

# Knowledge, Power and Being: Literature and the Creation of an Archive of “Marginal” Sexualities in the Maghreb

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## Summary

This article analyses the role of literature in creating knowledge and an archive of “marginal” sexuality in the Maghreb. Cultural and religious discourses have functioned in a manner that has not only marginalised non-normative sexuality but, more importantly, rendered them invisible. The burgeoning body of literary works that have dared to break the silence on such sexuality has played a pivotal role in establishing a significant archive of the marginalised lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals in Arab-Muslim Maghreb. Drawing on Jacques Derrida’s postulations on the archive, this article contends that the construction of an archive of “marginal” sexuality involves a questioning and challenging of the existing hegemonic heteronormative archive of sexuality in the Maghreb. This heteronormative archive has of course deliberately omitted non-normative sexualities which have been rendered taboo and unsayable. This article will show that in the quest to remember these marginalised sexualities; the project to construct an archive and knowledge of “marginal” sexualities relies greatly on the French archive of non-normative sexualities. This reliance is however imbued with agency considering how the selected corpus of literary texts also destabilise the orientalist gaze which has constructed Maghrebian sexualities as exotic and “other”.

## Opsomming

Hierdie artikel analiseer die rol wat letterkunde speel in die skep van kennis en ’n argief van “marginale” seksualiteit in die Magreb. Kulturele en godsdienstige diskoerse het non-normatiewe seksualiteit nie net gemarginaliseer nie, maar bowenal onsigbaar gemaak. Die ontluikende korpus van literêre werk wat dit waag om die stilte rondom sodanige seksualiteit te verbreek, het ’n deurslaggewende rol gespeel in die daarstelling van ’n aansienlike argief van die randstandige lewens van lesbiese, gay, biseksuele en transgender (LGBT) mense in Arabies-Islamitiese Magreb. Met Jacques Derrida se postulate as vertrekpunt voer hierdie artikel aan dat die konstruksie van ’n argief van “marginale” seksualiteit beteken dat daar ’n bevraagtekening en uitdaging van die bestaande hegemonese heteronormatiewe argief van seksualiteit in die Magreb moet wees. Hierdie heteronormatiewe argief het opsetlik enige non-normatiewe seksualiteite uitgelaat, wat natuurlik hierdie seksuali-

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teite taboe en onsegbaar gemaak het. Hierdie artikel sal wys dat in die soeke om gestalte te gee aan hierdie seksualiteite, die projek om 'n argief en kennis van "marginale" seksualiteite daar te stel tot 'n groot mate steun op die Franse argief van non-normatiewe seksualiteite. Daar moet egter ag geslaan word op die feit dat die blik op die Ooste gedestabiliseer word in die gekose korpus van literêre tekste wat Noord-Afrikaanse seksualiteite geskets het as eksoties en "anders".

The emphasis moves to fluid and complex archival traces in which the archive cannot provide a direct access to the past, but only a textual refiguring of it. The archive fever is the attempt to return to the lived origin, to the everyday experiences which are the sources of our distorted and refracted memories whose transience and forgetting makes us uneasy (Featherstone 2006: 596).

No archive can be the depository of the entire history of a society, of all that has happened in that society. Through archived documents, we are presented with pieces of time to be assembled, fragments of life to be placed in order, one after the other, in an attempt to formulate a story that acquires its coherence through the ability to craft links between the beginning and the end (Mbembe 2002: 21).

In the contemporary world in which information technologies and social media have taken over all facets of life, even the most mundane of quotidian activities are documented, conserved and shared. This attests to a growing urgency and need to produce archives of personal lives. Paul Vos and Marta Werner rightly explain how the evolution in writing technologies "has altered in still unimaginable ways our relationship to the archive" (1999: ii). Social media has engendered such a generation, collection, sharing and curating of audio-visual and written material which document our personal experiences. From the images shared on Instagram, to short messages posted on Twitter, to status updates displayed on Facebook, modern-day existence cannot be separated from the desire to document and archive lives and lived experiences, in a bid to make better sense of them. As suggested by Shira Tarrant, "social media involves new technologies, blurring of boundaries, and shifts in how people connect" (2016: 121). Social media and the new technologies thus allow for a rethinking of how bodies are constructed and relate to each other sexually and otherwise.

