to merely providing emotional bolstering when Mourad is tempted by the lure of financial security. The importance of their support in real terms is vastly outweighed by the pressures exerted on Mourad by his work colleagues, his wife and his in-laws for example. Even his cousin is involved in the 'parallel economy':

Devant le juge d'instruction, il essaya de justifier son comportement en disant que de toute façon, en payant si mal les gens, on les incite à la corruption. Il fit un exposé assez détaillé sur ce qu'il appela l'économie parallèle qui bouche les trous de l'Etat et finit par réclamer la légalisation de l'apport personnel des gens pour faire avancer le pays. (p. 16)

[*He tried to justify his behavior to the examining magistrate by saying that people's low salaries were inciting them to corruption. He prepared a fairly detailed report on what he called the parallel economy that fills in the gaps left by the state, and ended calling for the legalization of 'personal contributions' as a means of advancing the country. (p. 5)*]

His good friend Abbas, described as 'un homme de qualité' (p. 44) [*a good man* (p. 22)], also perceives corruption as '[une] contribution à la solidarité nationale' (p. 46) [*a contribution to national solidarity* (p. 23)]. Again, the relationship between the state and the citizen is questioned, the state's inabilities providing a justification for the individual's fraudulence and references to corruption are couched in socialist-sounding rhetoric.

Participating in corruption, however, does not seem to be about poverty, even with a sympathetic reading of the above quotation. Later on in the novel, it appears to be more about greed. For Sidi Larbi, Mourad's brother-in-law, it is simply a way of life which allows one to feather one's nest. A solicitor, Sidi Larbi initially made his fortune by claiming a significant cut of his clients' indemnity payments after road accidents. Indeed, it was Sidi Larbi who dealt with the case of Mourad's cousin Najia, when her husband was killed in a car crash. Mourad tells us: 'J'étais discrètement intervenu pour qu'il ne détourne pas la moitié de ses indemnités' (p. 37) [*I discreetly intervened so he wouldn't embezzle half the indemnity* (p. 18)]. Thus, Sidi Larbi's actions are little more than legally-sanctioned theft, and yet he is considered an admirable and successful man by most.

Mourad is the antithesis of Sidi Larbi: 'Pour lui, Mourad est un raté, un pauvre type qui n'a pas su s'adapter à la vie moderne' (p. 19) [*As far as he's concerned, Mourad is a failure, a poor guy, unable to adapt to modern life* (p. 7)]. The use of the reflexive verb 's'adapter' (*to adapt oneself*) signals the existence of an order to which, like an animal

heading towards extinction, Mourad is unable to change. In a marked contrast to the financially astute but morally bankrupt Sidi Larbi, Mourad is: 'Un homme tranquille. Tout ce qu'il cherche, c'est assurer avec dignité l'avenir de ses enfants. Il est prêt à tous les sacrifices mais pas à violer ses principes et faire comme les autres' (p. 17) [*'a peaceful man. All he wants is to ensure his children's future while maintaining his dignity. He is ready to make any sacrifice, but not to violate his principles and do like others'* (pp. 5–6)]. The omnipresent narrator therefore corroborates the description that Mourad provides of himself later on: Mourad is a modest man of humility and integrity. He is the very opposite of El Hadji in *Xala*, who actively sought to live his life by participating in corruption. El Hadji clung tightly to the 'machine' before he was banished from it in disgrace in much the same way as Haj Hamid does in *L'Homme rompu* (although Haj Hamid's position never comes under threat). At the opposite extreme, Mourad is decidedly and consciously a thorn in the system's side – a true 'grain de sable' (p. 28) [*'grain of sand'* (p. 7)] who is unwilling to surrender his principles to the will of society and its business leaders. He asserts:

C'est vrai je n'ai jamais su m'adapter, comme ils disent. S'adapter c'est quoi? C'est faire comme les autres, fermer les yeux quand il le faut, mettre de côté ses principes et ses idéaux, ne pas empêcher que la machine tourne, bref c'est apprendre à voler et en faire profiter les autres. Moi je n'y arrive pas (p. 19)

[*It's true, I've never been able to adapt, as they say. What is adapting? It's doing like everyone else, closing one's eyes when necessary, putting aside one's principles and ideals, not preventing the machine from turning. In short, it's learning how to steal and share the benefits with others. Personally, I can't do it.* (p. 7)]

Given his economic difficulties and the constant frustration and frequent wrath of his wife Hlima, Mourad is presented here as courageous, indicating an unparalleled strength of character and a clear understanding of his identity as a human being, and as a man. Adaptation is exposed as an enslaving mentality, as a predetermined blueprint of behaviour that overrides any individuality or personal morality. There exists a very clear and unfaltering determination to remain true to his individual morals and a determined but satisfied stance *vis-à-vis* his peripheral position to hegemonic values, which judge a man solely in relation to his economic status.

Those who accept bribes in the text usually end up as wealthy or, at the very least, considerably better off. Haj Hamid is a prime example of this. By feeding on the misfortune of others, they use their buying powers to improve their own lives, whilst also forcing the poorer elements of society down even further. The text provides us with an illustration of this very mechanism in action and reveals the real dangers of such a system. Mourad relates the

time his son Wassit swallowed a toxic product and needed hospital treatment. Having waited patiently in a dirty corridor, Mourad realises that he and his son are being neglected and that newly arrived patients are being seen before those who have been waiting for some time. He notices that the corpulent male nurse acts strangely and shakes the hands of certain patients several times. He eventually discovers that this individual makes a supplementary personal profit by selling medicinal drugs and by referring patients to private clinics in return for a commission, his protruding midriff a physical manifestation of his greed. Mourad writes a letter of complaint, but in vain. He realises later that this nurse's influence surpasses his own as a citizen: 'Je compris que l'infirmier avait vraiment le bras long et qu'on ne pouvait rien contre lui' (p. 31) [*I realized that this attendant had a great deal of influence and couldn't be touched*' (p. 14)]. This, he concludes, was during the same era as a senior Director of health was found guilty of diverting state-owned resources to his own private clinic, preventing new medicines from entering the country because the Swiss-German pharmaceutical company developing them refused to give him a percentage. This executive survived the scandal to live in affluence despite the hundreds of deaths for which he was responsible.

Immersed in this world of injustice and egocentrism, Mourad could easily exercise the 'suppleness' encouraged by his peers and by his wife so that in future he would be the one receiving the doctor's treatment first. The fact that he does not indicates the degree of importance he attributes to moral fibre and its centrality to his identity as a man and a decent human being generally. Nevertheless, Mourad remains isolated by his stance. His wife's view is indicative of the collective attitude advocated by the Director, and she believes that joining the merry-go-round of corruption is the only way of securing the best for your child. However, Mourad is fully aware that by joining this club, he would exert on others what is currently being exerted on him, and would ultimately perpetuate the system at the expense of those who are truly poor.

The Family, Domesticity and Sexuality

The interwoven concepts of socially respectable masculinity, economic wealth and dabbling with corruption are notions that also penetrate the home. In domestic settings, this can most clearly be seen through sexuality, male and female gender dynamics and of course within the familial hierarchy. The strength of adherence to his values that Mourad demonstrates in public is no mean feat, for he is surrounded both at work and at home by people who would pressure him into subverting his own morals. The strongest criticism of all

directed towards Mourad comes from his wife, Hlima, who incessantly berates and denounces him for his principled stance:

Ton adjoint [Haj Hamid], lui, est un homme! Il touche moins que toi et il vit dans une superbe villa, avec deux voitures, et ses enfants sont à l'école de la mission française, et en plus il offre à sa femme des vacances à Rome! Toi tu m'offres un stérilet et on ne mange pas la viande que deux fois par semaine. Ce n'est pas une vie. Les vacances on les passe chez ta mère, dans cette vieille maison de la médina de Fès. Tu appelles ça des vacances? Quand vas-tu te rendre compte que notre situation est misérable? (pp. 11–2)

[Your assistant [Haj Hamid] is a real man! He earns less than you but he lives in a beautiful house with two cars. His children go to the French mission school, and he also takes his wife on vacations to Rome! All you give me is an IUD and meat for dinner only twice a week. This is no life. Our vacations at your mother's, in that old house in the medina in Fez – you call that a vacation? When are you going to realize how miserable our lives are? (p. 2)]

Hlima's view of her husband is that he is a failed man, a failure made all the worse by the fact that it is intentional. As Mernissi argues, a man's honour is diminished by his inability to amass wealth for his family, a point that seems to trouble Hlima far more than her husband.³⁸⁸

Mourad will not accept bribes not because they are not offered, but because he makes a conscious decision not to, and this, in Hlima's mind, makes his condition self-induced.

Indeed, following this particular outburst Mourad despairs: “Ma situation est plus que misérable,” se dit-il. “Est-ce de ma faute si tout augmente, si les riches sont de plus en plus riches et si les pauvres comme moi stagnent dans leur pauvreté?” (p. 12) [“My life is worse than miserable”, he thinks to himself. “Is it my fault that everything is going up, that the rich keep getting richer while the poor like me are stagnating in poverty?”] (pp. 2–3). This quotation reads as a plea for help. Mourad does his best for his family but the circumstances of his life and his financial situation are beyond his control given that he is so vehemently opposed to corruption. Unwilling to enter into the ‘parallel economy’, he finds himself paralysed in his misery by his inability to perform manhood in a manner acceptable to his wife and extended family.

Engulfed by the collective ideologies of materialism and displayed wealth, Hlima's frustration is frequently taken out on her husband, and she rarely, if ever, reflects on the real reasons behind their situation. Mourad states: ‘Elle pourrait vivre en paix avec un mari de condition modeste, mais l'entourage veille et la pousse à protester’ (p. 18) [‘She could live in peace with a husband of modest means, but her entourage looks out for her interests and

³⁸⁸ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 171.

pushes her to protest' (p. 6)]. Trapped between a husband who will only earn money honestly and a mother who focuses relentlessly on material commodities however they are bought, Hlima internalises the materialistic and superficial ideology of her mother, leaving Mourad isolated.

At this point, it is worth examining in some detail the circumstances of Mourad and Hlima's marriage. Hlima's tirade against Mourad underlining his failure as a man quoted above epitomises the lack of compassion and solidarity between the two. Almost since its beginning, the relationship has deteriorated to such an extent that more often than not Mourad and Hlima appear as enemies rather than lovers and friends. Mourad states that at the beginning of his relationship with Hlima he loved her, but he retracts this statement immediately, leading Nangia to claim that Mourad was only interested in marrying her to ease his own sexual frustrations (p. 21). This is certainly a plausible reading and it is supported by some of the language used. Marriage is portrayed as the only way of 'conquering' and 'possessing' her body (pp. 22–3). However, an official consolidation of their relationship could be a result of pressure on two fronts: in the first instance as the *only* socially acceptable way of gratifying sexual urges by entering into the institution of 'nikāh' discussed by Bouhdiba,³⁸⁹ and, on a second level, as a result of family pressures.³⁹⁰ An inability to control sexual urges on Mourad's (or Hlima's) part points to the unrealistically high demands of a society whose dominant religion scorns unregulated sexuality (*zina*). Mourad's hesitancy to declare his love for Hlima could also refer to the swift decline of their rapport as well as to the fact that the relationship was unnaturally hastened into a state of marriage which neither partner seems to have thought through properly.

Nevertheless, Nangia's interpretation is also supported by later textual references. During the first real sexual contact between the two characters, Mourad finds himself alone in a friend's flat with Hlima, who appears to tease him. In spite of her efforts of seduction, the language used here to describe the context is revealing: 'Il fallait se battre pour qu'elle enlève ses vêtements. Je réussis à lui arracher son soutien-gorge, mais elle garda sa culotte' (p. 23) [*I had to fight to get her to take off her clothes. I succeeded in pulling off her bra, but she kept her panties on*' (p. 9)]. The aggressive verbs here seem to support the view that Mourad

³⁸⁹ Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 15.

³⁹⁰ Although there is no mention of the view of Mourad's parents at all, we know Hlima's family set up a premeditated and co-negotiated plan to catch them together in an inappropriate way.

wanted to conquer and ultimately possess Hlima's body, which is a common expression of normative male sexuality. However, the novel offers clues to the contrary too: 'Déjà elle était plus forte que moi. Son corps n'était pas offert, il fallait le conquérir et le seul moyen c'était la voie légale, celle qui allait m'enchaîner à vie' (p. 23) [*'Already she was stronger than I was. She wasn't going to give her body to me; I had to conquer it, and the only means was the legal route, the one that would chain me down for life'* (p. 9)]. This rather war-like presentation is undermined by the fact that Mourad is unable to fulfil the act before marriage, despite his forced attempt. This problematises the stereotypical power dynamics involved, since we are obliged to ask ourselves, who has the real power here? Is it Mourad, who is forced to marry Hlima without having won sexual fulfilment, or is it Hlima, who has kept her sexual purity intact and secured a marriage that both she and her family wanted badly? Tellingly, Mourad perceives his wife to be stronger than him, alluding to his diminished masculine authority.

It could be argued that this image of a woman tempting a man into a situation that suits her – marriage – reflects the fact that the sexual expression of both the woman and man is curtailed, and so it does not always privilege men in a clear-cut and unchallengeable way. Indeed, Mourad feels he is trapped by a premeditated plan: 'Lorsque son frère vint me voir à la sortie de la faculté, je savais que tout était arrangé entre eux [...] c'était un coup monté' (p. 23) [*'When her brother came to see me at the entrance to the university, I knew it had all been arranged between them [...] it was all a set-up'* (p. 9)]. Despite Mourad's attempted 'conquest' of Hlima's body, it is Hlima and her family who seem to have won the battle. Entirely consumed by androcentric tradition, Hlima herself unwittingly contributes to her own oppression by engineering a marriage for marital status alone, rather than for love.

Indeed, this is not the only detail in the novel that leads us to question the notion of male as controlling and female as submissive. The problematics of gender relations continue, particularly in the case of Hlima's mother. The figure of the mother-in-law as a powerful, troubling presence is common in many Islamic societies and her influence here is no less marked.³⁹¹ In *L'Homme rompu*, she is described thus:

Elle aurait fait une bonne patronne de bordel, d'ailleurs elle a marié ses filles non pas en fonction du statut moral ou intellectuel des prétendants, mais de leur situation

³⁹¹ Indeed, the mother-in-law is a figure of such prominence that Mernissi devotes an entire chapter to her in *Beyond the Veil*. Mernissi asserts that the mother-in-law is 'one of the biggest obstacles to conjugal intimacy' since she actively competes with her son's wife for his attention. Curiously, the relationship presented in *L'Homme rompu* appears to be the mother competing with her son-in-law for influence over her daughter. For more on the mother-in-law, see Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, pp. 121–136.

financière. On peut dire qu'elle vendait ses filles aux plus offrants [...] de manière déguisée, voilée, indirecte. (p. 20)

[*She would have made a good madam in a brothel, and in fact she married her daughters off not according to their suitors' moral or intellectual qualities but according to their financial prospects. You might say she sold her daughters to the highest bidders [...] in a roundabout, veiled, indirect [manner]. (pp. 7-8)*

Comparing his mother-in-law to a madam is a striking simile, indicating the paucity of social and familial bonds and suggesting the degeneration of morality when faced with the temptation of money. Her veiled and disguised manner alludes to the hypocrisy of society on the one hand, but to female collaboration with patriarchal norms on the other. Revealingly, Hlima's father (also not named in the text) plays no part in this process. The perpetuation of patriarchy within the family, which is commonly understood to be the goal of the men who benefit from it, is primarily undertaken by women in *L'Homme rompu*. Indeed, this bears resemblance to the portrayal of women in chapters two and three. In *Xala*, Yay Bineta is the determined and astute aunt who secures N'Goné's marriage. In *La Répudiation* also, the women of the tribe collude in upholding what Michelle Bakdaches-Laygues terms the 'regime of triumphant virility' for expressing repugnance at the violent sacrifice of the sheep.³⁹² This phenomenon has not gone unnoticed by critics. On Maghrebian writing in general, Hédi Abdel-Jaouad asserts that: 'The Maghrebian mother unwittingly becomes the custodian of the patriarchal system of which she is the primal victim'.³⁹³ Women are often the ones who most ferociously defend a system that oppresses them, a fact that certainly holds true in this novel as, indeed, it did through the character of Yay Bineta in *Xala*.

In relation to *L'Homme rompu*, Nangia argues that: 'While the text makes it clear that Hlima's and her mother's attitude are a product of the patriarchal system, it also indicates that it is the women who not only suffer most of the consequences of patriarchal subjugation but also that they are forced into being the enforcers of patriarchal values'.³⁹⁴ In seeking validation within misogynist ideologies that govern society, women such as Hlima and her mother certainly suffer from phallogocentric oppression, but they cannot deny the charge of colluding with patriarchy either. Indeed, the weight of masculinist influence is so effectively imprinted on the female psyche that they promote it as much as the men and this extreme internalisation of patriarchal doctrine is a key part of Hlima's characterisation. Nangia

³⁹² Bakdaches-Laygues, 'Le Rite sacrificiel', p. 352.

³⁹³ Abdel-Jaouad, "'Too Much in the Sun'", p. 21.

³⁹⁴ Nangia, 'Male-Female Relations', p. 100.

perceives Mourad as a sexually free and mobile, roaming man whereas he assigns Hlima to the role of submissive, downtrodden wife.³⁹⁵ Nevertheless, this last statement is not wholly supported by the text, which, at times, paints a picture of Hlima as a rampaging matriarch. Whilst Nangia is certainly right to emphasise Hlima's neurosis, she nevertheless challenges commonly-held assumptions regarding femininity.³⁹⁶ She is sexually hungry and aggressive, she is violent, she is financially corruptible and authoritarian *vis-à-vis* her husband (pp. 26–7). In short, Hlima represents a stark contrast to her husband because she fully accepts and seeks to promote the culturally persuasive trend of masculinist privilege.

Hlima's rage leaves little room for manoeuvre for Mourad and his principles, and their life together descends to the level of a living hell. The key characteristics upon which Mourad's identity is built, such as kindness, humanity, honesty and integrity are completely eclipsed by the demands for money and financial wealth. The only way that Mourad can live up to the standards set for him by Hlima and her family is to become complicit with the corruption that ultimately perpetuates poverty, a lack of social mobility and a lower quality of life for his less fortunate fellow citizens. Unwilling to do this, Mourad is well aware of Hlima's and her family's views about him, which can be summarised in the following quotation in which he refers to his mother-in-law in particular: 'Je lui gâche le paysage. Je suis son erreur, celui qui n'aurait pas dû entrer dans cette famille. Elle l'avait dit à sa fille mais avait fini par céder, comptant sur mon éventuelle adaptation à la machine' (p. 20) [*I spoil her picture. I'm her mistake, the one who shouldn't have gotten into the family. She'd told her daughter this but ended up giving in, counting on my eventual adaptation to the machine* (p. 8)].³⁹⁷

Mourad is a mistake because he does not fit the mould of the wealthy patriarch that Hlima's mother envisaged for her daughter. Where criteria of manliness are concerned, the primary qualification is that of money. Poverty of the soul is not perceived as a problem or even as undesirable, as long as you are materially wealthy, a point that was also true of the society depicted in *Partir* to an extent.³⁹⁸ Mourad's failure to adapt to the criteria and to embrace the dominant discourse around him signals a decadent and failing masculinity in his wife's eyes. Clearly, morals, conscience and integrity are not merely unnecessary but are

³⁹⁵ Nangia, 'Male-Female Relations', pp. 87–95.

³⁹⁶ Nangia, 'Male-Female Relations', p. 97.

³⁹⁷ This stands in marked juxtaposition to Hlima's father, who apparently admires Mourad for his personal integrity (p. 18).

³⁹⁸ Compare, for instance, the cruel Al Afia who, though corrupt and without scruples, does nevertheless possess a respect in society that Azel does not. Also, Azel's solicitor uncle provides an interesting parallel with Mourad. He promptly goes out of business due to his rejection of corruption.

actually deemed as denoting a shameful sub-category of man that falls short of the status of 'manhood'. Hlima's spirit here – like the collective spirit around her – is decadent and riddled with corruption, even though she does not practise corruption herself. Indeed, she justifies corruption as a means of rescuing her from her pitiful and poor existence. The extent to which Mourad and his wife can be described as poor, however, is debatable. Mourad believes they lead a modest life, rather than a poor one. Hlima's infatuation with bigger, better and richer signals her perceived poverty and the many frustrations in her life, rather than the actual state of affairs. In this sense, Hlima can be read as an Althusserian subject, for whom ideology provides an imaginary relationship to real-life conditions, but where this link is distorted and ceases to reflect reality, thus becoming both an allusion and an illusion.³⁹⁹

Unlike Mourad, she gives no thought to the wider consequences of this moral void for the future of their country. She is entirely taken up by the discourse of wealth regardless of how it is earned. Indeed, even if Hlima is right in crying poverty, the persuasiveness of the cult of materialism ends in her buying a gold belt for herself out of Mourad's first 'commission'. She prioritises this over her daughter's health, by buying herself a fashion item rather than paying for Karima's treatment. Without doubt, it is Hlima who demands a complicit attitude to gendered behaviour and she, more than her husband, who allies herself with dominant images of masculinity.

In *L'Homme rompu*, dominant masculine sexuality is portrayed as a predatory force and as a means of wielding power over the passive feminine. Both Haj Hamid and the Director, for example, cruise outside schools and colleges in expensive cars, trying to seduce young girls. Haj Hamid uses his financial wealth to impress and even possesses his own bachelor pad where he takes them to have sex, either alone or as part of orgies. The inequalities between him and these girls are evident, and stem from established power dynamics. Firstly, he is considerably older than these girls. He has accumulated wealth and also has the means to provide a discreet place for his dubious activities. He is therefore privileged by his sex, his age, his financial status and by his acquisition of space, rather like El Hadji in *Xala*, Si Zoubir in *La Répudiation* and El Haj in *Partir*. For all these characters, sexuality is rooted in a social dominance over their partners, whether through age or wealth, once more echoing the argument that penetration equals power. His behaviour exposes a considerable degree of hypocrisy amongst the bourgeois, well-to-do men in the novel. Indeed, when it comes to his own daughter, Haj Hamid is besieged with anxiety. There is an

³⁹⁹ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 153.

obsession with female virginity in the text which reflects a very real concern in Muslim society, which exists because of societal demands for a girl to be a virgin upon her marriage due to two points: firstly, the centrality of female sexual virtue to male honour, and in order to 'protect' the male from the unruly and destabilising effect of female sexuality.⁴⁰⁰ Haj Hamid is deeply concerned by the prospect of his own daughter losing her purity to one of the male predators who lurk outside college at the end of the day. However, he is exactly the type of man who undercuts the whole system of virginity and sexual purity. He is an excellent example of the (masculine) hypocrisies of the phallogocentric, patriarchal order and, as Nangia puts it: '[Haj Hamid] exemplifies an inner contradiction in his society's masculinist sociosexual values' in that for him, the female body is to be exploited for male pleasure on the one hand, but fiercely guarded to protect male honour on the other.⁴⁰¹ Indeed, this contradiction also reiterates Mernissi's assertion that female sexuality in Muslim countries is far more controlled and civilised than that of the male.⁴⁰² This blatant contradiction is observed by Mourad, who has a clear understanding of this hypocrisy and despises individuals like Haj Hamid for it. Mourad has no interest in entering into Haj Hamid's seedy world. Rather, he feels disgust at the actions of his peers and deliberately sets himself apart from them, therefore rejecting dominant paradigms of male sexuality.

