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Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed's performance of universal French citizenship and good Muslim brotherhood

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Abstract

This article builds on scholarship in performance studies, anthropology, discourse analysis and French studies by examining the performative speech acts of self-identified Maghrebi-French queer men from my recent fieldwork in France. As a point of departure, I draw on José Estaban Muñoz's notion of 'disidentification' (1999) and Mireille Rosello's notion of 'declining the stereotype' (1998) to examine the strategies of resistance for Maghrebi-French queer speakers who 'work on and against dominant ideology' and who try 'to transform cultural logic from within' a dominant system of identification and assimilation (Muñoz, 1999: 11−12). In my analysis, I examine an interview with one of my Maghrebi-French interlocutors, Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed, founder of several French associations including Homosexuels musulmans de France (HM2F), and the author of *Le Coran et la chair* (2012), to show how his speech acts function simultaneously from within contemporary France − and its notion of *laïcité* − and from within Islam and the Prophet's own dynamic approach to the Quran, to reinvent both the 'universal French citizen' and the 'good Muslim brother'. Zahed's story will help us to see how sexual and religious minorities must 'straddle competing cultural traditions, memories, and material conditions' and devise 'a configuration of possible scripts of self/selves that shift according to the situation' (Manalansan, 2003: x) in order to be heard in contemporary France by their families of origin, their fellow citizens and their Muslim brothers and sisters.

Keywords

citizenship, disidentification, flexible accumulation, Islam, Quran, sexuality, speech, stereotypes, universalism

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Introduction

In this article, I present the life and work of Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed, who is one of the interlocutors from my fieldwork and forthcoming book project on Maghrebi-French queers.[1] Zahed has founded three non-profit associations during the past few years: Les Enfants du Sida (2006), Homosexuels musulmans de France (HM2F) (2010), and Musulman-es Progressistes de France (2012). He is also the author of *Révoltes extraordinaires: un enfant du sida autour du monde* (2011), and *Le Coran et la chair* (2012). In that time the French media have covered several stories about him: his same-sex marriage in Cape Town to husband Qiyaam Jantjies Zahed in 2011, the publication of his latest book and his efforts to found La Mosquée inclusive de l'Unicité, the first 'gay-friendly' or inclusive mosque in Paris in 2012. In this essay, I analyse excerpts from our interview in 2010, which related to Zahed's discussion of his 'subaltern identity', his disclosure of his homosexuality to his family, and his views on the relationship between sexuality, queerness and spirituality. Zahed is inventing a new way for Maghrebi-French queers, and queer Muslims in particular, to tie themselves to the Quran and the teachings of Mohamed as well as securing them firmly to a normative and secular France. As we will see, this includes performative 'I' statements such as 'Je suis français, algérien, homosexuel et musulman', which allow him to live a hybrid identity in a country that touts universalism. Furthermore, Zahed relies on the Quran and the life of the Prophet to disidentify (Muñoz, 1999) or 'steal' previous stereotypes (Rosello, 1998). His life, work and language will help us to see how this Maghrebi-French queer citizen must 'straddle competing cultural traditions, memories, and material conditions' (Manalansan, 2003: x) in order to perform their identities in recognisable ways to their biological family, fellow French citizens, and fellow Muslim brothers.

This article builds on scholarship in performance studies, anthropology, discourse analysis and French studies by examining the performative speech acts of self-identified Maghrebi-French queer men. First, I draw on José Estaban Muñoz's notion of 'disidentification' (1999). In his study of the politics of queer performance artists of colour, Muñoz writes:

> Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship. (Muñoz, 1999: 4)

He continues: 'It often involves subjects whose identities are formed in response to cultural logics of heteronormativity, white supremacy, and misogyny − cultural logics that I will suggest work to undergird state power' (1999: 5). Finally, he states that:

> disidentification is *not always* an adequate strategy of resistance or survival for all minority subjects. At times, resistance needs to be pronounced and direct; on other occasions, queers of color and other minority subjects need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive a hostile public. But for some, disidentification is a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously. (1999: 5)[2]

Mireille Rosello's scholarship on 'declining the stereotype' (1998) functions very much in the same way as what Muñoz calls 'disidentification'. Rosello states that declining is a process that: 'includes a "necessary mimetic energy" that still draws on the original stereotype' (1998: 11). It is also a 'way of depriving it [the stereotype] of its harmful potential' (1998: 11) and 'an ambiguous gesture of refusal and participation at the same time … where both the stereotype and its critique cohabit so intimately that no safe barrier can be erected between the two' (1998: 13). Inspired by these two scholars, I will illustrate in this article how Zahed's strategies of resistance must 'work

on and against dominant ideology' in order 'to transform cultural logic from within' a dominant system of identification and assimilation (Muñoz, 1999: 11−12). As we will see in this essay, in the particular case of Zahed, he must situate his speech acts as a citizen in relation to the dominant universalising discourse of the secular French Republic and as a practising Muslim in relation to the teachings of Islam and the Prophet Mohamed.