Irving Velody writes that "as the backdrop to all scholarly research stands the archive" (1998: 1). The archive "appeals to ultimate truth, adequacy and plausibility in the work of the humanities and social sciences rest on archival presuppositions" (Velody 1998: 1). French scholar and theorist Jacques Derrida also attests to the importance of the archive stating that "there is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Effective democratisation can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution and its interpretation" (1995: 11). Derrida implies here that there are power dynamics at play in the structuring and understanding of the archive. These power dynamics certainly decide what should be included and excluded from the archive.

The question however arises as to how to archive that which has not only been marginalised but also rendered non-existent, invisible and taboo. This question arises when faced with “marginal” sexualities<sup>1</sup> in the Maghreb (especially in Morocco and Tunisia) where such sexual dispositions exist only as minatory shadows in the side-lines of the heteronormative national psyche. Moreover, although “marginal” sexualities are prevalent in Arab-Muslim Maghreb, their existence continues to be shrouded in secrecy and denial. How then is it even possible to begin to imagine the creation of an archive that will document not just the trials of “marginal” sexualities in these societies but also make it possible to put into action a “system of discursivity” (Foucault 1972: 129) that allows for the establishment of what is known and what can be said about sexual marginality. In spite of the fact that “queer studies” is a rapidly expanding field of scholarship, it is still very much in its embryonic stages in relation to the Maghreb region, and indeed the rest of Africa. Notwithstanding the solid scholarship on these non-normative sexualities in fields such as sociology, sexology and anthropology, there is a continued dearth of scholarship on the role of literature in the creation of an archive of “marginal” sexuality.

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1. The term queer is now generally used to refer to all non-normative sexual orientations. I however concede that the term is infused with Western history and it would be somewhat difficult if not problematic to employ the term queer in reference to North African sexualities. Jarrod Hayes in his book *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb*, uses the terms “sexual dissidence”, “minority sexuality” and “marginal sexuality” to make reference to sexual dispositions that stray from heteronormativity. Hayes uses the terms in inverted commas in a bid to capture the difficulty of finding or using the correct terms in talking about such sexualities. This question of nomenclature is certainly pivotal in referring to non-normative sexualities in North Africa. Thomas Spear clarifies that “one must exercise caution to not apply our notions of homosexuality to a very different social context” (1998: 198). Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer also point out that “in the societies of Muslim North Africa and Southwest Asia, male-male sexuality plays an important role. But in these societies there are no “homosexuals” – there is no word for “homosexuality” – the concept is completely unfamiliar. There are no heterosexuals either” (1992: 5). Spear concludes that “it is, in fact, rather odd to apply the term “homosexuality” (with attendant notions of homo-positive gays or even “queers” of the West) to a North African context” (1998: 197). I nonetheless accept the fact that queer, as a theory and critical praxis is important in the manner in which it sets out to “dislodge systems and structures from their comfortable niches” (Schehr 30). In this article, I make use of the term queer in inverted commas aware of the difficulty inherent in using Western terminology in describing non-Western phenomena. My use of the term acknowledges queer as a critical praxis destabilises traditional forms of gender and sexuality by exposing the vast array of alternative modes of being and experiencing sexuality and gender.