Nevertheless, this dichotomy – man as conqueror and woman as conquered – that it so apparent in the case of Haj Hamid as well as in the other novels discussed in this thesis, is not upheld as the only dynamics possible. Hlima displays a high level of masochism and a desire to be conquered – by force if necessary – by her husband. She thus stands as an indication of how woman internalise and promote patriarchal norms that ultimately harm and oppress them. Mourad's refusal to do the same indicates once more his liminal status as a man. The portrayal of sexuality in *L'Homme rompu* also undermines stereotypical and assumed gender dynamics in Islamicate societies. Many critics have expanded upon the notion that sexual gratification is a male privilege and that women have a duty to service their husbands in this respect, to the neglect of their own needs and desires.⁴⁰³ In *L'Homme rompu*, however, Ben Jelloun forces us to confront and challenge this assumption through his characterisation.

⁴⁰⁰ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 95; p. 103–104.

⁴⁰¹ Nangia, 'Male-Female Relations', p. 103.

⁴⁰² Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, pp. 46–49.

⁴⁰³ This commonly-held social belief and practice appears to be a cultural trend and does not stem from Islam itself. Indeed, Islam advocates women's pleasure in sexual matters and states that it is a husband's duty to please his wife sexually. This biased emphasis on male sexual fulfilment therefore appears to be an extension of patriarchal cultural norms, which encourage sexual expression in men whilst attempting to contain it in women. See Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, pp. 58–60.

Mourad, as has already been established, has an unconventional gendered identity within the constraints of his situation, and this individuality also becomes apparent in his sexual relations with his wife, for it is Hlima who confounds the traditional dichotomy. Hlima is predatory and at times aggressive sexually, and she goes as far as to suggest sexual practices that are outside the acceptable parameters designated by her religion and culture. Despite this, Nangia claims that Hlima is an 'epitome of subordinate woman', a point with which I would have to disagree.⁴⁰⁴ While Nangia accurately charts the elements of Hlima's subordination, it would be misguided as well as reductive to view her as simply a victim. Ben Jelloun therefore problematises the stereotypical formula of woman as passive, man as dominant and this impacts heavily on Mourad's male identity.

Like Siham in *Partir*, Hlima also insists on making love with her Islamic erotology book literally in hand. Notably, it is Hlima who introduces new ideas in bed, who avidly reads the Sheikh's advice and who wants to master the varying positions. There is no mention of Mourad's view and he gets swept along with his wife's sexual fantasies. Sheikh Nafzaoui's book is portrayed as a Muslim equivalent of the Kama Sutra, and the pair diligently attempt all of the sexual positions in it. Yet, it is Mourad who points out that all of these variations eventually culminate in the same basic pattern, that is to say, man on top. In addition, there is almost a complaint in his tone that, despite her hunger, Hlima will always remain inferior to her husband: 'Mais dans l'ensemble elles se ressemblent toutes: la femme toujours sous l'homme' (p. 24) [*But on the whole they're all fairly similar: the man always on top of the woman*' (p. 10)]. In Shonu Nangia's words: 'Penetrated and then fecundated in the classical position, the female is consigned to a structure which keeps her under eternal domination'.⁴⁰⁵ Mourad seems frustrated by the limited expression that Hlima is allowed as a female. Curious and adventurous, she is still relegated to the position of submission in the coital embrace. If we were to follow traditional lines of thought, one would imagine that this easy male conquest would please Mourad. Yet, it seems to have the opposite effect, suggesting that Mourad would prefer to be on equal terms with his sexual partner, once more placing him at a disjuncture with normative masculinity.

Mourad's desire to purge the sexual act of its power dynamics resurfaces again a few pages later, when Hlima, menstruating, demands that Mourad penetrate her anally. Mourad expresses misgivings as to whether or not this is permitted by Sheikh Nafzaoui and Islamic doctrine but he states that: 'Je refusai de m'exécuter. Je n'aime pas la sodomisation' (pp. 24-

⁴⁰⁴ Nangia, 'Male-Female Relations', p. 78.

⁴⁰⁵ Nangia, 'Male-Female Relations', p. 85.

5) [*'I refused to perform. I don't like sodomy' (p. 10)*]. This scene is a near exact repetition of the episode between Azel and Siham in *Partir*. Nevertheless, it is notable that Mourad *refuses* to perform, whereas Azel was *unable* to do so. This, therefore, underlines Mourad's more assertive and defiant attitude towards accepted expressions of virility. Hlima's outburst is aggressive and unforgiving. It is also an extremely powerful deflation of Mourad's masculine identity:

'Tu n'es pas un homme!' J'étais assis sur le bord du lit, mon sexe réduit à sa plus petite taille; je me sentis ridicule et compris qu'avec cette injure et surtout mon absence de réaction ma vie allait petit à petit se transformer en quelque chose qui n'allait pas tarder à ressembler à l'enfer. (p. 25)

[*'You're not a man!' she told me, getting up. I was sitting at the edge of the bed, my penis shriveled. I felt ridiculous and understood that with this insult, and my failure to react to it, my life, before long, would be transformed into a hell. (pp. 10–11)*]

Hlima's statement challenges Mourad's masculine identity to its very core, with his shrivelled penis serving as an indication of his battered masculine pride. Once again, penetration becomes a measure of manliness. Mourad's inability and lack of desire to penetrate his wife in this episode is tantamount to his failed masculinity in her view. Notably, however, this scene does not illustrate a cruel and tyrannical masculinity being forced upon the feminine object. Instead, it is the female here who is sexually dominant and demanding, turning traditional sex roles on their head. It is also Hlima who exerts pressure on Mourad, and Mourad who is relegated to the status of submissive partner, indicating to what extent he falls short of the sociosexual norm.

Matters do not get any better the following day when Mourad approaches his wife and tries to talk to her. His discussion is rebuffed and a perverse vision of manhood emerges:

Elle avait sa propre définition de la virilité et j'appris avec stupeur que la violence physique – les coups – en était l'un des signes. Elle me demandait donc de la battre pendant qu'on faisait l'amour. (p. 25)

[*She had her own definition of virility and I was stupefied to learn that physical violence, blows, were one of its signs. She asked me to hit her while we were making love. (p. 11)*]

Hlima's desire to be physically abused during sex sends an important message to Mourad. Her notions of ideal manhood include physical brutality and violence. Hlima's expectation to be totally dominated and violated is the ultimate expression of masochism, and this

masochistic nature that Hlima professes is not unknown in Islamic tradition.⁴⁰⁶ In his thesis, Nangia accurately refers to Hlima's 'psychosexual subordination', arguing that her psyche is undoubtedly embedded in societal ideologies that victimise women.⁴⁰⁷ Nevertheless, this also reveals the lack of room for manoeuvre for Mourad, as a man. For, unwilling to enact the role of sexually domineering male, the scene illustrates the impossibility of any other role for men. In a striking role reversal, Hlima appears to be the sexual brute of the relationship, not Mourad. She only lacks the cultural (and anatomical) justification to consolidate her dominance.

Mourad's unwillingness to submit himself to Hlima's views of what constitutes masculinity in the bedroom pushes him to the sidelines of recognised virility. He remains firm in his beliefs and stoically rejects sexual discourses that would require him to be something that he is not. He therefore retains an element of integrity, at least with regard to his marital relations. Hlima's preconceived notion of sexual dynamics is alien to Mourad, and represents a layer of masculine indoctrination not from men, but from the women in their lives. As Nangia rightly asserts, women such as Hlima fully internalise the doctrine they are brought up with, claiming that: 'Her notions of femininity, masculinity and sexuality reveal how these cultural meanings are tied to her subordination. Hlima, as a character, is the locus of a certain representation of femininity and exemplifies the internalization by women of meanings and practices that reinforce their own subordination'.⁴⁰⁸ While this is true, Hlima's culturally inherited beliefs regarding manhood and virility also enforce a kind of inferiority onto Mourad. Nangia also argues that 'Hlima's perceptions of gender roles reflect an association of economic power with masculinity'.⁴⁰⁹ Therefore, Mourad's presumed lack of virility in his relationship with his wife reflects his lack of manliness in the workplace too.

Perversely, the ideals of hegemonic manhood are revealed to be a series of negative attributes, with characteristics commonly thought of as good and honourable seen as unnecessary – even annoying – traits getting in the way of the more important business of

⁴⁰⁶ For instance, Mernissi refers to Abbas Mahmoud al-Aqqad who wrote *Women in the Koran* (Cairo, n.d.). Al-Aqqad believed that the male in all animals has power over the female by virtue of his superior physical strength and that this is used to coerce the female into copulation, and therefore procreation. His thesis therefore closely echoes Freud's 'law of the jungle' theory in that the female, according to al-Aqqad, is masochistic by nature, receiving (sexual) pleasure through suffering and submission to the male. Despite the fact that his work is, in her words, 'an amateurish mixture of history, religion and his own brand of biology and anthropology', Mernissi nevertheless accords al-Aqqad's theory importance in Islamic cultural heritage. For more details, see Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, pp. 32–3.

⁴⁰⁷ Nangia, 'Male-Female Relations', p. 83.

⁴⁰⁸ Nangia, 'Male-Female Relations', pp. 78–9.

⁴⁰⁹ Nangia, 'Male-Female Relations', p. 79.

making money. Mourad finally realises that he and his wife are incompatible, as they move in very different social circles. Mourad's admission is telling and says a lot about Moroccan society as it is portrayed in the novel. In Hlima's family as elsewhere, post-colonial Morocco has become a materialistic culture with an emerging bourgeoisie akin to that we saw in *Xala*. What matters to Hlima is not whether her husband is violent and morally challenged. More important than that is his capability to provide a big house, the trappings of wealth and, significantly, a veneer of financial respectability. These economic difficulties go some way towards explaining why playing the game of corruption is such a painful dilemma for Mourad. For the time being, Mourad makes a conscious decision to resist these powerful cultural currents and to reject the role prescribed to him, positing himself at the margins of sanctioned expressions of masculinity.

Mourad's Existential Predicament

Thus far, this chapter has argued that Mourad is a marginal man, branded a failure and looked down upon with contempt by his peers. He falls short of the mantle of masculinity – material/financial wealth, the trappings of power and influence and predatory sexuality – because his personal integrity stands in the way. His status, which is derided scornfully by the majority of those around him, is taken up consciously and purposefully. It is Mourad's own choice not to participate in the dominant order of gendered behaviour and to set himself apart in order to satisfy his own deeply-held principles and morals. The parallel economy, as the primary focus of the novel, does not only represent corruption but also a series of gendered roles deemed acceptable by society at large. Thus, Haj Hamid and the Director, who fully embrace corruption and who build suitably masculine public personae for themselves, are able to do so for the very reason that they engage with corruption. Mourad, determined to do the opposite, cannot *buy* himself a masculine image along these lines and so occupies a peripheral zone in gendered territory, stoutly declaring: “Je ne suis pas corruptible” (p. 17) [“*I don't take bribes*” (p. 6)].

Mourad cannot be described as subversive, however, because although he does not engage with the parallel economy, he does not *actively* work towards its dismantlement either. Indeed, the third-person narrator tells us at the beginning of the text that Mourad is not prepared to overtly capsize the system by setting traps to incriminate Haj Hamid (p. 14). When Mourad finally accepts his first bribe in the novel, his circumstances – which were hardly favourable to begin with – degenerate quickly. Corruption acts as a wider metaphor

for conformity and whether or not Mourad will adhere to normative notions of manhood. This is a point underlined by the fact that he hides the first batch of notes he receives as commission in a copy of Sartre's *L'Être et le néant* (p. 73), whilst declaring, rather ironically: 'Je saurai qu'en inversant le titre, en passant du néant à l'être, le livre me concernera' (pp. 73–4) [*That way if I reverse the title, and go from nothingness to being, the book will in a sense be about me* (p. 40)]. On a wider level, it also signifies his entrance into the system of the parallel economy on the one hand, and the neo-colonial order on the other. Reminiscent of El Hadji in *Xala*, Mourad teeters on the tightrope that separates his former life from his potential future life as a member of the corrupt bourgeoisie that has replaced the French colonisers. At the core of Mourad's self-perception were his dignity and his adherence to his own moral criteria. In short, his integrity as a man was intrinsically linked to his integrity in matters financial. Even though Mourad believes his decision to succumb will make him into someone, rather than the irrelevant outcast that he has been hitherto, this action actually marks a gradual erosion of his subjective identity.

At the beginning of the novel, Mourad's character stands in stark opposition to the meaning of the book's title.⁴¹⁰ Indeed, he is *unbreakable* in his adherence to his personal values. However, his virtuous intentions are slowly crushed by the social pressures he encounters. The boundaries between corruption and theft are blurred gradually by financial need and lashings of emotional blackmail from his wife:

[Hlima] me dirait: 'Tu te crois un saint, un héros, tu es bien le seul et tu nous entraînes dans ta solitude avec en plus privation et manque. Tes seigneurs, les vrais hommes, eux pensent à l'avenir de leurs enfants et se débrouillent pour le leur assurer. Toi, tu accumules les scrupules comme si on pouvait manger avec! En tous cas, notre fils ne sera pas la victime de ta rigueur. Je ferai tout pour qu'il obtienne sa bourse.' (p. 36)

[[Hlima] would say: '[You think you're a saint, a hero, that you are the only one. You drag us with you into your solitude of deprivation and lack.] Your lords and masters are real men, they think of their children's future and find ways to provide for them. Meanwhile you store up your scruples as if you could eat them! In any case, our son will not be the victim of your inflexibility. I'll do everything I can to make sure he gets the grant' (pp. 17–18)].

Hlima, by using words such as 'saint' and 'hero', mocks her husband cruelly, illustrating the total lack of respect she has for him. Conversely, such an anointed status is reserved for the likes of Haj Hamid, who is a 'real man' and vastly superior. Her veiled threat to sleep with someone else in order to ensure Wassit receives a bursary signals her inability to move

⁴¹⁰ Sadly, the English translation of the novel, entitled simply *Corruption*, loses this gendered connotation.

beyond the female gender attributed to her by society. This emotional blackmail is exerted on Mourad frequently, and when its focus turns to his children, it hits a nerve. Mourad, although distant, is nevertheless a loving father. His daughter Karima's asthma will only worsen, and his son Wassit's dreams of studying in America seem destined to fade. This psychological pressure grinds away at Mourad's pride and his determination to remain faithful to his principles. In finally accepting a bribe, he slavishly falls in line.

Mourad's psychological state deteriorates in a gradual and agonising process that intensifies once he makes his first concrete step towards joining the 'machine'. Whereas Mourad's descriptions of himself were steadfast and proud at the beginning of the novel, as the narrative progresses they become increasingly questioning as he is pushed ever closer to revising his stance:

Tout le monde s'y plie et ceux, comme moi, qui résistent, on devra bientôt les parquer dans une réserve et on les installera à côté des espèces d'animaux menacées ou en voie de disparition. C'est ma fierté d'appartenir à cette réserve. (p. 46)

[Everyone goes along with it, and people like me, who resist, will soon have to be kept on a [reserve], next to the endangered species. Personally, I'll be proud to be on this [réserve]. (p. 24)]

Mourad's monologues begin to take on a highly negative edge. The reference here to extinction illustrates clearly how widespread corruption is, and how rare honesty appears to be. The self-doubt and self-questioning continues, as he considers his daughter's chronic asthma and his lack of funds for her treatment. Symbolically asphyxiated by his poor wage and the costs of providing for a family, Mourad begins to surrender to the fact that he *could* pro-actively change position. It is at this point that the hallucinatory 'voice' of corruption appears:

[Tu es un] citoyen-pauvre, mais tu pourrais ne plus l'être. Ta condition est entre tes mains. Tu ne vas pas toute ta vie prendre ce foutu bus qui te jettera un jour dans une fosse commune! Réveille-toi, pense à l'avenir de tes enfants. Ce que tu appelles corruption n'est en fait qu'une forme subtile de récupération. Tout le monde s'arrange. Sois souple, mon vieux [...] (p. 51)

[You're a poor citizen, but you don't have to be one. Your situation is in your hands. Don't spend your life taking that stinking bus – one day it's going to drop you in a common grave! Wake up. Think of your children's future. What you call corruption is in fact only a subtle way of recouping what's yours. Everyone gets by. Be flexible, old pal. (pp. 26–27)]

Mourad is faced with an agonising choice. Either he resists corruption and all the inherent problems it brings with it for others and for Morocco as a whole, or he substantially eases his own life and ensures he can provide for his children. The fact that the discourse of corruption appears in his mind like an extra voice illustrates the very real pressure under which Mourad finds himself. Read in terms of Althusser's theory of interpellation, the voice hails Mourad and asks him to take his rightful place within an ideology with the implied promise that 'everything will be alright'.⁴¹¹

Just prior to the initial appearance of Mourad's 'second voice', the textual imagery is that of entrapment and suffocation. As Mourad begins to question his moral stance, he suffers recurring nightmares in which he is trapped in tunnels (p. 47). Indeed, at this point Mourad begins to wonder about his mental state, considering himself 'maniaque' (p. 48) [*obsessive* (p. 25)]. The second inner voice functions as a mouthpiece for the rhetoric of complicity, conformity and corruption. It incites Mourad to comply with, and participate in, corruption with the same reasoning as seen elsewhere. Moreover, this alternative voice insists upon the life that Mourad could offer his wife and family, before emphasising the ease with which Mourad could become the type of man that his wife has always wished for; a man who has a new car, a villa, who frequents restaurants and leaves generous tips, who dresses well and attends the mosque on Fridays (pp. 52–3).

Indeed, joining the dominant social order means leaving behind any inner qualities or principles, echoing the words of Mourad's father who used to criticise Hlima and her family for their hypocrisy and fixation with appearances, luxuries and money (p. 49). Being a real man is more to do with playing the part – a combination of acting and props – as the second voice explains:

Tout est dans l'apparence [...] Tu feras un effort, tu mettras entre parenthèses ta laïcité et ton athéisme, et tu joueras le jeu. C'est ça la société. Une interminable partie de cartes. Il faut savoir dribbler, passer d'un lieu à un autre, sauter les obstacles, tourner les difficultés, annuler les choses inutiles, comme les scrupules, la mauvaise conscience [...] (p. 53)

[*'Appearances are everything [...] You'll make an effort, you'll put aside your secularity and your atheism and you'll play the game. That's society. An endless game. You have to know how to maneuver, to move from one place to another, to overcome obstacles, to circumvent difficulties, to get rid of useless things, like scruples and a guilty conscience'* (pp. 27–28)]

⁴¹¹ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 169.

The above quotation underlines the centrality of performance to masculinity in the novel, transposing what Gilmore refers to as 'men-playing' to a fictional level and indicating a level of agency in the act.⁴¹² Evidently, becoming the man that Hlima and society at large desire is an exercise in theatricality, with an emphasis on superficiality and image rather than deeper, innate qualities. Nevertheless, as we saw in *Xala*, *La Répudiation* and *Partir*, the pressures of attaining and maintaining an authorised gender are acute and overwhelming. Moreover, the quotation also reflects current post-structuralist gender theory, by depicting identity as a process of tapping to, and then enacting, circulating hegemonic scripts of identity. In effect, Mourad can buy into it by performing it adequately.

Following this quotation, an episode of schizophrenic inner turmoil is depicted, representing Mourad's losing battle with the collective rhetoric of societal norms. As Mourad asks, the voice answers, screaming and insisting before eventually becoming disagreeable and insulting (p. 54). Mourad is even informed that his lowly social status renders his life worthless and that Haj Hamid is more important than him (p. 54), strongly suggesting a hierarchy in which he is subordinate to others. One is left to assume that Haj Hamid's superior worth is due to his ability to fit into the gendered mould which society provides. Bullied by the thought of supporting his mother as well as his own family, the inner monologue becomes stained with a large dose of self-denigration, as the hailing voice of society articulated by the second hallucinatory voice chips away at Mourad's self-image. Indeed, this voice tells Mourad: 'J'ai honte d'être ta voix' (p. 55) [*I'm embarrassed to be your voice* (p. 29)] before stating: 'Toi, On ne te dit même pas bonjour, tellement tu es pauvre; tu n'existes pas. On ne te voit plus' (p. 55) [*No one even says hello to you, you're so poor. You don't exist. No one sees you anymore* (p. 29)]. Masculinity and individuality are yet again equated with financial wealth and lacking this leads to social irrelevance.

Significantly, this particular tirade by the second inner voice ends on an existentialist note, as this voice bemoans:

Je me retire de ta conscience qui pèse une tonne et plus. Elle m'écrase. Elle m'étouffe. Elle me blesse. Tu te rends compte, je suis devenue l'ennemie de ta conscience. Elle occupe tout l'espace. Un jour, tu mourras asphyxié par elle. (p. 56)

[*I'm getting out from under your conscience, which must weigh a ton or more. It's crushing me, it's suffocating me, it's hurting me. Do you realize, I've become the enemy of your conscience. It's taking up all the room. One day it'll suffocate you!* (p. 30)]

⁴¹² Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, pp. 2–3.

Revealingly, personal conscience is rendered a negative attribute, to the extent that it will eventually cause Mourad's death. Mourad will forever be an outcast unless he can become a subject within ideology (by being subjected to it). Read once more with Althusser's theory in mind, In fact, the philosophy suggested above mirrors Hlima's attitude that honourable values merely impinge on the important – but ethically dubious – business of making money and acquiring materialistic goods.

The next time Mourad goes to work, a slight change in attitude is detectable. The first-person narrator now comments more lengthily and angrily on the disdainful attitude of his colleagues towards him. He recalls a past occasion when the *chaouch* seemed determined to 'humiliate' him by offering to take him home on his bicycle (p. 59). For the first time, Mourad displays an innate awareness of social class differentiation which had hitherto been absent. Furthermore, having torn his jacket on the way to work, Mourad sits behind his desk sewing it up, hoping that Haj Hamid does not see him. At this point comes the curious insertion that Hlima refuses to darn any of Mourad's clothes, only hers and those of the children. Mourad pointedly remarks that Hlima's refusal and the subsequent fact of having to do his own sewing is 'degrading' (p. 60). The intriguing point here is that both of these complaints appear to signal a shift in attitude. The fact that he must darn his own clothes, or that he perceives it to be degrading, is never mentioned previously, and the dismissive attitude of his work colleagues is easily forgotten. The emergent demarcation line between men's and women's roles at this point signposts Mourad's nascent complicity – an identity more in line with stereotypical paradigms of what a man should be (and what a woman should do for him) as well as his new position within the masculine hierarchy. Mourad is beginning to claim his place within ideology.⁴¹³

Once the jacket is repaired, Mourad is affronted by the arrogant Haj Hamid: 'Haj Hamid entre et pose sur mon bureau le dossier de M. Sabbane en me disant, comme si j'étais son subalterne, que je dois régler ce problème très rapidement' (p. 61) [*Haj Hamid comes in and puts Mr. Sabbane's folder on my desk, telling me, as if I were his subordinate, that I must resolve this problem very quickly*' (p. 33)]. By speaking to him in this way, Haj Hamid not only challenges Mourad's authority – he rejects it outright, representing Mourad's demotion. The difference here, however, is that on this occasion it appears to bother Mourad who, by now, it might be argued, has a desire to be recognised within the system. Haj Hamid instructs him: 'Ne négligez aucune page de ce dossier' (p. 62) [*Don't miss a page of that folder*' (p.

⁴¹³ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 168.

33)]. It is this particular file, which Haj Hamid insists upon so strongly, that contains Mourad's first bribe – an anonymous envelope with two million dirhams inside. At what constitutes a crisis point in the novel, Mourad decides to finally accept the money and to engage in corrupt practices. He recognises himself within corrupt ideology and is, in turn, recognised by it.

