

RESPONSE

‘On the fringes of society’ and ‘out of the closet’: a response to ‘Sexual/Textual Politics’

Gibson Ncube’s ‘Sexual/Textual Politics: Rethinking gender and sexuality in gay Moroccan literature’ focuses on an emerging body of gay literature that is developing within the larger framework of Moroccan literature. Ncube attempts to illustrate how the contemporary narratives of Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa portray the quotidian experiences of minority sexualities who strive to exist in the hegemonic heteropatriarchies of Moroccan societies. These narratives challenge and destabilise the heteronormative ideals of Arab-Muslim communities and endeavour to offer alternative ways of thinking about marginalised sexualities in the public space. This analysis draws on the feminist underpinnings of Maria Pia Lara to argue that private gay narratives have the potential to re-imagine the public domain. Given the persistent rise of homophobic tendencies and the backlash against queer sexualities in Morocco, the Maghreb and the rest of the continent, this article is well-timed. It attempts to change perceptions in social thought by drawing attention to heterogeneous constructions of sexual identity in Morocco. This is an extremely relevant topic; however, one needs to point out some of the shortcomings intrinsic to this argument.

Although the article suggests that the narratives of Rachid O. and Abdellah Taïa are significant, it is sketchy in regard to the biographical information of the two authors; there is no real sense of the literary works the authors have published, and the analysis of the selected texts does not provide any plot summaries or engage critically with the narratives. The author of the article assumes that the reader is familiar with these narratives and in the process misses the opportunity to fully contextualise these contemporary authors and their burgeoning body of work. For example, these are some of the questions that the article raises: What kinds of intersections are there with authors such as Tahar Ben Jelloun and Fatima Mernissi who also explore the construction of sexuality and gender identity? How do the narratives of O. and Taïa relate to the broader Moroccan literary corpus? Which other writers deal with taboo and unspeakable sexual issues in Arab-Muslim, Moroccan and Maghreb communities? The article deliberately chooses to focus on the aesthetic literary features of the novels. Yet, it does not explore how these specific techniques that blend prose and poetry, the written and spoken word draw on other forms of oral and literary traditions from Morocco. Are these two authors continuing an ancient tradition, but infusing it with new meanings? Or is it suggesting that O. and Taïa are creating new literary forms? If so, how would these new literary forms in themselves contribute to reconfiguring the public domain?

Ncube attempts to problematise the issue of accessibility in relation to language and availability, and in the process raises even more questions, how are these narratives going to change perceptions in the Moroccan public sphere, if they are inaccessible to the target audience who seem to speak and read Arabic? The article correctly points out that O. and Taïa are bound to fall into the trap of focusing on an ‘elite’ audience. However, there are other ways of making these novels accessible to the ‘poor large country of illiterates’