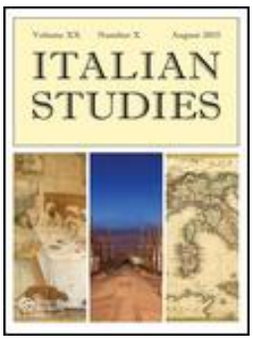

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Christopher Atwood

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'Voglio sedurre quelli che stanno di là': Same-Sex Tourism and the Manufacturing of Queer Elsewheres

CHRISTOPHER ATWOOD
University of California, Berkeley

This essay examines queer writers' representations of North Africa, focusing especially on Franco Buffoni's novel *Zamel* (2009). In the Maghreb, the same-sex tourist sees a land of primal (s)excess where the norms of home — exclusive heterosexuality, homophobic violence, and monogomous coupling — need no longer apply. Crossing the Mediterranean, this subject hopes to flee the discursive borders (gay *versus* straight) that supposedly domesticate desire in Italy. Eros not bound by either/or labels is thought still to flourish in North Africa. Turning to the Maghreb, the Italian same-sex tourist longs to approximate the homoerotics Italy once housed. North Africans do not represent for the Italian tourist an impossibly distinct Other but rather are made to signify a return to Italy's imagined erotic past. While certainly questioning the progressivist plots of Europe's LGBT movements, where the act of coming-out is considered equivalent to the forward-movement of history, *Zamel* presents North Africa as a land of sexual surfeit and archaic eros. It continues, that is, to repeat colonial scripts. Who is allowed to travel? Who, instead, gets made into a ventriloquized metaphor of eros' erratic stray?

KEYWORDS queer, travel, North Africa, border-crossing, orientalism

Throughout the Grand Tour, northern Europeans set their sights on the Mediterranean, lured by tales of lusty bodies, pagan permissiveness, and ambivalent sexualities.[1] For some, the goal of travel was to come in contact with men deemed at once Other (Arab/Southern) and same (male).[2] In addition to standard sites like Rome, Venice,

[1] See Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Ian Littlewood, *Sultry Climates: Travel and Sex* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002).

[2] For a discussion of homeroticism among Britons in eighteenth century Florence, see Clorinda Donato, 'Where 'Reason and the Sense of Venus Are Innate in Men': Male Friendship, Secret Societies, Academies, and Antiquarians in Eighteenth Century Florence', *Italian Studies*, 65.3 (2010), 329–44.

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and Florence, later visitors directed their erotic escapades toward the Maghreb, focusing in particular on Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.[3] In travelogues and novels, North Africa is a place where eroticism, including same-sex acts, is said to reside everywhere. Before landing in the Maghreb, though, travellers would often pass through southern Italy, considered the outer edge of Europe and the Orient.[4]

With this in mind, the Italian same-sex tourist is in a queer position. On the one hand, he is a European discontent with desire's domestication back home. And yet, his dissatisfaction emerges from the belief that, in centuries past, Italy had attracted men in search of same-sex relations. In twentieth- and twenty-first century Italy, Pier Paolo Pasolini (*Il fiore delle Mille e una notte*), Aldo Busi (*Sodomie in corpo 11*), Alessandro Golinelli (*Le rondini di Tunisi*), and Nico Naldini (*Shahrazad ascoltami*) all continued to exoticize North Africa as a space where sex between men, but no homo *versus* hetero ontology, is endemic.[5] Naldini commented that 'nella nostra società è sparita la bisessualità; è un dato antropologico. Ci sono club gay, ma fanno orrore'.[6] To touch bygone bisexuality, these writers claim, Italians must head south.

Franco Buffoni's novel *Zamel* (2009), the object of this essay, is a prime example of this orientalist fantasy.[7] One of the book's protagonists, Aldo, moves to Tunisia in search of a porno-utopic elsewhere in which he aims to play out the homoerotics supposedly ubiquitous once in Italy. Disappointed with the homophobia and homonormativity of home, the Italian subject crosses the Mediterranean, hoping to approximate there Italy's wanton past and distance himself from its wanting present. In North Africa, he sees a land of primal (s)excess where the norms of home — exclusive heterosexuality, homophobic violence, and monogomous gay coupling — no longer apply. Going there, he longs to revert to the way eros worked before Italy's adoption of gay and straight identities.

Despite envisioning abundant sex in the Maghreb, novels like Buffoni's sketch North Africa as a space where taboos — Islam forbids male-male sex — hamper the articulation of a homosexual identity. The horizon is imagined as simultaneously indulgent of homosexual acts and prejudiced against homosexuals. Seemingly contradictory concepts — perverse excess and homophobic constraint — work in productive tension here. Yearning to return to a time/place when same-sex acts were not only performed by those identifying as gay, the Italian visitor searches abroad for sex with men who would sleep both with women and with him.

Through travel, the visitor longs to queer heterosexuality, proving that male-male sex and homosexual ontology are not one and the same. But, as a male tourist interested only in men, he continues to worry that, once there, the Maghreb may be more

[3] See Joseph A. Boone, 'Vacation Cruises: Or, the Homoerotics of Orientalism', *PMLA*, 110.1 (1995), 89–97; Robert Aldrich, *Homosexuality and Colonialism* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[4] For a discussion of southern Europe's place in Europe's self-constitution, see Roberto M. Dainotto. *Europe (in Theory)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius. Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

[5] *Il fiore delle Mille e una notte* (dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini. PEA Produzioni Europee Associate. 1974); Aldo Busi, *Sodomie in corpo 11: non viaggio, non sesso e scrittura* (Milan: Mondadori, 1988); Alessandro Golinelli, *Le rondini di Tunisi*, (Milan: Marco Tropea Editore, 2005); Nico Naldini, *Shahrazad ascoltami* (Naples: L'Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2011).