Mourad's transformation from an unfaltering and honest character into a corrupt state worker gains him entry into the masculine fellowship of the corrupt. Haj Hamid, now referred to as H.H., as if representing a type rather than a particular individual, is delighted: 'Il croit que c'est le début d'une complicité. Il se lève et se propose d'aller me chercher un café ou une autre boisson. Dans son esprit nous allons fêter notre nouvelle collaboration' (p. 64) [*He thinks it's the beginning of a complicity between us. He gets up and offers to get me a coffee or something else to drink. In his mind we're going to celebrate our new partnership*' (pp. 34–35)]. He also extends his help to Mourad, offering to introduce him to an acquaintance of his who imports suits from France of which the Director is also very fond, indicating the extent of the involvement in corrupt practices in Mourad's workplace.⁴¹⁴ From now on, H.H. will greet Mourad with the warm, exaggerated and knowing handshake reserved for fellow members of the brotherhood. The Director also welcomes Mourad into the metaphorical boys' club by inviting him to dinner at his house with his friends, amongst whom will be M. Sabbane himself. Phoning from his office, the Director's voice is noticeably calm and Mourad reflects: 'Ce doit être la voix de la complicité' (p. 65) [*This must be the voice of complicity*' (p. 35)]. Even the *chaouch* begins to respect Mourad, bringing him tea and asking after his children's health (pp. 70–1). At a restaurant, Mourad leaves a big tip and travels home by taxi, in marked difference to the first pages of the novel where he walks or gets one of the chaotic and heavily overcrowded buses. He comments: 'Je suis traité comme un chef, un patron. C'est agréable' (p. 72) [*I'm treated like a VIP, like a boss. It's nice*' (p. 39)]. After years in the wilderness of manhood, mocked and regarded with disdain by his family-in-law and work colleagues alike, Mourad has finally made it into the exclusive club of masculine privilege.

The transformation that Mourad undergoes with one small action is profound. He is catapulted into favour with his male peers and suddenly has a brighter, wealthier future ahead of him. Having given in, Mourad reflects on the overwhelming temptation of *la souplesse* (flexibility/pliability):

⁴¹⁴ The implication in the novel is that these clothes are imported illegally, since the fittings take place in this man's personal apartment. See p. 65.

Je sens que je suis conquis par la souplesse. Je la compare à un sofa moelleux où le corps s'enfoncé doucement. Je me laisse aller, la tête en arrière, je ne vois plus le monde tel qu'il est, je ne sens plus mes muscles, je suis ailleurs [...] je suis heureux. (p. 65)

[I feel flexibility overtaking me. I compare it to a downy sofa into which your body gently sinks. I let myself go, my head back, I no longer see the world as it is, no longer feel my muscles, I am elsewhere [...] I am happy (p. 35)]

Mourad feels conquered by the pleasure of bending the rules, hinting at the complete erosion of agency. Letting himself go, being unable to see clearly now or even to feel the sensations within his own body – all imply that Mourad is fractured from his earlier self, where he possessed a degree of subjectivity. From now on, he will act as societal notions dictate, rather than according to his own personal judgement and will, his temporary feeling of happiness masking his abandonment of self-responsibility.

Once he has taken his first 'commission', Mourad's malady is manifold and yet unnamed. He walks differently and dresses better. He plans weekends away and days out and begins to treat himself to meals, expensive cigarettes and wine (pp. 74–5). Indeed, Mourad states: 'Je me sens un autre homme' (p. 76) [*I feel like a different man' (p. 41)*], a phrase which is highly revealing, for his psychosomatic symptoms underline the fact that Mourad is, by now, a very different man indeed. As the new files pile up on his desk awaiting his signature, he admits: 'Je suis peut-être malade' (p. 82) [*I may be sick' (p. 46)*]. This illness exists on several levels – psychological, emotional and moral – all signalling a profound disorientation. On one occasion, as Haj Hamid and M. Sabbane enter to discuss a file with Mourad, he describes himself as: 'sur les nerfs. Je transpire, je bafouille [...] Je ne suis pas normal' (p. 84) [*nervous wreck. I'm sweating, uttering nonsense [...] I'm not my usual self' (p. 47)*], a description which is heightened all the more by the comparative ease and relaxation of Haj Hamid and M. Sabbane. This brings to mind Gupta's assertion that corruption is not simply an economic transaction but an example of a 'cultural practice' that demands a certain amount of 'performative competence'.⁴¹⁵ Mourad's physical state in this instance betrays his total lack of 'performative' know-how.

Anxiety-ridden, Mourad suffocates in the close atmosphere of the office and eagerly anticipates his trip to Casablanca with his daughter Karima (p. 86). At this point, Mourad

⁴¹⁵ In his article, Gupta relates the example of two young Indian men who are inexperienced in the rules of corruption and who learn quickly that bribery is much more than paying for a service; it requires a certain ceremony to be respected and played out. Indeed, Gupta argues that the bribe itself acts as a 'gesture of goodwill [...] rather than a conscious mechanism to grease the wheels'. See Gupta, 'Blurred Boundaries', p. 381.

declares: 'Je me sens un homme libre. C'est normal! Je prends des décisions. J'agis. Un homme corrompu est-il un homme libre? C'est paradoxal' (p. 86) [*I feel like a free man. This is only normal! I make decisions. I act. Is a corrupt man a free man? It's paradoxical*' (p. 48)]. His desperation to distance himself from Haj Hamid and M. Sabbane in particular is such that he resorts to counting the hours until he will be free of them, and at the same time it indicates the intense asphyxiation he experiences in the tightly-knit masculine order he chose to join, undermining his claims of freedom. A sinister revelation then descends on him: 'Les liens sont tissés de telle manière que tout le monde ou presque est impliqué [dans la corruption]. Comme dit M. Sabbane, la mémoire est importante. Un service rendu est un prêt. Il doit un jour ou l'autre être remboursé' (p. 106) [*The bonds are woven in such a way that everyone or almost everyone is implicated. As Mr. Sabbane says, a good memory is important. A good turn is a loan; one day or another it must be repaid*' (p. 60)]. As Gupta points out, corruption becomes a culture – a way of life – and Mourad realises the impossibility of disentangling himself. Quite to the contrary of personal freedom, Mourad is now ensnared in the vicious cycle that is corruption, and is rendered subordinate within this new order, forced to repay the favour at a later date. No longer able to exercise his integrity, he finds himself enslaved by conformity.

However, the theme of corruption in the text does not simply express an alternative economic order with gendered implications. A further layer to this parallel economy is its (neo-)colonial element. When Mourad finally concedes to the pressure placed upon him to dip his feet into the sea of corruption, he finds himself ensnared in another type of exploitation – that of the global capitalist variety. Notably, the second commission that he accepts from M. Sabbane, who is on this occasion representing an American construction company, is in dollars. The suggestion here is that people, and/or their services, are bought with foreign money, signifying that corruption spreads far beyond Moroccan borders, another point on which *L'Homme rompu* converges with *Partir*. The one thing that can improve Mourad and his family's life more than any other is – significantly – the batch of dollars he is given covertly.

Even before this moment, other references imply an imperialist presence. The items that Mourad longs to treat himself to include American cigarettes and Monte Cristo cigars – luxury Western items that become globally recognised symbols of wealth (p. 17). Suits are imported from France (p. 65) as El Hadji's suits were made from English textiles in *Xala*, and

whisky and pornography, almost certainly of Western origin, are consumed (p. 194).⁴¹⁶ At one point Mourad meets with an old friend of his. His friend has returned back to his native Morocco but is now based in the United States where he has made his fortune. There is no apparent textual necessity for the inclusion of this scene other than to underline the neo-colonial aspect of corruption. Clad in Western clothes, sporting a mobile phone and lounging at the edge of a swimming pool in a hotel that would be unattainably expensive for most Moroccans, Mourad's friend has returned to his native land victorious. In addition, Mourad's own son, Wassit, dreams of being able to continue his studies in America. These small details, considered together, suggest that the US holds some sort of gravitational pull for Moroccans.

Ben Jelloun also includes snippets of information that relate to the first Gulf War, with certain sectors of Moroccan society supportive of the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. Haj Hamid is one such individual, and he sympathises with the Iraqi people's plight whilst supporting Saddam. The reference to a conflict thousands of miles away in the heart of the Middle East is a very specific reference in a largely unspecific novel, alerting us to the irony of Haj Hamid's claims. He does not support Saddam out of any true conviction, but instead trumpets enthusiasm for the dictator in order to reject unwanted Western influence in the Arab world. Ironically however, despite his apparent camaraderie with other Arab, Muslim nations, Haj Hamid conveniently forgets his politicised speeches and Arab allegiances when a few American dollars are sent his way. Like many of those around him – M. Sabbane and the Director included – Haj Hamid is ever-ready to engage with the colonial powers in accepting bribes from American construction companies when it suits his purpose, but also to denounce them in the name of pan-Arabism at the next moment, rather like the opportunistic politics of Si Zoubir in *La Répudiation*.

Lastly, the colonial machine appears to be alive and well in an episode in which Mourad seeks to change his dollars into dinars. The bank is an obvious embodiment of modern-day neo-colonialism. Big, cold and imposing, the building stands as a triumphant and poignant reminder of who is still really in control of North Africa's economy. Mourad describes it as 'une architecture de l'époque des Français. C'est du solide' (p. 117) [*the architecture dates from the French period. It's solidly built* (p. 67)]. Foreign currency, and

⁴¹⁶ Frédéric Lagrange points out that all societies need a space for expressions of transgression, and asks 'whether Arab societies have not in fact started delegating the "function of transgression" to the Western world, with which contact is nowadays ubiquitous: ridding themselves of the task of producing their own transgressions, and consuming imported versions, makes it all the easier to condemn what they consume as evidence of the "moral failure" of the West when and if necessary'. Lagrange, 'Male Homosexuality in Modern Arabic Literature', pp. 192–3.

specifically American dollars, occupy space that should be preserved for native dinars. Even the employees of the bank are 'quasi automatiques' (p. 117) [*quasi-mechanical* (p. 67)], and symbolise the nameless and impersonal nature of global capitalism. The transaction forms available at the counter are available only in French. In a post-independent Morocco, as a matter of principle, Mourad assumes that official forms would at the very least be bilingual. This is not the case however, and a simple form highlights the colonisers in their mutated form – that of the global capitalist market. These are details which are not lost on Mourad, who declares: 'Je pourrais faire le malin et exiger un papier en arabe ou du moins bilingue. Mais je ne ferai pas le malin' (p. 117) [*I could act smart and demand a form in Arabic or at least a bilingual one. But I won't act smart* (pp. 67–68)]. Once more, Mourad stops short of radically challenging the *status quo*. Having accepted the bribe and been caught up in the slavishly oppressive world of corruption, this last quotation cements Mourad's new obedience not just to the codes of the social class around him, but also to the neo-colonial machine.

Until this point in the narrative, Mourad had built his identity on his honesty and moral cleanliness. These values cast aside, he struggles to rediscover who he is. Integrity was a conscious choice, and indicated a large degree of subjectivity and control over his own life. Suddenly, however, even with the new-found freedom that money can buy, events are now largely beyond Mourad's control and he finds himself dictated to by external factors. This paralysis is emphasised by the acute guilt and shame that Mourad feels at the abandonment of such long-guarded principles. He feels particularly ashamed when he meets a childhood friend in Casablanca, a shame that is mingled with paranoia as he fears the appearance of M. Sabbane. For this friend, who remains unnamed, is also known as 'Grain de sable' [*Grain of sand*] (pp. 90–1) and is eventually sent to work abroad by his employers due to his irritating way of pro-actively shattering corrupt but lucrative deals. Mourad asks himself whether he dare admit to this friend that he has eventually succumbed: 'Oserai-je lui avouer que j'ai fini par céder, que je ne suis plus le même et qu'une nouvelle vie commence pour moi?' (p. 91) [*Will I dare confess to him that I ended up caving in, that I am no longer the same man and that a new life is beginning for me?* (p. 51)]. It is at this point that the second voice reemerges. However, this time the second voice appears not to represent socially dominant values, but rather Mourad's former morality, which berates him for having lied to his friend, and for having betrayed their friendship by engaging in the very practices that his friend abhors.

More distressing than this for the protagonist is a conversation with his son Wassit, a veritable lesson in morality and inner determination. As they discuss Wassit's studies, the son

tells his father that he works hard, despite the disheartenment he experiences on occasion. He is, however, staunch in his attitude and declares himself his father's son: 'Je suis comme toi, jamais de corruption' (p. 98) [*I'm like you, no corruption*' (p. 56)]. Indeed, Wassit refers to the Arabic word for corruption, a word that depicts woodworm eating an object from the inside: 'L'homme est pareil. S'il vend son âme, s'il achète la conscience des autres, il participe à un processus de destruction générale' (p. 99) [*It's the same thing with a man. If he sells his soul, if he buys off people's consciences, he participates in a process of general destruction*' (p. 56)]. This last remark is of profound importance for, as Wassit unwittingly suggests, Mourad has buckled under the pressure exerted on him and has sold out. Moreover, his entrance into the world of corruption signals a rupture with the values to which his own father always adhered. Caught between an honest father and an honest son, Mourad represents a disjuncture between the generations which serves to exacerbate his self-perception as a failure. This is due to the fact that the father is one of the principal role-models for budding masculinity.⁴¹⁷ Having fully identified with his father, and his son having fully identified with him, Mourad now becomes painfully aware of his moral cowardice and once more mentions the revealing phrase *mauvaise conscience* (p. 100). During one of his more lucid moments following his conversation with Wassit, he reflects on the recurring image of the tunnel, and concludes: 'La mauvaise conscience n'a qu'à continuer à travailler. C'est elle qui me jette dans le tunnel. Si c'est le prix à payer, j'accepte' (p. 100) [*It's my conscience that throws me into the tunnel. If that's the price to be paid, so be it*' (p. 57)], indicating his confirmed status as subordinate within the system.

This acceptance is the final step in Mourad's submission to the collective rules that govern individuals in society. It sparks the beginning of yet another inner, psychological battle of personal will over conformity to social norms and again, in schizophrenic fashion, Mourad hears two voices in his head. The first, the voice of corruption, is mightily relieved at his eventual yielding: "“Enfin te voilà délivré, débarrassé des scrupules”" (p. 101) [*“Finally you're free, rid of scruples”*"] (p. 57)]. It continues to tell him to throw himself into the role of the corrupt man:

Il faut que tu changes un certain nombre de choses dans ton comportement. Je sais, tu as noté ce que tu devras changer. Ce n'est pas suffisant. Il faut avoir de nouvelles fréquentations, sortir, te montrer, aller dans les bars, offrir à boire, organiser des dîners, des parties, bref entrer dans la peau grasse d'un corrompu. Au début, tu ne seras pas à l'aise. Mais, après quelques jours, tu t'y trouveras merveilleusement bien installé. (p. 101)

⁴¹⁷ Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 122.

[Now you have to change a certain number of elements in your behavior. I know, you've already noted what you should change, but it's not enough. You have to change the company you keep, go out, be seen, go to bars, pay for rounds of drinks, organize dinners, parties, you have to get into the slick mindset of a corrupt man. At first you'll feel uneasy, but after a few days you'll be so comfortable you'll get used to it and see that world with brand-new eyes. (p. 57)]

The performance aspect of gender is all-important. All the activities noted by the voice of complicity require money but they also serve to consolidate the parallel economy. Rather than any real bonds, the community which Mourad enters is cemented by appearances and materialism. Thus, Mourad's existential dilemma intensifies, with the second voice even telling him to 'stop thinking' (p. 102). Representative of socially dominant scripts of being a man, it therefore demands the relinquishment of agency and subordination to unwritten but established codes within the wider community, portrayed as the only way of gaining a status as subject. Mourad submits himself to the command fully, stating: 'Tu as raison, il faut que j'arrête de penser sinon c'est la folie' (p. 102) [*'You're right, I have to stop thinking or I'll go mad'* (p. 58)]. As Michel Foucault has argued, the label of madness has traditionally been a conveniently easy way of dismissing any challenge to discursive norms throughout the ages, shedding further light on this last quotation.⁴¹⁸

As Mourad spends his commission, strange white marks start to appear on his skin and spread (p. 116). The doctor concludes that these marks are 'vitiligo' (p. 154) [*'a vitiligo'* (p. 89)] accompanied by an allergy and that they are a form of rejection. He tells Mourad: 'C'est psychosomatique. Vous devez être hyperémotif. Prenez la vie du bon côté. Faites comme tout le monde' (p. 154) [*'It's psychosomatic. You must be overemotional. Look on the bright side of life. Do what everyone does'* (p. 90)]. Furthermore, when Mourad discloses his regular constipation, the doctor declares that all makes sense, and informs him: 'Vous retenez au lieu d'éjecter. Vous avez un problème de mauvaise conscience' (p. 155) [*'You're retaining instead of excreting. You have a guilty conscience'* (p. 90)]. The doctor's advice to Mourad is to take up a sport, to relax and to let life spoil him. With heavy irony, he also advises him to work on his 'souplesse' (*flexibility*) (p. 155), and the reader is left with the strong sense that the doctor's remedy has a double meaning, particularly since Mourad is aware that he is suffering from *mauvaise conscience*.

⁴¹⁸ Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', in *Untying the Text: A Post-structuralist Reader*, ed. by Robert Young (London; New York: Routledge, 1981), p. 53.

Unable to reconcile himself fully with the new order to which he adheres, Mourad remains somewhat of an outsider. When auditors come to the office, Haj Hamid initially panics. Nevertheless, he quickly regains his composure, and invites the inspectors back to his home for lunch, in a less than subtle attempt to befriend them and smooth over any inconsistencies or suspicious activities in the office itself. The narrative states:

La villa de H.H. lui ressemble – mauvais goût à l’intérieur, signes extérieurs du nouveau riche. La télévision transmet un match de football [...] Le chef et ses deux collaborateurs aiment le foot. H.H. fait semblant d’être passionné. Il n’y a que moi pour émettre une réserve contre ce sport. J’ai tort. (p. 144)

[‘H.H. ’s house looks like him: bad taste on the inside, signs of new money on the outside. A soccer match is playing on television [...] The boss and his two associates like soccer and H.H. pretends to be a fan. I’m the only one to express reservations about the sport. It’s wrong of me. (p. 84)]

Once more, H.H. throws himself into the part, feigning interest in order to curry favour with the auditors. As elsewhere in the novel, Haj Hamid’s identity is self-consciously malleable and able to adjust to any setting. His sophistication lies in his ability to read other people, and to adjust his own behaviour to be in line with theirs. Haj Hamid can manipulate his own identity to order, therefore masquerading as everyone’s best friend. Mourad’s unfailing genuineness and honesty prevents him from doing the same, and his lack of flexibility in this respect hinders his progress in the society around him. This point is made by Mourad himself on a previous occasion, when he states: ‘J’ai toujours dit que Haj Hamid était plus marocain que moi. Il sait parler, il a l’art d’envelopper les choses dans des formules poétiques et parfois religieuses qui donnent le tournis à ses interlocuteurs’ (pp. 83–4) [‘I have always said that Haj Hamid is more Moroccan than I am. He knows how to talk, he knows the art of enveloping things in poetic and sometimes religious formulas that make those he’s talking to giddy’ (pp. 46–47)]. As Mourad recognises, Haj Hamid embodies the art of oratory which is perceived here as the very essence of Moroccan-ness. Thus, whereas Haj Hamid can negotiate his way easily amongst people and extract the best deal for himself, Mourad is left awkward and marginalised, struggling to strike up conversations and find common ground. In short, Mourad lacks what Gupta calls ‘cultural capital’.⁴¹⁹

Indeed, Mourad is aware of this contrast between himself and his colleague, stating that he does not like crowds (p. 144), adding that: ‘[Il a] toujours peur de mourir piétiné par des gens affolés’ (p. 145) [‘I’m always afraid of getting trampled by frenzied masses’ (p.

⁴¹⁹ Gupta, ‘Blurred Boundaries’, p. 381.

84)]. Stated in the context of Haj Hamid's sycophantic interest in football, Mourad's comments indicate his real fear of crowds on the one hand. On the other, they strongly suggest his distaste for crowding in the metaphorical sense – for the lack of agency and individuality, and the slavish attitude that Haj Hamid displays. The 'crowd' can therefore also be read as a symbol for conventionality and complicity.

Mourad's continuing lack of masculinity is also evident at home, in his relationship with Hlima. Once he accepts his first bribe and during his trip to Casablanca with Karima, Mourad returns to find a flustered Hlima who tells him that two men had called to see him. These mysterious men's identities are never revealed but Hlima clearly believes they are from the police. She shouts at her husband: 'La première fois que tu oses être un homme, un vrai, ta maladresse congénitale te perd' (p. 124) [*The first time you dare to be a man, a real man, your innate clumsiness does you in* (p. 71)]. She therefore confirms that a 'real' man is one who will amass wealth whether by corrupt means or not. Furthermore, she goads him:

Il a suffi que Monsieur Mourad, Monsieur la Vertu, Monsieur la Morale, touche une misérable petite commission pour que la police accoure à la maison. Ça se voit sur ta figure que tu as touché de l'argent pas très propre. C'est écrit sur ton front (pp. 124–5)

[*It suffices for Mr. Mourad, Mr. Virtue, Mr. Morality, to receive a tiny little commission for the police to dash to his home. You can see it on your face that you took some money that wasn't very clean. It's written on your forehead.* (p. 72)]

Hlima's deriding remarks underline Mourad's persistent status as a misfit, who now fails to adjust fully to the discourse of dishonesty and bribery.

On joining the masculine club, Haj Hamid initially offers Mourad friendship which Mourad rejects, stating that his only friend is in Tangiers. A fiercely honest person, this friend also remains nameless. Haunting Mourad this time is the knowledge that if his friend were ever to find out, that single friendship would be retracted (p.127). Mourad therefore finds himself caught between two different value systems but unable to adhere fully to either. His failure to remain true to his principles leads to his diminished respect from other like-minded people (who are, admittedly, few and far between). However, unable to engage fully and successfully with hegemonic version(s) of masculinity, Mourad is left with little room for manoeuvre. Previously, Mourad could at least cling to his integrity and identity as a simple but honest man who was grounded firmly in the belief that corruption was damaging his country and his people. Following his transformation into a corrupt functionary, however, as well as his failure to fully participate in the game, he is left totally subordinated and cast aside by both ways of thinking. By the end of the novel, Mourad has lost everything – his dignity

and self-respect, the respect of his son and non-corrupt friends, and he is left with the troubling idea that his father would also have been disappointed in him. Najia, the cousin he wished to marry, overtly declares her disappointment in him and he knows that he has plummeted in her estimation. In spite of all of this, he is no closer to earning his family's or work colleagues' respect either.

Mourad's various symptoms – paranoia and anxiety, restlessness and insomnia, hypochondria and imaginary pains, the white patches spreading on his skin, lack of bodily sensations (p. 136) – are not simply symptoms of his physical lack of well-being. They are physical manifestations of his profound inner turmoil. Mourad's body rejects the corruption and, consequently, the new person he has become. His extreme discontent and the effects of the taxing emotional, psychological and moral pressure under which Mourad continues to find himself leads Nangia to assert that Mourad is subject to 'acute existential suffering' provoked by the pressure exerted upon him by others.⁴²⁰ He argues that Mourad's mystical, psychological suffering eventually affords him a degree of subjectivity that frees him.⁴²¹ While Mourad certainly does go through a painful process of existential self-assessment, the ending of the novel, however, is ambiguous, and does not suggest a personal and subjective liberation, as Nangia claims.

In *L'Homme rompu*, Mourad is, quite literally, broken by the pressures of society and family around him. The unmistakable link between the title of this novel and Simone de Beauvoir's *La Femme rompue* provides a marked contrast.⁴²² For, in *La Femme rompue*, Monique lives in almost robot-like fashion, enslaved by the discourse(s) around her and unable to think independently or to insist on her own will. Along existential lines, she is guilty of *mauvaise foi*. With no genuine subjectivity and essentially moulded into a social object, Monique is forced to confront her predicament and her lack of self-responsibility. In the end, and following a painful self-reflection, she emerges reborn, subjective and conscious.