During my first summer of fieldwork for this project (2009), I went to the Centre Gay et Lesbien (CGL) in Paris on rue Beaubourg to inquire about organisations and events where I could potentially meet Maghrebi and Maghrebi-French men who were dealing with their homosexuality and religious identity. The representative at the front desk of the CGL showed me a catalogue of affiliated organisations that the Centre tries to update regularly. At the time, it included religiously affiliated organisations such as 'David et Jonathan' for 'homosexual Christians' and 'Beit Haverim' for 'Jewish gay men and lesbians'. However, in June 2009 no official organisation existed for French Muslims or immigrant Muslims of Maghrebi descent. Approximately six months later, I discovered the Facebook page for Homosexuels Musulmans de France (HM2F), the organisation founded by Zahed in January 2010.[3] I noticed we had some Facebook 'friends' in common from the Université Paris 8 and the École des Hautes Études de Sciences Sociales (EHESS), so I decided to write a message to the organisation/him to explain my research and express interest in speaking to someone. Zahed replied to my message and agreed to meet me for an interview in July 2010 in Paris. Since that time, we have continued to communicate through Facebook and email and we have had follow-up meetings in Paris and Marseille.

Zahed is 35 years old and was born in Algiers in 1977. A year later his Algerian parents moved the family to Paris, to the 17th arrondissement, where he was raised alongside an older brother, and eventually a younger sister. During his childhood Zahed and his family also spent many of their summers in Algeria where most of their extended family still lives.[4] In 1993 Zahed (aged 16) and his family moved back to the Maghreb to live in Algiers before then returning to France in 1994 where Zahed attended high school in Marseille. He eventually completed an undergraduate university degree in psychology at l'École Normale Supérieure in Paris, and is currently pursuing a doctorate in the anthropology of religion at the EHESS. Indeed, Zahed's education affords him a significant amount of social and cultural capital as well as the tools to understand and theorise about gender, sexual orientation, religion and citizenship at an advanced level. He possesses a combination of education, critical thinking skills, creativity and time to devote to these pursuits that several of the Maghrebi-French queer speakers whom I analyse in my forthcoming book do not.

During our interview, Zahed spoke at length about his education and familiarity with a variety of fields of study including religion and theology, postcolonial studies and feminist and queer theory. On several different occasions he talked about the work of Elizabeth Stuart on gay and lesbian theologies, and mentioned several other scholars including Gayatri Spivak on the subaltern subject, Scott Kugle on Middle Eastern studies, sexuality and queer theory, Fatima Mernissi on feminism and Islam, and Amina Wadud on Islamic studies and gender studies.[5] Also, he distinguishes himself from traditional Islamic imams and thinkers such as Tareq Oubrou and Tariq Ramadan.[6] Zahed explained to me that in his own doctoral thesis he plans to investigate 'les représentations identitaires subalternes' and 'comment les *queers* ont une influence sur l'Islam en France' (more on this below). His use of the word 'subaltern' suggests familiarity with Spivak and postcolonial studies, while his use of the English word 'queer' suggests familiarity with a body of largely Anglo-American scholarship that has not very often been translated in the French-speaking academic context. Moreover, like many young people in the West today, he feels that 'ce n'est pas un choix d'être homosexuel, c'est une question d'avoir une sexualité'. He believes, however, that one chooses to practise a religion and that this requires an education or acculturation process whereby the individual must learn how to perform it correctly (Guignard, 2010). Moreover, as we

will see below, Zahed's speech acts during our interview and throughout his writing and other public performances (radio and television interviews, electronic and print articles) draw on a flexible accumulation (Leap, 2003) of scripts derived from postcolonial theory, Anglo-American scholarship on queer theory, feminist theory, Islamic studies, the Quran, the hadiths and his own experiences living in two urban centres − Paris and Algiers.

Zahed's subaltern identity and ideas on Islam and queerness

I begin with an analysis of Zahed's discussion of his 'subaltern identity', the declaration of his sexuality to his family, and his views on the important role sexual minorities can play in reinterpreting Islam. During our interview, he talked briefly about his personal life and his upbringing in Paris and Algiers. This may be due to the fact that he knew I was writing a book on a topic that is related to his own research interests and was trying to 'perform' on an equal footing as a researcher with his own academic interests. Nevertheless, when I directed the conversation more towards his upbringing and family, he was very forthcoming with stories about his childhood and his parents' background. He explained to me that his mother was a beautician and his father was a retired self-made businessman (with no high school diploma); his parents had been married for over 35 years. Although they had been raised in Algeria under French rule and attended Catholic school and Sunday mass, they now identified themselves as moderate Muslims who taught him and his siblings about the importance of family and marriage. He described his family as 'une famille soudée' despite his father's constant verbal complaining about not wanting his son to act 'like a girl' and despite his brother's physical abuse and homophobia against him when they were both children.[7] Although Zahed now lives in Paris, he continues to see his family regularly in Marseille where he spent his high-school years in the 1990s and where the family continues to live and spend their holidays together. Despite their close-knit appearance as a family, Zahed never had any intention of telling his family about his homosexuality, which he describes in the first excerpt below.