[6] http://ilmiolibro.kataweb.it/booknews_dettaglio_recensione.asp?id_contenuto=3716476 [accessed 1 May 2012].

[7] Franco Buffoni, *Zamel* (Milan: Marcos y Marcos, 2009).

homophobic than the Italy he has left behind. An encounter with sexual difference elicts desire and dread. Jasbir Puar rightly cautions that homophobia and homoeroticism are not necessarily mutually exclusive in Western fantasies.[8] Competing imagined topographies, I claim, trouble Italian writers' homoerotic representations of North Africa, which is understood in *Zamel* as tantalizingly and terrifyingly distinct. Aligned in *Zamel* with Europe and the United States, a minoritarian homosexual identity is, in contrast, read as a symptom of eros immobilized. It is precisely this promise of a lack of coming-out politics that lures the Italian south in *Zamel*.

Composed of messages exchanged between two Italian gays, the novel narrates the epistolary friendship of Edo and Aldo. Edo, the younger of the two, lives in Italy, but travels to Tunisia after ending a long-term relationship. Aldo, an Italian ex-pat, transported his life to Tunis, attracted by the ease of sex there with 'uomini veri' — men who do not identify as 'omosessuali'. Whereas Edo wishes Italy could be more akin to '[i] paesi avanzati e civili' (p. 99) like Spain or the Netherlands, countries that legally recognize same-sex unions, Aldo bemoans the domestication of male-male erotics in Europe. While Edo aligns Northern Europe's gay rights with the 'direzione' of 'modernità', Aldo lambasts coming out as an obstacle to pervasive, polymorphous homoerotics (p. 144).

Zamel opens with Edo in Aldo's Tunis home. Edo is going through his friend's books, reading comments Aldo had scribbled in the margins. Soon, we learn that Aldo is dead; fleeing Italy in search of a culture peopled with orifice-indifferent 'scopatori', Aldo is eventually killed by his lover, Nabil. Nabil murders Aldo after the ex-pat called him *zamel*, a derogatory regional term for the passive male partner in anal sex (p. 14). Rifling through Aldo's bookcase, Edo stumbles across a book called *Omocidi*: *gli omosessuali uccisi in Italia*. This text is not fictional and was published in 2002, detailing anti-gay homicides in the peninsula.[9]

On a page listing these crimes, Edo spots a note written by Aldo: 'e qualcuno si chiede perché io abbia deciso di trasferirmi in questo paradiso' (p. 30). Rather than interpreting Aldo's murder as a sign of Italy's progress vis-à-vis the Maghreb, the novel draws a parallel between the homophobic violence rampant in Italy and that still prevalent abroad. Aldo, like Pasolini, fetishized Italy's south and the Orient seeing there a polymorphous eros not-yet-homogenized by capital, or not-yet-confined to either/or identities.[10] Like Pasolini, Aldo is killed by his male lover.[11] While refusing to laud Italy as more civilized than North Africa, *Zamel* nevertheless cites the Maghreb in order to underscore just how backward Italy is when compared to the rest of Western Europe.

North Africa tempted Aldo because he believed that, upon arrival, familiar sexual labels would have no purchase on sex: 'La differenza è che non ho bisogno di andare

[8] Jasbir Puar, 'Circuits of Queer Mobility: Tourism, Travel, Globalization', *GLQ*, 8.1–2 (2002), 101–37.

[9] Andrea Pini, *Omocidi: gli omosessuali uccisi in Italia* (Rome: Stampa Alternativa, collana Eretica, 2002).

[10] For a discussion of Pasolini and Orientalism, see Luca Caminati, *Orientalismo eretico: Pier Paolo Pasolini e il cinema del terzo mondo* (Milano: Mondadori, 2007).

[11] Later in the novel, Edo chastises Aldo, saying: 'Parli come Pasolini' (p. 90). In response, Aldo exclaims: 'Ma certo, lui era uno che le cose le capiva. Voi a Milano a scimiottare stili di vita nord europei e americani. Bel risultato. E li avete esportati pure a Roma, che è diventata invivibile da questo punto di vista. Se non ci fossero gli immigrati curdi, rumeni e albanesi, non si caverebbe più un ragno dal buco' (p. 90).

da nessuna parte, che non ci sono luoghi deputati. Qui c'è la vita e basta, perché i maschi sono ancora normali, come Allah commanda, e guardano le femmine e i froci col desiderio di farsele e — se proprio vuoi — di farseli' (p. 154). North Africa's lack (the absence of homo/hetero identities) is thus eroticized as a sort of sensual plenitude (more men are available). In the United State of America, in contrast, desire between men allegedly stays 'all'infuori di qualche club, una discoteca, un paio di ristoranti — gay per definizione, dove trovavi solo gay' (p. 153).

There, the tourist wants to trespass what is imaginable at home all the while staging that transgression. North Africa is no paradise of gay sex. On the contrary, it is imagined as the site of polymorphous sodomy. Being penetrated abroad is thought to transport the visitor away from the gay sex (between homosexuals) he associates with his point of origin. Sex bound to identity is precisely what Aldo longs to leave behind him in Europe. North Africa's negativity, not conceptualizing sexuality the same way as in Europe, is its desired surplus. According to Aldo, silence around male-male sex (*si fa ma non si dice*) sustains the ubiquity of same-sex erotics in North Africa.