The recurrent references to *mauvaise conscience* in *L'Homme rompu* highlight its existentialist concerns. The similarity with the term that was coined by Sartre and de Beauvoir is hardly coincidental. Whereas Monique began as broken, but gradually begins to awaken, Mourad's case provides an example of the very opposite. Initially self-contained morally and proud in his convictions, Mourad's engagement with dominant discourses and scripts of masculinity slowly undermine his integrity, and with it, his agency and sense of

⁴²⁰ Nangia, 'Male-Female Relations', p. 204.

⁴²¹ Nangia, 'Male-Female Relations', p. 191.

⁴²² Simone de Beauvoir, *La Femme rompue* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1967).

independent individuality. Existentialism and Althusser's interpellated subject momentarily converge to give rise to Mourad's 'guilty embrace' of dominant ideology.⁴²³ Indeed, by the end of the novel Mourad desires to become part of the crowd that he abhorred earlier, stating: 'Il est facile d'être personne. Il suffit d'aller au Caire ou à Calcutta et de se fondre dans la foule. Là-bas, je serais un étranger perdu, un homme parmi des millions d'hommes, un être sans importance' (p. 185) [*It's easy to be no one. All you have to do is go to Cairo or Calcutta and blend into the crowd. There I would be a lost foreigner, one among millions of men, a being of no importance* (p. 108)]. The desire to be one amongst millions expressed here is a direct contradiction of his belief that by taking a bribe he would, at last, become *someone*.

Troubled by physical, emotional and psychological afflictions, Mourad is left considering suicide (p. 204). He qualifies this thought by stating: 'Ce n'est pas à l'envie de vivre que je renonce mais à la vie telle que Hlima la préfère et telle que mon adjoint et mon patron l'illustrent' (p. 205) [*It's not that I don't want to live, but that I don't want to live as Hlima does, following the examples of my assistant and my boss* (p. 120)]. In spite of this last comment, the novel's final sentence sees Haj Hamid greeting Mourad with the words: 'Bienvenue dans la tribu!' (p. 223) [*Welcome to the tribe* (p. 136)]. Faced with the stifling straitjacket of socially sanctioned masculinity that can only manifest itself through financial gain and conformity with the corrupt regime, Mourad flounders, and his subordination to those dictates is a direct result of his inevitable interpellation by dominant ideology.

Conclusion

The notion of negotiating masculinity, though present in all of the novels examined in this thesis, appears to be at its strongest in *L'Homme rompu*. Mourad occupies all three of the subject positions outlined by Robert Connell at different times. As in the case of the other characters examined in this thesis, unhappiness, anxiety and a range of afflictions are side-effects of the pressure to conform felt by these fictional constructions and, in particular, by the failure to perform manhood as conceptualised by hegemonic ideologies in their respective contexts. Mourad's deliberate disengagement with the normative template of masculinity at the beginning of the novel can be seen as a sign of his unbreakable moral courage but also as a betrayal of patriarchal norms for he refuses to collude with the discourse of aggressive male sexuality, of proving his virility and manliness to others by amassing wealth and social

⁴²³ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 112.

prestige. By doing this, he also ignores the interpellative call by refusing to 'turn around', as Althusser would have it, and become a subject. He also refuses to dominate his wife and accepts her tirades, symbolic of her lack of submission to his will, with patience. He therefore does not to perform some of the most prominent markers of successful masculinity.

The societal pressure exerted on him, however, leads to his engagement with the paradigms of performing masculinity that result from corruption and, in a sense, exposes his willingness to be 'broken in' by dominant discourses of what constitutes a man in the view of his wife and his peers. For a man acutely aware of the process of cultural interpellation, his existential anxieties suggest that by allowing himself to be hailed by hegemonic ideologies of masculinity, Mourad in fact relinquishes the degree of subjectivity he possessed previously. When he remarks 'Je n'ai pas su m'adapter à mon milieu' (p. 160) [*I haven't been able to adapt to my surroundings*' (p. 93)], Mourad is in fact referring to his lack of performative competence, a situation that leads him to be trapped within dominant discourses (i.e. subjected to them), without being able to play the role of hegemonic man adequately, and therefore lacking a subject status. Once he enters into the masculine hierarchy, he lacks the authority and ability to be able to consolidate his new position and is consequently left with little room for manoeuvre, rather like Rachid in chapter three and Azel in chapter four, finding himself enslaved within ideology. Positioning himself within the masculinist order and yet still proving to be inadequate, he is inevitably rendered subordinated. Thus, he becomes the epitome of the novel's title – just another broken man.

Shifting Sands: Gender and Blurring the Boundaries in Tahar Ben Jelloun's

L'Enfant de sable

Introduction

L'Enfant de sable is the extraordinary tale of a female child brought up as a boy by parents desperate for a male child. This apparent contradiction, however, epitomises the relevance of the novel, which boldly challenges the essentialist view of 'masculine' as automatically equating to 'male' by exposing the tenacity of that assumption. Indeed, *L'Enfant de sable* can be read as a queer text, and one which challenges the normative gender and sex assumptions largely at work in the previous four novels examined here. Ahmed, the protagonist, is born into an already large family.⁴²⁴ His parents have seven other children, all of whom are female. Feeling the tremendous weight of social scrutiny, Hadj Ahmed is desperate to beget a son. His unnamed wife is also desperate for a son and both feel it would reinstate their worth as individuals. Before the child's birth, the decision is made. This eighth child *will* be a son, and so begins Ahmed's story. Both Hadj Ahmed and the child's mother, therefore, demonstrate the weight of societal dictates which push them towards their rather outlandish decision, an implicit yet ever-present pressure which finds clear parallels in the previous novels examined here.

If we consider chapter four, Azel, who attempts unsuccessfully to carve a dominant template of masculinity for himself, is also rendered subordinate to more powerful or influential men. Like Rachid, he finds himself in a situation where there is little room for him to negotiate an identity that is more in line with social norms for himself. Indeed, for very different reasons, both characters can be considered to be trapped between an identity that they covet, and the reality of the gendered order and their position within it. In *L'Homme rompu*, Mourad's case is highly revealing and he, of all the masculine characters considered here, might be the closest to Ahmed in terms of his position *vis-à-vis* hegemonic reference points. His initial stance represents a rejection of the implicit masculine order which surrounds him. Though he cannot be considered totally seditious, Mourad's unwillingness to

⁴²⁴ For the majority of the novel, Ahmed, who is later called Zahra, is treated as male. It is only later that she is described as female. Ahmed/Zahra will be referred to as masculine for the first part of this chapter, in accordance with his treatment in the text. The protagonist will then be rendered female when discussing the later stages of the text, since it is in these latter parts that she is referred to explicitly as being female by the narrator(s) in the novel itself.

cooperate and be complicit with the corruption around him also expresses his disdainful view of normative masculinity. Nevertheless, in contrast to the protagonist that we are about to discuss, Mourad does sell out eventually to normative referents of manhood.

More than any of the other novels considered in this thesis, it is in *L'Enfant de sable* that normative masculine positions are (eventually) dismissed and where the very notion of gender is truly questioned. All of the other novels engage with normative scripts of performing masculinity, because the protagonists are either complicit with, or subordinated and/or marginalised by dominant versions of manhood in some way. To an extent, it might be argued that all of the positions of masculinity seen so far have worked within an established gender system that has largely remained unchallenged. In this final chapter, however, it will be argued that the protagonist of *L'Enfant de sable* ends by subverting normative, binary gender roles by destabilising those norms and, in doing so, exposing the fragility of their foundations.

In spite of this, the process of masculine interpellation is at its most evident in *L'Enfant de sable*. During the early years of his life, Ahmed assumes his dictated gender role fully. Indeed, the protagonist is veritably *made* into a man, and the plot revolves around what might be called a process of masculinisation.⁴²⁵ Subsequently however, this becomes a process of *demasculinisation*, since the elaborate scheme starts to unravel as Ahmed stumbles from one obstacle to the next, acutely aware of his inability to fit into the society around him. His story ends with him rejecting both masculine and feminine gender roles available to him, as he embraces an ambiguous but highly fluid gender identity that challenges binary hegemonies. *L'Enfant de sable* is therefore not solely a novel about the construction of masculinity, because it also dismantles it as purposefully as it constructs it. As we have seen in the impressive masquerades of *Xala* and *La Répudiation*, or even in the shame and inadequacy felt by *Partir*'s Azel or *L'Homme rompu*'s Mourad, the process of construction is an important concept in the study of all masculinities and genders, but it is of particular importance in *L'Enfant de sable*. The contradiction between Ahmed/Zahra's gender – which is masculine – and sex becomes increasingly problematic. The protagonist straddles gender divides in order to negotiate a space between them. This chapter will therefore examine the extent to which dominant social discourses mould gender identity and will explore how the binary gender categories sanctioned by Ben Jelloun's fictional society result in a serious

⁴²⁵ One recalls Simone de Beauvoir's famous quotation: 'On ne naît pas femme: on le devient' [*One is not born a woman; one becomes a woman*]. Nevertheless, it appears equally pertinent for this novel, in which one becomes a man. Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 2.

psychological fracture for the protagonist, a fracture that, by the end of the novel, symbolises not a necessarily oppressive but a potentially liberating experience.

Unlike *Xala* or *Partir* for instance, *L'Enfant de sable* highlights this 'process' of masculinisation from the very outset of the novel. Therefore, from birth and the early and influential years of childhood, Ahmed becomes the target of discursive influences, and the importance of rituals and institutions in the process of masculinisation is underlined firmly. Thus, the novel exposes the intricacies of 'making' men, and by extension, all gendered identities. In addition, and in a striking contrast, Ahmed's slide towards gender instability rejects this gender binary altogether and demonstrates the *deconstruction* of man.

Furthermore, *L'Enfant de sable* allows us to examine the masculinity of female characters. As I have argued in relation to the matriarch Yay Bineta in *Xala*, or the neurotic Hlima in *L'Homme rompu*, performing masculinity is not solely a male reserve. Females too can demonstrate masculine traits in the same way that males can demonstrate feminine behaviours. In a rather complicated way therefore, Ahmed's behaviour and thoughts manifest not simply masculinity in a woman, but also an awareness and assumption of what renders men 'masculine', making *L'Enfant de sable* an intriguing text with which to approach the study of masculinity in post-colonial Francophone literature. Above all, however, it is the exposure of the process of masculinisation and the problematisation of masculinity and maleness that render *L'Enfant de sable* such a radically thought-provoking novel that interrogates masculinity and produces such a gender-subversive character.

Rituals, Institutions and Interpellation

It is perhaps with regard to *L'Enfant de sable* that the interpellative process outlined in the introduction to this thesis is most clearly at work. On a narrative level, Ahmed's development is obscured by the narrator, hinting at the way in which subjectivity may be obscured, or even effaced, by interpellative self-formation in real life. The main narrative voice is that of a storyteller who recounts the events of Ahmed's life from what he claims is Ahmed's very own diary. This diary also contains references to an anonymous confidante whose letters to Ahmed/Zahra are cited by the narrator, resulting in the additional blurring of the original story. This is problematised further when, later on, the members of the storyteller's audience offer their own contrasting versions of the story's conclusion. Thus, Ahmed's story is always conveyed on his behalf, seemingly by a narrative voice that censures his development somewhat by interpreting it along normative lines. It also reminds us of

Althusser's concept of ideology and subjection, as the protagonist is clouded by several other views of who or what he is, rather than being able to voice this himself. Even if we are to take the narrator's account of events as credible, Ahmed remains 'branded' with normative masculine discursive scripts which, despite his sex, render him, for the early part of the novel, male. The upbringing so fundamental to his father is, in fact, a discursive constitution of the child – a cultural (masculine) indoctrination. Thus, the body is immediately rendered a problematic vehicle for Ahmed, since it is only a matter of time before these ideologically determined binaries (sex and gender) contradict one another.

In *L'Enfant de sable*, Ahmed's introduction to the world and customs of 'masculinity' begins from birth. Indeed, the obsessive desire for a male heir has haunted both his father and his mother for years. Hadj Ahmed, the child's father, is a character who strives to be a man along normative lines. Described as a rich artisan, Hadj Ahmed Souleïmane has an obedient wife and seven daughters. In fact, we might be forgiven for considering Hadj Ahmed as having an assertive, authoritative identity, his seven children testament to his phallic prowess. Nevertheless, Hadj Ahmed is plagued by misery, shame and a sense of being a failure as a man. He openly admits to his bitter disappointment regarding his cohort of daughters and thinks longingly of the custom of burying unwanted newborn daughters alive during the time of the *jahilya*, regretting that this is no longer possible (p. 17).⁴²⁶ Indeed, his rejection manifests itself not just through hate or resentment, but through sheer indifference. He disowns his daughters figuratively, even asking his wife if they are aware of the fact that they have no father (p. 22). Furthermore, the Hadj considers himself an 'époux stérile ou un célibataire' (pp. 17–18) [*a sterile husband or as a bachelor*] (p. 9),⁴²⁷ a curious self-description given that he is clearly not sterile because the couple have a string of successful pregnancies behind them. Begetting a male heir is, therefore, central to Hadj Ahmed's perceptions of successful manhood because, the narrator informs us, inheritance, and therefore financial wealth and class status, can only pass undiluted through the male child.⁴²⁸ Hadj Ahmed's brothers circulate eagerly like vultures, revelling in each female child that brings them closer to partaking in the Hadj's inheritance: 'Ils jubilaient publiquement et faisaient des spéculations à propos de l'héritage' (p. 18) [*They rejoiced publicly and*

⁴²⁶ Tahar Ben Jelloun, *L'Enfant de sable* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1985). All subsequent quotations in French and page references relating to the French original will be parenthesised in the text.

⁴²⁷ Tahar Ben Jelloun, *The Sand Child*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985). All subsequent quotations in English and page references relating to the English edition will be parenthesised in the text.

⁴²⁸ The Islamic religion in *L'Enfant de sable* is described as '[une] religion impitoyable pour l'homme sans héritier' (p. 18) [*our religion is pitiless for a man who has no heirs*] (p. 10).

speculated about the inheritance' (p. 9)]. The mockery of the Hadj by his own brothers suggests the hierarchical and ultra-competitive nature of masculinity. Faced with the prospect of his wealth passing to another man, and not through patrilineal lineage, Hadj Ahmed looks not just to phallic potency, but to a fertility that is read solely in terms of begetting male progeny, to save him from emasculation and demotion in the masculine stratum.

As the early passages of the novel illustrate, Ahmed's mother also finds herself in a rather precarious situation before his birth due to her failure to produce a male child. This 'failure' is portrayed as the sole cause of his father's frustration. The importance of a male heir is paramount – a feature not unknown in Arab society.⁴²⁹ The body thus becomes an obstacle to social progression, and specifically the mother's body. Her husband tells her: 'J'ai compris que tu portes en toi une infirmité; ton ventre ne peut concevoir d'enfant mâle [...] Ça doit être une malformation [...] je m'acharne sur ce ventre malade' (pp. 21–2) [*I realized that you carry some infirmity within you; your belly cannot conceive a male child [...] I, too, bitterly resent that inhospitable womb*] (pp. 12–13)]. The female body is presented in almost medical terms as dysfunctional, and the failure to produce a male heir as an illness or a handicap. In its unwillingness to comply with its owner's social needs, it becomes a liability, the blame for which is attributed solely to the female. Hadj Ahmed therefore displays a high level of denial, refusing to accept any responsibility for the lack of male progeny. Indeed, as Azel blamed his sister Kenza for his failings and inadequacies in *Partir*, so Hadj Ahmed also blames his wife for his unfulfilled dreams.

One conclusion that can be drawn from this early passage is the importance of the body as a site which is discursively constituted and on which social discourses are imprinted (i.e. the female body must be fertile). Indeed, the inability to produce what is expected of it (in this case, the conception of a male child) leads to an acute mental anguish which appears to be inescapable, threatening male social status. Moreover, it illustrates the supremacy of the male in society and the relative unimportance of females. We are told by the narrator that the long-suffering mother is willing to try all sorts of methods, ranging from the eccentric to the disturbing, in order to have a son: 'Elle était prête à tous les sacrifices et nourrissait des espoirs fous à chaque grossesse' (p. 19) [*The wife was ready to make any sacrifice and was*

⁴²⁹ Nawal El Saadawi for example writes about the various abuses directed at female children in Arab societies, but she also states that the first 'aggression' towards the female child is 'the feeling that people do not welcome her coming into the world'. Indeed, she relates that female children are often welcomed with coldness, gloom and depression, particularly in rural areas. Their mothers are often abused verbally and physically for having given birth to a daughter and threatened with divorce if they conceive another girl. There appears to be a significant disparity in infant mortality between the sexes, a point that El Saadawi attributes to the neglect of the less-valued daughter. El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, pp. 20–1.

filled with wild hopes each time she became pregnant (p. 10)]. The word 'sacrifice' alludes to resignation, abandonment and desperation, in addition to unpleasant, maybe even torturous endurances in order to obtain a goal, all of which point to the pathetic and degraded mental state of the woman, but also to the fixated determination of her husband. Her 'wild hopes' are mistaken and deluded. The lack of fecundity of this woman's body with regard to male offspring has driven both to despair.

Maleness, accompanied by the appropriate image of masculinity, appears to have a functional purpose, the importance of which cannot be overestimated. A male child would neutralise the sense of shame and failure that haunts both parents. A son destined to grow up into a suitable specimen of man and who will perpetuate the masculinist dominion of this fictional society is what is desired, rather than a male child for the sake of one. Indeed, we are told explicitly that a male heir is needed in order to act as a guardian of the family's wealth. Begetting a son therefore becomes a matter of protecting personal honour, family wealth and of maintaining the masculinist *status quo* of society. It would seem, according to the last quotation, that religion itself penalises a failure to reproduce a male heir, capable of perpetuating the system. With no male child, all Hadj Ahmed's gains will be stripped from his family and given to another (man). Masculinity therefore becomes an all-important column in the social framework, with a functional role that would ward off threats from other, opportunistic men.

Hadj Ahmed's masculinity is doubly threatened by the lack of male children. Rather than being a contented and successful father and husband, Ahmed's father is a broken man. Unfulfilled and mocked by his younger brothers, he is a failure in the eyes of society: '[Il] s'isolait et il lui arrivait parfois de pleurer en silence. Il disait que son visage était habité par la honte, que son corps était possédé par une graine maudite' (pp. 17-18) [*He withdrew into himself and sometimes wept in silence. He said that his face was inhabited by shame, that his body was possessed by an accursed seed*] (p. 9)]. This quotation is highly revealing since it contains such strong words as 'honte' (*shame*), 'graine maudite' (*accursed seed*) and 'stérile' (*sterile*), all loaded with significance. The shame that Hadj Ahmed experiences relates to his lack of male progeny. Indeed, with the mention of sterility, it could be argued that not producing a son is an affront to his feeling of manliness and that it has an emasculating effect, one which goes as far as to question his sexual prowess. Thus, these two bodies, which together fail to provide the much sought-after male child, are sources of shame and failure that result in the psychological misery of both parents. The subsequent scheme thought up by

Ahmed's father illustrates the denial and self-delusion to which both are driven, but also their susceptibility to the power of social discourses and ideals.

The arrival of their eighth child, Ahmed, symbolises an escape route for both parents. For Hadj Ahmed, in particular, it has the potential to consolidate his (complicit) masculine identity. The child's body – unlike Hadj Ahmed or his wife's – is a neutral territory on which an appropriate persona can be carved out, and the site onto which the 'branded contingencies' that Gutterman conceptualises can be imposed. Furthermore, the expected eighth child functions as an Althusserian 'always-already' subject who has already been allocated a subject status by a family that requires a boy in order to legitimise itself. Ahmed therefore becomes what Althusser calls 'the subject-to-be [who has to] "find" its place, i.e. "become" the sexual subject (boy or girl) which it already is in advance'.⁴³⁰ Bringing Ahmed up as male, in spite of his female sex, is a manipulation of established gender constructions that blatantly defies accepted binary sex categories but that will ease the perceived failures of his parents. Hadj Ahmed perseveres regardless, declaring triumphantly: 'Mon honneur sera enfin réhabilité; ma fierté affichée' (p. 22) [*My honour will at last be restored and my pride will be displayed*].⁴³¹

Following the birth, Hadj Ahmed is portrayed as proud and prince-like, the cracks in his masculinity firmly papered over by the deception: 'Il portait sur les épaules et sur le visage toute la virilité du monde! A cinquante ans, il se sentait léger comme un jeune homme' (p. 27) [*On his face and shoulders could be seen all the virility of the world! At fifty, he felt as lighthearted as a young man*] (p. 17)]. At the beginning of the third chapter, *La porte du vendredi* ['The Friday Gate'], Ahmed's parents even go as far as to announce the birth of their son in a national paper. The photo and the short announcement take up half a page, such is their desire to inform the wider public. Therefore, at birth, the baby is interpellated not only in terms of gender, but is also interpellated as a sexed body along Butlerian lines. The bold announcement in the newspaper, like the utterance of the midwife and father at Ahmed's birth, acts as a performative statement that interpellates Ahmed into the system of binary sex and gender norms,⁴³² in which he must henceforth strive to be masculine along normative lines in order to qualify for subjecthood within the ideological system that has hailed him. Their previous failings as parents forgiven and forgotten, the parents' enhanced social status is sealed.

⁴³⁰ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 165.

⁴³¹ My translation.

⁴³² Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 7–8.

Unlike Si Zoubir in *La Répudiation* who resents and suspects his sons, Hadj Ahmed longs for a son who 'sera élevé selon la tradition réservée aux mâles [...] et régnera sur cette maison de femmes' (p. 23) [*'will be brought up according to the tradition reserved for males, and [...] will rule over this household of women'* (p. 14)]. Firstly, Hadj Ahmed is so caught up with his public manifestation of masculinity that he desires a son created in his own image. He therefore stands in contrast to Si Zoubir, who fears losing his ruling position to his sons. Rather, Hadj Ahmed invests heavily in his son, since the younger Ahmed provides him with narcissistic value and an opportunity to flaunt his socially-defined worth as a man. On a second level, however, and despite this stark difference between Hadj Ahmed and Si Zoubir, both cling to a highly complicit version of masculinity and both are textually constructed as mouthpieces for the hegemonic, patriarchal order. The appropriation of the child's body by the self-worshipping Hadj therefore becomes an exercise in interpellative construction via a family ISA which is fiercely at work. Hadj Ahmed can therefore also be read as a Frankensteinian figure.

The importance of *creating* a son is highly significant. Much of the vocabulary concentrates on the act of formation, and on the deliberate construction of Ahmed's gender, and the use of numerous active verbs: 'fêter' (*to celebrate*), 'faire' (*to make, to do*), 'créer' (*to create*), for instance, all signify the action of other parties – namely the parents and society – and not of the child himself who remains the object of the verb. Indeed, the narrator states explicitly: 'Ahmed grandissait selon la loi du père qui se chargeait personnellement de son éducation; la fête était finie. Il fallait à présent faire de cet enfant un homme, un vrai' (p. 32) [*'Ahmed grew up in accordance with the instructions laid down by his father, who assumed personal responsibility for his upbringing. The festivities over, the child had to be turned into a man. A real man'* (p. 21)]. The important factor here, expressed by the language of the quotation, is the *creation* of Ahmed as a person and his lack of agency within the process. Ahmed himself becomes nothing more than a canvas onto which the wishes of his parents and society will be painted, reflecting Butler's theoretical stance when she argues that the body is a gender-neutral site onto which cultural discourse may be etched.⁴³³ At this point in the novel, his sex is of complete irrelevance. Ahmed will grow 'according to the law' of his father whose own interpretation of masculinity is coloured by the social ideologies in which he is also immersed. He will mould his son according to the codes and the accepted practices of his community and therefore Ahmed's family appears as a microcosm of society

⁴³³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 12.

at large. The word 'éducation' (*upbringing*) is revealing here. In the French, the verb *éduquer* alludes in particular to the process of being brought up and not particularly to scholarly education as in English. Thus, Ahmed will be *made* into a man, a fact underlined by the usage of verbs such as *faire* and *créer*. Therefore, in a very explicit way Ahmed is constructed by ideology and invited to recognise himself within that system in order to become a subject. The *éducation* so fundamental to his father will in fact entail the branding of discourses and therefore a cultural and masculine indoctrination of the young child who, in turn, must seek validation within the realm of sanctioned masculinity by accepting his construction.

