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Denis M. Provencher and Siham Bouamer, eds., *Abdellah Taïa's Queer Migrations: Non-places, Affect, and Temporalities*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021. Viii + 302 pp. Notes, bibliographies, and index. \$120.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781793644862; \$45.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781793644879.

Review by Jarrod Hayes, Monash University.

Abdellah Taïa's Queer Migrations: Non-places, Affect, and Temporalities, edited by Denis M. Provencher and Siham Bouamer, assembles ten very well-researched scholarly chapters on the author named in its title, along with a short work by him and its English translation. As the authors claim, Abdellah Taïa is “the first or one of the first ‘openly gay’ or ‘openly queer’ Moroccan writers” (p. 12).^[1] Author of almost ten novels or novel-like texts at the time of this collection’s publication (one of which he adapted into a film), Taïa has elicited a great deal of interest in queer Maghrebian studies of late. As a sign of this interest, *Abdellah Taïa's Queer Migrations* follows at least three other works devoted solely to Taïa; it is preceded in 2020 by two books in French ^[2] and, in 2021, one in English,^[3] the first two of which Provencher and Bouamer engage with in spite of the brief duration separating their dates of publication. The proximity of these dates alone underscores the timeliness of Provencher and Bouamer’s collection.

As this is the second work on Taïa in English, it is worth briefly discussing the first, Tina Dransfeldt Christensen’s single-authored *Writing Queer Identities in Morocco: Abdellah Taïa and Moroccan Committed Literature*. Christensen begins with a discussion of Taïa’s coming-out interview in the Moroccan press to establish him not just as the author of a corpus of texts, but also as a social phenomenon. Christensen then refuses the commonplace notion that Taïa is somehow exceptional in his treatment of sexuality by establishing connections between Taïa’s work and a number of other important trends in the history of Moroccan literature in French. These include the poet and activist Adbellatif Laâbi through the journal he played a leading role in, *Souffles*; the first Moroccan novel in French to represent MSM, Driss Chraïbi’s 1954 *Le passé simple*; and Abdelkebir Khatibi’s theoretical work, which allows her to incorporate this writer’s early discussions of sexuality into her readings of Taïa. As this book was published in the same year as *Abdellah Taïa's Queer Migrations*, it is not cited by Provencher and Bouamer, who nonetheless engage with Christensen’s earlier articles.

If Christensen looks outward from Taïa to think through the Moroccanness of his œuvre, Provencher and Bouamer situate him within the recent fields of queer migration and diaspora studies as well as queer theory more generally. Specifically, they suggest that he might be

productively read against the grain of *successful* queer migration (which would align his coming out with a move to metropolitan France), against the “overly rehearsed interpretation, in the scholarship at times, of Taïa’s path to Europe as a migration of a gay man and a modern influence by Western values of urban life, commercialism, conspicuous consumption, ‘pride’ and liberation, and reverse sexual tourism” (p. 12). Indeed, their “volume favors the recognition of failure in migrancy and dismantles expectations of a utopic reconciliation between home, host country, and queer subjectivities. [Their] analysis of Taïa’s work, for that reason, aims to explore queer migrancy not only beyond geographical borders, but also beyond the bounds imposed by fixed socio-historical spaces” (p. 17). One essay in particular, highlights the possibilities regarding Taïa as a thinker of queer migration: Olivier Le Blond’s “Sexual Fluidity and Movements in Abdellah Taïa’s *L’armée du salut*: The Birth of a Queer Moroccan Francophone Identity.” Key words in this chapter include *sexual fluidity*, and indeed Le Blond considers “same-sex male sexualities as movement” (p. 99), thereby carrying forward work done by the likes of Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú Jr. and giving full meaning to their title *Queer Migrations*.^[4] Furthermore, in addition to sexuality, gender as well—in this case, masculinity—becomes more fluid in the movements Le Blond chronicles in Taïa’s work. Finally, like Bouamer’s and Thomas Muzart’s essays discussed below, Le Blond’s contribution engages with the important work of Mehammed Amadeus Mack, whose 2017 *Sexagon: Muslims, France, and the Sexualization of National Culture* works at and through the intersection between Beur studies, French postcolonial studies, and queer and gender studies.^[5] With Taïa figuring prominently among this study’s key cultural texts, Mack argues that understanding contemporary controversies in France and what they say about French identity, society, and culture requires making “marginal” sexualities central to cultural analysis.

