



Heteroglossic Masculinities: Multilingualism in *Armée du salut* and *Princesa*

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Abstract

The article examines the literary representation of masculinities in the context of border crossings in the Mediterranean area and specifically the relationship between multilingualism and gender identity. The discussion is based on comparative close-readings of two auto-fictional novels which embody border crossings in the form of migration, globalization and (de)colonization: *L'armée du salut* (2006) by Abdellah Taïa and *Princesa* (1994) by Fernanda Farias de Albuquerque. The article argues that the novels' representations of multilingualism and complex gender identities can be fruitfully understood in terms of Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, and that both gender and linguistic practices shift as they are recontextualized socially and geographically.

Keywords Heteroglossia · Multilingualism · Gender identity · Migration · Abdellah Taïa · Fernanda Farias de Albuquerque

Introduction

Literary representations of exile and migration are interesting laboratories for the portrayal of multifaceted identities. This article will examine the representation of masculinity and translanguing practices in two literary narratives of border crossings in the Mediterranean area.

The Mediterranean has historically been a site of border crossing, and remains even more so today. It is also characterised by multilingualism and the co-existence of languages, both historically and to the present day. In addition, situations of

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border crossing are often the site of the encounter of conflicting and conflicted gender identities. This article seeks to examine literary representations of the enactment and interpretation of gender identities in the context of border crossings, and specifically how the practices of multilingualism that characterise such contexts interact with the negotiation of gender identities.

The notion of border crossings has been used as a metaphor in discourses about gender identities, and more specifically transsexuality, but we follow Halberstam (1998) in considering this perspective as overly reductive. Notions such as *journey*, *home* and *belonging* associated with border crossing imply and foreground a neat and desired movement from one place to another, and may implicitly provide an essentializing reading of gender and sexual identities as discrete and unitary categories, as well as potentially contribute to the cultural appropriation of the experiences of the migrant. In order to reconceptualize or redirect this metaphor from its potential pitfalls, we argue that multilingualism and heteroglossia may be more fruitful metaphors for understanding how gender identities are navigated in migrant narratives. We will explore this hypothesis by providing a comparative close-reading of two auto-fictional novels that represent border crossings across the Mediterranean: *L'armée du salut (The Salvation Army)* by Abdellah Taïa (2009) and *Princesa (Princess)* by Fernanda Farias de Albuquerque (1994). The novels have been selected for analysis because they both present fluid gender identities, and use multilingualism as an aesthetic strategy. The two novels also complement each-other, as they present different facets of the exilic experience in the Mediterranean area.

L'armée du salut tells the story of a young boy, Abdellah, growing up in Morocco who gradually discovers his gay sexuality. When he meets an older Swiss man he decides to pursue a PhD degree in Switzerland, but there Abdellah finds himself on the street, confronted with others' perception of his identity. Thus, the novel examines questions related to multilingualism, gender and sexuality, as well as post-colonial tensions in the French-speaking world.

Princesa is the autofictional story of the Brazilian boy Fernandinho who becomes Fernanda or Princesa, a transsexual prostitute. She leaves Brazil and ends up in Italy where she tries to save up money for a sex reassignment surgery. Working the streets, Fernanda experiences the dark side of both migration and gender violence, and she ends up in jail found guilty of attempted murder. In prison she finds out that she is HIV-positive, and to keep together and to stay alive, she starts to write her own life-story in collaboration with two male inmates and in a threefold linguistic community: Brazilian Portuguese, Italian and Sardinian. The written story of her life ends there: in a prison cell, in her own inferno, of which she does not want to write.

The two novels depict and problematize the two protagonists' border crossings in the form of migration, and the texts articulate the effects of the recontextualization of both language, through multilingual practices; and of gender identity, through the negotiation of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities. Alternating between French and Arabic, and Italian and Brazilian Portuguese respectively, the two novels are both written in contexts of multilingualism and use multilingualism as an aesthetic device. Thus, in this article, we will examine how practices of multilingualism and heteroglossia interact with the unstable gender identities the novels present. In both novels, the protagonists navigate the constraints of society, downplaying

or intensifying any visible aspects of their gender identity according to the context in question, and by using linguistic resources as a tool in this process. The main research questions that will be addressed in the remainder of the article can be stated as follows: How does the navigation between different cultures in these two novels question the norms of masculinity? How does spatial and linguistic recontextualization of language and gender identity shape the literary representation of these phenomena?