The scheming of Ahmed's parents alone, however, is not enough to cement a masculine identity. The importance of institutions and rituals in gender formation is firmly highlighted in Ben Jelloun's narrative and they prove invaluable to the process of eventually turning Ahmed into a man and can therefore be defined theoretically as religious, cultural and educational ISAs along Althusserian lines. Again, the body acts as a blank space which is itself discursively formulated, thereby permitting the development of a masculine identity engraved according to dominant ideology. In the first instance, Ahmed is forced to partake in rituals which are commonly associated with male children. We are told for example:

La maison connut, durant toute l'année, la joie, le rire et la fête. Tout était prétexte pour faire venir un orchestre, pour chanter et danser, pour fêter le premier mot balbutié, les premiers pas du prince. La cérémonie du coiffeur dura deux journées. On coupa les cheveux d'Ahmed, on lui maquilla les yeux du khôl. On l'installa sur un cheval en bois après lui avoir passé une djellaba blanche et couvert la tête d'un fez rouge. (p. 31)

[*Throughout the year, the household experienced joy, laughter, and festivities. Anything was a pretext to bring in an orchestra, to sing and dance, to celebrate the prince's first stammered word or first few stumbling steps. The ceremony of the barber was to last two days. Ahmed's hair was cut and his eyes were made up with kohl. He was dressed in a white jellaba, a red fez was put on his head (p. 20).*]

Bravely perhaps, Ahmed's father even organises Ahmed's circumcision, an initiation rite that goes to the very root of what it is to be a man in Islamic societies:⁴³⁴

⁴³⁴ Pierre Bourdieu perceives circumcision to be 'the rite of institution of masculinity par excellence'. Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, pp. 24–25. In David Gilmore's primarily anthropological approach to global masculinities, he argues that men, in a surprisingly high percentage of cases, have to endure a forced ritual that will make them into real men, and failure to achieve this leads to some level of social ostracism. See Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, pp. 11–15. Nawal El Saadawi argues that male circumcision is a remnant of ancient Jewish blood sacrifice and that this ritual has been embraced through the ages by Jewish, Muslim and Christian societies. She also notes that circumcision must be carried out in the presence of religious notaries (in Judaism and Islam) and that it therefore reflects the child's entry into the socio-religious order (which is, of course, masculine). Nawal El Saadawi, 'Introduction', trans. by Marianne Sarkis, *The Female Genital Cutting Education and Networking Project*

Le père pensait à l'épreuve de la circoncision. Comment procéder? Comment couper un prépuce imaginaire? Comment ne pas fêter avec faste le passage à l'âge d'homme de cet enfant? [...] Figurez-vous qu'il a présenté au coiffeur-circonciseur son fils, les jambes écartées, et que quelque chose a été effectivement coupé, que le sang a coulé, éclaboussant les cuisses de l'enfant et le visage du coiffeur [...] Il faut dire que Hadj Ahmed était un homme puissant et déterminé. (pp. 31–2)

[*The father was thinking of the ordeal of circumcision. What was he to do? How could an imaginary foreskin be cut off? Yet how could one avoid celebrating in great splendor the transition of this child to the age of a man? [...] No, his son was presented to the barber-circumciser, the legs were spread, and something was cut. Blood flowed, spattering the child's thighs and the barber's face [...] Hajji Ahmed was a very [powerful and] determined man (pp. 20–1).*]

Religious and cultural ISAs are employed to uphold an ideology of masculinity on a body that is, itself, discursively constructed by performative acts; by cutting the hair in certain ways and even by mimicking circumcision.⁴³⁵ The importance of these rituals cannot be overestimated, and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu states that these rites and institutions:

Aim to set up, in the name of the whole assembled community, a sacralizing separation not only, as is suggested by the notion of the rite of passage, between those who have *already* received the *distinctive mark* and those who have *not yet* received it [...] but also and more importantly between those who are socially worthy to receive it and those who are *forever excluded* from it. (italics in original)⁴³⁶

Ahmed's body is, as yet, unable to challenge the masculine identity that Hadj Ahmed attributes to it and so can easily serve the purpose of acquiring the 'distinctive mark' that will bestow the privileges of masculinity upon him. All of these actions underline the ritualistic aspects of virilisation (and defeminisation) and performativity as theorised by Butler.⁴³⁷

The significance of institutions as influential sites of gender consolidation is not confined to these instances. Not only does Ahmed receive monthly visits from the barber – in order to maintain the appearance of a male – but he also attends the Quranic school, a male-only institution that proves to be yet another influential ISA and site of masculine interpellation. The Quranic school is only mentioned fleetingly in the text. Nevertheless, it plays a significant role, for it plunges Ahmed into the socially authorised realm of

<<http://www.fgmnetwork.org/articles/nawel.php>> [accessed 21 November 2009] (para. 12 of 15). This introduction was originally published in Arabic as the introduction to: Sami A. Aldeeb Abu-Salieh, *Khitan al-dhukur wal-inath ind al-yahud wal-masihyyin wal-muslimin: al-jadal al-dini* (Beirut: Riad El Rayyes, 2000), pp. 11–16. Also see Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, pp. 174–175.

⁴³⁵ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p. 30.

⁴³⁶ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 24.

⁴³⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 173.

masculinity. Until now, the process of 'masculinisation' takes place solely within the family environment and in a domestic setting, surrounded by familiar people and, it should be pointed out, mostly women. From now on, however, the Quranic School comes to represent the wider community, which will also be used to consolidate and uphold Ahmed's masculine identity. The Quranic School is, after all, a space reserved strictly for boys and has the purpose of educating those boys to be men. It functions as an educational ISA and offers a constant source of masculinisation and a locus where masculine identity can be bolstered and consolidated as the child grows older. It is a comparable site to the Chamber of Commerce in *Xala*, or to the office in *L'Homme rompu*, for even though these institutions are for adults, they nevertheless play a similar part in cultivating a certain model of manhood and bolstering masculinity by providing a space for like-minded men.

The narrator himself draws our attention to the long-lasting influence of such institutions, and in particular to that of another important place in Ahmed's early life, the *hammam*. The narrator addresses the reader directly, stating: 'Vous savez combien ce lieu nous a tous fortement impressionnés quand nous étions gamins. Nous en sommes tous sortis indemnes..., du moins apparemment. Pour Ahmed ce ne fut pas un traumatisme, mais une découverte étrange et amère' (p. 32) [*You know how much that place impressed all of us when we were small. We all emerged unscathed... or so it seemed. For Ahmed it was not a trauma but a strange, bitter discovery*' (p. 21)]. The fictional importance of the *hammam* stands in parallel with Bouhdiba's sociological writings, but whereas the inevitable expulsion is traumatic for most boys, the 'bitter discovery' referred to in this quotation foretells that Ahmed will be haunted by his body, since the word 'discovery' necessarily implies a realisation that cannot be reversed. The *hammam* leaves its mark on the naïve child who initially arrives still partially 'uncorrupted', that is to say not entirely marked by discursive influences (at this point), but who will leave profoundly confused.

The description given to us of Ahmed's experiences in the communal baths is perhaps not entirely trustworthy, yet it merits further analysis.⁴³⁸ Ahmed tells us that he dreads the afternoon in the *hammam* with his mother. As a child, he finds it unbearably tedious. Surely the secret will be discovered in the baths, while Ahmed is being washed? How can his sex be hidden effectively in such an environment? The novel provides few answers, implying only

⁴³⁸ *L'Enfant de sable* is related for the most part by a rather elusive narrator who arrives one day on a market square and claims to be telling a true story. We are given little if any information about this individual by the text. This narrator claims to be reading from a book he found that was written by Ahmed. The particular description of Ahmed's experiences in the *hammam* appear to be quoted directly from a diary entry. Nevertheless, the authenticity of the entire mode of narration remains debatable.

that Ahmed keeps his underwear on. This is perhaps indicative of the persuasiveness of the performative acts. Ahmed's hair style, his clothes and perhaps by now his mannerisms and behaviour, are enough to avoid any suspicions being raised, challenging the normality of sex categories when they can so easily be defied.

In order to amuse himself during the lengthy stay at the women's baths, Ahmed plays games with words, which are described in a lengthy passage. Ahmed sees the imaginary or physical manifestations of the words spoken in the baths floating or hanging in the air, rising towards the ceiling and being knocked back down upon contact:

Ils fondaient au contact de la pierre et retombaient en gouttelettes sur mon visage [...] je me laissais couvrir de mots qui ruisselaient sur mon corps mais passaient toujours par-dessus ma culotte, ce qui fait que mon bas-ventre était épargné par ces paroles changées en eau. J'entendais pratiquement tout, et je suivais le chemin que prenaient ces phrases qui [...] se mélangeaient et donnaient ensuite un discours étrange et souvent drôle [...] En tout cas je les mettais de côté, attendant d'être alimenté par d'autres mots et d'autres images. Curieusement, les gouttes d'eau qui tombaient sur moi étaient salées. Je me disais alors que les mots avaient le goût et la saveur de la vie. (pp. 33–4)

[They melted away upon contact with the stone and fell again as droplets on my face... I allowed myself to be covered by words that streamed down my body, always passing over underpants and sparing my lower abdomen these words mutated into water. I heard practically everything and I followed the path of these words which blended together and gave off a strange and often funny discourse [...] Every time I would put them aside, waiting to be fed other words and images. Curiously, the drops of water that fell on me were always salty. I told myself that words had the taste and flavour of life.]⁴³⁹

This passage gains an extra significance when we read it in light of the concept of discursive scripts being imprinted onto the body. Ahmed allows these metamorphosed words to fall on him, not just onto his face but to trickle all over him. It is not without significance perhaps that these words initially bypass his genital area, nor perhaps that the child remains partially dressed in the midst of naked bodies. In addition, Ahmed claims that he hears almost everything and discards some ideas and awaits others to replace them. One of the reasons that Ahmed does not look forward to the afternoons spent in the baths is the incessant chatting and gossiping in which the women partake. What Ahmed is witness to in the *hammam* is the constant stream of both implicit and explicit societal notions. The chattering therefore takes on a more serious form – that of consolidating a collective, social ideology through performative utterances. The words that hang in the air represent the lingering significance of

⁴³⁹ My translation.

societal discourse(s). Interestingly, the power of words (which are representative of discourse) appears total, and yet the way in which the water streams over his underwear and fails to reach the skin underneath is illustrative of the fact that the power of discourse is not wholly insurmountable because it cannot change everything, a fact that becomes even more apparent later in his story.

Furthermore, some of the words mentioned during these afternoon sessions at the baths are particularly fascinating for Ahmed, words which are ordinarily taboo for the women speaking them. These words are of a sexual nature and indicate the sexual act or the genitals – ‘sperme’ (*sperm*), ‘couilles’ (*testicles*) and ‘vagin’ (*vagina*) (p. 35). These words do not fall, perhaps because the women do not have the right to use them, as Ahmed believes. He collects these words together and hides them in his underwear but, intriguingly, they tickle him. These taboo words are particularly destabilising for Ahmed, since they are the very words which denote parts of the body or actions that can never be ‘normal’ for him. On a secondary level, however, we might note that these words designate parts of the body by which individuals are discursively split into two categories which name human beings as either male or female.

When Ahmed’s mother finally gets around to washing him, she is surprised at the dirt on him:

Lorsque ma mère me savonnait, elle était étonnée de constater combien j’étais sale. Et moi je ne pouvais pas lui expliquer que le savon qui coulait emportait toutes les paroles entendues et accumulées le long de cet après-midi. Quand je me retrouvais propre, je me sentais nu, comme débarrassé de frusques qui me tenaient chaud. (pp. 35–6)

[When my mother washed me, she was surprised to see how dirty I was. I couldn’t explain to her that the soap was washing away all the words that I had heard and collected during the afternoon. Once I found myself clean, I felt naked, as if rid of the threads that were keeping me warm].⁴⁴⁰

As this quotation confirms, Ahmed recognises the performative utterances that he has heard that afternoon amongst conversations that no doubt reflect the wider views of society.

Nevertheless, by still attending the *hammam* for women with his mother, Ahmed has not yet been banished to the masculine world of his father. He therefore continues to live for the time being in a liminal world, straddling the sex/gender divides, and finds himself cleansed and ‘naked’ once more.

⁴⁴⁰ My translation.

Not only are these visits to the women's baths tedious for Ahmed, they also provoke some disturbing feelings in him. He expresses disgust at the naked female forms he sees parading unashamedly in front of him, and he is particularly repelled by female genital areas – the very areas that really differentiate men and women's bodies:

Je m'accrochais à ces cuisses étalées et j'entrevois tous ces bas-ventres charnus et poilus. Ce n'était pas beau. C'était même dégoûtant. Le soir je m'endormais vite car je savais que j'allais recevoir la visite de ces silhouettes que j'attendais, muni d'un fouet, n'admettant pas de les voir si épaisses et si grasses. Je les battais car je savais que je ne serais jamais comme elles; je ne pouvais pas être comme elles... C'était pour moi une dégénérescence inadmissible. (p. 36)

[*Clinging to those splayed thighs, I saw fleshy, hairy parts, a disgusting sight. At night I went to sleep quickly, because I knew I would be visited by those images. I awaited them, armed with a whip, since I refused to see them so fat and ugly. I beat them. Because I knew that would never be like them [I could never be like them]... An unacceptable ugliness. (p. 24)*]

This quotation could be read on two levels. The first would be the obvious level of denial. Ahmed is at the beginning of a process of masculinisation. He appears to understand the objective – to become a man – and is learning how to achieve it. He could be said to be investing in the process, an act that demonstrates his nascent self-recognition within ideology and therefore his acceptance of his place within the ideology that interpellates him. The sight of female bodies roaming freely and proudly in their nakedness therefore provokes a strong reaction and the repulsion that he experiences could be the manifestation of the anxiety that Ahmed feels, caught as he is between a female body and a masculine gender.

On a second level however, masculinity is commonly defined by theorists as being a gender role that defines itself in opposition to femininity. That is to say, by rendering oneself different to the feminine, one can in fact render oneself masculine.⁴⁴¹ In a definition relating specifically to Islamicate masculinity, Afsaneh Najmabadi characterises masculinity as a perpetual demonstration to other men that one is no longer 'contaminated' by the feminine in order to prove his masculinity and that the ritual expulsion from the women's *hammam* was, traditionally, a significant part of this process.⁴⁴² This seems another plausible reading of the

⁴⁴¹ Many critics see masculinity as being entwined with the dynamics of differentiation and disassociation. David Gilmore describes masculinity in general as being 'a category of identity distinct from femininity'. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 26 and pp. 51–2. He also states that independence from, and a domination over women is an important marker of masculine status in Moroccan manhood and a key aspect of successful (hegemonic) masculinity is ensuring that one is not seen to be 'clinging' to domestic, and therefore primarily 'female' settings. On Western masculinity in particular, Robert Connell points to semiotic readings of gender that view masculinity as defining itself through a symbolic difference from femininity. Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 70.

⁴⁴² See pp. 40–41 of introduction and also Najmabadi, 'Reading "Wiles of Women" Stories', p.150.

above quotation. Having grasped the rules of the game, Ahmed's disgust represents his attempt to sever himself from the world of femininity, to pledge his loyalty unconditionally to the masculine realm and to be fully interpellated. Indeed, the day when Ahmed is no longer allowed entry to the women's *hammam* is one of pride for his mother, and of glee for him:

Ainsi le jour où la caissière du hammam me refusa l'entrée, parce qu'elle considérait que je n'étais plus un petit garçon innocent mais déjà un petit homme, capable de perturber par ma seule présence au bain la vertu tranquille et les désirs cachés de femmes honnêtes! Ma mère protesta pour la forme, mais elle était au fond heureuse. Elle en parla fièrement le soir à mon père qui décida de me prendre avec lui dorénavant au hammam. Je me réjouissais dans mon coin et attendais avec une énorme curiosité cette intrusion dans le brouillard masculin. (pp. 36–37)

[*The day, for example, when the cashier at the hammam refused to let me in, because she considered that I was no longer an innocent boy but already a young man capable by his mere presence of rousing the hidden desires of honest women! My mother made a show of protesting, but was really pleased. That evening she spoke proudly of it to my father, who decided to take me with him to the men's hammam in future. I was secretly delighted and awaited with enormous curiosity my entry into the male fog. (p. 24)*]

Ahmed's experiences thus far have been in the safe, domestic environment connoted feminine: the home, the women's baths and in the bosom of his family. Henceforth however, the time has come for Ahmed to enter into the world of men, a world that takes place almost exclusively outside the home and in environments that are dominated by men and masculinity. Fatima Mernissi devotes considerable attention to the sexual segregation of Islamic societies. She states: 'Strict space boundaries divide Muslim society into two sub-universes: the universe of men (the *umma*, the world of religion and power) and the universe of women, the domestic world of sexuality and the family'.⁴⁴³

In stark contrast to the representation of the women's baths, the men's baths are a place of silence, where Ahmed's father swiftly washes himself and promptly leaves. There are no words this time. In fact, Ahmed refers only to silence, which is punctuated by the occasional exclamation and the sound of the water gushing. This locus of masculinity is characterised as 'foggy', marking an entirely different atmosphere to the women's *hammam* which was brimming with vivacity and chatter. The male *hammam* on the other hand is murky and ambiguous. Ahmed also refers to it as 'une ambiance de travail' (p. 37) [*a businesslike atmosphere*] (p. 24)]. This short, simple passage stands in marked contrast to the lengthy, detailed and intimate portrayal of the women's baths. Moreover, although Ahmed's

⁴⁴³ For more details, see Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, pp. 137–147.

mother protests hotly when Ahmed is finally deemed a man, and too old, to be admitted into the intimacy of the women's *hammam*, she is in fact gleefully proud at her son's exile and imminent arrival in the men's baths. Hadj Ahmed's reaction is minimal, perhaps alluding to the role of women as bearers of cultural tradition.⁴⁴⁴ To reiterate Bouhdiba's assertion, the *hammam* marks Ahmed's entrance into a world of order and, in line with Mernissi's assertions, a locus of masculine unity and power.

Shortly after this glimpse of the men's baths, Ahmed is taken to his father's place of work where he is introduced to the employees and where his father explains to him how the business works. Ahmed is designated the 'future' of the business. The depiction of the workshop itself amounts to no more than three sentences, but it clearly indicates the highly masculinised status of the work-place. As in *L'Homme rompu*, the work-place is a masculine environment *par excellence*, designed to maintain and protect men's influence and financial wealth (presumably from dangerous and destabilising female incursion). The next initiation rite, as it were, takes place in another highly male domain – the mosque, the heart of Muslim society. Ahmed declares: 'J'aimais bien me retrouver dans cette immense maison où seuls les hommes étaient admis [...] L'important pour [mon père], c'était ma présence parmi tous ces hommes' (pp. 37–8) [*I went to the mosque. I enjoyed being in that huge building in which only men were admitted [...] For [my father] the important thing was my presence there [amongst all the other men]*' (p. 25)]. This textual excerpt emphasises the extremely androgynous nature of the mosque. Ahmed remarks that only men are admitted, making the mosque a seat of phallocracy. His privilege is to be permitted entry to the masculine power-base, and to be able to join the brotherhood of male ascendancy. Childhood impressions hold a lasting significance, and the gendered places in which Ahmed passes his formative years lead him to internalise and eventually embody the concepts promoted by these rituals and institutions, sealing his gender formation. Moreover, it also serves as a strong signal of the androcentric nature of Ahmed's world, where power and financial wealth are claimed by men and denied to women, who remain subject to the authoritative male and are hidden away in female spaces. Space is divided into public and private, with the public arenas being classified as masculine. The male prerogatives of dominance and supremacy are therefore institutionalised and given physical form in educational and religious facilities. The male

⁴⁴⁴ Yvonne Yasbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito comment on women's role in Islamic(ate) countries as the 'primary' bearers of cultures. They argue that laws and customs relating to women and the family often remain closer to Islamic *shari'a* roots, in an attempt to defend cultural authenticity (*al-asala*). They argue that women are seen as the 'maintainers of [...] tradition'. See Yvonne Yasbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito, 'Introduction', in *Islam, Gender and Social Change*, pp. ix–xxviii (p. xvi). Also Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 232.

individual is trained to be 'masculine' by attending such highly phallocratic institutions, which, in turn, cements the masculine order for another generation.

Nevertheless, this formation of Ahmed the man is not seamless. However potent social discourses may be, there are also lessons to be learnt the hard way, as Ahmed experiences at the end of chapter three. Here, the physical nature of being male is highlighted by Hadj Ahmed, along with the imperative for emotional containment. He encourages his son to grow up and to manage alone, without the aid or support of others. Accosted one day in the street by three boys, Ahmed is unable to defend himself as he has been encouraged to do. He runs home to his father crying, an action that receives a firm and unsympathetic reaction:

Je rentraï à la maison en pleurant. Mon père me donna une gifle dont je me souviens encore et me dit: 'Tu n'es pas une fille pour pleurer! Un homme ne pleure pas.' Il avait raison, les larmes, c'est très féminin! (p. 39)

[I went home in tears. My father gave me a blow that I remember to this day and said, 'Stop crying! You're not a girl!' He was right – tears are very feminine! (p. 26)].

In a view that parallels the common, traditional assumption in the West that men should be in control of their feelings and that crying is a feminine trait, it is made clear that Ahmed is not to demonstrate such 'weak' behaviour. He is also taught from this early stage to stand up for himself, with violence if necessary. This amounts to a masculinity that is stoic, masterful and assertive and which differentiates itself from femininity which is viewed as emotional, weak and passive.

In this early part of the novel, Ahmed is interpellated as the child his parents want him to be. Ben Jelloun seems to be suggesting the overwhelming strength of gender here as a carefully conditioned series of performative acts. The body is presented as an empty space, ripe for acquiescing the cultural codes and social ideologies being imposed upon it. At this point, Ahmed is becoming the man envisaged by his father, highlighting his interpellative subject-formation.

Becoming a Man

Ahmed continues to internalise the social scripts imposed on him by his family and by society at large. The difference however, as Ahmed grows up, is that he becomes fully aware of the differences between being a man and being a woman. Indeed, he is so conscious of these codes of behaviour that he begins to manipulate them for his own gain. Nevertheless, despite the fact that he now chooses to play the gender game knowingly, Ahmed's existence

remains a troubled one. Upon seeing naked female bodies in the *hammam* with his mother in chapter three, Ahmed hinted at his uneasy relationship with womanhood. Later on, however, Ahmed experiences a deep anxiety due to his refusal to confront the truth of his bodily status. Indeed, his social persona is by now fully masculinised, and stands in striking opposition to the physical reality of his femaleness. Ahmed finds himself caught between two ideologically defined categories. His denial deepens in its intensity as the novel progresses, and Ahmed's inability – or unwillingness – to negotiate a space between the two extremes causes mounting problems and creates deep schisms between the gendered and sexed adolescent.