Inverting the logic of coming-out politics, silence is the screen behind which male-male sex is said to flourish. Speech domesticates desire: 'Prenderlo in culo — che è l'unica cosa veramente essenziale — ed essere discrete, disponibili e silenziose come geishe. Questo è molto rassicurante per i maschi. Altrimenti perché sarei venuto ad abitare in Tunisia? Restavo a Roma' (p. 71). Aldo imagines himself going oriental abroad, appropriating and aligning himself with a far-off culture and the feminine. North Africa attracts because, Aldo insists, the divide between 'real men' and *froci* is still firm there.

Although the text says that Europe is more accepting of homosexuals, Aldo refuses to see the expression of a homosexual identity as a sign of European superiority. He critiques the demand to attach an either/or orientation to sexual acts, claiming that coming-out politics have limited — not liberated — male eros in Europe. Obligatory labels, according to Aldo, block desire's natural tendency to veer from one object to the next: 'Eh, sì, oggi si fa il coming-out ... Mi procura solo irritazione: inutile perdita di tempo. E in più distrae i veri uomini dall'unico risultato che mi interessa: che si svuotino i coglioni non solo con le donne, ma anche con me' (p. 70). Aldo ventures to North Africa to sleep with men who do not identify as gay.

Men, Aldo says, are inclined to empty their 'coglioni' in women and men, as long as they do not have to talk about it. Coming-out, the compulsion to confess a homosexual identity, sets off-course the capacity of 'i maschi veri' (p. 113) to wander from one object to another: between female and male bodies. Indeed, travel to the Maghreb is thought to expose the distance separating hetero- and homo- sexualities as a learned limit, not an innate border. Mobility, perversion, and deviation become textual markers here of a queerness loosened from exclusive sexual identity. Abroad, Aldo says, male eros continues to overstep limits whose naturalness is taken for granted in Italy, seeking satisfaction inside men's and women's bodies.

Aldo tells his friend: 'mio caro, quando si ha un po' di calo del desiderio, qui, si prende la metro' (p. 46). Eros, not confined to an either/or sexual identity, is, like the traveller, said to migrate from one object to the next. In *Zamel*, the proper itinerant subject is he-who-affirms that travel and transgression are coterminous, that wandering crumbles fixed positions. Travel represents the structuring metaphor of queerness

both in *Zamel* and in much contemporary (queer and post-modern) theory.[12] Edo, the co-narrator in *Zamel*, explains his trip by saying that 'avevo bisogno di un po' di dis-vertimento, appunto di volgermi altrove' (p. 73). Via travel, the same-sex tourist hopes to affirm male-male sex's naturalness (there it is ubiquitous) and disorient familiar sexual identities (there sex doesn't follow the same path).

Initially, Aldo presents himself as he-who-strays, rendering the traveller a privileged figure of queerness.[13] Like the texts' depictions of eros, he imagines himself as nomadic. 'Ma io voglio uscire dalla categoria, non lo capisci?' Aldo avers, 'Io voglio sedurre quelli che stanno di là' (p. 103). Presumed in his account is the idea that travel 'already destabilizes and transgresses forms of boundary making'.[14] Notwithstanding Aldo's lauding of eros's itinerant flow, his own desires stay solidly homo. Transgression of boundaries moves, then, only in one direction: the same-sex tourist desires men who, despite sleeping with women, still bed him. As a European homosexual, Aldo is a travelling reminder of the very identity system he purports to leave behind.

This contradiction raises a number of interlaced questions. In producing proximity between itinerant deviance and queerness, how have theorists and novelists necessarily presented the homosexual as a static category confined to the West? How might queerness need the fantasy of far-removed eroticism — *not* gay, *not* familiar, *not* straight, *not* close — to narrate its own alterity? Does the fluid queer subject need to invoke homosexuality as the staid orientation that s/he moves past? Might this moving past demonstrate that queerness is always-already constituted in relation to — imagined against or beyond — the homosexual or the heterosexual? How does queerness come to cohere around identity positions which it claims are too coherent? Might identity's figuration as outside queerness actually be symptomatic of queerness's reliance on identity as foil?

[12] Sara Ahmed argues that 'the experiences of migration, which can involve trauma and violence, becomes the idealized basis of an ethics of transgression, an ethics which assumes that it is possible to be liberated from identity as such, at the same time as it belongs to an authentically migrant subject': *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 82. We find a prime example of this in Iain Chamber's *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*. He writes that 'for the nomadic experience of language, wandering without a fixed home, dwelling at the crossroads of the world, bearing our sense of being and difference, is no longer the expression of a unique tradition or history, even if it pretends to carry a single name. Thought wanders. It migrates, requires translation. Here reason runs the risk of opening up to the world, of finding itself in a passage without a reassuring foundation or finality: a passage open to the changing skies of existence and terrestrial illumination'. Chambers morphs migrancy into the generalizable state of post-modernity. Travel without the guarantee of return, a constant de-centering, becomes the metaphor of an erratic post-modern subject. Iain Chambers, *Migration, Culture, Identity* (New York & London: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.

[13] Puar notes that queerness wants to see itself as 'as singularly transgressive of identity norms'; 'the focus on transgression, however, is precisely the term by which queerness narrates its own exceptionalism. [. . .] queerness has its own exceptionalist desires: exceptionalism is a founding impulse, indeed the very core of a queerness that claims itself as an anti-, trans-, or un-identity. The paradigm of gay liberation and emancipation has produced all sorts of troubling narratives: about the greater homophobia of immigrant and communities of color, about the stricter family values and mores in these communities, about a certain prerequisite migration from home, about coming-out teleologies': Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 22–23.