The article is structured as follows: second section introduces the theoretical framework, which covers understandings of masculinities, and multilingualism considered in the form of heteroglossia. Third section provides readings of the two novels, while final section presents the final remarks.

Theoretical Framework

Masculinities

Recent decades have seen a reconsideration of traditional models of masculinity, stimulated by critiques originating in both masculinities studies as well as queers studies. In the groundbreaking book *Masculinities* (Connell 2012 [1995]), Connell showed, through the analysis of four major categories of masculinity, that masculinity is not a universal category, but far more complex than traditionally conceived of, and that it comes into existence in connection with categories such as age, ethnicity, class, sexuality and other social, cultural and discursive relations: “Because gender is a way of structuring social practice in general [...] it is unavoidably involved with other social structures. It is now common to say that gender ‘intersects’—better, interacts—with race and class” (75). But, as stated by Hibbins and Pease: “the lack of research on the interconnections between masculinity and ethnicity has meant that white hegemonic masculinity has dominated the discourse about what it means to be a man” (Hibbins and Pease 2009, 12). Moreover, recent research into masculinities has shown that masculinity cannot be understood as a homogeneous category, but rather should be understood as masculinities, including hegemonic and marginalized masculinities.

In addition, masculinities cannot merely be understood in a national context alone, as transnational arenas influence the interpretation and enactment of masculinities (Connell 2005, 72). This may become particularly visible in contexts of exile and migration. Among the aspects of masculinities that are affected by the transnational dimension, emotional relations and sexual identity play an important role, and as stated by Connell (2005, 79), “The realm of sexuality and emotional relations may also be the site where larger changes or tensions are registered”. Of particular interest for this article are instances of flexible negotiation or “queering” of masculinity in transnational and urban contexts. In his overview of research on masculinities in these contexts, Connell follows Pearlman (1984) in adopting the socio-linguistic term “code switching” to refer to these kinds of practices, which Connell describes in the following way:

[...] there are ways in which men are not permanently committed to a particular model of masculinity - contrary to what we assume on the basis of familiar models of “gender identity”. Rather, men strategically adopt or distance themselves from the hegemonic model, depending on what they are trying to accomplish at the time” (Connell 2005, 80).

Masculinities are further complicated by situations of marginalization. As noted by Coston and Kimmel (2012), marginalization in terms of class or sexuality may also affect masculinities, and they argue that

[...] for men, the dynamics of removing privilege involve assumptions of emasculation—exclusion from that category that would confer privilege. Gender is the mechanism by which the marginalized are marginalized. That is, gay, working class, or disabled men are seen as “not-men” in the popular discourse of their marginalization. It is their masculinity—the site of privilege—that is specifically targeted as the grounds for exclusion from privilege (Coston and Kimmel 2012, 98).

In this article, we will examine literary representations of marginalized masculinities. While previous research has explored the literary representation of hegemonic masculinity (e.g. Gwóźdź 2018) we will focus on literary representations of masculinities in contexts of migration and exile, and where trans and gay perspectives allow for further nuancing of the representation of masculinities. In order to do so, we will apply the notion of *heteroglossia*, which will be discussed in the following section.

Multilingualism and Heteroglossia: Recontextualisation of Language and Gender

In Mikhail Bakhtin’s text ‘Unitary Language’, the notion of *heteroglossia* is adopted to describe the multilayered nature of human language (Bakhtin [1934–1935] 2000). Heteroglossia, other-languageness, does not only refer to the sociolinguistic relationship between national language and dialects, but also to the fact that language, or more precisely the utterance, encompasses and refers to other utterances and, therefore, can create a dialogue between the two or more voices present in a statement. Thus, every word, or utterance, is potentially the embodiment of the conflict between ideological positions and values that run through society. This is expressed by Bakhtin as follows:

[t]here are no “neutral” words and forms - words and forms that can belong to “no one”; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. [...] Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions (ibid., 278).

Thus, the notion of heteroglossia can be used to describe the internal tensions at work in any language, and can be used to describe even a monolingual reality. It

demonstrates how every utterance is a site of conflict, of the expression of co-existing views and ideologies. In this article, we propose that heteroglossia may be useful to understand how different gender ideologies and representations of masculinity come to co-exist in the texts we analyse. While the use of language is a clear example of this intersection of competing forces, we argue that gender identity and masculinity can also be seen as sign systems, which are the sites of competing forces or ideological systems and interpretations, and whose interpretation adjust as the context changes.