In chapter four, entitled *La porte du samedi* ['The Saturday Gate'], Ahmed reveals the depth of the disquiet he experiences when growing up in a passage apparently taken from his private diaries. At this point in the narrative, we are also given the reactions of a group of listeners engrossed in Ahmed's story. These listeners are a narrative device and provide the occasion for the narration of Ahmed's tale. They can be seen as portrayals of the differing schools of thought within gender studies. The first of the listeners states that Ahmed has probably become 'aware' of what is happening to him and is consequently experiencing a profound personal crisis: 'Je l'imagine tiraillé entre l'évolution de son corps et la volonté de son père d'en faire absolument un homme...' (p. 42) [*I imagine him torn between the development of his body and his father's determination to make him wholly and entirely a man...* (p. 28)]. This listener believes in a severe friction between culture and nature. The acute psychological trauma evoked here suggests that mental and psychological interpellation cannot be wholly effective due to a certain 'truth' of sex. The second listener however doubts that there is a crisis at all: 'Moi, je ne crois pas à cette histoire de crise. Je pense qu'Ahmed a été fabriqué et qu'il évolue selon la stratégie du père...' (p. 42) [*I don't believe [...] there was a crisis. I think Ahmed developed according to his father's strategy* (p.28)]. This second attitude illustrates the possibility of a total creation of gender, without any consciousness of something being amiss or not quite fitting. The verb 'fabriquer' (*to fabricate, to produce*) implies that acculturation is entirely possible without problems triggered by the body at a later stage. The importance of the word 'strategy' illustrates the power of social discourse and of interpellative self-formation. Thirdly, in a view that would seem to support the previous one, we are told: 'Il est devenu un homme. En tout cas, on lui a appris à se comporter en homme' (p. 42) [*He became a man. In any case, he was taught to behave like a man* (p. 28)]. In this view, we are taught what to do, we are taught how to act and therefore we are taught how to be. Both this and the previous opinion suggest that there is no agency to be had, and that the individual is wholly constituted by culture. Finally, a fourth listener claims:

‘Si Ahmed a vraiment existé, il doit être dans un asile d’aliénés’ (pp. 42–3) [*If Ahmed had really existed, he would have ended up in a madhouse...*’ (p. 28)]. It is perhaps the fear of a socially ambiguous gender construction that threatens the listener? These reactions are perceptive and their inclusion within the main body of the text seems to serve to underline the author’s desire that his readers consider the issue of gender and its construction.

Later on in this same passage, we are given an insight into Ahmed’s psyche and into his feelings regarding his gender. He does certainly appear to undergo some sort of crisis as the rift between his gendered and sexed self, and his body widens with age. He describes the onset of depression in terms of death, isolation and disease with phrases such as ‘solitude absolue’ (*an absolute loneliness*), ‘la pourriture’ (*rot*), ‘une dégénérescence physique’ (*a physical degeneracy*), ‘un cimetière’ (*a cemetery*), ‘une tombe’ (*a tomb*), ‘prisonnière’ (*a prisoner*), ‘condamnée à mourir’ (*condemned to death*), ‘étranglée’ (*strangled*), ‘étouffée’ (*suffocated*) (p. 43–4). Thus, the body, as a site of contestation, becomes a vehicle of isolation and, in many respects, of imprisonment. Crucially however, as the feminine adjectival endings here suggest, Ahmed is incessantly haunted; a (public) masculinity haunted by a female body, a formula that in Ahmed’s world, which is dominated by essentialist binaries, can only signify incompatibility. Though Ahmed may not be a man in the strictest sense, encased as he is in a female body, the onset of his malcontentment echoes the misery of El Hadji, Rachid, Azel and Mourad in previous chapters. Once more, this malaise signals the overwhelming disembodiment and discontent that upholding (or failing to uphold) an acceptable masculinity can cause. Tellingly, Ahmed refers to himself as ‘prisonnière de ses illusions, condamnée à mourir’ (p. 43) [*prisoner of illusions, condemned to death*].⁴⁴⁵ The use of the word ‘illusions’ evokes the unattainable mantle of masculinity that is also evident in the other novels examined here.

One image that reappears frequently throughout the text and, in particular, in the direct quotations from Ahmed’s diaries is the image of the mirror. As an object that reflects reality, in many episodes in the text the protagonist is unable to confront the mirror, hinting at his unwillingness to see the truth of his condition. This problematic relationship underlines Ahmed’s discomfort: ‘[Je] me tends un miroir où je ne peux me regarder sans être troublé par une profonde tristesse’ (p. 44) [*[I hold] up a mirror to me in which I cannot see myself without being overcome by a profound sadness*’ (p. 29)]. Indeed, the mirror becomes the subject of dread for Ahmed:

⁴⁴⁵ My translation.

Alors, j'évite les miroirs. Je n'ai pas toujours le courage de me trahir, c'est-à-dire de descendre les marches que mon destin a tracées et qui me mènent au fond de moi-même dans l'intimité – insoutenable – de la vérité qui ne peut pas être dite. (p. 44)

[*So I avoid mirrors. I haven't always been brave enough to betray myself – that is to say, to descend the steps that my destiny has traced out for me, which are leading me to the depths of myself in the unbearable intimacy of a truth that cannot be spoken. (p. 29)*]

What we can read in this quotation is Ahmed's inability at this stage to confront the truth of his condition. Having affirmatively answered the interpellative call to be a son in his father's image and self-identifying as a man, expressed here as his 'destiny', he cannot look at the female reflection that stares back at him, particularly since masculinity defines itself by such fervent disassociation from femaleness and femininity. The female body therefore sparks a crisis of masculinity, in which the gendered self recoils in denial. The reality is unspeakable and forbidden and Ahmed's inability to articulate this fundamental truth, that is to say his permanent 'contamination' with femaleness, brings upon him an anxiety that leads quickly to acute depression.

The reluctance to confront the forbidden truth, as well as the deathly imagery, represent a kind of symbolic death for Ahmed as a man, but inevitably provokes a series of probing questions: 'Mon visage enroulé dans le voile de cette voix, est-elle de moi ou est-ce celle du père qui l'aurait insufflée, ou simplement déposée pendant que je dormais en me faisant du bouche à bouche?' (p. 45) [*My face is wrapped up in the veil of that voice. Is it my voice or could it be that into which my father breathed life? Or did he simply leave it there, performing mouth-to-mouth on me as I slept?*].⁴⁴⁶ Ahmed's self-questioning here implicitly recognises the interpellative process that he has undergone, and metaphorically articulates the realisation that his father, as mouthpiece for dominant ideology, has injected him with the means of existing as a subject within the established order. This alarming revelation is felt as a torture from which he cannot escape: 'Ô mon Dieu, que cette vérité me pèse! dure exigence! dure la rigueur [...] moi et un autre; moi et une autre' (p. 46) [*God, how heavily the truth weighs upon me! Such a trial, such hardship [...] another and I, I and another*].⁴⁴⁷ The weight of this truth is such that, understandably, Ahmed's personality begins to split into two. Crucially, in the French, the indefinite pronouns 'un' and 'une' (for 'another') allow the articulation of this gendered split. Masculinity here, therefore begins to crack under pressure.

⁴⁴⁶ My translation.

⁴⁴⁷ My translation.

Whereas earlier in the novel it seemed steadfast and bound for success, here the process of masculinisation begins to unravel as the by now adolescent body exposes Ahmed's masculinity to be a masquerade.

This painful identity crisis is brought about by the incompatibility of Ahmed's gender and sex, both of which are theorised by Judith Butler as culturally composed but which exist within a dominant ideology as normative. In reference to the French hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin, she states: 'The linguistic conventions that produce gendered selves find their limit in Herculine precisely because she/he occasions a convergence and disorganization of the rules that govern sex/gender/desire'.⁴⁴⁸ Though Ahmed may not be a hermaphrodite, his existence does query the 'intelligibility' of the gendered self in a similar way. A product of a society where a heteronormative law is in place and where women are women, and men are men, Ahmed appears also to exemplify both a reflection as well as a disorganisation of those rules simultaneously. In effect, it is Ahmed's inability to negotiate the regulatory and essentialist framework of gender norms, which sees gender as a corollary to sex, that haunts him here. He is unintelligible within that framework, even to himself.

The title of chapter nine *Bâtir un visage comme on élève une maison* ['Construct a face as one constructs a house'] is not without significance. The face, after all, is the most defining part of any body, and of any person. Faces are unique. To build a face in the same way in which one would build a house is a strong suggestion of personality, and gendered personas, being 'built' by society according to premeditated plans. This would eradicate any essence of uniqueness. Notably, it is in this chapter that Ahmed experiences a sexual awakening that radically changes the course of his life. The problematic relationship between the body and the socially-constructed self becomes ever more acute. This provokes another bout of self-questioning and reflection for the protagonist who, after an unsettling dream, states: 'J'ai perdu la langue de mon corps; d'ailleurs je ne l'ai jamais possédée. Je devrais l'apprendre et commencer d'abord par parler comme une femme. Comme une femme? Pourquoi? Suis-je un homme?' (p. 96) [*I have lost my body's language; indeed, I never possessed it. I ought to learn it, starting out by speaking as a woman. Why as a woman? Am I a man?*] (pp. 71–2). Ahmed's belief that he has never owned the language with which to speak his own body is an admission that he was constructed through discourse. His inability to articulate the body can be read as a queer critique and leads Ahmed to conclude that he must 'réveiller ce corps' (p. 96) [*awaken this body*] (p. 72)]. The use of the verb 'réveiller'

⁴⁴⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 31.

(to wake, to awaken) implies a dormant body/sexuality that has always existed but that has been repressed and buried away by the powerful discursive influences of manhood. However, it is now about to (re)surface, and this represents a reclamation of a self that has also been lying dormant since birth. Ahmed's acculturation as a man has until now been highly effective, but the strain becomes increasingly apparent. It is here that Ahmed becomes aware of the superficial nature of his existence: 'Il comprit que sa vie tenait à présent au maintien de l'apparence. Il n'est plus une volonté du père. Il va devenir sa propre volonté' (p. 48) [*He realized that his life was now a matter of keeping up appearances. It was no longer his father's will; it was his will*' (p. 32)]. Ahmed realises that his masculinity has no innate core, and that it is merely a consequence of performative acts. He sees himself for what he is – no more than the physical manifestation of his parents' wishes, and by extension, 'is' merely in accordance with the normative rule that governs his world.

Equipped with this awareness, initially, Ahmed decides to take advantage of his male status in a fiercely patriarchal environment. He pushes his father's lies to their very limit and insists on being able to take a wife as every good Muslim man should do.⁴⁴⁹ Acting the role of Frankenstein's monster, Ahmed resolves to marry his cousin, the disabled and socially ostracised Fatima. In doing so, he attempts to consolidate his manliness, telling his father pointedly: 'Père tu m'as fait homme, je dois le rester' (p. 51) [*Father, you've made me a man. I must remain one*' (p. 35)]. Nevertheless, proclaiming that he is no more and no less than their son, Ahmed resolves to live out his parents' logic. By this point, Ahmed is consolidating a masculinity that, like his father's, is complicit and domineering. In the workshop he has begun to 'take things in hand' and is described as 'efficace, moderne, cynique' and 'un excellent négociateur' (p. 51) [*efficient, modern, cynical [...] an excellent dealer*' (p. 35)]. He lords it at home by forcing his sisters to serve him lunch and dinner, becoming extremely withdrawn and secretive. Indeed, Ahmed becomes a feared and tyrannical figure (p. 51), assuming an almost regal role over which his father has little control (p. 51). Nevertheless, he remains unchallengeable, his father proudly recognising the firm and authoritative person – the personification of the hegemonic male – developing before his

⁴⁴⁹ Islam as a philosophy and as a religion embraces the notion of sexual relations between man and woman because the creation of life is seen to be the manifestation of the will of God. Therefore, the institution of marriage, or *nikāh*, forms a central part of Muslim society as it provides the only framework within which sexual relations are legal and encouraged. See Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 7 and pp. 14–15. Furthermore, Bouhdiba tells us, marriage is not simply a pleasure, but a duty (p. 89). For this reason, it is considered an obligation for parents to help their children to marry (p. 90), and Bouhdiba quotes the prophet Mohammed in saying that to marry is to perform one half of religious duty (p. 91). Of particular relevance to this text, Bouhdiba states: 'The personality of man finds fulfillment only in the intimacy of the sexes' (p. 91), something that Ahmed is unable to achieve.

eyes. Ahmed's sudden hyper-masculinity constitutes a performance, and a performance that is so hyperbolic in its nature that it could be read as parodic. Its subversive value, however, may be diminished somewhat by the fact that only Ahmed, his parents and the midwife who helped deliver him are aware of the secret; namely that Ahmed is female. Thus, Ahmed's exaggerated display of masculine authority exposes the constructed nature of gender.

Odile Cazenave believes that this realisation of masculine objectivity triggers a true subjectivity, and claims:

Ahmed is conscious of the fact that she/he is not an autonomous being, but a creation. Once aware of the artificiality of her status as he-subject, she conquers her true subjectivity as an individual in deciding that, precisely, she will be that he-subject that has been forced upon her. By dismantling herself, she deconstructs the object she was and gains the status of an individual.⁴⁵⁰

According to this line of argument, Ahmed's deliberate and conscious decision to 'be a man' appears at first to be an empowering experience, allowing the protagonist to exercise some influence over his own life at last. For Cazenave, it is this realisation that transforms Ahmed into a subject. Nevertheless, exercising the 'he-subject' identity to which Cazenave refers, Ahmed remains profoundly unhappy and emotionally torn. Moreover, he remains enslaved by the ideological system into which he was born.

In many ways, Fatima's character can be seen as a parallel to that of Ahmed. Her body too can be seen in terms of a physical prison. Fatima is an epileptic, who experiences extreme and frequent seizures. She is also disabled and has a malformed leg. She is portrayed as an inconvenience whose only purpose in life is to wait to die: 'Sacrifiée et lasse, elle était une petite chose déposée par l'erreur ou la malédiction sur la monotonie quotidienne d'une vie étroite' (p. 74) [*Sacrificed and exhausted, she was a tiny thing laid by mistake or by some curse on the everyday monotony of a narrow existence* (p. 53)]. Fatima can never lead a socially conventional life and is consequently not really presented or treated as a woman, or, at least, not as a 'whole' woman. Her disability and condition render her burdensome, almost asexual, since it is widely understood that no man would ever want to marry her – and this is the pinnacle of a woman's life as portrayed in the text. She is therefore doomed to live her life on the periphery of society, as an object – a 'thing' unable to qualify as 'woman'. Thus, she sits, along with Ahmed, on ambiguous, unclassifiable gender territory, a highly marginal figure deployed by Ahmed in order to consolidate his public façade of masculinity.

⁴⁵⁰ Odile Cazenave, 'Gender, Age, and Narrative Transformations in *L'Enfant de sable* by Tahar Ben Jelloun', *French Review*, 64 (1991), 437–450 (p. 442).

Fatima, the dysfunctional, asexual woman who is not considered a gendered human being by society but more of an anomaly, is resented by her husband for the fact that she is a disquieting influence on him. This can be explained by the fact that in her, Ahmed sees a mirror image of himself as a dysfunctional man. Fatima's presence troubles him greatly, even though it was he who chose to bring her into his life, principally because she is a permanent reminder of the highly precarious nature of his hitherto complicit performance of masculinity:

C'était là mon miroir, ma hantise et ma faiblesse [...] cette chose qui ne bougeait presque pas, ce regard fermé, ce ventre gainé, ce sexe absent, nié, refusé, cet être ne vivait que pour s'agiter durant les crises d'épilepsie et toucher des doigts le visage frêle et imprécis de la mort' (pp. 77–8)

[*That was my mirror, my weakness; that is what haunted me [...] that thing that scarcely moved, that inscrutable gaze, that girdled belly, that absent sex, denied, refused, that creature lived only to flail about in her epileptic fits and to touch with her fingers the delicate, imprecise face of death (p. 56)*]

Fatima is both a burdened and burdening creature whose presence illustrates for Ahmed the limitations of his own existence. She is limited to a series of parts in the above quotation – a look, a stomach, genitals, a being – thereby utterly dehumanising her. The reference to her absent and rejected vagina echoes Ahmed's condition, whose sex is denied not by disability, but by his masculine self-identification, which cannot be consolidated due to the absence of the male sexual organ, a point hinted at by the reference to 'ce sexe absent' (the absent organ) in the quotation above. Fatima is at the mercy of her epilepsy, and the severity of her seizures governs the rhythm of her life. She is robbed of the ability to lead an independent, fulfilling life by a medical condition, in a similar way to Ahmed, who must lead a contradictory and incoherent life due to a masculine status which forces him to pretend to be what he is not. Furthermore, Fatima functions as Ahmed's mirror, for when Ahmed pities Fatima for her asexuality and for her resignation to her debilitating condition, he unwittingly recognises himself as his own resignation vis-à-vis the identity chosen for him. The absent sexuality that he sees is not Fatima's, but his own, which remains repressed and denied by an individual striving to comply with masculine norms that a female body cannot substantiate.

To return to Cazenave's argument, Ahmed cannot have regained total subjectivity by masquerading as a man since he is still haunted by the knowledge that he can never play the role fully. In all of the novels examined in the thesis, and most notably perhaps in *Xala* and *Partir*, penetration becomes key to asserting (and perpetually reasserting) an accepted male identity and a suitable level of maleness. Ahmed's masculinity will, therefore, forever be rendered impossible by his sex. With predatory sexuality playing such an important part in

notions of manliness Ahmed realises he is doomed to failure and that his abortive efforts to live up to the ideal of virility will forever be in vain. Furthermore, his identity is pre-ordained, a realisation that haunts Ahmed, who still has little agency. To this extent, his new-found subjectivity is partial and limiting. Ahmed's only real chance to exercise a greater agency in his own life is by rejecting totally both masculine and feminine gender roles and by seeking a third gender space that defies the limiting binary formula he has known so far.

Subverting the Plan

The third and final part of this chapter will focus on Ahmed's life as an adult, and on the profound changes that he himself exerts over his life. This final section will argue that it is Ahmed's rejection of the hegemonic masculine persona with which he was raised, as well as his rejection of a traditional feminine role, that frees him from the cultural norms that have suffocated him until now. In her article 'Betwixt and Between', Damla Isik accurately labels Ahmed as a 'liminal' persona, and argues that this liminality becomes increasingly disturbing for a child who is unable to fit into any of the socially-sanctioned gender roles available to him.⁴⁵¹ She argues that Ahmed/Zahra cannot move beyond this indeterminacy and 'can never hope to achieve a stable identity'. Isik emphasises: 'Ahmed/Zahra is neither female, nor male; neither husband nor wife; neither abnormal nor normal' and states this as evidence that Ahmed/Zahra escapes binary positions.⁴⁵² While Isik's interpretation is a valid one, it is also a little limiting in that it fails to acknowledge that liminality, for Ahmed, is not necessarily a negative attribute. Indeed, it is the absence of categorisation that will liberate the tortured youth at the end of the novel and that will transform him from object into subject at last.

Until this point, Ahmed had answered the interpellative call and had endeavoured to assume and maintain a complicit masculine persona in line with social norms, as was designed for him by his parents. Nevertheless, the physically frail Fatima proves to be 'plus forte, plus dure et plus rigoureuse' (p. 79) [*Stronger, harder, [more rigorous]*] (p. 57)] than Ahmed expects and he irritably declares: 'Voulant l'utiliser pour parfaire mon apparence sociale, ce fut elle qui sut le mieux m'utiliser et faillit m'entraîner dans son profond désespoir' (p. 79) [*Though I had intended to use her to perfect my social appearance, it was*

⁴⁵¹ Damla Isik argues that Ahmed/Zahra's liminality is indicative of an unstable identity. See Damla Isik, 'Betwixt and Between – Gendering Liminality: Tahar Ben Jelloun and *The Sand Child*', in *The Image of the Outsider in Literature, Media and Society*, ed. by Will Wright and Steven Kaplan (Pueblo, Colorado: University of Southern Colorado, 2002), pp. 284–88 (p. 284).

⁴⁵² Isik, 'Betwixt and Between', p. 284.

she who managed to use me; she almost dragged me in to her profound despair' (p. 57)].

Indeed, it is Fatima's destabilising presence as his sister, cousin and wife that unsettles Ahmed (p. 80). In reality, Fatima touches a raw nerve and refers repeatedly to Ahmed's problematic identity. His unwillingness to abandon his masculine projections at this point is evident by the fact that she becomes the focus of his hatred (p. 80).

However, Fatima's death paves the way for Ahmed to move to the opposite extreme – to transform himself into a woman, a process described in his own diary entry as being a state of 'pleine mutation' (p. 99) [*a radical mutation*].⁴⁵³ He thus disregards his masculine pretensions, and for a time dismisses masculinity altogether. Here, the imagery of the mirror, which is a recurring symbol, resurfaces again. Until this point, the image reflected in the mirror is one created solely by discourse and it is not the image of the protagonist's own making. This time, however, the mirror is not an object to be avoided as a reflection of a forbidden truth as it was earlier in the story, but one that must be confronted head-on. Indeed, Ahmed tells us: 'J'apprends à me regarder dans le miroir. J'apprends à voir mon corps' (p. 98) [*I'm learning to look at myself in the mirror. I'm learning to see my body' (p. 73)*]. Thus, the recognition of the female body staring back at Ahmed forces him to confront the naked and unmasked reality.

Significantly, however, the discovery of the feminine self is not entirely satisfactory for our protagonist, since the only parts of Ahmed's body that are recognisably feminine, to him at least, are the buttocks, suggesting that Ahmed himself cannot move beyond the discursive formulation attributed to him at birth. Yet, he persists, removing the hair from his legs in an attempt to become more feminine and therefore using the female equivalents of the performative rituals he underwent as a child. He quickly recognises that this transformation into a woman will take him back into the depths of childhood memories: 'Qu'avant il va falloir remonter à l'enfance, être petite fille, adolescente, jeune fille amoureuse, femme..., que de chemin..., je n'y arriverai jamais' (p. 98) [*That before that I must go back to childhood, become a little girl, an adolescent girl, a girl in love, a woman... What a long path. I shall never get there' (p. 73)*]. The normal stages of a girl's, and therefore a woman's development, will forever be lost opportunities in Ahmed's life:

Croyez-vous que vos émotions sauront me réapprendre à vivre? C'est-à-dire à respirer sans penser que je respire, à marcher sans penser que je marche, à poser ma main sur une autre peau sans réfléchir, et à rire pour rien comme l'enfance émue par un simple rayon de lumière?... (p. 99)

⁴⁵³ My translation.

[Do you think your emotions will be capable of teaching me to live once more? To breathe without thinking I'm breathing, to walk without thinking I'm walking, to put my hands on someone else's skin without hesitation, and to laugh at nothing in particular, like a child moved by a sunbeam? (p. 74)]

As this quotation from a letter to an anonymous acquaintance suggests, reconstructing himself as a woman is by now impossible and points to the all-pervading, all-powerful influence of masculine interpellation, suggesting that Ahmed will never entirely shed his masculine persona successfully. Tellingly, the claustrophobic prison imagery that we saw earlier in the text here subtly transforms into imagery that is still enclosed, except that from now on the protagonist talks of 'la cage' (*the cage*) of glass or with windows. Though Ahmed can now see out of his personal prison thanks to his new found understanding of his dilemma, the external reality is still blurred and distorted, suggesting that a female gender is, by now, beyond reclamation.