[14] Ahmed. *Strange Encounters*, pp. 81–82.

Fetishizing fluid sexuality, aligned here with Arab (s)excess, can lead to a denial of identity's instability in Europe.[15] Metaphorizing the Arab male — making him the vehicle of queering — reaffirms a myth very much at home in Europe's sexual imaginary: the Orient is where sex exceeds. Same-sex tourism, Puar argues, aims for 'the disruption of heterosexuality through visible and mobile homosexuality'.[16] Joseph Boone similarly argues that the 'Arabic Orient bec[a]me a psychic screen on which to project fantasies of illicit sexuality and unbridled excess', including homoerotic longings.[17] Images of anthropological distance, rather than neutrally reporting cultural difference, participate in a European fantasy of North African sensuality, fixing the Arab in terms of his utility for the European tourist. The Arab, subsequently, is expected to stick to a line that swerves.

'The journey towards the stranger', Ahmed says, 'becomes a form of self-discovery in which the stranger functions yet again to establish and define the "I"'.[18] Claiming that only those Arab men whose desires stray are valid, Aldo maps a proper orientation — aimlessness — onto their sexuality. Narratives of flight like *Zamel* fix certain subjects into the embodiment of errancy, continuing to demarcate a border between authentic (errant/non-identitarian) and inauthentic (domesticated/identitarian). In the afterward to his earlier book of poetry, *Noi e loro,* Buffoni claimed that 'sesso Edenico [. . .] ancora pulsa in Nordafrica e nel Vicino oriente, così come nella mia giovinezza ancora pulsava in Sicilia, in Grecia'.[19] In representing same-sex desire in North Africa, moreover, 'è questo "ancora" che ho voluto testimoniare, pur nella consapevolezza del suo progressivo sfumare — di stagione in stagione — nell'inautentico'.[20] In North Africa, Buffoni says, male-male eroticism is still innocent, unbeholden to gay panic or the need to link acts to ontology. In Italy, that sodomical reality is bygone.

North Africa's Eden, he fears, will soon vanish, supplanted by 'l'inautentico' — the adoption of either/or sexual identities. Following this logic, southern Europe has

[15] For a discussion on the 'fetish of fluidity', see Brad Epps, 'The Fetish of Fluidity', in *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Tim Dean and Christopher Lane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 412–31.

[16] Puar, 'Circuits', p. 102. Puar writes that the presumed homophobia of other cultures 'does not, after all, deflect the lure of an exotic (queer) paradise; instead it encourages a continuity of colonial constructions of tourism as a travel adventure into uncharted territory laden with the possibility of sexual encounters, illicit seductions and dangerous liaisons — a version of what Renato Rosaldo terms "imperial nostalgia"': 'Circuits', p. 113.

[17] Boone, 'Vacation Cruises', p. 89.

[18] Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, p. 6.

[19] See: http://www.francobuffoni.it/noi_e_loro.aspx [accessed 25 June 2012].

[20] *Noi e loro* is a collection of alternating first-person poems between an Italian homosexual and various 'extracomunitari'. The immigrant becomes a figure through which the 'omosessuale' voices and legitimizes his feelings of being an outsider. While acknowledging differences, Buffoni is attempting to invoke a homology between the two groups' feelings of 'homelessness'. Describing a young man in North Africa, he writes, 'E sei sano come un dio / Sei quasi bello, col profumo / del tuo amore / Vuoi riempire la mia casa?' Again, *altrove* is made to compensate — to fill in — for what is considered lacking 'a casa'. In another poem, the homosexual 'io' describes feeling ill-at-ease in Italy. Errancy, embodied in the figure of the migrant, comes to signify the queer subject's alienation from home: 'Una lunga sfilata di monti / Mi separa dai diritti / pensavo l'altro giorno osservando / Il lago maggiore e le Alpi / Nel volo tra Roma e Parigi / [. . .] / Da Barcellona a Berlino oggi in Europa / Ovunque mi sento rispettato / Tranne che tra Roma e Milano / Dove abito e sono nato': Franco Buffoni, *Noi e loro* (Rome: Donzelli Poesia, 2008).

replaced an authentic male-male paradise with an inauthentic present. North Africa entices because, in it, the Italian queer sees a return to the way sex, supposedly, used to be done in Italy. Elsewhere is thought to supply the visitor with an archaic reality no longer in Italy.[21] In the words of Sara Ahmed, this move works to 'fix others in regimes of difference', and assign to Africa a distant temporality.[22] It also participates in what M. Jacqui Alexander has called Western gay tourism's production of a 'queer fetishized native'.[23] Ironically, the essential character of the fetishized Arab male is, now, his assumed lack of an essential orientation.

If people aren't stably straight, then heterosexual identity can be re-presented as a social fiction that — only in some places — has come to obstruct men's desire for same-sex satisfaction. According to this logic, queerness is desire's natural state, which exclusive heterosexuality only later di-verts. Same-sex desire, not heterosexuality, has become originary. Aldo says that 'prima il maschio vero non ci pensava neanche a definirsi' (p. 36). Exclusive heterosexuality, not homosexual longings, is the veering away from nature. This queering projects natural desires onto a seemingly anachronistic Arab elsewhere. 'Lo preferisco così: *nature*!' Aldo says (p. 36). If queering demands a place where heterosexuality is felt to have less purchase on sex, that same logic assigns to North Africa the time of the other, whose nature is desired against home's/homosexuality's wanting present.