The creation of an archive of non-normative sexuality is of particular strategic importance in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, which marked a historic time when Arab-Muslims spoke up and stood up against tyranny in defence of their human rights. Vincent Durac asserts that the protests for the “end of sclerotic and gerontocratic regimes, and radical reform of economic and political systems” were vital in unsettling “received wisdom concerning our opposition to long-established authoritarian regimes” (2013: 175). The main objective of such destabilisation was to usher in political change which would consequently bring about economic and social reforms. The Arab Spring has undoubtedly made debate of LGBT issues more disputed by opening up the public space (Kreps 2012; Needham 2013). An archive of “marginal” sexuality will thus allow for a bringing together of often disparate and opposing perspectives and ultimately lead to a new-found understanding and perception of these forms of sexuality.

It cannot be denied that the perception and construction of “marginal” sexualities, even in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, continues to be a complex domain in which LGBT individuals remain despised and loathed in Arab-Muslim communities of the Maghreb. Although the Arab Spring was not largely driven by issues affecting sexual minorities, it is worth pointing out one of its main objectives was the emancipation of all marginalised Arabs. Brian Whitaker explains that LGBT individuals are “people whose sexuality does not fit into the norm and have no legal rights; they are condemned to a life of secrecy, fearing exposure and sometimes blackmail” (2006: 10). The Arab Spring was an opportune moment to deal with these issues, but the aftermath of these revolts shows that little has changed in as far as the empowering and recognition of LGBT individuals is concerned. In a 2013 report on Algeria, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada echoed similar sentiments, attesting that the question of “sexual minorities is very sensitive and not discussed in the press. It is hard to live as a homosexual in Algeria, and those who are, generally act very discreetly” (2013). The report also maintains that “homosexuals who do not conceal their sexual orientation risk verbal harassment” (2013). Homosexuals and any individuals with sexualities which are deemed “deviant” thus cannot openly come out about their sexual orientation for fear of persecution and possible arrest. Various laws prohibit same-sex activities in Morocco and Tunisia. Such legislation essentially constructs LGBT individuals as criminals. Religious dogma has fortified this criminalisation of LGBT individuals by describing “marginal” sexualities as unnatural, deviant and unholy.

I posit that literature plays a pivotal role in the creation of an archive of “marginal” sexualities in the Maghreb. The literary space, unlike the actual countries of the Maghreb, is not closed off. There is veritable contrast and friction between the “real” and “fictive” world. It is interesting to note that the last decade or so has seen the burgeoning of a body of “queer” literary

works in the Maghreb. Writers such as Abdellah Taïa, Rachid O. and Eyet-Chékib Djaziri<sup>2</sup> have composed novels that broach a topic that has been, and continues to be, taboo and contentious in the Arab world: marginalised desire and sexuality. These openly “queer” writers are widely regarded as pioneering contemporary Maghrebian writers who have candidly and openly romanticised their own (homo)sexual experiences in the conservative and pious societies in which they grew up. The outing of “marginal” sexuality in their literary oeuvre is important in creating an archive of “marginal” sexuality and desire in this region of Africa. Their autofictional novels offer a candid and unassuming take on the lives of “queer” protagonists who have to struggle and grapple with the friction between their culture and religion and the pressing desire to assume their “queer” identity.

I begin by offering a brief overview of the perception of homosexuality in the Maghreb. Thereafter, I propose to analyse the manner in which self-writing (or writing the marginalised subject into being) by the aforementioned writers, is an integral element in the creation of an archive of “marginal” sexuality in the Maghreb. Ultimately, I will consider the methodological challenges that involve the use of literature in the construction of an archive of “marginal” sexuality. Given the yawning gap in scholarship on the construction of an archive of “marginal” sexuality in the Maghreb which as a result has side-lined the importance of literary works, I affirm that interest in the role played by literary works is not only overdue but indeed worthwhile in “marginal” opening up the discursive space on non-normative sexualities in this region of Africa.