The chapters of *Abdellah Taïa’s Queer Migrations* are organized into three thematic parts—“On Place and Non-place,” “Affective Migration,” and “Postcolonial Temporalities”—plus a fourth, “New Directions and Conclusions,” which includes the less traditionally academic of the collection’s pieces. If the first of these parts considers the where of migration, the second explores the subjective experience it entails, and the third considers the when of migration. Put slightly differently, part one is about movement, part two feeling, part three time. Together, the collection’s four parts combine close readings of individual works and thematic approaches to his œuvre more broadly to provide extensive coverage of his work, which makes the essays contained therein a valuable resource for Taïa scholars as well as those approaching his work for the first time, such as teachers considering the inclusion of one of the very readable and often relatively brief works by Taïa in their syllabi. In discussing Taïa’s texts in relation to the fields mentioned above, it also provides a coherent account of the field of Taïa studies in the context of both a broader queer French studies and queer postcolonial studies. It is thus appropriate that the collection be published by Lexington Books in their series “After the Empire: The Francophone World and Postcolonial France,” edited by Valérie K. Orlando, a series that has been providing considerable contributions to Francophone studies in recent years through its extensive publication list.

The chapters by the collection’s editors contribute significantly to its strengths. Provencher comes to this project with an already-established record in both queer Maghrebian studies and Taïa studies more specifically. Published in 2017, like Mack’s aforementioned study, Provencher’s *Queer Maghrebi French: Language, Temporalities, Transfigurations* also includes an entire chapter on Taïa as one of its key cultural figures.^[6] That two book-length studies in queer Maghrebian studies were published the same year and that both devote a considerable

portion of their reflections to Taïa attest to Taïa's increased visibility within this field over the past five years. Provencher's single-authored contribution to *Abdellah Taïa's Queer Migrations* is its ninth chapter, "Abdellah Taïa's *Transfilial* Mythmaking and Unfaithful Realms of Memory." Provencher first developed this essay's title notion, transfiliation, in relation to a number of the key cultural figures considered in *Queer Maghrebi French*. He has since taken up the concept again in relation to Taïa in two book chapters.[7] Already in *Queer Maghrebi French*, he defines transfiliation as "the creation of filial ties through subversive and transgressive artistic and cultural productions, and the transmission of those models across genres and generations of producers and consumers, and across transnational networks of communication." [8] This definition links the *trans-* in *transfilial* to transgression, transmission, and the transnational. The crossing named by the *trans-* in *transfilial* thus involves time as well as space, and this concept offers "ways to thrive, produce, and 'reproduce' their ideas and 'offspring' across traditional and contemporary spaces." [9] Provencher comes back to transfiliation in his chapter for *Abdellah Taïa's Queer Migrations* as a means to consider references to cinema and other writers in multiple works by Taïa, references that establish a transfilial relation between Taïa and the cultural forebears he chooses for himself. He is then able to relate transfiliation to several interesting concepts that have emerged recently in French postcolonial studies: after Pierre Nora, postcolonial sites of memory; and after Roland Barthes, postcolonial mythologies.[10] By addressing postcolonial sites of memory, Taïa is able, according to Provencher, to decolonize them and tear down French cultural myths with colonial implications.

Bouamer, as well, comes to the collection having written an essay on Taïa, "De 'River of No Return' à 'Trouble of the World': Parcours initiatique musical dans *Infidèles* (2012) d'Abdellah Taïa." [11] Interestingly, the primary text of this article is the same as the one considered in one of Provencher's book chapters ("Je suis terroriste"). One may thus discern a dialogue between the two editors that begun before this particular collaboration. Bouamer's contribution to *Abdellah Taïa's Queer Migrations*, "He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not: Cruel Optimism in Abdellah Taïa's *L'armée du Salut*," whose title says it all, focuses on the film version of its primary text. Bouamer's key theoretical intertext here is Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*, whose title names the concept of an impossible hope encouraged by dominant discourses, such as that of the so-called American dream.[12] Cruel optimism, for Bouamer, permeates Taïa's protagonist's childhood, and she contrasts this cruel optimism with Kathryn Stockton's concept of "growing sideways," itself an important contribution to recent work seeking to queer childhood.[13] According to Bouamer, Abdellah's "detachment" from his family (p. 146) constitutes a form of growing sideways that serves as an antidote to cruel optimism. One might also connect Bouamer's engagement with Berlant to her questioning of the "celebratory mode" (p. 135) with which many readers interpret Taïa's work as examples of queer liberation. Such a connection would reveal the promise of gay freedom through migration to the West as, likewise, an example of cruel optimism, which Taïa's work thereby dismantles. As one of the strongest chapters of the collection, this chapter, like Bouamer's editorial contributions to the collection as a whole, speaks to her great promise as a scholar in this and related fields.