By insisting that same-sex desires inhabit only self-declared homosexuals, Aldo says, the West has refused to admit all men's capacity for male-male sex: 'Incontri così, qui, ne capitano continuamente e ovunque. *Non* c'è bisogno di andare in *alcun* locale, anche perché i locali per fortuna *non* ci sono. *Non* ci sono ancora' (my emphasis p. 155). The authentic Arab man is used, as foil, to show that same-sex desire is everywhere. Sex with both men and women is not a contradiction — a homosexual lying to himself. Instead, the seemingly angst-free co-existence of same-sex urges alongside heterosexual ones is exalted as proof of the straight subject's potential for same-sex relations. Proof, that is, of the instability of heterosexuality.

Still, the tourist worries if this tendency to stray might soon be displaced in North Africa by outside identities. Since the tourist's point of origin is the site of desire's supposed domestication, the same-sex traveller needs someone queerer, someone less homosexual, than himself. That person is the Arab male. 'La sua *bite* si muoveva, da sola', Aldo recounts, 'di sotto al blu del gabardine. Una cosa commovente e sconvolgente. Il suo cazzo era contento di vedermi' (p. 180). His *bite*, French slang for penis, moves to the itinerant flow of eros, following pleasure wherever it pulls him — even into another man. The Arab is reduced to his penis. Evidently, it (he) will cross a boundary that most men in Europe still shy from: men's anuses.

[21] Recalling an earlier age when sex between men in Italy was once organized around active/passive roles, Aldo comments: 'quando l'Italia era ancora una paese serio — mi riferisco all'Italia peninsulare e in particolare al sud e alle isole (p. 89).

[22] Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, p. 8.

[23] M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 70.

In *Zamel*, ambivalence around the homo/hetero definition feeds the fantasy of homoerotic stray.[24] If the unstable border between the homoerotic and the homosocial leads to homophobic disavowals back home, then, maybe, some place else, this instability might create more possibilities. 'Loro', Aldo claims, 'non hanno il concetto di omosessuale attivo' (p. 18). Heterosexuality's presumed instability in North Africa is what makes the Arab so appealing to the traveller. Although locals' willingness to have sex with men and with women seems at first blush proof of desire's drift, that same volatility raises identitarian anxieties in the tourist. He wonders if the Arab might be less queer — more homosexual or more heterosexual — than hoped for.[25] Home's sexual system haunts his fantasy of homo-erraticism.

Aldo never quite convinces himself that the Arabs' famed (s)excess and the encountered Arabs, some of whom profess familiar sexual identities, are one and the same. Aldo complains that 'le cose cambieranno anche qui. Stanno cambiando. Troppo turismo, troppa televisione, troppo invadente il modello occidentale. Ahimè sarò costretta a emigrare in Arabia Saudita' (p. 155). Rather than civilizing the desired Orient, the West is presented as a threat to the Orient's contrarian excess. Although the Arab supposedly embodies eros-as-stray, the tourist worries that, perhaps, he is no less erratic than home's homosexuals. Aware of this disheartening prospect, Aldo sardonically comments that he will have to emigrate to Saudia Arabia. The threatened elsewhere can no longer supply the tourist with a satisfactorily strange horizon. Now, he longs for an even more far-off *altrove*.

Narrative anxieties like these confirm Homi Bhabha's argument that orientalist discourse is composed of volatile representations of racial and cultural otherness.[26] Stereotypes, he argues, announce what is already known about the other, what needs no proof. Stereotypes must also be anxiously repeated because their truth claims can never satisfactorily be proven. 'Ambivalence', Bhabha writes, gives the stereotype 'its currency, [ensuring] its repeatability' (p. 18). Otherness is an effect of representation and desire, 'as anxious as it is assertive' (p. 22). Colonial discourse follows the logic of the fetish, producing a purportedly obvious knowledge about the other while also disavowing the need to defend that fixity by means of continual representation. Fetishism denies the construction of the very difference it names/tames.

[24] For a discussion of this ambivalence, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008). Sedgwick argues that 'the major nodes of thought in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured — indeed fractured — by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition' (p. 1). As sympathetic as I am to Sedgwick, I question her claim about 'Western culture as a whole'. Italy's dual figuration as a birthplace of Western culture and orientalized site demonstrates that the notion of Western culture — let alone a coherent Western homo/hetero crisis — is itself internally fractured.

[25] I am indebted to Joseph Boone's reworking of Homi Bhabha's notion of the colonial stereotype. Boone traces 'a series of collisions between traditionally assumed Western sexual categories (the homosexual, the pederast) and equally stereotypical colonialist tropes (the beautiful brown boy, the hypervirile Arab, the wealthy Nazarene) — *collisions that generate ambiguity and contradiction rather than re-assert an unproblematic intellectual domination over a mythic East as an object of desire*. For many white gay male subjects, the object of desire remains simultaneously same and other, a source of troubling and unresolved identification and differentiation. It is precisely in the space opened up by this gap that a critique of orientalist homerotics may usefully locate itself and begin the work of dismantling those paradigmatic fictions of otherness that have made the binarisms of West and East, of heterosexuality and homosexuality, at once powerful and oppressive': Boone, 'Vacation Cruises', p. 91.

[26] Homi Bhabha, 'The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse', *Screen*, 24.6 (1983), 18–36.