Jarrod Hayes explains that although “marginal” sexualities are prevalent in the Maghreb, they are neither openly recognised nor overtly discussed. Hayes further points out that “everyone knows about it and admits it. But speaking about them remains intolerable. The weight of sexual taboo is without doubt the most insurmountable even at the discursive level” (2000: 8). In spite of the prevalence of these so-called “marginal” sexualities in the

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2. These three writers are part of a growing canon of North African writers who fictionalise their lived experiences. The Franco-Tunisian Eyet-Chékib Djaziri, the oldest of the three, was born in 1957 to a French mother and Tunisian father. His autofictional novels *Un poisson sur la balançoire* (1997) and *Une promesse de douleur est de sang* (1998) detail the protagonist’s awakening to his homosexuality in a homophobic Tunisian society of the 1980s. Rachid O. from Morocco is considered the first Maghrebian writer to openly represent “marginal” sexuality in a positive light. To date he has written five novels which chronicle his sexual experiences as a boy. His compatriot Abdellah Taïa has been the most mediated of the three writers. He is also the first to come out through his novels. To date, he has written six novels which offer different perspectives on “marginal” sexuality in Morocco. Four of these novels narrate his own personal experiences as a homosexual growing up in a homophobic Arab-Muslim society which is deeply embedded in religious and cultural practices.

Maghreb, it is important to note that the combined effect of culture and religion make it next to impossible for individuals embodying non-normative sexual and gender identities to fully and openly embrace and express their identities. As such, a pact of pervasive silence and stumbling ignorance “is kept so as to give the illusion that these societies are stable and are not havens of any forms of deviation: behavioural, sexual and otherwise” (Ncube 2014b: 89). Moreover, “in as much as alternative sexualities exist, because of the intimate and private nature of sex and sexuality, their open discussion [...] remains an insuperable challenge” (Ncube 2013: 67).

It is also important to explain the vastly contentious consideration of “marginal” sexualities in the Arab-Muslim societies of the Maghreb. In her analysis of male homosexuality, Nicole Kligerman attests that an Arab-Muslim man can engage in same sex sexual practices provided that he is the penetrator (2007: 54). In fact, culturally, the social standing and stature of the penetrator is not compromised in any way whatsoever. The penetrator can openly show off about his sexual conquest over other men. However, scorn and loathing are directed at the passive men who allow themselves to be penetrated. Penetration<sup>3</sup> is equated to feminisation and this in itself implies that the penetrated man is regarded as less of a man. Abdessamad Dialmy and Allen J. Uhlmann explain in this regard that “the Arab epistemology of sexuality reduces sexual activity to penetration, this act becomes a fundamental condition for the construction and empowerment of the Arab male ego and for securing his mental health” (2005: 19). What is ostensibly apparent in this regard is that in the predominantly Arab-Muslim societies of the Maghreb, the prevailing perception is that homosexuality is not an identity as is the case in the West. Homosexuality is reduced in this instance to a simple act that does not identify the participants as exclusively homosexual. This of course fits perfectly into existing scholarship which argues that sexuality and gender are constructed, fluid performances rather than stable or essential identities. Ncube elucidates in this line of thought that there is an obvious “gap between ‘doing’ and ‘being’, i.e. between performance and identity” (2014a: 482). It is therefore against such a multifaceted and elaborate historical and cultural background, characterised

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3. The question of penetration certainly highlights the gendered nature of the construction and conceptions of sexuality in the Maghreb. Penetration frames the penetrated as less than a man and closer to a woman. Ncube, in his analysis of “queer virginity” in the Maghreb attests that in the societies of the Maghreb, “available gender and sexual roles are highly masculinised and masculinising, or if one is penetrated, feminising” (2016: 156). Ncube concludes that “the emergence of alternative modes of being” (2016: 148) has led to the reconsideration and undermining of traditional forms of gender and sexuality. As such, the creation of the archive of “marginal” sexuality has to be seen as been founded as a gendered enterprise.

by silence and denial, that current attitudes and perceptions of “marginal” sexualities in the Maghreb are constructed.