Zahed's subaltern performance?

Zahed's disclosure of his homosexuality to his family occurred at the age of 21, when his grandfather, the patriarch of the family as Zahed describes him, passed away. Zahed returned home to be with the family during their time of grief and although he did not plan to tell them, he decided to make his announcement in front of his entire family 'toute réunie' (lines 001−002 below). He spoke of his grandfather's death and his decision to tell his family in an impromptu fashion, after having imagined for so long a 'subaltern identity' (line 003 below) for himself. He states:

001 **LMZ**: … je me rends compte que … j'ai dit à mes parents, toute ma famille
002 réunie que j'étais homosexuel alors que je n'avais pas du tout
003 prévu voilà, j'avais prévu une identité subalterne, 'ne m'en parlez pas, je
004 ne vous en parle pas quoi', 'secret [de] polichinelle', et je leur ai dit,
005 quelques jours après que mon grand-père soit mort, le patriarche on
006 aimait tous eh, on respectait tous, c'est quand même comme ça de le
007 garder d'une certaine famille parce que l'homosexualité c'est pas un
008 menace pour LA famille, c'est un menace pour une certaine famille
009 traditionnelle, hétérosexuée encore une fois. Et voilà, je leur ai dit
010 comme ça abrupte, point, quelque chose que j'avais pas prévue … et mon
011 père, c'est lui qui me dit après m'avoir dit pendant toute ma vie, 'il faut
012 que tu ne sois pas une femme, une gonzesse, un pleurnichard', 'il faut
013 que je sois un homme, fort', etcetera, voilà c'est lui qui a dit à tout le

014 monde, 'il est comme ça, on avait compris', [laughter] 'il va falloir
015 l'accepter tel qu'il est', etcetera, qui m'a fait ma place dans la famille.
016 **DP:** Et toi, tu leur avais dit 'moi, je suis homo' ou tu avais dit …?
017 **LMZ:** … 'les garçons', je disais, 'je ne me marierai pas, je fréquente les
018 garçons', c'est ça, 'je sortais avec des hommes'. Et ma mère, qui est
019 tombée des nues et mon père qui a dit, 'là, on a compris'. Ma mère crise
020 d'hystérie, enfin, très, très, très … euh, choquée, deux mois de pleurs,
021 enfin …
022 **DP:** …vraiment ?
023 **LMZ**: … ah, oui, oui, oui, tous les soirs dès que je bougeais, je sortais … bon
024 après, ça s'est calmé, et puis ça a duré plusieurs années où elle a … elle a
025 un peu, elle se disait 'oui, bon, ça passera' puis maintenant ils ont sens à
026 dire 'bon, ça passe pas' [laughter] … 33 ans … ils ont compris que c'est pas
027 un passade, ils savent que du point du vue scientifique, c'est pas une
028 maladie, c'est pas un déséquilibre, c'est pas … voilà, donc, ils commencent
029 à avancer, ils ont été là à l'Assemblée nationale pour le colloque 'religion
030 et homophobie', ils sont restés, ça leur a plu, ils ont appris plein de
031 choses et on en a parlé. Mais on n'a vraiment jamais parlé après, euh, de
032 ce sujet. Ils comprennent un peu mieux ce que je suis, quoi, qui je
033 suis … plus ou moins mais ce que je suis, qui je suis, ils ont du mal jusqu'à
034 présent.

Zahed clearly draws on his own graduate studies and the tradition of scholarship in critical theory and postcolonial studies by Spivak and others in his intention to perform a 'subaltern identity'. At the same time, however, his speech act represents a flexible accumulation that also incorporates French-specific references and both French and Maghrebi-French values regarding marriage and family. For example, he adopts the widely used French expression 'secret de polichinelle', which is derived from Pierre Wolff's play of the same name. He also uses a form of queer French I have documented elsewhere (Provencher, 2007: 117–45), where speakers adopt face-saving strategies by using normative expressions related to gender, love and marriage when discussing their sexuality with family members. For example, he talks about 'going out with guys' and 'with men' (lines 017–18) instead of using performative 'I' statements like 'je suis homo' or 'je suis gay' or 'je couche avec les garçons'. He also says, 'I will not get married' (line 017), and this phrase resonates both with what 2Fik (pronounced 'Toufik'), another one of my interlocutors has described as his 'coming out à orientale' (Provencher, 2011a) and with what other queer French speakers say about being as clear or 'direct' as possible (Provencher, 2007: 126–32). What is also interesting is that Zahed's father serves as an active agent in this story. It is not necessarily dialogic in the same way that it is between 2Fik and his own father during the negotiation of the purchase of the veil for Fatima or discussions of his onstage performances (Provencher, 2011a). Nevertheless, Zahed's father speaks on behalf of the whole family when he says: 'il est comme ça, on l'avait compris, il va falloir l'accepter tel qu'il est' (lines 014–015). In fact, his father serves as an example of family, not 'LA famille' (line 008) of his grandfather, but of an evolving Maghrebi-French family living in contemporary France that accepts a gay son. Hence, in contrast to recent scholarship on the absent or mute Maghrebi fathers in published Maghrebi-French narratives (Naït-Balk, 2009; Chaumont, 2009) or the representation of Maghrebi-French fathers in *beur* and *banlieue* cinema (Tarr, 2005), Zahed's father provides us a vivid and touching counterexample. In fact, Zahed even states that his father 'secured' (line 015) his place for him 'in the family'. Furthermore, he will go on to proudly use his father's surname 'Zahed' when he publishes his full name on the cover of his polemically titled, *Le Coran et la chair* (see Figure 1). He will also construct a clear family genealogy that unites the multiple identities he is assembling for himself. For example, he writes:

> Je rêvais également d'un arbre généalogique familial qui remonterait, indirectement, jusqu'à la dynastie des Safavides – les restaurateurs de la tradition persane authentique. Je rêvais de notre ancêtre qui fut alors nommé Zahed, ce qui veut dire tout à la fois ascète, persévérant, opiniâtre, obstiné et dévoué à Dieu. (Zahed, 2012: 12)

In the excerpt, he ties himself both to the historical past of dynasties and Persian traditions and to his father's name and its various assigned qualities. In fact, Zahed carried forward these ties and personality traits throughout many speak acts during our interview and elsewhere.

In contrast to his father and the paternal name, Zahed explained how his disclosure greatly upset his mother who cried for two months. In fact, when he left the house each night, he fell outside of his mother's gaze and she was no longer able to remain calm. This destabilised her traditional role within the Maghrebi family, which involved keeping an eye on her children, and hence she ended up anxious and in tears each time he disappeared from her sight.

As Zahed stated, his mother and father believed for several years that his homosexuality was a phase and that it would pass (lines 024–025). However, they now understand differently. Like other queer French speakers, Zahed had difficulty breaching the topic with them again following the initial disclosure. Nevertheless, both parents continued to evolve over the next few years. For example, they both attended and learnt from the conference on religion and homophobia at the Assemblé nationale (line 029). His mother also underwent psychotherapy for four years (Henry and Sauvaget, 2012) and eventually approached him when he was 30 years old to express her concern for his continued search for peace in his life. She encouraged him to get married like his other siblings. Zahed explains:

> Un jour au tournant de mes trente ans, ma mère est venue vers moi en me disant, 'Je vois que tu n'es pas totalement apaisé. Je vois qu'il y a quelque chose qui te manque. Marie-toi comme tes frères et sœurs. Nous accepterons ton mari.' Et c'est ce qu'ils on fait. (Zahed, 2013)

Indeed, after Zahed married Qiyaam in 2012 (see Figure 2) in South Africa, his entire family attended their follow-up ceremony and celebration in Sevran. Moreover, Zahed's father continued to show concern for his son and his protective paternal instincts emerged when he stated:

> Mon fils défend ce qu'il pense être juste. Il n'a aucune récompense. Il vit très chichement. On l'aide un peu. Il se bat pour amener un peu de tolérance. J'ai juste peur pour lui avec tout l'obscurantisme, ceux qui disent qu'il faut tuer les homosexuels … Des fous, il y en a partout. (Henry and Sauvaget, 2012)

These are signs of an evolving Maghrebi-French family with moderate Muslim parents who take an active role in learning to accept a gay son in contemporary France.

After this important declaration to his entire family, and his eventual marriage, Zahed no longer saw the need to perform a subaltern identity in relation to them. He told me how he no longer wanted to be like the boy from the ghetto who lives a 'double life by wearing his baseball cap backwards, ducking into the restroom, changing into a "fashion victim", and clubbing in the Marais or at Le Dépôt'. He continues: 'On a tous fait ça. Aujourd'hui, je ne veux plus me sentir schizophrène, quoi.' Zahed's announcement to his family is an important step towards the integration of his sexuality for himself and his family. However, it will take several more years for him to reconcile his sexuality with his spirituality and to speak and write publicly about such issues.

Zahed's queer, religious and French performances

During our interview, Zahed distinguished very clearly between a time in his youth, especially during the family's return to Algeria, when he memorised the Quran in Arabic and prayed every