A related term to heteroglossia, which is particularly relevant in the case of the two texts we study, is multilingualism, which can be defined as the coexistence of several languages within the speaking subject, as well as in a specific community. However, traditional models of multilingualism have recently come under criticism, because they are seen to presuppose certain ideals of linguistic skills and competences to be attained, rather than concrete, situated practices of language use. Moreover, they may presuppose a monolingual bias, where one code is dominant, that codes can be neatly delimited as discrete categories, and that power relations between them are clear-cut; in short because they are seen to represent an essentialist view of language use (Sebba 2012; Blommaert et al. 2005). As a reaction, several alternative conceptualisations of the phenomenon have been proposed. Among these is the term *metrolingualism*, proposed by Otsuji and Pennycook (2010),¹ and which they define as follows:

Metrolingualism describes the ways in which people of different and mixed backgrounds use, play with and negotiate identities through language; it does not assume connections between language, culture, ethnicity, nationality or geography, but rather seeks to explore how such relations are produced, resisted, defied or rearranged; its focus is not on language systems but on language as emergent from contexts of interaction. [...] Metrolingualism [...] allows the reconstitution of language and an alternative way of being in and through ludic and other possibilities of the everyday, a queering of linguistic practices (Otsuji and Pennycook 2010, 246).

While the notion of metrolingualism is useful, because it examines the function and use of different codes or language in context, it has a potential disadvantage because it emphasises the playful, stylized aspects of cosmopolitan language use. This may potentially downplay the very real power relations between different languages, such as the colonial and the indigenous, as well as the very real differences between a wealthy, polyglot cosmopolite and the illegal immigrant who speaks several languages, but none of them well. This is (of course) acknowledged by Otsuji and Pennycook, but perhaps not sufficiently. However, if we keep in mind this critique, we believe that notions such as metrolingualism may be fruitful in the analyses of texts

¹ For a further development of the concept of metrolingualism which links it to the notion of heteroglossia, see Adam Jaworski (2014), Metrolingual art: Multilingualism and heteroglossia, in *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 18, 2 (pp. 134–158).

such as the ones studied in this article, in order to account for the mixing of different languages.

In the following, we will examine what we consider instances of metrolingualism in *Princesa* and *Armée du salut*, with specific reference to how instances of multilingualism interacts with the representations of gender identity, providing a context for the interpretation of masculinity and femininity. We consider these to be examples of heteroglossia, a queering of masculinity in and through multilingualism.

Readings of Heteroglossic Migrant Masculinities

Princesa

Princesa is rich with variations of masculinity, ranging from the traditional breadwinner to the rebellious and subversive transgender, from the nurturing father to the violent male, sexually and culturally empowered within the heteronormative patriarchy. Crossley and Pease (2009, 116) have stated that the focus on machismo in Latin America has tended to impede more nuanced discussions of Latin American masculinities and obscures other meaningful and intersectional influences, and we believe that novels such as *Princesa* are able to broaden the range of represented Latin American masculinities.

From childhood, Fernandinho fantasizes of having breasts and he tends to identify with feminine roles during games with other children (he is the cow, the others the calf or the bull, he is the sheep, the others the ram). Many of the games they play have a clear sexual component; the boys in particular seem to experiment quite a lot physically, but the games turn into sexual abuse of the confused Fernandinho, who both seeks for the physical attention of other boys and men, and is sought out by others in the small town of Northeast Brazil, and he is raped on several occasions. He is bullied and harassed by the other males, but, at the same time they are sexually attracted to his body, without being judged as homosexuals themselves. As Marysol Ascensio's study on Latin-American male homosexuality (Ascensio 2011) suggests, this is not unusual: the penetrated male partner (*pasivo*) is seen as homosexual, while the penetrator (*activo*) can still retain a heterosexual identity. This gendered construction of male homosexuality, "[...] bound to hegemonic masculinity through various social mechanisms", allows, according to Ascensio, for the punishment of male femininity (ibid., 350). It is this so-called male femininity which is punished with beatings and rapes in *Princesa*, both by boys in his home town and police officers in the cities he runs off to. Fernando's attraction to other boys and men and his preference for being the passive partner effeminates him in the eyes of the rural Brazilian society in which he grows up, and there is no discursive room for him to deal with his own masculinity within a homosexual frame. Fernando desires the love and affection of a man, and the rigid and hierarchical gender system thus determines that he has to be a woman in order to earn that right.