Ahmed eventually decides to leave his family behind and to embark on a new life of recovery, or indeed, *discovery* of a less determined identity. This discovery is essentially the process of the protagonist escaping the persistent grasp of his father's influence, and, on a second level, the unpeeling of layers of social discourses that have limited Ahmed's existence to obeying the dictates of a masculine order. The further sexual awakening Ahmed experiences is described in terms of a renaissance – 'Il est temps de naître de nouveau' (p. 111) [*It is time to be born again*' (p. 83)] – not necessarily as a woman but as an individual refusing to slavishly become what (s)he was destined to be:

J'ai enlevé les bandages autour de ma poitrine, j'ai longuement caressé mon bas-ventre [...] J'ai su que le retour à soi allait prendre du temps, qu'il fallait rééduquer les émotions et répudier les habitudes. Ma retraite n'a pas suffi; c'est pour cela que j'ai décidé de confronter ce corps à l'aventure, sur les routes, dans d'autres villes, dans d'autres lieux. (p. 112)

[I have taken off the bandages around my chest. I have stroked my sex at length [...] I knew that the return to myself would take time, that I had to re-educate my emotions and reject old habits. My retirement was not enough; that is why I decided to make this body face adventure, on the roads, in other towns, in other places. (p. 84)]

Earlier on in the novel, the bandage that was tied around the protagonist in order to stifle and hide the growth of breasts was not only a practical necessity, but was also symbolic of a psychosexual oppression. Here, the loosening of the bandages also seems to point to the new-found freedom regarding the self. The touching of this newly uncovered female body, in stark contrast to previous scenes where the protagonist would not even look at his own nude body, is indicative of an acceptance, even an embrace of what Ahmed's femininity and, in addition,

a recognition of himself as transcending the subjecthood allocated to him at birth. The use of the word 'retour' (*return*) is significant as it suggests a revisiting of a self that has always been present. Words such as 'répudier' (*to repudiate*) represent a clear rejection of the former self. The future 'adventure' and the different places to be discovered are indicative of a certain new-found mental and psychological freedom which will leave the protagonist free to wander and explore new territories – imaginary or real. This stands in marked juxtaposition with the enclosed, withdrawn and introverted self of the novel thus far, since this newly-discovered territory will prove to be the third space between normalised gender binaries.

Odile Cazenave argues that Ahmed becoming a 'he-subject' is the beginning of his subjective personhood. I would argue, however, that it is the abandonment and venture into unclassifiable gender territory that offers the greatest agency to the protagonist, where the fracture between Ahmed's physical and gendered identities can, in fact, become empowering. This territory is one where Ahmed will discard the limitations of 'masculine' and 'feminine' and seek a far more peripheral third gender that is highly marginal. It is here that the protagonist moves beyond the seemingly rigid boundaries of manhood and where he defies all attempts to pigeonhole him.

Once embarked on this new journey, Ahmed has an encounter with an old woman with whom he has a bizarre sexual experience. Like Fatima before her, the old woman, described as an old beggar and reminiscent perhaps of the old hag of medieval European literature, also functions as a mirror by virtue of her asexuality. She forthrightly asks him who he is and the question proves to be extremely unsettling: 'J'aurais pu répondre à toutes les questions, inventer, imaginer mille réponses, mais c'était là la seule, l'unique question qui me bouleversait et me rendait littéralement muette' (p. 113) [*I was ready to answer any question, to invent, to imagine innumerable replies, but that question alone threw me into confusion and literally struck me dumb*' (p. 85)]. The truth that emerges here is that Ahmed cannot be easily categorised using existing gender stereotypes, either by the old woman or by himself, and he is therefore unable to answer. The social discourses that were internalised and adopted as a child have by now melted away, leaving behind the vulnerable underbelly of an individual with no socially-accepted sexual or gender identity and who is not able to align himself with any easily recognisable identity. It would seem that Ahmed has begun to assume an 'unintelligible' subjecthood of which the heterocentric frame of society cannot make sense. The fact that Ahmed himself cannot answer the question suggests on one level that his self-discovery is still at an early stage. Nevertheless, an alternative interpretation might also view his difficulty in providing an answer as his inability to talk within the structures of

social discourse. The rhetoric for his liminal, unclassifiable gender status simply does not exist, leaving him unable to describe himself. Even the old hag is not sure, for, having groped Ahmed, she justifies her actions by saying: 'J'avais un doute' [*I wasn't sure*] to which Ahmed responds: 'Moi aussi' (p. 118) [*Nor was I* (p. 89)]. The beggar-woman is illustrative of a society that judges gender and sex on purely physical grounds and which conflates male and masculine, female and feminine. Ahmed, on the other hand, by his mere presence and ambiguity subverts the seemingly watertight assumption that there are men (who are male and masculine) and women (who are female and feminine).

Stripped of identifiable codes of being, Ahmed does not recognise himself within the entrenched binaries of his society. Indeed, it could be argued that Ahmed deliberately *mis*recognises himself within the heterocentric matrix. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler argues that self-misrecognition can serve as a useful means of subversion within discourse and that 'a willingness *not* to be – a critical desubjectivation – [can] expose the law as less powerful than it seems'.⁴⁵⁴ Ahmed's unrecognizability – his alienness within heterocentric norms – renders his identity unstable which, Butler claims, can displace normative assumptions by exposing them as fragile constructions. When probed further by the old woman in this episode, Ahmed tells her: 'Je ne le sais pas moi-même [qui je suis]. Je sors à peine d'un long labyrinthe où chaque interrogation fut une brûlure..., j'ai le corps labouré de blessures et de cicatrices...' (p. 114) [*I myself don't know [who I am]. I have only just emerged from a long labyrinth in which each question was a burn. My body is plowed with wounds and scars, and yet it is a body that has lived little* (pp. 85–6)]. The image here is one of a body ravished, tortured and permanently marked with injuries and scars, in a labyrinth alluding to a Greek mythological hell. The imagery evokes dungeons and prisons, with self-questioning rendered 'interrogation', suggesting the overwhelming strains of upholding a façade of masculinity, the like of which Ahmed can never be totally free.

Following this response, the old woman proceeds to touch and suck on Ahmed's breasts in a scene which is an intriguing combination of adult sexual foreplay and the innocent suckling of a mother's breast by an infant. The old woman is described as having no teeth and lips as soft as a baby's, and yet her face manifests sexual desire, an image that blurs the boundaries between nurturing, maternal instincts and sexual desire. This experience leaves the protagonist profoundly ill at ease and yet he admits: 'La sensation physique que j'éprouvai aux caresses de cette bouche édentée sur mon sein fut, même si elle ne dura que

⁴⁵⁴ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 130.

quelques secondes, du plaisir' (p. 115) [*The physical sensation I felt as that toothless mouth caressed my breast was pleasurable, even if it lasted only a few seconds*' (p. 86)]. The experience has begun the concrete development of a sexuality, which continues as he touches himself and caresses the parts of the feminine body that were hitherto neglected: 'Ces caresses devant le miroir devinrent une habitude, une espèce de pacte entre mon corps et son image' (p. 116) [*These caresses in front of the mirror became a habit, a sort of pact between my body and its image*' (p. 87)]. This 'pact' between the body and its image was impossible earlier in the novel since it displayed Ahmed's lacking maleness and was a clear signal of his incurable contamination with womanliness and the impossibility of consolidating his appointed subjecthood fully. The fact that Ahmed can now look at himself and begin to establish a relationship between his/her body and gendered self demonstrates just how marginal a persona Ahmed/Zahra has negotiated for him/herself but, moreover, that this marginality is potentially liberating.

One act that emerges as all-important in the reworking of gender in the text is the act of writing. In fact, such is the significance of the act of writing that it becomes synonymous with reworking gender. Ahmed proceeds to 'rewrite' himself, firstly by deconstructing himself, and then by proceeding with a process of reconstruction.⁴⁵⁵ In this same episode, the body is described as 'la page blanche. Mon corps était cette page et ce livre' (p. 116) [*the white page. My body was that page and that book*' (p. 87)]. This time, it is not the father who will create the person but the person himself, illustrating Ahmed's true transformation into a 'subject' that is, in Butler's words, 'constituted by discourse [but not fully] determined by discourse, where determination forecloses the possibility of agency'.⁴⁵⁶ This (re)creation on a blank page is a symbolic self-development *by* and *for* the self which, though still subject to cultural law, nevertheless exercises a greater degree of agency. To return to Gutterman's arguments, it was argued that masculinity is a masquerade and that individuals are created by unseen discursive scripts, or socially acceptable codes of behaviour. The only way of rewriting these scripts is by recognising their existence in the first place. Rewriting social discourses is only possible after acquiring an awareness of them in the first place.⁴⁵⁷ Ahmed appears to have done this and to have dislodged the masculine future written for him by his father. Therefore, this rewriting takes on the form of subverting the normative genders of

⁴⁵⁵ Perhaps the theme of writing is also significant given that Ben Jelloun is a Moroccan, and therefore an Arabic-speaking author. The word 'maktub' (from the root k-t-b – to write) in Arabic means 'it is written', and is also a word to denote fate or destiny. This rewriting would then take on an additional significance, as it would imply the rewriting of destiny for and by the hero of the novel.

⁴⁵⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 182.

⁴⁵⁷ Gutterman, 'Postmodernism and the Interrogation of Masculinity', p. 59.

Moroccan society that seek to dictate his appearance, his person, his mobility and even his sexuality. In relation to hegemonic norms, Ahmed chooses firmly to position himself as marginal, rejecting dominant models of masculinity and preferring to seek out a peripheral, subversive gender.

In the latter stages of the novel, Ahmed, now referred to by the narrator and other fictional characters as Zahra, has broken entirely with her family and upbringing. She works for a time at a circus, a natural home for any sort of performance, with what can be termed as other socially ambiguous characters, or perhaps even 'misfits', such as orphans and drunks. Despite being known as Lalla Zahra, the narrator is still unsure about how to refer to the protagonist and consistently draws the reader's attention to this fact: 'Notre personnage – je ne sais comment le nommer – devint la principale attraction du cirque forain' (p. 126) [*Our character – I don't know what to call him or her – became the main attraction of the circus' (p. 96)*]. 'Notre personnage' is, of course, a gender-neutral term and this neutrality conveys how Zahra continues to evade gender characterisation. This appears to render the narrator ill-at-ease, since his/her constant reminders imply that (s)he is unsure and unconvinced. Effectively, the protagonist inhabits the liminal space of a third gender as (s)he eludes gender classification – both for other textual characters but also for the general narrator. Her work at a circus also highlights the eccentric and nomadic nature of her gender identity which, by now, is marginal in the extreme.

However, it is pertinent to ask for whom Ahmed is a marginal character. Certainly, (s)he is ostracised by other characters of the novel. The narrator, who claims to be quoting these events directly from the pages of the protagonist's diary, still finds it difficult to attribute a satisfactory gender. In the same paragraph, both the masculine and feminine pronouns – 'il/elle' (he/she) – are used intermittently to denote Ahmed/Zahra. The narrator even tells us: 'Tantôt homme, tantôt femme, notre personnage avançait dans la reconquête de son être' (p. 126) [*Sometimes a man, sometimes a woman, our character was moving toward the reconquest of his [or her] being' (p. 96)*].⁴⁵⁸ This is perhaps the strongest evidence yet for Ahmed/Zahra's refusal of normative, binary gender roles but also for society's discomfort with that refusal. By consistently problematising Ahmed/Zahra's ambiguous gender, the narrator is in effect rendering the protagonist Other and pushing him/her further and further towards marginalisation by labelling him/her as unintelligible (to use Butler's phrase). Significantly, Ahmed/Zahra does not appear to be uncomfortable with this highly pliable

⁴⁵⁸ My insertion.

identity. This ostracising technique can be explained by society's failure to deal with Ahmed/Zahra, rather than his/her own insecurities, and Ahmed/Zahra's conscious liminality can be read as a queer critique of heterocentric binaries.

This unintelligibility is heightened by the fact that Zahra works in the circus as a transvestite dancer, performing as Lalla Zahra. Indeed, this detail is curious, since Ahmed's masculine status in the early parts of the novel would indicate that he has now become a *khawal*, the socially subordinate male dancer, a fact which might suggest Zahra's subordinate position within the gendered hierarchy.⁴⁵⁹ On the other hand, Lalla Zahra may simply be a *ghawazee* dancer, the traditional role of a female performer in Arab culture. This bewildering ambiguity cannot be resolved, because Zahra refuses to be categorised by an 'either... or' formula. The act of dancing itself and Zahra's status as dancer highlights this unstable identity all the more, since dancing is a constant movement subverting the rigid bodily gestures of the everyday. More important than this, however, is Zahra's drag performance as a woman, which parodies the supposed 'naturalness' of that state and instead draws attention to the highly unnatural and unstable qualities of 'woman' and 'feminine' and, by extension, gender in general. Indeed, as Marjorie Garber states: 'If transvestitism offers a critique of binary sex and gender distinctions, it is not because it simply makes such distinctions reversible but because it denaturalizes, destabilizes, and de-familiarizes sex and gender *signs*' (italics in original).⁴⁶⁰ It is this destabilisation that characterises Zahra in the later stages of the novel. For, having rejected both mainstream genders, Zahra empties these two terms of meaning and once more eludes classification along traditional lines by refusing to conform to socially recognisable markers of gender, indicating a deliberately subversive attitude towards the plan that meant so much to her father.

It is interesting to remind ourselves at this point that the narrative technique deployed in *L'Enfant de sable* means that Ahmed's true story is lost underneath other people's views of what or who (s)he is, in a similar way to which Other identities may be lost in the mist of cultural ideology. The narrator's version of events, along with various alternative interpretations of the story offered by three members of his audience, seems to provide a

⁴⁵⁹ The *khawal* is a male performer – usually an oriental dancer – but his status is, nevertheless, heavily tied in with social inferiority and subordination. His role also consists of being the passive partner in male-male sexual relationships, a phenomenon that is triggered by his low status *vis-à-vis* more dominant (and therefore powerful) versions of masculinity. The *khawal* is therefore subordinate both socially and sexually, therefore signaling a lack of masculinity. Dunne, 'Power and Sexuality in the Middle East', p. 6 and Schmitt, 'Different Approaches to Male-Male Sexuality/Eroticism', p. 11.

⁴⁶⁰ Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), p. 147.

narrative parallel to the discursive formation of identity. In one concluding version, that of Amar, the circus manager's mother Umm Abbas exclaims: 'Heureusement que nous sommes là. Nous t'avons sauvée! Tu as usurpé toute une vie l'identité de quelqu'un d'autre, probablement celle d'un homme que tu as assassiné' (p. 143) [*It's a good thing we're here. We saved you! All your life you've been usurping someone else's identity, probably that of a man you murdered*] (p. 110)]. The question of credibility in these alternative endings is an important one. However, the irony of the above statement is its truth value. Zahra had been usurping an identity by means of the discursive social conditioning that was imposed upon her as a young child. When referring to Zahra's supposed admirer who frequently sends anonymous letters, Umm Abbas states: 'C'est simple. Si c'est un homme, tu es un homme; si c'est une femme, je m'en chargerai!' (p. 128) [*It's quite simple. If it's a man, you're a man; if it's a woman, I'll take care of her!*] (p. 98)]. The situation is anything but simple, however, as Zahra still possesses a variable gender status which can be manipulated to be either masculine or feminine, once more questioning the veracity and stability of normative gender through parody and drag.

Nevertheless, it is not long before Zahra begins to experience nightmares in which her father appears as a brooding and threatening presence. In these nightmares, Hadj Ahmed returns to deny Zahra's feminine existence altogether, and insists defiantly on Zahra's male persona: 'Ahmed, mon fils, l'homme que j'ai formé, est mort, et toi tu n'es qu'usurpatrice. Tu voles la vie de cet homme' (p. 130) [*Ahmed, my son, the man I formed, is dead. You, woman, are merely a usurper. You are stealing that man's life*] (p. 100)]. Echoing the words of Umm Abbas above, this appears to be the voice of normativity attempting to sideline any gender that does not fit in tidily with those that are socially acceptable.⁴⁶¹ Gutterman points to the successful marginalisation of other genders as 'Other' by normative masculinity. Referring to Butler's 'heterosexual matrix', he emphasises that any departure from these 'norms' represents instability and is swiftly interpreted as difference. Difference is perceived as a challenge to hegemony and is promptly ostracised to a socially peripheral position of 'Otherness' and considered deviant. The dismissal above criminalises Zahra, accusing her of having committed either a literal or symbolic murder. The irony here is that if anyone has 'stolen' Ahmed's life, then it is surely the father, the bastion of hegemonic Moroccan manliness himself, since it was he who 'formed' Ahmed/Zahra. Thus, the fragmentation, or indeed separation of sex and the gendered self which we saw earlier in the novel, reappears in

⁴⁶¹ Gutterman, 'Postmodernism and the Interrogation of Masculinity', pp. 61–2.

the nightmare, since Ahmed/Zahra's body is not considered a self-contained unit capable of practising an unstable identity. This societal voice that haunts Ahmed/Zahra represents in fact society's unwillingness, or inability, to cope with gender roles that fall outside the normalised, structured roles sanctioned by it.

It is here that the relevance of the concept of postmodern eccentric subjectivity is most apparent. The narrator's continued problematisation of Zahra's gender appears to be an attempt to ostracise and undermine this new-found identity, as indeed do the haunting threats of the father in her dreams. This identity is, undoubtedly, fluid, unfixed and complex. Cazenave concludes that Ahmed/Zahra's identity is a Rubic's cube which the reader can endlessly reformulate.⁴⁶² However, I would argue that this third gender is in fact an example of the postmodern gender role that Gutterman calls for in his article.⁴⁶³ As the title of the novel suggests, this individual possesses an ever-changing form, like the shifting sands of the desert. Zahra's unstable and multiple identities represent a 'mobile' identity, and one that floats effortlessly and happily between the binary gender boundaries imposed by society in a subversive denial of the binary order imposed on sex and gender.⁴⁶⁴ Her work as a transvestite dancer can be seen to represent her transvestite identity and clearly destabilises the preconceived gender norms of Umm Abbas, the father, the narrator and perhaps some of the novel's readers. As Gutterman argues in his article, the traditional and oppositional poles of gender in the West, a concept with a comparable equivalent in Morocco, dictate that anything other than, or in-between, the binaries of masculine/feminine, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual cannot exist.⁴⁶⁵ Ahmed/Zahra, however, can be read as a queer invention that challenges this logic.

Having accepted and put into practice a prescribed gender role, Ahmed/Zahra's body increasingly becomes a thorn in his/her side, as the rupture between sex and gender deepens. It would appear at the beginning of the novel that this fracture is caused solely by the confusion of a female child being brought up as male. However, an attempted reconciliation with the female self does not solve Ahmed/Zahra's dilemma, laying bare the purely performative nature of gender. Once stripped of the rigid social codes that govern the body and behaviour, gender becomes an extremely ambiguous and fluid notion that eludes simplistic and clear-cut definitions.

⁴⁶² Cazenave, 'Gender, Age, and Narrative Transformations', p. 448.

⁴⁶³ Gutterman, 'Postmodernism and the Interrogation of Masculinity', pp. 69–70.

⁴⁶⁴ Gutterman describes the mobile identity as a fluid gender role that refuses to be categorised tidily as either male or female, but is intrinsically unstable and therefore destabilises the current understanding of gender. Gutterman, 'Postmodernism and the Interrogation of Masculinity', p. 70.

⁴⁶⁵ Gutterman, 'Postmodernism and the Interrogation of Masculinity', p. 62.

Conclusion

More than any of the other novels analysed in this thesis, *L'Enfant de sable* exposes masculinity to be no more than an 'effect' of discourse.⁴⁶⁶ Ahmed becomes a subversive character. Brought up as a man – indeed, representing a creation of masculinity in the most obvious sense – Ahmed does succeed in fabricating a convincing masculine persona for himself. This parody of masculinity exposes the institutions and practices by which a veneer of normality is produced, and put forth as an eternal truth, and as being built upon the most tenuous of foundations. The body is exposed as an all-important site for discursive imprinting and cultural marking.

Nevertheless, although the novel suggests that sex and gender are entirely separate, as Butlerian theory would also have it, Ahmed's failure to continue living as a man results from his physical inadequacies due to his sex. As a recurring theme in this study, it has been argued that phallic potency represents a quintessential marker of masculinity. Trapped in a female body, Ahmed is unable to exercise the penile power necessary for an authorised masculine identity. Though sex and gender may be independent of one another, the novel does underline the fact that the two concepts remain tightly interwoven in some cases, with sex used as a means of bolstering gender. Ahmed/Zahra offers an interesting contrast to Rachid in *La Répudiation*. Both revolt against the suffocating presence of their fathers. Rachid is subordinated, primarily because he tries to play his formidable father at his own game, and loses. He therefore works within the gendered order promoted by Si Zoubir. For Ahmed/Zahra, gender negotiation is far more radical and complex. Having very nearly become the son his father desired, (s)he comes up against the irresolvable problem posed by a female body – the lack of male organ with which to consolidate masculine ascendancy. As we have seen in each of the novels examined in this thesis, sexual potency is a key means by which masculinity is measured. For El Hadj Abdou Kader Bèye, the failed attempt to consummate his third marriage proves to be the trigger for his downfall. In *La Répudiation*, Si Zoubir ensures his survival as patriarch by being able to subdue women sexually. Rachid, however, like El Hadj, experiences the bitter self-doubt that eats away at a man unable to perform the sexual act and, through it, assert his virility. Impotence is also at the heart of Azel's ailing sense of masculine worth, and leads to a far more general impotence vis-à-vis

⁴⁶⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 24.

his life. Neither is Mourad unaffected, berated by his wife for his unwillingness/inability to penetrate her. For Ahmed/Zahra, however, a similar problem exists. Nonetheless, it is not a temporary impotence that haunts him/her, but a permanent inability to prove himself sexually as a man. Whereas the other characters here could potentially reassert their sexual puissance, Ahmed/Zahra can never fully perform masculinity. Therefore, though sex and gender can be theorised as independent from one another, the male body retains an important place in 'doing' masculinity.

Realising the pre-programmed nature of his/her existence leads the protagonist to desert the gender provided for him/her by moving beyond his pre-ordained masculinity and by rejecting outright the wishes of Hadj Ahmed. Ahmed/Zahra's revolt is far more effective than that of Rachid because it refuses to bow to conventional ideology and confounds those who adhere doggedly to traditional (binary) gender norms. It is highly significant that (s)he ends up nomadic and considered a misfit by other characters in the novel. Ahmed/Zahra's marginalisation within mainstream society merely points to normative gender's hard-line view towards those who reject, or openly challenge, its norms. There seems to be no place for a man who rejects the structures of hegemony. Ahmed/Zahra's gendered fluidity – his/her liminality – at the end of the novel can be read as a queer critique of heteronormative binaries as (s)he continues to highlight through parody the *unnatural* assumptions that govern gender. In the context of *L'Enfant de sable*, renouncing traditional gender models appears as both marginalising *and* empowering, and constitutes what could be seen as a call to dismantle rigid and limiting gender norms in favour of more fluid and less stringent models of gendered behaviour.

General Conclusion

The novels that have been analysed in this study illustrate in the clearest sense the sociological proposition that gender, and in this case, masculinity, is a fluid phenomenon for which the singular form of the latter term is inadequate. Echoing many of the premises of gender theory, the protagonists of these five novels display an array of masculine subject positions and demonstrate the fluctuating and ever-changing positional landscape in which their identity as men is formed, thereby highlighting the pluralistic nature of masculinities. Gender is portrayed as a notion that is relational in its construction, depending on forces such as sex, sexual orientation, race, geography, class and labour market relations amongst others, all of which prove to be central to the fabric of gendered identity. Furthermore, as these diverse forces interact with each other, they can be interpreted as altering notions or expressions of manhood, once more reiterating the eternally polymorphous constitution of masculinity. The novels therefore provide echoes of current Western gender theory and appear to validate its application to non-Western literature by problematising masculinity, portraying it to be a highly complex phenomenon. They also demonstrate the intricate process of perpetual negotiation involved in constructing masculine identities.