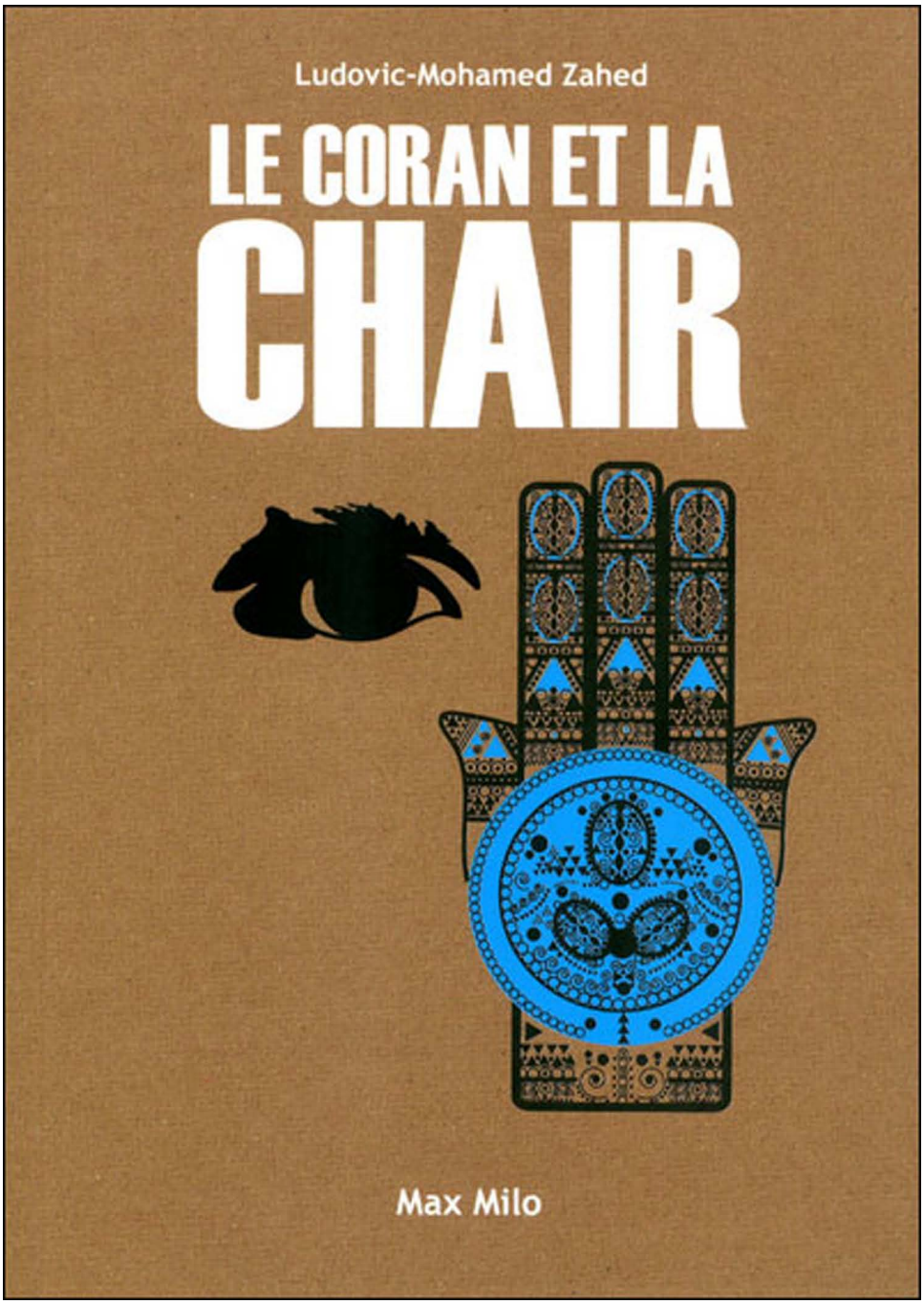

Figure 1. Zahed, *Le Coran et la chair* (2012).

day, followed by a seven-year separation from Islam as a young adult when he moved back to France, attended high school and university, and came out to his family, and then, finally, the most

Figure 2. Qiyaam Jantjies Zahed (left) and Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed (right).

recent stage of his life when he expressed a more 'coherent', 'peaceful' and reintegrated self and reintroduced the Muslim faith into his daily life in France as a French citizen and a Muslim.

In the excerpts that follow, Zahed discusses this rejection of Islam, and then the eventual reintegration of his spirituality into his daily performances of sexuality and citizenship. In the first excerpt below, he speaks about his own evolving approach to Islam and the Quran after a seven-year hiatus when others had told him how it was impossible to live as a homosexual and be a practising Muslim at the same time. As we will see, Zahed's emerging hybrid identity required new and dynamic ways of thinking about his heritage and interpreting the Quran. He states:

001 **LMZ:** … il y a des sectes entières qui se sont fait décapités parce qu'ils
002 ont dit que le Coran a été créé au fur et à mesure, que les versions ont été
003 adaptées, ce qui est dit dans le Coran en noir sur blanc, les versions ont
004 été adaptées aux contextes, et c'est très intelligent, justement c'est la
005 véritable révélation, c'est celle qui prend source qui ne descend pas du
006 ciel, c'était dans la Bible aussi, il disait à Moïse, il faut le faire vivre parmi
007 vous, c'est à nous de le réapproprier et la faire vivre, c'est un fait
008 historique, quand un verset du Coran n'était plus adapté, le Prophète lui-
009 même le changeait, l'enlevait, et le faisait oublier et le remplaçait par un
010 autre verset … donc, voilà, de ce point de vue, il faut une approche
011 dynamique qu'il faut avoir de son héritage.