Arab men's desired sexual instability is itself subject to a sort of ambivalence. In *Zamel*, the fetishized body's excessive difference is desired and linguistically produced. That difference is a form of knowledge that emerges from within the tourists' expectations of, and yearnings for, sexual otherness. Alterity, Aldo avers, inheres in the Arab. Because an encounter with the difference desired by the tourist can never be guaranteed, representations of said differences are best understood as an effort to invoke, via repetition and citation, the surplus the traveller wants to find abroad. Encountering Arab men whose most immediate difference is their departure from the visitor's fantasy of Arab alterity, the tourist wonders if the promised excess can still be found anywhere.

Vacillation structures the traveller's journey. Depictions of difference are here representations of a desire for difference and a defensive response to the fear that elsewhere will not match that desired difference. A minoritizing understanding of homosexuality, Aldo claims, has come to encumber sex between men in Italy, eliciting two main responses: am I gay? or I'm not gay! An inverse logic besets the traveller's encounters in North Africa. When he beds another man in the Maghreb, Aldo cannot help but wonder: is he gay or is he straight? Since the Arab allures because he is thought to exceed familiar sexual categories, the possibility that he might be closer to home's identity system troubles Aldo. Sexuality's instability, what initially drives the tourist's journey southward, impels a sort of reverse homo/hetero panic: is Arab sex not so erratic after all?

The local homosexual: a threat in the homoerratic horizon

In *Zamel*, the Orient's difference tempts not because it needs the West's patronizing plenitude but, inversely, because the European sees in the Orient what he presumes not to have at home. After Edo tells Aldo that France, Denmark, Holland, and Switzerland are 'gli stati pionieri' for gay rights, Aldo replies that those places '[sono] quelli dove io non sono mai riuscito a combinare niente, neanche da giovane' (p. 114). Emblems to Edo of the forward-moving progress of gay rights in Europe, such countries are for Aldo signs of what is missing in the West — abundant male-male sex.

Aldo then goes on to outline the confines of his desire, beginning not in Italy, but from Morocco. 'Quei culi lattei. Lo sperma acquoso', Aldo says, describing men in Europe: 'Il mio desiderio pulsa su quella fascia del globo che parte da Marocco, costeggia il Mediterraneo — compresa la Turchia — giunge in Medio Oriente e si chiude in Afghanistan: culi stretti e neri, poche gocce di sperma che ti bruciano dentro. Pakistan nulla, per carità: già troppo molli e colorati' (p. 114). His desire 'si chiude' at the place where men with 'culi stretti', closed off to penetration, are thought to end. Milky rumps, aligned with the European nations Edo exalts as advanced, rouse no longing in Aldo. Metonymically personified in watery sperm, European men represent a diluted virility. Whiteness lacks. His desire chases 'culi stretti e neri' between the 'Medio Oriente' and Afghanistan, collapsing the bodies he is aroused by and the places they inhabit into the same imagined destination.

Because the Arab male performs the work of untaming desire, his distance — a spatial metaphor for difference — must be continually announced. To admit his proximity is to admit that eros, even there, can be domesticated, undermining North

Africa's promised prurience. It would mean acknowledging that here (tamed, domesticated) and there (excess, natural) are closer than the traveller wants. As Ahmed has argued, 'the idealization of movement, or the transformation of movement into fetish depends on the exclusion of others who are already positioned as *not free in the same way*'.[27] Even as the text claims that Europe, not North Africa, is the site where eros is fixed in place, it demands that the desired Arab man always signify eros as errancy. It demands that he does not stray from the tourist's fantasy that there, unlike at home, eros moves free from identity. Textually, the Arab man is made into the fixed emblem of erratic desire.

Desire for the Other expresses at once the hankering for proximity (intimacy with what is perceived as different/there) and the establishment of borders (they/there entice because of their non-proximity). In the Italian case, the line between Arabic Other and Italian subject is murky. For the Italian, the Arab is abject — externalized and already part of the peninsula's past and present. This understanding is a source of troubling ambivalence: he is close (we were like that) and too close to be different (he, too, might be like us). Although Aldo exoticizes/eroticizes Arab difference, this alterity is something the Italian tourist not only wants, but believes Italy once had.

North Africa's proximity to Italy soon forces Aldo to question the Maghreb's own Westernization. When Aldo encounters local men he believes are homosexual, he denigrates them as corrupted, unmanned, and as Westernized Arabs. Quarantining homosexual identity into a slim minority of the Arabs allows Aldo to maintain his fantasy of Arabs' transgressive (s)excess: 'Non inquiniamo le teste di questi maschi magrebini'. Critiquing Edo's insistence on calling these men bisexual, Aldo states '[L'uomo magrebino] ti va bene purché sia cosciente di essere bisex: ma perché deve imparare questa nuova parola; non basta che si senta maschio, come da generazioni — nella sua cultura — tutto gli fa credere?' (pp. 128–29). Discrete sexual categories — the hetero-, the homo- and the bi- sexual — threaten to 'inquin[are]' the 'maschi' who will penetrate other men because it makes them feel more virile. Outside labels, Aldo says, can 'corromperlo' (p. 129). Rejecting the idea that North Africans need to learn from the West's (and Western gay movements') purported progress, Aldo paints European *mores* as a sullying imposition. Rhetoric of pollution voices more than a selfless concern for the cultural imperialism behind migrating labels. It is an attempt to cling onto the fantasized unity of North Africa, understood as a pure time and distant place not tainted by home's domesticating schema. His account presumes the immobility of gay/straight identity in Europe and that Arab sexuality, somehow, has gone untouched by Western influences. To believe in the uncorrupted elsewhere, Aldo must erect a fictive divide between here and there that, in a globalized world, does not reflect the transnational circuits of travel, migration, and sexual labels in which he himself is a participant.