When Fernando leaves his hometown at the age of sixteen, he decides to become Fernanda, and as Fernanda s/he finds some sort of freedom working as a transsexual

prostitute: “I imitated a woman in order to find a man. One can see it, I am a transvestite” (Farias de Albuquerque and Jannelli 1994, 31).²

However, she still struggles with her double, or hybrid, gender identity: the quiet and shameful Fernando and the sparkling Fernanda:

I was there, divided, harmless, while Fernanda sparkles and tells about herself, whore and student. I look at her, I look at myself [...] Fernando, I am a spectator of myself. Fernanda surprises me, unexpected, freed [...]. Here I am, malefemale (ibid., 36).

Her body holds two different persons, and none of them are easily dismissed in terms of gender, language and identity. After taking an overdose of hormone treatment pills, Fernando makes his continued presence in Fernanda known in a very physical way: “I threw up a red spot, I twisted in agony. Fernando resisted in me, he rebelled. The hardness of his body. Smooth chest and square buttocks. A man” (ibid., 43). The same pills that initially made Fernanda feel like a woman, now turn against her when she tries to accelerate her bodily transformation. The pills, and later on silicone injections, that Fernanda self-administer, are procured illegally, and Romeo (2005) sees Fernanda’s life story as an account of trespassing not only national and linguistic boundaries, but also sexual boundaries, because she tries to change her body from male to female (118). But, as we shall see in the following, Fernanda’s trespassing, her crossing over from one gender identity to another, is never complete, and is even more contested when she enters the Italian cultural context.

To make herself worthy of the love of a man and to escape her imprisonment, Fernanda convinces herself that she needs to complete a sex reassignment surgery:

I ran away [...] Far away from everyone, from my conviction’s execution: only Fernando: trousers and a hard-on. I desired the love of a man - for them [the clients] it was an attempt, a shiver of horror. For me it was guilt, a loss in a world which did not have the fantasy to create me without despising me. Neither male nor female, only gay and asshole (Farias de Albuquerque and Jannelli 1994, 38).

She thus leaves Brazil for Europe, where she is told that she will make a fortune working the streets of Spain and Italy. But when she arrives Milan, after crossing European borders illegally, her gender identity is tested:

I didn’t know if I was male or female anymore, woman or man. It was them, the Milanese of the first night, who made me collapse into confusion. And certainly not because their eyes were aimed at the sky [...] No, they weren’t thinking, they paid and touched. They looked down, between my legs. It were their hands, their bizarre desires that reshuffled my fragile and surgical certainty: Fernanda, yet a final effort, a small defect to be eliminated. No, to them that small imperfection was decisive. Fundamental. [...] Until that moment when a Joe [*José*] came to me and paid handsomely, I spontaneously thought

² All translations into English from the novel *Princesa* are the authors’ unless stated otherwise.

that it was the female he desired. But with those fifteen clients [...] everything occurred to me. It was male and female that they wanted me (ibid., 84).

Gender instability or fluidity is not Fernanda's by choice, but her gender identity cannot escape its dialogical change. She tries to leave the male Fernando in Brazil in order to return as a complete woman, but the attempt fails. Her encounters with both expectations and prejudices leave Fernanda with an indeterminate and oscillating gender identity.

Where Romeo (2005) sees Fernanda's life-story as trespassing, Gandolfi (2010) interprets the protagonist's narrative, geographical and gender border crossings as an example of a *third space*, of an "interstitial space" with reference to Homi Bhabha (Bhabha 1994), "[...] in which Fernanda [...] constructs and reconstructs herself continuously" (Gandolfi 2010, 88). The notion of the *third space* that Gandolfi applies to *Princesa* comes from Bhabha's theory on the encounter between cultures, but she also draws upon Marjorie Garber's *third term* represented in cross-dressing, which destabilizes the unity of "identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge" (Garber 1992, 11).³ In our view, Fernanda disrupts the hierarchical and binary gender category she tries to simultaneously flee from and conform to. Her body as well as her mind fluctuate physically and linguistically between male and female. If we interpret Fernanda's unstable gender identity and body as *utterances*, her movement between the one and the other becomes a dialogical third space: always conflictual, but also a space in which gender normativity is contested and where the categories of male and female are potentially changed.