In this excerpt, Zahed adopts an image of the Prophet Mohamed who represents an active agent of change working against a static form of Islam and static interpretations of the Quran. Zahed took this one step further when he argued in public speeches: 'Aujourd'hui, je suis persuadé que si le prophète Mahomet était vivant il marierait, par exemple, des couples d'homosexuels' (Zahed, 2012: 28−9). This provides Zahed with a semantic anchor, and a justification for his own dynamic/queer approach to Islam, thereby creating a symbolic filiation with Mohamed while also securing

a place for his new approach in a secular France that is engaged in a fight for universal human rights. Of course, this dual filiation of France and Mohamed is reinforced by the author's hyphenated name, 'Ludovic-Mohamed', which allows him to perform dual identities.[8] Indeed, he adopts a flexible accumulation of discourses that allow him to work as an agent of change from within those two established systems. He also performs the role of a careful, informed, critical reader of the Quran who cautions against a 'black and white' reading (line 003) of the sacred text and supports dynamic approaches to the verses. He also relies on Christianity here and elsewhere as another established system with references to the Bible and Moses, and he links them to a wider set of converging religious systems (the three Abrahamic religions), which points to an ecumenical and universal approach that emerge more fully in *Le Coran et la chair*.

Zahed continues to discuss heritage and the role of the Prophet in the next excerpt, and, as we will see, he relies on an even broader accumulation of discourses that draw on both historical and contemporary debates on the Prophet, family, filiation, revolution, the veil, and the rights of women and other minorities.

001 **LMZ:** Au bout de sept ans, j'ai compris que … il fallait me réapproprier
002 mon héritage. Donc là, j'ai compris effectivement qu'il y avait des
003 homosexuels à l'époque du Prophète et qu'il ne les a pas condamnés, il
004 ne les a pas trucidés contrairement à ce qu'on dit … voire même mieux,
005 c'est comme les femmes, comme les esclaves, comme les minorités
006 sexuelles, il leur a donné, de mon point de vue, on pourrait dire la
007 meilleure place possible au vue de l'ordre social et des préjugés que ses
008 contemporains avaient. C'est-à-dire que c'était un révolutionnaire mais
009 dans une moindre mesure. Et qu'il amenait une révolution petit à petit.
010 Euh, il a fait des pactes avec des tribus à son époque, ça c'est reconnu et
011 connu, il y a aucun blasphème là-dedans par les historiens d'Islam, eux-
012 mêmes. Il a fait des pactes avec certaines tribus donc c'était un fin
013 politicien, un fin tacticien, il n'a pas juste sortie une civilisation comme ça
014 en massacrant tout le monde certainement pas, et certainement pas en
015 faisant la promotion de l'esclavage, en voilant les femmes alors qu'elles
016 étaient déjà voilées à l'époque, en leur donnant un statut, comme ça,
017 inférieur. Il a donné des droits aux femmes alors qu'elles étaient
018 vendues à l'époque, les gens les lapidaient dans certains villages … parce
019 qu'il disait 'je veux donner des droits aux femmes, il faut pas les faire
020 souffrir' … bon, minorités sexuelles, la meilleure des places au sein de sa
021 famille, les hommes qui n'avaient pas d'attributs de la masculinité, on
022 dirait aujourd'hui des gays, des homosexuels, ils servaient les femmes du
023 Prophète, lui-même, dans leur maison, et les femmes ne se voilaient pas
024 devant eux, donc tout le monde savait qu'ils n'avaient pas de désir
025 envers les femmes, et voire même lorsque l'un d'eux était efféminé,
026 comme ça, disait maintenant, donc c'est vraiment une forme d'empathie,
027 comme ça, d'accueil et de respect total de ces minorités sexuelles.

In this excerpt, Zahed points to the Prophet again as a key point in his religious history and also now as a model of revolution to justify Zahed's own dynamic approach to Islam. In fact, the Prophet becomes a revolutionary figure who embraces dramatic change as well as the decolonised and unveiled subject. Moreover, Zahed situates homosexuals in relation to other minority groups − women and slaves − and presents a narrative of progress that opens up /universalises rights for all groups; hence he also draws on a universal republican narrative to achieve this. At the same time, he constructs a discourse in which he situates the marginalised individual (i.e. woman, slave,

effeminate homosexual) within the 'queer' family of the Prophet and locates himself within that familial space. Since Zahed struggled as a child with the ambiguity of his own gender, he finds a sense of home in this version of the house of the Prophet (Zahed, 2012: 179). In fact, the Prophet secures the place of the 'effeminate homosexual' within his family in the same way that Zahed's father 'secured' his own son's place within the Zahed family. This discursive manoeuvre allows him to unite past dynasties, the Prophet, his father, the Zahed heritage and universal rights to forge a place for himself in contemporary France.