As earlier mentioned, the novels of Abdellah Taïa, Rachid O. and Eyet-Chékib Djaziri propose a fictionalisation of the lived experiences of the writers. Although not autobiographical, in the strictest sense of the term, these novels depict personal and intimate ordeals that the writers went through as they grappled with their sexual identities. I argue that these autofictions are central in revealing marginalised narratives which had hitherto either been misrepresented or not accorded and afforded space within the heavily censored and controlled public space. In an affected epistolary article entitled “Homosexuality Explained to My Mother” (2009), Abdellah Taïa discloses that writing allows him to bring into being and negotiate his sexual identity:

I can't. I exist in writing. That's to say I have a certain responsibility towards myself and towards the society I come from. I am permanently questioning. A book, it goes without saying, interrogates the world, society.

(2009)

For Taïa, writing the self is closely tied to the faithful and plausible capturing of the tumultuous functioning of society. It is in this plausible representation of society that literature can fame itself as a possible element that can help in the construction of an archive of “marginal” sexuality. Some scholars, such as Allan Pasco, have however been quick to point out that “art is regularly exploited as cultural artefact is, of course not to say that it should be” (2004: 373). Pasco further cautions that “such use of literature should be avoided, since art is not fact, and one should not confuse history with fantasy” (2004: 373). I contend nonetheless that literature can be a reliable tool to understanding general historical backgrounds, personal histories, preconceptions, assumptions, states of mind and other personal nuanced attitudes that might not be easily captured by official historical documents. It was in this line of thought that Lucien Febvre called for an analysis of literary texts which according to him, are “of inestimable value, on the condition naturally that we observe the same critical precautions in the manipulation of literary texts as in the study and use of figurative arts” (1953: 234).

In his analysis of Eyet-Chékib Djaziri and his literary oeuvre, Eric Levéel explains that:

Eyet pense que l'on doit se livrer dans ses écrits, la neutralité est difficile et bien sûr la sexualité de l'écrivain perce malgré tout même si elle n'est pas le trait principal de son acte d'écriture. L'écriture doit être aussi un témoignage. Les lecteurs ne s'y sont pas trompés et ont su reconnaître l'accent de vérité qui parcourt ce premier livre et sa suite Une promesse de douleur et de sang. L'indécence de Sofïène est également révélatrice d'une certaine révolution

sexuelle qui s'est produite en Tunisie dans les années soixante-dix principalement dans la classe moyenne et la bourgeoisie

(2005: 88)

[Eyet thinks that one should open up through their writings, neutrality is difficult and of course the writer's sexuality still filters through even if it is not the main feature of his act of writing. Writing should also be a form of testimony. Readers do not make mistakes and they recognise the hint of truth that runs through this first book and its sequel *Une promesse de douleur et de sang*. Sofène's indecency is also indicative of a certain sexual revolution that occurred in Tunisia in the seventies mainly in the middle-class and the bourgeoisie].<sup>4</sup>

Levéel reveals above that there is an element of "truth" which can be found in Djaziri's novels. There are palpable similarities between what is portrayed in the novels and what happens (or has happened) in the real world. Such a truthful representation of real lived experiences is what Marien Gouyon terms "ethnography of oneself" (2013: 186). She explains in this respect:

L'ethnographie de soi-même est un type d'écriture qui suit une logique d'introspection tout en obéissant aux codes de l'ethnographie: la désarticulation du quotidien observé et le remodelage thématique destiné à créer une connaissance. Au cœur de ce processus, l'écriture a tout à la fois un rôle, un lectorat et une méthode. Dans une plus grande mesure que l'autobiographie, 'l'ethnologie de soi-même' témoigne d'une époque, d'un contexte social et d'une expérience de vie.

(2013: 186-187)

[Ethnography of oneself is a type of writing that follows a logical introspection whilst respecting the codes of ethnography: disarticulation of observed daily life and thematic remodelling intended to create knowledge. At the heart of this process, writing at once has a role, a readership and a method. To a greater extent than autobiography, "anthropology of oneself" reproduces an era, a social context and a life experience].