Multilingualism and Code-Switching in *Princesa*

Princesa is written in a peculiar collaboration between three prisoners in the all-male Rebibbia penitentiary in Rome: Fernanda herself, the Sardinian shepherd Giovanni Tamponi, and Maurizio Jannelli, a former member of the Red Brigades. Tamponi, who is able to pass between the transsexual prisoners' area and the other parts of the facility, suggests to Fernanda to tell and write her life-story "[...] in order to keep together [...] to not forget having been born free", as Jannelli writes in the book's preface (Jannelli 1994). Here Jannelli also reveals how the private language used between the three of them was later edited and adapted to a wider readership:

To communicate with Fernanda I participated and helped to make this "new language". This written and oral variation, which resulted from the chemistry of our mother tongues. Portuguese, Italian and Sardinian [...] Born only for us, the original writings were subsequently manipulated to make it accessible to a wider audience. Nevertheless, hands and different cultural backgrounds are perhaps traceable even in their last draft (ibid., 9–10).⁴

³ For a reading of *Princesa* in light of Judith Butler's theories of queer see Campagnola 2011 in which the text is considered to be a *counter-history* (179) and a queer and nomad text in terms of both gender, language as well as literary genre.

⁴ Unfortunately the first drafts of the book are no longer available.

The use of different linguistic codes makes its presence known already in the book's title, *Princesa*, which means 'princess' in Portuguese, and continues throughout the novel. Besides from a small number of plant names and Brazilian dishes, the use of the Portuguese language is almost exclusively limited to pejorative expressions denominating feminine men, homosexuals, prostitutes, transsexuals, and others in connection with them: *veado* ('passive gay') or the diminutive *veadhino*, *maricão* ('effeminate', 'gay'), *José* ('John'), *bicha* ('fag'), *bombadeira* ('body moulder', someone who injects others with silicone to modify their bodies) and others. The Portuguese pejoratives are inserted and mixed into the Italian text without translations or explanations. An example of this is a scene where the other prostitutes tell Fernanda that her boyfriend is homosexual: "'Il tuo Edson è una *maricas*, Princesa" [...]. Un frocio. Mi tradica col peggiore dei tradimenti: darsi come una femmina con un gay, il mio uomo. Un *maricão* [...]" (Farias de Albuquerque and Jannelli 1994, 54).⁵

Why did Fernanda choose to write her life-story in a language that was foreign to her? One cannot underestimate the pragmatic motivation, i.e. the writer-collective which created itself between Fernanda, Giovanni and Maurizio, and which allowed her to make her story more widely known, but the linguistic shift of self-expression can also be interpreted in more ideologically charged terms. In her analysis of *Princesa*, Gandolfi (2010) states that Fernanda's decision to write her book in Italian suggests both a "progressive distancing from her native language" and a "process of appropriation of the new language" (83), and that the kind of code-switching, or more precisely, self-translation, enacted by Fernanda implies an

[...] explaining and interpreting herself through an act of linguistic, spatial, and identitarian appropriation that inevitably recalls her migratory experience. [...] She creates an "other" space or, taking up Homi Bhabha again, an "in-between space [...] [that] provide[s] the terrain for elaborating selfhood - singular or communal - that initiate[s] new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Gandolfi 2010, 83–84).

We will also add to Gandolfi's analysis that the cultural displacement and linguistic shift that Fernanda carries out in *Princesa*, imply an ideological distancing from a significantly machista Brazilian attitude towards her gender identification. Embedded in the use of the Portuguese language within the Italian, one can hear the voice of a heteronormative and hegemonic masculine discourse, but with its persisting code-mixing, it seems like the autofictional novel's narrator tries to distance herself from this hegemonic discourse. Multilingualism or code-switching thus becomes a means of recontextualizing one's identity and challenging hegemonic norms of masculinity and gender.

⁵ "'Your Edson is a pouf, Princesa" [...]. A gay. He betrays me with the worst of all betrayals: he gives himself as a woman to a gay man. A faggot [...]'". Italics are the authors'.