Readers of *Abdellah Taïa's Queer Migrations* may also notice another contributor who has long made contributions to Taïa studies, Ralph Heyndels, perhaps the scholar who has worked the hardest to bring Taïa to the attention of both French- and English-language scholars as well as one of the first to do so. He is the author of numerous essays on the novelist and edited the other prior collection of essays on Taïa mentioned above, which, by the way, also includes an essay by Provencher ("Trans/filiations"). Titled "'Sortir de tous les territoires': To Be a Racialized and

Colonized Subject within France Today,” Heyndels’s chapter opens *Abdellah Taïa’s Queer Migrations*. The other French-language book on Taïa mentioned above is by Jean-Pierre Boulé, who likewise contributes a chapter to *Abdellah Taïa’s Queer Migrations*: “Mourning and Reconciliation: Anger, Politics, and Love.” This contribution thus helps share Boulé’s work with an Anglophone readership and is a significant part of the way this collection bridges French- and English-language scholarship on Taïa.

Of the remaining essays, several are worth mentioning for their theoretical contributions. Like Bouamer’s chapter, Daniel N. Maroun’s “Marginal Masculinities: Disidentifying Sexual Performativity across Abdellah Taïa’s Novels” engages with a key notion from queer of color critique, disidentification, which was proposed by José Esteban Muñoz.[14] Because what Taïa writes about is recognizable to many Western readers, they often think they easily understand his work. Maroun, however, seeks to dislodge this familiarity. To do so, he deploys disidentification in conjunction with a Butlerian notion of performativity to argue that Taïa deviates from the normative performance of Moroccan masculinity to queer it. Ryan K. Schroth’s “Queerness, Shame, and the Family in Abdellah Taïa’s Epistolary Writing” uses Taïa to enter the conversation on gay shame, a productive (though controversial) concept that coalesced around and through a conference held at the University of Michigan in 2003.[15] Gay shame, of course, existed well before the conference devoted to it—witness the work of Jean Genet, for example. It names a decentering of gay pride, particularly in its commercialized manifestations, as *the* paradigm for queer liberation. Schroth has previously published an article on a similar topic,[16] but in his contribution to Provencher and Bouamer’s collection, he focuses on the epistolary genre in general and Taïa’s use of it. Here he also pays more specific attention to shame in a Moroccan context.

Like Bouamer’s chapter, Schroth’s is included in part two of the collection, “Affective Migrations.” It is in this part that the collection engages with affect theory, which itself has a strong kinship with queer theory. Part three as well, “Postcolonial Temporalities,” engages as a whole with the theoretical current that goes by the name of queer temporalities. Along with Provencher’s chapter, discussed above, it includes Muzart’s chapter and Philippe Panizzon’s “From the ‘Garçon du bled’ to ‘Tintin’s Dog’: The Interplay between Race and Sex in Abdellah Taïa’s *Un pays pour mourir* and *Celui qui est digne d’être aimé*.” Moving from the collection’s first part through its second and third, from the physical movement of migration to its affective and temporal theoretical implications, allows one to see the layering that ends up making its theoretical contributions not only to Taïa studies but also to queer postcolonial studies more generally. While the spatial implications of migration are obvious, the temporal ones are much less so. In its consideration of the nexus between queer migration studies, affect theory, and queer temporalities, *Abdellah Taïa’s Queer Migrations* thus takes Taïa studies considerably further than the body of scholarship on his work has done thus far, even if some of these connections are left to the reader to make. Furthermore, the quality of writing is somewhat uneven with the result that it can read in parts as having been rather rushed. If Taïa studies are going to be more than a fad, Taïa scholars will need to take more time to work through their wealth of ideas on the writer more carefully. This collection nonetheless takes a significant step in advancing this field.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Denis M. Provencher and Siham Bouamer, “Introduction: Reconsidering Abdellah Taïa’s Queer Migration”

Ralph Heyndels, “Sortir de tous les territoires’: To Be a Racialized and Colonized Subject within France Today: Is There for Abdellah Taïa a There Where to Go and to Exist?”