Through ethnography of themselves, writers like Abdellah Taïa, Rachid O. and Eyet-Chékib Djaziri are able to create literary universes which mirror the vicissitudes of everyday life in the communities in which they grow up and live. Abdellah Taïa suggests that the universe of the novels is a "*espace réel, mental, pour oser se redéfinir, dire tout, révéler tout et, un jour, écrire tout. Même l'amour interdit. L'écrire avec un nouveau nom. Un nom digne. Un poème*" (2008: 110) [real space, mental, which allow to dare to redefine oneself, to say everything, to reveal everything and one day write everything. Even forbidden love. Write it with a new name. A worthy name. A poem]. For Taïa, the literary space of his novels allows him to represent

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4. This and other translations in this article are my own.



what is forbidden in the real world. He is able to poeticise and offer a different perspective on “marginal” sexuality. Rachid O., through the words of his protagonist, also clarifies that “*je voudrais remettre quelque chose en place: je construis malgré moi mon image à vos yeux, ne soyez pas dupes d’aucun de mes livres*” (2003: 25) [I would like to put something in place: in spite of myself, I construct an image of myself in front of your eyes, let not any of my books fool you]. O. cautions his readers that the image he proposes of himself through his novels is an honest representation. He further cautions that the reader needs to be aware of this reality. Benoît Pivert spells out in this respect that the writing by writers such as Taïa, O. and Djaziri “*témoigne, reflète, et fait acte de mémoire pour garder vivant le quotidien d’une communauté qui n’a pas toujours eu accès à la parole et à la visibilité*” (2009: 69) [testifies, reflects, and is an act of memory to keep alive the daily lives of a community that has not always had access to speech and visibility]. Pasco also agrees that:

Given that all these texts occur in synchronic and diachronic relationship with other sociological phenomena and that they form a complex of interlocking elements reflecting the world of the day, significant extensions will exist to and from other works of literature and will key some aspect of the larger field of society. Salient elements will form extensions that connect similar contexts in other of the author’s creations and in those of other writers. As readers make the conceptual journey from element, to textual context, to other contexts, to society, and back, new insights and discoveries may occur. At some point, the recurrent patterns should be gathered together and considered as a constellation that will almost certainly configure either a particular social reality or a reaction to that reality. The larger the sample, the better, though one must remain open to whatever variant meanings exist.  
(2004: 385)

It can thus be concluded that there exists a strong relationship between the world of the novels and the contexts from which these novels originate. I contend that the ethnography of the self as well as the act of sincerely and openly portraying “marginal” sexuality is read as pivotal in the initiation of a reparative archival project that reads into and beyond the texts themselves. Such an undertaking is necessary, if not overdue, so as to “exhume” (in the Foucauldian sense of the term) the histories and discourses of “marginal” sexuality that have hitherto been marginalised, stifled as well as under and misrepresented by dominant heteropatriarchal fiat.

Having thus established that there is a close connection between the literary worlds that are portrayed in the novels of writers like Taïa, O. and Djaziri and actual personal experiences, and the need to archive and document these experiences, the problem arises where this archival project demands a method. This pressing and indeed unyielding call for method in turn requires a process of systematising, arranging, structuring and

compelling some sort of order to a pool of narratives which are in various states of use and disuse. However, in the face of such a daunting exercise, a question is persistently posed: what is more important, the method or actual documentation of the marginalised existences and experiences? Although coming up with a method might seem unimportant, I argue that as long as there is a porous theoretical method, any attempt to create an archive of “marginal” sexuality will remain incoherent and incomplete.