L'armée du salut by Abdellah Taïa

Abdellah Taïa is said to be the first Moroccan writer to make his homosexuality publicly known, and several of his books explicitly evoke homosexual sexuality or transgender issues (Zaganiaris 2012). While Morocco is a conservative society when it comes to gender and sexuality, analyses of Taïa differ in the space that they assign to gay sexuality in Morocco. In an article discussing another of Taïa's novels, *Une mélancolie arabe* (Taïa 2008), Smith (2012) examines the discursive conditions of possibility for expressing a gay identity in a Moroccan context. She argues that there is a lack of a discursive and linguistic repertoire in Moroccan Arabic and Arabic at large, which constrains the possibilities for the protagonist and for Taïa himself to express a gay identity such as it is understood in the West, and that this may explain why Taïa writes in French, rather than Arabic. However, other analyses of Taïa, as well as Taïa himself (Taïa 2013), argue that the reality on the ground is much more complex and evolving. In any case, Taïa is consistently addressing issues related to gender and sexuality in a Moroccan context, and is a vocal critic of traditional and conservative models of masculinity and sexuality.

Multilingualism and Code-Switching in *Armée du salut*

In Taïa's novel *Armée du salut*, the protagonist's heteroglossic set of linguistic resources (Bailey 2012, 504) contribute to the textual representation of a fluid gender and sexual identity, while also indexing gender and sexuality in the different settings (Morocco and Switzerland) that Abdellah, the protagonist, navigates on both sides of the Mediterranean. Thus, the novel is indicative of a cosmopolitan, multilingual subject, moving between cities in Europe and in the Arab world. Throughout the novel, language is essential to the textual representation of Abdellah, both in expressing home and belonging, often using Arabic words and related to the Moroccan context, as well as professional and artistic ambition and sexual identity, often related to the French language and in a European context.

Abdellah's mastery of the French language is a means to distance himself from his Moroccan background, geographically but also in terms of gender and class identity. Heteroglossic linguistic resources may in this instance be used by Abdellah to carve out a gay identity, perhaps resembling that which is conceptualized in the west, but also, and perhaps primarily, in the sense that it renders his dream of becoming an artist and an intellectual more realistic, making it possible to move beyond the social milieu he was born into. However, Abdellah's relation to the French language is ambiguous. On the one hand, French gives him access to a new world, a world where non-hegemonic models of masculinity are available, and where it will be possible to become an intellectual and an artist, a dream embodied by the city of Paris. On the other hand, French represents an otherness, something distant and foreign compared with the native Arabic. In several episodes throughout the book, Abdellah is represented as a heteroglossic sign, whose interpretation is dependent on the context: while his expression of masculinity may be interpreted as 'normal' in one context, it is perceived as marginal or even deviant in another. His heteroglossic linguistic resources, i.e. his language skills and command of French, is what

allows him to ‘pass’ from one context to another—from Africa to Europe—from his childhood home to the ambiguous tourist zones in Marrakech and Tangiers, which are neither completely Moroccan nor completely Western, but a sort of in-between-space where multiple interpretations of gender, sexuality and language are possible. Thus, metrolingualism, the command of several languages in the cosmopolitan, multilingual subject, can be seen as a means which allows Abdellah to explore different gender identities and masculinities, and heteroglossic practices clearly accompany his exploration of masculine identity, in settings and situations that are variously pleasurable and playful, or humiliating and painful. We will now look closer at two episodes where this double aspect of Abdellah’s identity is at stake.

Relinquishing Monolingualism: Metrolingualism at the Beach Abdellah’s uneasy relationship with the French language is challenged when he meets Selim at the beach in Tangiers. Selim is a middle-aged man who lives in Paris, and represents the incomprehensible phenomenon of a Moroccan who does not master his own mother tongue, Arabic. In the stretch of text where this encounter is described, language and sexual identity are construed in parallel. Abdellah is on vacation in Tangiers with his two brothers; the older brother is away for the day, leaving Abdellah in a jealous rage, and looking after his younger brother, who wants to play football. Abdellah declines to join them, for fears of being ridiculed and called a ‘little girl’. While he is sulking on the beach, an older man, Selim, approaches him. Selim’s intentions are quite clear, and he convinces Abdellah to go with him to a cinema where they have a sexual encounter. However, the most shocking thing for Abdellah is the fact that the man does not speak Arabic, although he is Moroccan.

This older man (maybe 35, 40?) came up to me. He gently touched my shoulder and said in French:

“You’ve got to be careful in the sun. It’s dangerous. Do you have any sunscreen?”