Zahed constructs an imagined active and sympathetic listener in this conversation who can 'hear' what he is saying (i.e. an intended 'perlocutionary' effect). This could include a 'secular' French listener who is sympathetic to universal rights, women's rights and unveiled women's rights, or an informed Maghrebi-French listener of Islamic background who also believes in unveiled women's rights, Mohamed's agency in determining the Quran, and what Zahed states are the historic facts about the Prophet. Zahed is performing a citizenship of the twenty-first century that moves away from 'fundamentalist listeners' related to staunch Frenchness or Islamist tendencies by constructing an imagined 'moderate' listener who can hear what he has to say about models of family, filiation, human rights and the ability to perform private (religious, sexual) identities in a public space in contemporary France. So, in contrast to 2Fik's dissident citizenship constructed outside the communities of France (Provencher, 2011a), Zahed constructs his homosexuality and Muslim identity squarely in relation both to the 'normative' with historical ties to the Prophet and secular France, and to the 'subversive' or 'queer' through the Prophet's welcoming house and dynamic approaches to the Quran, to imagine a new Islam of France.

In relation to my question about what queerness has to teach us about spirituality, and vice versa, Zahed continues to perform as a French citizen who subscribes to a universalising argument about human rights, and he imagines a sympathetic listener who supports a reimagined model for heritage or filiation:

001 **LMZ**: Je pense que les minorités sexuelles, nous sommes à l'avant garde,
002 comme les femmes au siècle dernier, les femmes encore aujourd'hui
003 mais, encore plus les minorités sexuelles, c'est pour ça que Elizabeth
004 Stuart, avec la théorie queer et la politique queer sont au centre des
005 débats qui sont au cœur des sociétés parce que c'est le dernier des
006 tabous … minorité sexuelle au 21e siècle, on est à l'avant garde de ces
007 mutations sociétales-là, ce n'est pas qu'on en décide mais c'est qu'on peut
008 les formuler, formuler les solutions et formuler en tout cas les
009 problèmes, et les tenant à l'aboutissement les problématiques mieux que
010 n'importe qui d'autre parce qu'on est vraiment obligé, nous, de
011 remettre en question cet héritage-là, on ne peut faire autrement que de
012 se dire 'ça n'est pas compatible'. Cette représentation de la religion qui
013 est rigoriste, hétéronormée qui existe en Islam en tout cas depuis le 19e
014 siècle qui a été construite … ce rejet de l'homosexualité, cette, comment
015 dire, cette exaltation comme ça de, un peu presque comme les Nazis, tu
016 vois, le totalitarisme c'était la même chose eh, c'est rejet des minorités,
017 les boucs émissaires, et exaltation de la toute puissance masculine. 'On
018 est en danger, l'empire ottoman n'existe plus, qu'est-ce que c'est que
019 l'Islam finalement, ça va pas disparaître? L'occidentalisation forcée. Le
020 progrès à tout va. On se sent colonisés.' En gros, c'est ça. 'C'est la faute
021 de l'occident, ils nous ont apporté la drogue, les films porno, et
022 l'homosexualité'. En gros c'est ça. Mais, la plupart des musulmans

023 reviennent de ça et ont bien compris au moins à l'occident, on est double
024 minorité que nous arrivons ici à faire des dialogues … j'ai été en Afrique
025 du sud à la 7e où j'ai rencontré … conférence internationale des homosexuels
026 musulmans, et j'ai vu toutes ces associations, je sais en France, et je le dis
027 en toute modestie, en France, il y a un débat qui se mène, qui n'existe
028 nulle part ailleurs. C'est difficile, mais, on a des armes intellectuelles en
029 France que dont d'autres ne disposent pas. Même si en Afrique du sud
030 effectivement, s'ils ont mis ça il ya 15 ans la protection des minorités
031 sexuelles dans leur constitution, c'était, le premier pays au monde … il y a
032 vraiment ici en France, qui est peut-être plus difficile … toujours comme
033 ça en France … on fait la révolution plus que les autres mais plus tard.
034 Donc, je pense que, voilà, ce que l'homosexualité et les minorités
035 sexuelles peuvent apporter à ce débat en France et en particulier sur
036 l'Islam de France, c'est une représentation, une vision, une acuité comme
037 ça sociale que personne d'autre ne peut avoir.

In this final excerpt, Zahed juxtaposes a genealogy of 'scapegoats' ['boucs émissaires'] or minorities − women, queers, etc − that represent 'Western progress' and 'corruption with drugs, porno, homosexuality' against the 'non-Westerner' or 'Nazis', 'Fascists', 'totalitarianism', 'la figure masculine', 'Islam' and the Ottoman empire. In so doing, Zahed creates an implicit 'we' grouping of multiple listeners who can sympathise with him and his words − Jews, Muslims, moderate secular French citizens. This could also include the sympathetic Maghrebi-French, moderate Muslims, immigrants, women, and the *beurette* (unveiled Muslim woman). I have discussed elsewhere (Provencher, 2011b) that hate speech and the language of homophobia in France involve anti-Semitic references and images of Hitler and the gas chambers with statements like 'au four avec les pédés!' In contrast, a language of tolerance, universal difference or 'ecumenicalism', to borrow Zahed's approach, must then turn against Nazism, Fascism and totalitarianism, and present a universalised front of victims from various historical periods, like the time of the Prophet and of the Holocaust − women, slaves, children, Jews, queers, etc. − and beyond. Indeed, Zahed's verbal performances in our interview and in other public venues allow him to construct a new French Muslim who builds a linguistic community, filiations and affiliations with other French groups.