In devising a method to create an archive of “marginal” sexuality, it is initially important to understand that an archive is not simply a depository or collection of documents, cultural artefacts and knowledge. In fact, an archive, in the Derridian sense of the term, refers to any discourse that strives to de/scribe the past, the present as well as the future through a preservation of knowledge of a social being or group of beings. In his seminal article “Archive Fever”, Derrida bases his theory of the archive on Freudian psychoanalytic supposition of the existence of two conflicting forces that embody human existence: the death drive and the conservation drive (Thanatos and Eros). He explains that the conservation drive is concerned with pleasure and safeguarding of a certain type of being. On the other hand, the death drive is characterised by a primal impulse toward violence, aggression and destruction (1995: 13). I hypothesise that the “death drive” has been holding sway in the Maghreb in as far as the production and dissemination of knowledge on “marginal” sexuality is concerned. This death drive has made it problematic to reflect upon literary works and other cultural forms with judicious hermeneutic openness and greater theoretical engagement. Moreover, this drive has in so doing been involved in not just determining what deserves to be disseminated in the mainstream public sphere but also in stifling any attempt at creating an archive of “marginal” sexuality because it “not only incites forgetfulness, amnesia, the annihilation of memory ... but also ... the eradication of the archive, consignment, the documentary or monumental apparatus” (1995: 11). A certain deliberate collective forgetfulness has characterised the manner in which Arab-Muslim societies of the Maghreb have viewed “marginal” sexuality. Although prevalent in these societies, there is deliberate lack of acknowledgement of the presence of marginalised sexualities. On the other hand, the project to create an archive of “marginal” sexuality is motivated by the “conservation drive” as it attempts to rehabilitate and re/construct an archive of non-normative sexuality in the Arab-Muslim societies as depicted in the novels of Rachid O., Abdellah Taïa and Eyet-Chékib Djaziri. The “conservation drive” also makes it possible to interrogate the “mechanics of power” (Foucault 1980: 116) which decide what narratives can and should be archived. These mechanics of power give authority and visibility to certain narratives whilst marginalising and banishing others into convenient oblivion. The “conservation drive” thus

seeks to question the production and dissemination of knowledge, of what is known and how it should be known.

In considering the manner in which the works of the aforementioned writers are pivotal in creating an archive of non-normative sexuality, it is indispensable to highlight the fact that these writers also frame and forge themselves in both the Maghreb and France. To begin with, they inscribe themselves alongside pioneering Maghrebian works such as Mohamed Choukri's *Le pain nu* (1980) and Djalil Djellad's *Cet Arabe qui t'excite* (2000) in the manner in which they offer an emancipatory, self-assured, less-apprehensive view of "marginal" sexuality. Abdellah Taïa, Rachid O. and Eyet-Chékib however differ from preceding writers who had broached non-normative sexuality in that, as openly "queer" authors, they offer a different perspective to that offered by previous heterosexual writers. Such diametrically opposed perspectives on "marginal" sexuality are imperative in offering a holistic archive of such sexualities.<sup>5</sup> Before the emergence of writers such as Taïa, the archive of "marginal" sexuality had been dominated by perspectives that viewed such non-normative sexualities in a negative light. These views had presented "marginal" sexualities as sickness and morally corrupt practices.

In addition to forging a place for themselves in the Maghrebian literary archive of "marginal" sexualities, the novels of the said writers concurrently position themselves in the elaborate French archive of "queer" literature which has stretched from the early twentieth century when Marcel Proust wrote *À la recherche du temps perdu* right to the contemporary works of writers such as Renaud Camus and Cyril Collard. Like the French writers, the Maghrebian "queer" writers put to use "imagery and narratives related to the sexual 'outlaw' or 'dissident' and [...] initiate the creation of a public discursive space where alternative models" (Provencher 2007: 55) of identity and sexuality can be articulated and negotiated. However, in taking into account this relationship with the French archive of "queer" literature, there is need to be wary of the potential orientalist gaze which might impose itself on the "marginal" sexuality archival project in the Maghreb. This is particularly taking into account that there exists a rich body of literary works by the French that has depicted "marginal" sexuality in the Maghreb. The novels of renowned writers like Gustave Flaubert, André Gide, Henry de Montherlant and Jean Genet have offered exoticised bodies of Arab-Muslims of the Maghreb. In this regard, Robert Aldrich maintains that the North African colonies offered Europeans numerous possibilities of coming