He didn’t give me time to answer and offered me his. I rubbed it all over my body, thanked him, and gave it back. He started right in again:

“Your back. You forgot to rub some on your back. Turn around, I’ll help you... when it comes to your back... it’s hard to...”

I did as he asked. He put his left hand on my shoulder and started to rub his sunscreen across my back with his right hand. It didn’t take long. Maybe a minute at most.

“What’s your name?”

“Abdellah.”

“I’m Selim.”

“Are you Moroccan?”

“Yes!”

“Then how come you speak French?”

“Because I live in Paris. I don’t know any Arabic.”

“You mean, you don’t even know a single word in Arabic?”

“Well, maybe four or five...tops...”

“And you don’t miss that...speaking your country’s language, your first country’s language?”

“No, I really don’t! How about you, where did you learn French?”

“My French isn’t very good, I know that. I still make a lot of mistakes. I learned it in school, just like everybody else (Taïa 2009, 54–55. Trans. by Frank Stock).

The encounter with Selim opens up alternative models of both masculinity and sexuality for Abdellah, as well as an alternative model to the monolingual reality he is already trying to escape. Selim represents a metrolingual reality, where one can be Moroccan without knowing the language, and where you can speak in French even though you still make many mistakes. Language, gender and sexuality thus become closely intertwined in this episode, showing Abdellah the possibilities of a freer life, where language as well as sexuality may be freely chosen, and which eventually makes him question and reject traditional models of masculinity.

This episode also shows the importance of context for the heteroglossic utterance. In this case it is geographical space, or place, which is the context that makes the metrolingual utterance possible. The episode takes place in Tangiers, a Moroccan city which is geographically close to Europe, and was historically well known for being relatively tolerant towards gays. From the moment when Abdellah arrives in Tangiers, his reaction to it is instinctively as towards something foreign, which is again closely linked to language and manifested in the metrolingual practices of its inhabitants: “People in Tangiers seem lost to me, don’t even seem Moroccan. Besides, most of them speak Spanish pretty well” (ibid. 47). Thus, it is the very fact of coming to Tangiers, a metrolingual space which is more permissive both linguistically and morally, that is the condition of possibility of what later happens with Selim at the beach.

However, as becomes clearer as the novel progresses, it should be noted that Abdellah, as opposed to Fernanda in *Princesa*, is among the relatively privileged, cosmopolitan multilingual subjects to whom metrolingual practices are easily available. It is Abdellah’s command of the French language which later allows him to go to Europe, and to live a life where he will be freer to pursue his artistic ambitions, and where gender and sexuality are less heavily policed. However, in spite of a position of relative privilege, his Arabic background is clearly visible, and is a constant subtext for the interpretation of his masculinity and sexuality in a European context, as we shall see in the following.

Contextual (Mis)Interpretation of Heteroglossic Identities Switching between a Moroccan and European context, and switching between languages in these different contexts have important repercussions on the level of represented and experienced gender identity. In Abdellah’s case, this is even further accentuated by the frequentation of western men, and more specifically the Swiss professor Jean, with whom Abdellah develops a romantic relationship. In the eyes of the surroundings, this relationship comes to carry heavy connotations of prostitution, both in the West and in Morocco, and on several occasions, Abdellah is taken for a prostitute when appearing

in public with Jean. These episodes are often associated with linguistic code-switching and emphasis on the intercultural and heteroglossic aspects of the context.

The first time Abdellah is taken to be a prostitute is in the Moroccan city of Marrakech, in the chic neighbourhood of l'Hivernage. Abdellah and Jean are out for a walk, going back to their hotel. They are stopped by two policemen who address Abdellah in Arabic, asking him what he is doing with Jean, and telling him that it is illegal in this country to bother tourists. When Abdellah answers that he is not bothering him, that he is his friend, they answer: "Your friend or your boyfriend? Where do you think you are, in America? This is Morocco, you're in Morocco now, you ignorant piece of ... you stupid fool. How much is he paying you? Let's see some ID and make it fast..." (ibid., 91). Jean then addresses the police in French and tells them that he is Abdellah's teacher, and that they are visiting Marrakech together. Returning to Arabic, the police then order Abdellah to tell Jean that they are just doing this for his own safety, to protect him, so that he will be happy with the Moroccans: "I very reluctantly had to be their translator" (ibid.).