In *Xala*, El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye embraces and re-enacts the dominant variant of masculinity in the context in which he lives, assimilating himself totally with the gendered currency of the bourgeois class. Indeed, his overriding ambition to adhere to prevalent notions of masculinity robs him of the opportunity of articulating and developing a more subjective identity, since his actions are always decided upon with public image and peer judgement in mind. That is not to say, of course, that El Hadji is *forced* to become corrupt or to neglect his wives and children, but merely to point to the power of ideological interpellation and the subsequent, insidious pressures at work in his highly masculinised world. His fixated attempts to conform to the established gender order therefore suggest a fragile and vulnerable man who sees his status as a man as wholly reliant upon thoroughly digesting and then performing tried-and-tested – and widely accepted – expressions of masculinity. It is only in the final scene of the novel, subjected to the humiliation of being spat on by social inferiors, that El Hadji is finally forced to deviate from the hegemonic norm to which he has attached himself for so long.

For Rachid, Zahir and their father Si Zoubir in Boudjedra's *La Répudiation*, the negotiations of being – or indeed, becoming – a man are more complex. Growing up in a

world in which the authority of the patriarch is total and unchallengeable but where the hallmark of a successful man is familial and social ascendancy, both Rachid and Zahir struggle to develop a masculine identity due to the stifling presence of their father. Zahir rejects the culturally sedimented ideals, opting instead for a peripheral position which marginalises him not only from his family, but from the cultural and social mores around him. Unwilling to pander to normative dictates as El Hadji and Si Zoubir do, Zahir is cast out of the gender order and ostracised as a man, having chosen a self-positioning that is marginal and therefore potentially threatening to the normalised core of masculine ideals. Rachid half-heartedly attempts to embody the masculine values that police male individuals at first but, failing to do so, is rendered subordinate, not only to Si Zoubir and other men within his tribe, but to the community at large due to his periods in mental health institutions, to the foreign, female Other in the form of Céline, and to the Clan which later wields power in the fictionalised Algeria of Boudjedra's novel. *La Répudiation* therefore offers a variety of masculine positions *vis-à-vis* the normative referent and displays in a more explicit way the constant process of negotiation involved in constructing masculine identity.

The emphasis in the novel examined in chapter four, Ben Jelloun's *Partir*, also lies with the negotiation – and, indeed, perpetual *renegotiation* – of masculinity. Azel's ambitions, however, are thwarted by several forces at work, namely: economic stagnation and lack of opportunities in his native land, the symbolic emasculation resulting from the evolution of women's roles, but crucially also by unsuccessful engagements with the cultural, economic and sexual Other in the form of homosexual European Miguel. Azel repositions himself several times during the course of the novel and in particular contexts, accepting Miguel's sexual propositions at certain points and with certain people, and yet denouncing his same-sex relations at others. Similarly, he adopts a condescending and dismissive attitude towards religious fundamentalism at times but does, nevertheless, engage with it as and when the need arises. Thus, the fictional Azel demonstrates the complex and often contradictory negotiation(s) of real-life masculinity and yet never quite manages to escape his subordinate position within the masculine hierarchy, remaining victimised by hegemonic and 'hyper-masculine' patterns of manhood. By contrast, in *L'Homme rompu*, Mourad's perceived masculine inferiority is not presented as an element of his subordination. Rather, his deliberate self-marginalisation due to his unwillingness to engage in corruption and adopt a fiercely materialistic world view actually becomes empowering. Thus, Mourad begins the narrative as a self-confident, principled man who is unwilling to be enslaved by an implicit yet fully absorbing ideology, with subversive tendencies which undermine the hegemonic

criteria of manliness. Nevertheless, his eventual decision to yield to a dominant model of masculinity and to engage actively with normative standards demonstrate the very real pressures to which he is subjected and again underlines the principle of necessary negotiation for masculine subjectivity. Having entered into the normative order, his awkward and clumsy enactments of masculinity ultimately fail to consolidate a suitable air of masculine authority. Mourad becomes trapped within a hierarchy in which he cannot exercise authority but from which he also cannot escape, thus rendering him subordinate.

The final novel under discussion here, *L'Enfant de sable*, challenges masculine hegemony(-ies) most radically by openly questioning them. Brought up as male, the Ahmed/Zahra throws himself into the role-play of masculinity before anatomical reality prevents the consolidation of a masculine identity. Having therefore attempted to negotiate a masculine identity imposed on him by a father who is representative of the voice of hegemony, the protagonist abandons this nascent masculinity to search instead for a feminine self. As this also proves to be impossible, Ahmed/Zahra is forced to seek out a liminal gender status that defies entrenched visions of what masculine and feminine are, or should be. The gendered transgressions of this novel therefore emphasise the continual transactions involved in identity-building, finally culminating in a highly subversive attitude *vis-à-vis* binary gender constructions.

Via these constant (re)negotiations, several phenomena recur throughout the five novels which contribute to the process of creating an ideology of masculinity. The first point to be made here is the importance of institutions and other social/cultural circumstances in this process, not simply as sites for masculine interpellation in the first place, but also as means by which gender can be maintained and buttressed more generally. Indeed, cultural customs, religion, historical and socio-economic factors all contribute to the development of acceptable narratives of masculinity, functioning as Althusserian ISAs. Furthermore, the concept of collectivity is also a recurrent theme. In *Xala* and *L'Homme rompu* for example, El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye and Haj Hamid ensconce themselves within a particular order by positioning themselves within the (masculine) business community for their own security. In a similar fashion, in *Partir* the socially ostracised and culturally isolated young immigrants congregate together in cafés or on the streets, both in their native Morocco and in the foreign city of Barcelona, as if there were safety in numbers. Masculinity in these novels is problematised further by the fact that the authors frequently expose the vulnerabilities of their fictional characters. Group allegiances are depicted as being highly unstable in nature. El Hadji's expulsion from the 'Groupement', for example, symbolises an expulsion from the

masculine brotherhood, leaving the individual vulnerable, explaining perhaps why the men presented here frequently choose to operate in herds. In contrast, however, Mourad in *L'Homme rompu*, is dismissed as a non-man by his wife and in-laws precisely for *not* being a member of a masculinised group. In *La Répudiation*, Zahir's banishment from the masculine sphere results in an even more extreme threat, culminating in his death and expulsion from the narrative. Zahir's tragic end appears to imply that any challenge to the cult of accepted masculine hierarchies is not tolerated, and embodies the premise that an isolated man, without the protection of an ideologically masculinised group around him, is left in a very precarious position indeed.

These sites – literal or symbolic – embody a cultural currency that not only creates versions of masculinity but also bolsters them, with individuals continually referring back to these in order to seek reassurance and solidarity as masculinised individuals. Performative categories are therefore mutually reinforced by group interaction, a point that once more reflects the assertions of gender theorists and sociologists alike, by drawing attention to the intrinsic instability of gender and to the need for men to receive 'normative "feedback"'.⁴⁶⁷ The (male) body also becomes a significant locus on which to imprint societal discourses of dominant, subordinate or subversive masculinity, but also on which to enact power dynamics, a notion which is illustrated most forcefully in Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable*. Nevertheless, the emphasis on phallic potency and the tightly interlaced nature of masculinity and virility in this novel, as well as in the other works in this study, also questions the interpretation of the body as simply a blank page onto which codes of masculinity may be written. For, although *L'Enfant de sable* suggests initially that sex and gender are independent of one another, it later problematises this assertion by demonstrating that the protagonist cannot continue to live as male after the onset of puberty.

With the exception of *La Répudiation* and possibly *L'Enfant de sable*, fatherhood is not as prominent a theme as we might expect to find in these novels. El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye's father is not mentioned at all, and only fleeting references to Azel's father in *Partir*, and Mourad's father in *L'Homme rompu*, inform us that their fathers are dead. Nevertheless, these deceased fathers exercise almost as much influence over their sons' self-perceptions as do Hadj Ahmed in *L'Enfant de sable* and Si Zoubir in *La Répudiation*. For Mourad, knowing that his eternally honest and hard-working father would have been, and that his own son will

⁴⁶⁷ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 63. Bourdieu also notes that masculinity must be 'validated' by other men and 'certified by recognition of membership of the group of "real men"' (p. 52).

be, disappointed in him deepens his sense of guilt. Similarly, Azel's father was a fervent nationalist, a point which seems to compound Azel's self-perception of failure. Thus, the influence of the father-figure is central to formations of masculinity, and appears to provide a blueprint for the son. Not living up to this expectation is but another potent pressure exerted on the fictional characters under scrutiny here, since paternal esteem or commendation carries more weight than that of any other male associate.

Throughout this study, another element has become readily apparent – that of a troubled male relationship with women and notions of femaleness and/or femininity. Frequently, the male protagonists examined here who aim to cultivate a socially-favoured masculine identity, albeit successfully or not, seek to distance themselves from femaleness and those traits considered to be feminine. The earlier novels, *La Répudiation* (1969) and *Xala* (1973), portray male-female relations that are characterised by a profound chasm, where men are very firmly in control of their wives, daughters, female acquaintances and sisters. In *Xala*, El Hadji has financial and social dominance over his wives, with their polygamous lifestyle serving to bolster and confirm El Hadji's social status. In *La Répudiation*, Si Zoubir regards women with a significant amount of disdain, perceiving them only in terms of his own sexual gratification or social advancement. In turn, his sons Zahir and Rachid also develop ambivalent attitudes towards members of the other sex. Only Ahmed/Zahra and, to a much lesser extent, Mourad in the final two novels examined here engage purposefully with femininity, a fact that renders Ahmed's character in particular as subversive with regard to established gender norms. The portrayal of male-female dynamics in these texts therefore appears to reflect current sociological and anthropological thought. For the most part, relations between the sexes are characterised by ambiguity and unequal power dynamics, and are rarely mutually embracing.

Moreover, notions of womanhood, which are currently undergoing a profound revision in the light of modernisation and increasing globalisation, appear in the chronologically most recent novels, *L'Homme rompu* (1994) and *Partir* (2007), to be causing a considerable amount of anxiety to men, who perceive female incursion into hitherto male domains to be acts of trespassing. Women's appearance in the workplace, for example, is therefore thought of as emasculating, and this is certainly the case in *L'Homme rompu*. The former certainties of men, and traditionally clear-cut gender roles, are disappearing and, in the process, are leaving men unsure of their present role. It is perhaps with this in mind that we may talk most persuasively of a 'crisis' of masculinity, one brought about by significant shifts in culture caused by modernisation and increasing westernisation. For, as the notion of

negotiation suggests, the perennial instability of masculinity means that men are in an eternal cycle of gender performance and therefore may, at different times, appear to approach a critical point, following which their masculinity is reinstated. Therefore, though the premise of 'masculinity in crisis' may serve as an effective sound bite, the truth seems to be that masculinity *per se* is in no more of a crisis now than it always has been. The difference, however, is the changing landscape of the post-colonial, globalised world where modernisation and westernisation are increasingly endorsed for, and accepted by, the developing world. In *Partir* and *L'Homme rompu* in particular, protagonists such as Azel and Haj Hamid seek to enact what they perceive to be their masculine roles, despite the fact that such starkly demarcated roles are no longer desirable or necessary. Indeed, the frequent references to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism suggest that, faced with insecurity and potential symbolic castration, some men choose to revert to ultra-traditional versions of masculinity in order to justify the continued hegemony of men in society, by drawing on extremist readings of religious doctrine in order to do so. Subtly then, these two novels suggest that men are reluctant to adapt to social changes that, by now, render the evolution of masculine roles inevitable, and that in order to counteract the effects of modernisation, some men, indeed, some whole cultures, may appropriate a regressive, rather than progressive, stance towards what constitutes a man in their view.

Furthermore, an emergent neo-colonialism appears explicitly in *Xala*, *Partir* and *L'Homme rompu*. As the global economic machine seeks to influence the economies of less powerful nations, another layer of gendered change is coupled with the unease already experienced by men due to the advent of modernisation and the changing role of women. Neo-colonial influence also appears to emasculate men, not always in explicit ways but also by subordinating men within a nascent global gender hierarchy, as masculinities critics Robert Connell and Michael Kimmel argue.⁴⁶⁸ Therefore, constituting what could be described as a two-pronged attack on the former privileges and entitlements of men, both the phenomena of modernisation and neo-colonialism are provoking a crisis of masculinity, and the tensions of such a 'period of anomie' are clearly visible in the novels examined here.⁴⁶⁹

Perhaps what is most striking of all when we consider the portrayal of masculinity in these novels is the lack of that most universal of human experiences, love. Conspicuous by their absence, true passion and love appear to be impossible for the fictionalised men depicted here, with sexual relations between the sexes characterised solely in terms of the

⁴⁶⁸ Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 37; Kimmel, 'Globalization and its Mal(e)Contents', p. 605.

⁴⁶⁹ Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, p. 97.

consolidation of male ascendancy in the eyes of both women and male peers. For El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye in *Xala* and Si Zoubir in *La Répudiation*, relations with the other sex merely illustrate their own social prestige with little, if any, emotional investment in their wives or mistresses. Likewise, for some of the minor characters in *Partir* and *L'Homme rompu*, love does not exist, or if it does, merely represents a dangerous force requiring a hasty retreat. In fact, the only character to show signs of loving a woman, Azel in *Partir*, fears his feelings and denigrates them as a sign of emotional fragility deemed unsuitable in a man. On romantic passion, Pierre Bourdieu states:

[The] mysterious grip of love [...] blind[s] men through the magic of the attachments of passion, making them forget the obligations linked to their social dignity, bring[s] about a reversal of the relation of domination, a deadly break in the ordinary, normal, natural order which is condemned as an offence against nature that can only reinforce the androcentric mythology.⁴⁷⁰

Therefore, loving a woman (or, indeed, another man) leads to a reciprocity that would signify a 'suspension of power relations', a deeply threatening prospect for the implicit yet ever-present patriarchal regime.⁴⁷¹ Indeed, Bourdieu continues by stating that: 'In that seemingly miraculous truce in which domination seems dominated, or, rather, cancelled out, and male violence stilled [...] there is an end to the strategies of domination'.⁴⁷² The omission of men who would willingly relinquish this masculine domination in these novels therefore suggests a masculinity tightly bound to concepts of power, which no doubt contributes to a generalised discontent and misery. Moreover, it reminds us of Berthold Schoene's claims that certain hallmarks of normative masculinity can resemble certain syndromes in which empathy and emotional intelligence are lacking.⁴⁷³

An intense anxiety permeates each of these five novels to varying degrees. In *Xala*, the malady is explicitly male and destabilises the very basis of masculinity, for the phallus has long been interpreted as the justification and principal instrument of male domination. Afflicted by a sudden and unexplained impotence, El Hadji's carefully carved masculinity quickly crumbles, leaving him emasculated and a figure of ridicule amongst his peers and social inferiors. Nevertheless, El Hadji's sexual infirmity triggers a broader malaise and reveals the extent to which he has been enslaved to societal dictates of what a man should be. He becomes conscious, for the first time, of the vacuity of his interpersonal relationships, which could be read as a subjective awakening of sorts. It also underlines his isolation and

⁴⁷⁰ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, pp. 109–110.

⁴⁷¹ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 110.

⁴⁷² Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 110.

⁴⁷³ Schoene, 'Serial Masculinity', pp. 378–380.

lack of satisfying and mutually beneficial relationships with others, not least with his wives and children. Similarly, in *Partir*, Azel's temporary impotence not only underlines his powerlessness in life more generally, but it also indicates the extent to which certain versions of masculinity are dominated by quests for authority over others and highlights an inability to conceive of relationships based on equality and mutual respect. Ensnared in a masculine hierarchy in which successful manhood depends on subduing others – women and/or other men – Azel's impotence betrays his inferior status as a man on the one hand, but on the other draws the reader's attention to the controlling nature of hegemonic forms of masculinity by emphasising Azel's inability to assert that control.

The overarching motif of a generally questionable emotional well-being is expressed time and again through not only physical ailments, but through emotional, spiritual and mental instabilities also. In different ways, all of the men discussed in this study are very isolated. Their interpersonal relationships leave a lot to be desired. None have good relationships with women, either as friends, family or as lovers, thus signalling a disassociation from the female Other, noted by the likes of Bouhdiba, Gilmore and Najmabadi for instance.⁴⁷⁴ In short, very few of the men in these five novels are happy or contented. Each finds himself entangled in a constant battle of becoming what society thinks he should be, or if he chooses not to engage in complicity, he has to deal with the shame of being 'less of a man' in some way. Most are very unhappy due to their unending and often complex negotiation of normative reference points, and the discontent that pervades each of these novels therefore becomes a symbolic motif of masculinity. Indeed, of the characters examined here, only Si Zoubir maintains a hegemonic gender ideal successfully. All of the others fail to embody the values incumbent upon them, a fact that provokes multiple forms of affliction. Berthold Schoene-Harwood argues that most living men fail to live up to the standards of manhood implicitly conveyed by culture,⁴⁷⁵ a point certainly upheld in these novels, where the failure to adhere to approved manifestations of masculinity leads to various maladies and degrees of malcontentment. Si Zoubir, by contrast, does negotiate his gendered identity successfully, and yet he displays the emotionally retentive and extremely unempathic behavioural traits that Schoene likens to autism and Asperger's syndrome, which suggests that even successfully complicit masculinity is not free from pathology-provoking

⁴⁷⁴ Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, p. 169; Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, p. 50; Najmabadi, 'Reading "Wiles of Women" Stories as Fictions of Masculinity', p. 150.

⁴⁷⁵ Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men*, p. xii.

constraints.⁴⁷⁶ Ironically perhaps, only Ahmed/Zahra, who chooses to subvert masculinity, appears to evade this affliction, a point which poses some radical questions regarding masculinity and gender more generally. It could be argued that this could be read as a call for the dissolution of current mainstream gender formulations altogether.

Nonetheless, the use of malady as well as discontentment as symbolic for the fictional men of this study certainly deflates the proud and commanding image of hegemony, exposing instead its vulnerabilities and frailties. The authors thereby provide an effective challenge to traditional versions of patriarchal masculinity. Indeed, it may be argued that these novels can be taken as a suggestion that there is a need to rewrite masculinity. By illustrating, in the starkest of terms, the negotiation(s) required in order to 'be a man' along socially-sanctioned lines, Sembene, Boudjedra and Ben Jelloun underline clearly the unstable nature of masculinity along with its propensity for constant mutation. Nevertheless, while they may challenge traditional patriarchal variants, at the same time they also problematise the influence of the West on the gender norms of the developing world. The hypothesis that only modernisation and Western models provide future templates of masculinity is rejected. Noting the oppressive and often damaging influence of neo-colonialism, these novels observe the need to revisit gender and call for a revision of what it is to be a man, but notably, along culturally authentic lines.

In Sembene's *Xala*, the sarcastic voice of the narrator provides a radical challenge to the validity of hegemonic manhood in the context of the bourgeois classes of post-independence Senegal of the 1960s and 1970s. The novel's dénouement points to a redemption of sorts, signposting the need for a long-overdue reform of masculinity, which serves as a metaphor for the corrupt and neo-colonial regime. Sembene is highly critical of the influence of Islam on Senegalese culture both in *Xala* and elsewhere, and also of the post-colonial African bourgeois who betrays African independence. Although *Xala* was written in 1970s, and corruption and nepotism may have improved in Senegal in recent decades, the novel could be read as calling for an end to the similar state of affairs that continues in many African states to the present day. By destroying El Hadji's proud manly status so forcefully, Sembene appears to call out to all post-colonial African nations in order to encourage them to develop new models of masculinity that are able to combine cultural authenticity with modernity. By ridiculing and deflating El Hadji and his sort, he calls for an African man fit for the era of independence.

⁴⁷⁶ Schoene, 'Serial Masculinity', p. 378.

Rachid Boudjedra, like Ousmane Sembene, is also highly critical of Islam, and sees Islamic heritage as a cultural system open to widespread abuse, used to justify oppression and based on power dichotomies that prevent men from engaging in egalitarian, healthy relationships, particularly with women. His pathological representation of Si Zoubir, for instance, collapses hegemonic pretensions and exposes the relative paucity of meaningful masculine relationships with spouses, other family members and children. By highlighting such damaging tendencies, Boudjedra also signals the need for a version of masculinity that moves beyond mere power acquisition and self-interest. Ben Jelloun follows both Sembene and Boudjedra in his criticism of masculinist hypocrisies and deflates many of his masculine characters in order to expose and ultimately reject the models of manliness to which they adhere. Curiously, Ben Jelloun's optimism seems to fade as his fictional output progresses, as indeed, we might argue, does that of Sembene. Published in 1985, *L'Enfant de sable* calls for a radical revision of gender by eliminating binaries altogether and developing a potential third space in which gendered behaviour becomes a free-floating and non-structured phenomenon. *L'Enfant de sable* is therefore a radically destabilising novel in terms of gender.

In *L'Homme rompu*, by contrast, the main protagonist Mourad tries to escape the smothering grip of masculinity, but ends up caving in and assimilating himself into the pre-existing gendered order, much to his own detriment. *Partir* explores the damaging effects of neo-colonialism and the consequences of migration on the mental health of men, but also outlines the pull of Islamic extremism and how it is related closely to gender, a key issue in the context of today's global political backdrop, in which fear of the Muslim world has become heightened. What is intriguing about Ben Jelloun's novels in particular is the increasing pessimism with which cultural constructions are viewed, and the former potential for subversion that no longer appears to be possible. Thus, it can be argued that, like Sembene, his later fiction is permeated with scepticism.

In calling for a more engaged man – culturally, politically and morally – the novels analysed here seem to point to a need to resist denigrating women, and to rewrite a masculinity that is not entrenched so thoroughly in superiority over others, or, indeed, in dynamics of power. All authors reject the appropriation of the Islamic religion by extremists and religious fundamentalists as a site of masculine consolidation, criticising the hypocrisy and manipulation of Islamic values rather than the philosophy of Islam itself.⁴⁷⁷ The frequency with which characters possess the honorific Islamic title 'Haj' bears witness to this.

⁴⁷⁷ Although Sembene viewed Islam as but another, earlier form of colonialism.

They highlight the tendency to use Islam in order to uphold masculinism and, although there is little doubt that Islam is fundamentally a patriarchal religion, it is portrayed in several of these novels as justifying social abuses. Furthermore, the authors appear to condemn a global capitalism that subordinates and symbolically castrates populations of the developing world, and they denounce it as no more than a perpetuation of previously explicit, militarised colonialism, and one which suffocates native populations for the gain of the powerful, compounding gender crises at the same time. Above all, however, perhaps the most striking element of the portrayal of masculinity in these novels is that of its consistently problematic relationship with women. In order to consolidate masculine power, these fictional representations depict men who are permanently estranged from their female peers. It is this very relationship that, if revised and improved, can herald a new set of gendered identities that do not chain the individual to the shackles of current societal discourse.

This study has shown that constructions of masculinity are plural and fluid, but also that they are inherently related to dynamics of power at work in society at large. In addition, it has demonstrated that the internal masculine hierarchy is very much at the heart of Francophone African fictional depictions of masculinity. The preceding thematic analysis also suggests that established notions of acceptable gender create a set of virulent pressures on the male individual, and that a generalised malady is a side-effect of the strain of living up to preconceived and psychically incorporated notions of what constitutes being a man. Indeed, this analysis has raised several questions of relevance to future studies in this field. It may well be fruitful to apply this approach to the discussion of other Francophone novels, written by both male and female authors, with a view to ascertaining to what extent fictional masculinity is depicted in terms of negotiation. The portrayal of previously feminised themes such as patriarchy and polygamy also merits exploration in the works of other contemporary authors. Finally, what conclusions may be reached from focusing on masculinity, men and patriarchy, and to what extent can we accept the presumption that men are not as interested in dismantling the patriarchal order as women? This study might offer certain clues, given that in the novels under discussion, the patriarchal order ultimately proves to be so detrimental to men's health and happiness.

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