Complaining about other tourists' tendency to corrupt the locals, the same-sex traveller manages to believe (albeit temporarily) that, unlike them, he is safely detached from home's *mores*. Exalting the lack of coming-out politics in Tunisia in the name of opposing Western cultural imperialisms does not displace the fact that Arabs' difference is valued here against Europe's lacking sexual system. Respect for

[27] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp. 151–52.

cultural difference is, in part, symptomatic of imagining North Africa as a supply point for sating what the tourist wants. Tunisia is imagined as close enough to Italy to be within reach, and far off enough to feel different from home. This volatile figuration eventually leads to doubts over whether North Africa might be too influenced by invasive Western notions to furnish the tourist the distance he desires from home — a difference that is supposed to inhere, untouched, over there.

Despite lauding the errancy of Arab eros, the same-sex visitor stays the mobile subject in these plots. Even when he is penetrated, the tourist stays he who passes through elsewhere, encounters excess, and overcomes the obstacles to desire that, he says, vex home. 'Io vado con gli uomini', Aldo says, 'Semmai il turismo sessuale lo fanno con me [. . .] Lo fanno molto volentieri' (p. 131). Here, Aldo erases Europeans' economic mobility precisely when he fixates on the others' presumed fluidity. Representing Arab men as sexual tourists who trespass the boundaries of the male body, Aldo continues to figure them as symbols of eros' flux, uninfluenced by the flow of capital. In the text's narrative economy, the Arab and the tourist are exchanged. Aldo's anus becomes, henceforth, the space-through that, once penetrated, establishes the Arabs' virile difference: a phallic eros not hexed by sexual labels.

In one breath, Aldo disavows the extent to which he has naturalized mobility as mark of Arab sexuality. The Arab, we read, is the travelling body. Describing Arab eros as itinerant, Aldo produces the fantasized erratic Arab he then can claim is synonymous with North Africa's corpo-reality. As Said states, Orientalist discourses tend to '*create* not only knowledge but the very reality they appear to describe'.[28] Because the Arab male is believed to compensate for what the tourists wants back in Italy, the only authentic Arab is he who authenticates the visitor's pre-departure expectations. Presented as a synecdoche of reality over there, these portrayals of Arab men are symptomatic, if anything, of the reality the traveller wants/attempts to encounter. That an Italian man can imagine local men overstepping the fixity of Western homo/hetero identities does not mean that they are expected to stray from his fantasy of North African excess. Expectations of excess institute a line between authentic and inauthentic, desirable and non-desirable Arab men. He who fits the homerratic fantasy is deemed most authentic, while he who veers earns the visitor's disapproval.

Difference, it is worth remembering, is largely an effect of the novel's representation of elsewhere — produced by, for, and in the tourist's fantasy. Such depictions of difference cannot be cleaved from the tourists' longing for difference. My point is not to deny cultural, sexual, or economic differences. Distinct local sexual cultures and subcultures of course exist elsewhere. Still, narratives that offer travellers' takes on such differences are tales guided by desires, including the yearning to see absolute difference inhering to other places. Desires can lead to an exaggeration of difference (Arab sex = no identity) and the denial of similarity (no gays in North Africa) or, just as problematically, the presumed interchangeability of home's labels and the distinct sexual terms in use elsewhere (same-sex always = gay). In Aldo's case, other cultures' value is its negative utility for the visitor, albeit a lack now fetishized as plenty.

[28] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books Inc., 1994), p. 94.

Expecting the strange allows the tourist to deny the presence of bodies, identities, and practices that do not line up with his fantasy of elsewhere, all the while necessarily glossing over the fissures, contradictions, and ambivalences that always inflect sexual identity in Europe. Once abroad, he attempts to map his pre-departure fantasy of lack (North Africa doesn't have Europe's norms) onto a post-arrival encounter with an unexpected absence (North Africa is not the reality he wanted). Unlike in colonial rhetoric, North Africa's backwardness — not moving at the same pace or in the same direction as European history — no longer signifies inferiority. Perceived through an oblique gaze, backwardness comes to exemplify how desire, imagined as inherently bent, used to move before the fictive fixity of modern sexual identities. This fantasy, however, requires a space where sexual and temporal *arretratezza* still rules.

Travel to the Maghreb, a movement through space, is, conceptualized thus as a movement across time — a movement which will bring the Italian traveller closer to the way things used to be done in Italy. Even as Aldo critiques the linear teleologies of lesbian and gay identity politics, he projects an imaginary stability backwards onto lesbian and gay identity (USA/Europe), painting sodomical queerness as more free-moving. Anachronism, now desired, gets mapped onto southern and Arab bodies. Modernity, aligned with Europe, represents for Aldo the fixing in place of desire, not its liberation: 'Poi, le cose sono cambiate. A Roma, negli ultimi tempi, a darmi il gusto della vita era rimasto solo il fiorista egiziano' (p. 83). The only thrill still left in Italy is an Egyptian man. Without his outside ways, Italy would have lost all homoerotic lure. Having sex with him is a return to the way things were prior to recent changes.