Finally the police leaves them, shouting homophobic insults to Abdellah, while a young couple witness the incident, shocked, but expressing their sympathy with Abdellah. At night, Abdellah cannot find sleep, thinking about the incident, yet he worries that Jean did not really understand what had happened: "I didn't sleep that night. I cried my eyes out but found no comfort in tears. I don't know if Jean had understood what really happened" (ibid., 92).

This episode shows a complex interaction of heteroglossic resources, both in terms of gender, language and geographical context. While Jean is insulated from the reality through his monolinguality and his Europeaness, Abdellah, through his multilingual command of both French and Arabic, as well as a seemingly ambiguous presentation of masculinity, is in a double bind. First, he is harassed by the police, second he is confronted with Jean's more or less consciously chosen ignorance. Moreover, his status as a multilingual in-between is in a sense used against him, as he is forced to translate for Jean, against his own will.

This episode also clearly shows how it is the context that selects an interpretation of the multilingual subject who displays a non-hegemonic masculinity. It seems as if it is the presence of Jean with Abdellah in Marrakech, a city very popular with tourists, that causes Abdellah to be interpreted as a prostitute, and their behaviour to be interpreted as the interaction of prostitute and client. It is thus this context of Marrakech, and of the presence of the French-speaking Swiss citizen, Jean, which causes Abdellah to be racialized, to be sexualized, to be a representative of marginalized and non-hegemonic masculinity, and to be seen as a prostitute, however, it is Abdellah's own command of the two languages that enables him to observe these double aspects of himself; first, as he himself perceives his own identity, and second how others, both Jean and the policemen, see him. The lines and borders between the North and the South, or the Western and the Arabic are clearly drawn: the notion of a romantic relationship between two men is impossible in Morocco. Yet the reaction of solidarity of the young couple shows that this model is in no way clear-cut.

On the other hand, the multilingual and cosmopolitan context represented by Tangiers and Marrakech may also provide a possibility to some for faking a marginal masculinity, which is condemned and frowned upon within a Moroccan

context in general, but that may provide material advantages in the intermediate settings of these cities. This position is illustrated by Mohammed, a young boy whom Abdellah and Jean meet in Tangiers. Mohamed is a prostitute, and after having tried for some time to attract a European woman for a more or less pro forma wedding, he has switched and now tries to attract Western men, whom he considers easier to deal with. For Mohamed, sex and prostitution is a means to escape the poverty in Morocco. However, for Mohamed there is a strict distinction between having sex with a Westerner and a Moroccan: “He played on their team now, had turned homosexual, but make no mistake, only with foreigners. He’d never sleep with another Moroccan man. Even the idea of being mistaken for a *zamel* [derogatory term for homosexual] in Tangiers filled him with horror” (ibid., 98–99). In other words, it is the multilingual and cosmopolitan context, the presence of the European and the multilingual reality, and thus the recontextualization of the transgressive practices, that render these practices acceptable to Mohammed, practices that would be simply inadmissible for him in a monolingual, monocultural context (as represented by the pejorative expression *zamel*.)

Final Remarks

In this article, we have examined two novels, *Princesa* and *Armée du salut*, which both, we argue, instantiate representations of marginal masculinities in multilingual settings. The two novels show multilingualism through code-switching in both dialogues and in narrative parts (within the narrator’s speech). Moreover, they display heteroglossic readings of masculinities: masculine identities are negotiated and re-shaped in dialogic contact and interaction with social, historical, and normative contexts in the same way as the speaking subject’s words or language use. Throughout the novels the two protagonists change in their masculine enactment and gender self-perception, they interact with other cultures, languages and expectations, and continuously create—in a dialogical encounter in the Bakhtinian sense of the word—a heteroglossic masculinity.

Our readings indicate that the analysis of metrolingualism and heteroglossia must take into account context and the material conditions of possibility for metrolingualism. First, such conditions are related to place—some places such as Tangiers or Milan seem to be conducive to a re-interpretation of gender identities, because they are spaces of relative freedom, metrolingualism and moral permissiveness. Second, the linguistic resources of the subject, as well as access to cultural and material capital, offer varying access to metrolingual practices. Thus, as the novels show, migrant men are in contradictory positions in relation to dominance and subordination. Therefore, we argue in conclusion, the relation between masculinity and border crossing is not a clear-cut one, and it can profit from being enriched by the perspectives opened up by recent work on multilingualism.

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