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Daniel N. Maroun, “Marginal Masculinities: Disidentifying Sexual Performativity across Abdellah Taïa’s Novels”

Siham Bouamer, “He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not: Cruel Optimism in Abdellah Taïa’s *L’armée du Salut*”

Ryan K. Schroth, “Queerness, Shame, and the Family in Abdellah Taïa’s Epistolary Writing”

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Thomas Muzart, “Abdellah Taïa’s Melancholic Migration: Oscillation between Solitude and Multitude”

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Denis M. Provencher, “Abdellah Taïa’s *Transfilial* Mythmaking and Unfaithful Realms of Memory”

Antoine Idier, “The Voices of Reappropriation”

Abdellah Taïa, “Des hommes fatigués”

Abdellah Taïa, “Tired Men” (trans. Denis M. Provencher)

Denis M. Provencher and Siham Bouamer, “Conclusion: New Directions for Abdellah Taïa and the Field”

NOTES

[1] All page references herein are to the ebook. It should be noted that Taïa was preceded by several Francophone Maghrebian writers who might also make this or similar claims. The Moroccan Rachid O. arrived onto the literary scene in 1995, and Eyt-Chékib Djaziri in 1997. Like Taïa, Nina Bouraoui published her first novel in 2000.

[2] Jean-Pierre Boulé, *Abdellah Taïa: La mélancolie et le cri* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2020); Ralph Heyndels and Amine Zidouh, eds., *Autour d’Abdellah Taïa: Poétique et politique du désir engagé / Around Abdellah Taïa: Poetics and Politics of Engaged Desire* (Caen: Editions Passage[s], 2020).

[3] Tina Dransfeldt Christensen, *Writing Queer Identities in Morocco: Abdellah Taïa and Moroccan Committed Literature* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021).

[4] Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú Jr., eds., *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

[5] Mehammed Amadeus Mack, *Sexagon: Muslims, France, and the Sexualization of National Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

[6] Denis M. Provencher, *Queer Maghrebi French: Language, Temporalities, Transfigurations* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).

[7] Provencher, “Je suis terroriste, pédé et le fils de Marilyn Monroe’: Cinematic Stars and Transfiliation in Abdellah Taïa’s *Infidèles*,” in Valérie K. Orlando and Pamela A. Pears, eds., *Paris and the Marginalized Author: Treachery, Alienation, Queerness, and Exile* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019), pp. 153-66; “Trans/filiations épistémologiques: Écrire la famille, la révolution et un nouveau Maroc dans ‘Lettre à ma famille’ et ‘Le chaouche,’” in Ralph Heyndels and Amine Zidouh, eds., *Autour d’Abdellah Taïa: Poétique et politique du désir engagé/Around Abdellah Taïa. Poetics and Politics of Engaged Desire* (Caen: Editions Passage[s], 2020), pp. 229-43.

[8] Provencher, *Queer Maghrebi French*, p. 47.

[9] Provencher, *Queer Maghrebi French*, p. 25.

[10] See Pierre Nora, ed., *Les lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-92); Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno, eds., *Postcolonial Realms of Memory: Sites and Symbols in Modern France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020); Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957); Etienne Achille and Lydie Moudileno, *Mythologies postcoloniales: Pour une décolonisation du quotidien* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2018).

[11] Siham Bouamer, “De ‘River of No Return’ à ‘Trouble of the World’: Parcours initiatique musical dans *Infidèles* (2012) d’Abdellah Taïa,” *Expressions maghrébines* 19.1 (2020): 107-124.

[12] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[13] Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child; or, Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

[14] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[15] David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, eds., *Gay Shame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Schroth engages several chapters of this collection in his chapter for *Abdellah Taïa’s Queer Migrations*.

[16] Ryan K. Schroth, “Queer Shame: Affect, Resistance, and Colonial Critique in Abdellah Taïa’s *Celui qui est digne d’être aimé*,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 26.1 (2021): 138-162.

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