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5. Although I concentrate on non-normative sexualities of men, I am cognisant of the literary work of writers like Nina Bouraoui who concentrates on lesbianism. The elision of female non-normative sexualities does not in any way imply that non-normative sexualities of men are representative of all such sexualities.

into contact with homoerotic and homosexual experiences, away from the rigours of religious dogma (2003: 3).

An examination of the creation of an archive of “marginal” sexuality would be incomplete without an examination of power. It cannot be argued that the archive mirrors experiences as observed and perceived by the archivist. It is equally incontestable that nation-states have to a large extent had hegemony over what is included or excluded from national archives and narratives. According to James C. Scott:

Builders of the modern nation-state do not merely describe, observe, and map; they strive to shape a people and landscape that will fit their techniques of observation ... there are virtually no other facts for the state than those that are contained in documents.

(1998: 82-83)

Achille Mbembe also concurs as he specifies that the “archive, therefore, is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and of selection, which, in the end, results in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents and the refusal of that status to others, thereby judged ‘unarchivable’” (2002: 20). Those who hold power in societies also have the power to unilaterally decide what narratives and documents deserve to be archived and which do not. I argue in respect of the novels of Abdellah Taïa, Rachid O. and Eyet-Chékib Djaziri that they bring to light narratives which had not been accorded a place and acknowledged within the national archive, particularly in relation to sexuality. The novels of these writers even though they feed into and question the existing archive of sexuality in the Maghreb, also create an alternative archive which runs parallel to the hegemonic archive. This alternative and parallel archive creates new knowledge and new forms of knowing what has hitherto been unarchived and regarded as not worthy of being archived. In destabilising the status quo and the power structures in place, this alternative archive which is cast around the intimacies of sexuality attempts to make visible and known that which is normally regarded as private. As such, “in the absence of institutionalised documentation or in opposition to official histories, memory becomes a valuable historical resource, and ephemeral and personal collections of objects stand alongside the documents of the dominant culture in order to offer alternative modes of knowledge” (Cvetkovich 2003: 8). This parallel archive offers decentred and decentering perspectives and thus subverts the process of archival exclusion that is perpetuated by official national histories. This, wittingly or unwittingly, involves an adjustment of the limits of the dominant official histories by filling the yawning gaps that might exist in these histories. These gaps are filled by rehabilitating and making an effort to trace and uncover the voices of the muzzled “marginal” sexualities within the archive produced by the Arab-Muslim societies of the Maghreb.

In conclusion, it is my distinct observation that a lot of research still needs to be carried out on the subject of creating an archive of “marginal” sexuality in the Maghreb. If successfully carried out, such an archival project may mark, in archetypally paradigmatic sense, a significant contribution to the growth of scholarship on sexuality in the Maghreb. As an assemblage of divergent perspectives, theories and research methods, a model of archive creation will certainly lead to better comprehension of “marginal” sexuality in the Maghreb which continues to be marginalised by dominant and official discourses on gender and sexuality in this region. The way in which archives and knowledge are produced and used (or not used) is related to power. This power, as I have shown, is fundamentally gendered. As such, this analysis has called for greater reference to gender as structuring all understandings not just of gender but more importantly of the construction of an archive of non-normative sexual identities. The creation of an archive of “marginal” sexuality offers a counter narrative of otherness and demands new understandings, discourses and modalities of making sense of knowledge and the knowable. Such an endeavour will allow for the configuration of what Foucault calls “a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects” (1980: 117). I conclude with the words of Derrida who describes the great importance that must be placed on archival projects:

It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive .... It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.

(1995: 57)

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