We may think that listeners of Islamist tendencies would be unnerved by most by Zahed's speech acts; however, we can also imagine that 'fundamentalist' or traditional French citizens of the far right who are anti-Islam would be most unnerved by his arguments. Like performance artist 2Fik, whose photographs of the veiled woman touches a sensitive French nerve about Islam and Muslims in France (Provencher, 2011a), Zahed's verbal performances touch a sensitive French nerve about citizenship and the need for integration of all differences − Algerian, sexual and religious − in order to integrate and perform 'Frenchness'. In her study of Les Indigènes de la République, Kiran Grewal (2011) argues that the French non-profit organisation's female Muslim leader Houria Bouteldja advances in new political directions by drawing attention to the interconnected nature of racism and sexism. As Grewal states:

> The simultaneous highlighting through both scholarship and activism of the interconnected nature of racism and sexism is perhaps the most important new development in French political, academic and public life. By stating in their *appel* that '[d]ans notre société, racisme et sexisme sont intimement imbriqués', *les féministes indigènes* sought to avoid the trap, which *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* had fallen into, of being forced to choose between ethnic identity and their gender identity. Moreover, they showed their cynicism for employing the language of Republican universalism and egalitarianism in the context of a nation which had far from satisfactorily achieved these lofty goals. (2011: 241−2)

Like Bouteldja and other speakers from *les feministes indigènes* who draw on a wide semiotic system and flexible accumulation of discourses on gender, race and ethnicity to advance new developments in French political, academic and public life, Maghrebi-French queer speakers like Zahed with open declaration of being simultaneously gay, Muslim, Algerian and French promise similar success. In other words, Zahed's is not only a system that recognises 'the interesting and mutually reinforcing nature of race and gender discriminations' (Grewal, 2011: 241), but one that also recognises discrimination related to religion and sexuality. His performance relies on the simultaneous emergence of multiple 'I' statements (i.e. 'I am French', 'I am Algerian', 'I am homosexual' and 'I am Muslim') to forge a new language of activism and citizenship in France that works through and beyond the current linguistic and semiotic systems.

Conclusion

In sum, Zahed effectively uses a flexible accumulation of discourses to perform a universal French identity of multiple differences for the twenty-first century. He nicely recaps this himself at the end of *Le Coran et la chair*:

> Je pense qu'il est essentiel de comprendre que l'homosexualité n'est pas un cas à part; c'est bien au contraire *le cas* de figure qui permet d'explorer l'axiologique islamique sans concession. L'homosexualité ne me permet pas de porter des revendications particulières; elle me permet d'adresser, de manière incandescent, des problématiques qui concernent l'ensemble des musulmans de France, et au-delà même, l'ensemble de nos concitoyens. (2012: 186)

Zahed moves both his homosexuality and his spirituality out of the margins or 'out of the ghetto' of *communautarisme* and 'particularism' to centre stage as a universal concern for all French citizens. He accomplishes this by relating his own struggle to other 'normative' and 'queer' French and Muslim groupings. All that is required for successful execution, of course, is insightful and sympathetic listeners who are able to 'hear' his ecumenical and dynamic performance of difference through universal French citizenship and good Muslim brotherhood.

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Notes

1. This is part of a forthcoming monograph entitled *Queer Maghrebi French: Language, Filiations, and Temporalities.*
2. In his study of Filipino gay men in the diaspora, Manalansan writes: 'Filipino gay men's experiences and discourses do not construct a consistent monolithic self. Instead, we find a configuration of possible scripts of self/selves that shift according to the situation … As immigrants, these men straddle competing cultural traditions, memories, and material conditions' (2003: x).
3. For more about this organisation, see www.homosexuels-musulmans.org/.
4. During our interview, he also mentioned an uncle who lives in New York and approximately a dozen cousins who live in Montreal.
5. For example, see Stuart (2002), Spivak (1988), Kugle (2010), Mernissi (1987, 2009), and Wadud (2006).

6. See Oubrou (2009) and Ramadan (2009).
7. Zahed explains how his brother had broken his nose and jaw when he was younger for acting 'effeminate' (Zahed, 2012: 14).
8. He writes: 'Je me sentais entre les filles et les garçons. J'étais très androgyne et mon prénom usuel était encore Lotfi. Du fait de cette androgynie prononcée, les gens ne savaient pas si j'étais une fille ou un garçon' (2012: 179). During his early twenties, he decides to legally change his name from Mohamed-Lotfi to Ludovic-Mohamed, which paradoxically anchors him into a gender normativity while also signifying a bi- or polyculturality/queerness that corresponds to his multiple (Iranian, Maghrebi and French) origins (2012: 179).

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