The longed-for era is, then, not some bright gay future. It is a time and place before heterosexuality, a time and place before the need to identify. Since queerness is here what precedes modern/Western sexual identities, being out-of-synch marks the Arab as more queer (less gay) than the travelling homosexual. Aldo tellingly comments:

> Tu mi accusi di avere una visione arcaica del piacere e del sesso. E se invece fosse la visione del futuro? Se — dopo tutti questi sbandamenti femministi e omosessuali — si tornasse a coltivare il maschio vero come in una serra per presevarne la specie? [. . .] In una donna e in un omosessuale ci sta sempre un po' di desiderio arcaico: essere prese per i capelli, tirate dentro la caverna e sanamente scopate. (p. 83)

North Africa is the place/culture that will help the Westerner overcome what modernity has domesticated (male-male sex). Such a plot inverts without subverting a progressive idea of European history. For Aldo, Modern Europe has exterminated desire's natural flux, and no longer houses its laudable liberation.

A turn to what Anne McLintock has dubbed 'anachronistic space' is thought to transport the visitor to a primordial queerness removed from today's/Europe's identities.[29] In producing this riven mapping of desire, that which is considered non-anachronistic — same-sex sexual identity — is pathologized and denied as a possible source of desire. Once in Tunisia, Aldo refuses to consider any Arab man who

[29] Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York & London: Routledge, 1995), p. 9.

identifies as 'omosessuale' or engages in receptive anal sex as authentically Arab. Discussing the emergence of Arab feminist and Arab gay organizations, Edo tells Aldo: 'So dell'esistenza della GLAS — Gay and Lesbian Arabic Society — con un sito in funzione all'estero' (p. 160). Edo calls these developments a sign of liberating progress: 'La modernità va in questa direzione' (p. 144). Aldo, in contrast, replies: 'Terribile: non dirmele neanche certe cose!' (p. 160). Aldo links gay and lesbian identity politics with 'l'estero', an outside importation that has the potential to 'svirilizzare' (p. 160) North Africa's 'maschi, maschi veri' (p. 166). Real men, says Aldo, have not yet adopted sexual labels that direct sex in Europe and, regrettably, have begun to invade the Maghreb.

Superficially, this rhetoric does question the presumptive universality of Western sexual schemas. Behind his wariness lies a longing for a time/place anterior to compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory homonormativity. Aldo's critique is motivated, then, by an Italian's queer nostalgia: the urge to return to Italy's now-bygone era of unregulated homoeroticism. By eroticizing the Arab as anachronistic and pathologizing homosexual identity as evirated, Aldo re-presents a nativizing narrative all the while critiquing the civilizing rhetoric of Western gay rights movements. He draws attention to home's problematic norms against the bygone difference he makes North Africa(ns) signify.

Considering the text's fixation on mobility, it invokes a strangely static image of North Africa and Europe. Whereas sodomical sexuality is said to persist in the Maghreb despite the adoption of homo/hetero categories elsewhere, Europe is said to be stuck in an immobile identitarian system.[30] Making elsewhere signify remoteness from modern sexuality fixes the Arab in the time of the other.[31] 'Io sono attratto da questa società tradizionale, olistica, gerarichica, al punto che la vorrei ancora più tradizionale e arcaica', Aldo states (pp. 164–65). The Orient's negativity is not mentioned in order to exalt the Europe's progress. Its 'not-ness' is here a source of desire — a sign of what Europe now lacks. Romanticizing this time/place as home to eros unbound from identification does little, though, to trouble the texts' reproduction of the colonial trope of the out-of-synch Arab. Aldo paints authentic Arab eros as perverse (neither straight nor gay) and archaic — the way male eros worked before the arrival of modern, Western sexual politics. Arab authenticity is dictated by the tourist-invoked boundaries of Arabness, not the Tunisian men's variegated experiences of desire, sex, and identity.[32]

[30] Both Meyda Yeğenoğlu and Sara Ahmed have shown how the Orient tends to be depicted in terms of a sexually-inflected lack or absence. Yeğenoğlu argues that the West came to imagine itself as the masculine, phallic subject and see the East as the feminized lack: Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 104. Ahmed argues that 'the Orient [. . .] is also desired by the West, as having things that "the West" itself is assumed to be lacking. This fantasy of lack, of what is "not here", shapes the desire for what is "there", such that "there" becomes visible as "supplying" what is lacking': *Queer Phenomenology: orientations, objects, others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 114.

[31] See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

[32] I am by no means arguing for a wholesale acceptance of gay/straight identity as the model of erotics. Rather, I am asking: when a visitor represents different sexual systems, how much of that narrative reflects local norms and how might it also reflect his desire for a different/distant reality?

Intriguingly, such a vexed fantasy requires that the tourist turn away any Arab perceived as homosexual. He is disavowed because his existence challenges the notion that over there sexuality and identity always diverge. He is inappropriately perverse, I contend, because his sexuality veers from the tourists' expectations of Arab virility and sex. Refusing to see local homosexuals as representative of Arab sexuality, Aldo wants to believe they are Westernized exceptions. In Aldo's queer fantasy, the homosexual Arab is, oddly enough, out-of-place. By accepting as 'veri' only those Arab men who are active and seem to eschew familiar identities, *Zamel* invokes a binary as problematic as the homo/hetero one: the authentic Arab (he who engages in active sodomy but isn't a homosexual) *versus* the inauthentic Arab (he who is a homosexual).

'Mi piacciono i maschi veri', Aldo says: 'Temo la loro estinzione. E allora vivo questa contraddizione: mi piace chi lotta per la libertà e i diritti civili, ma al contempo lo temo e le temo perché mira e mirano a fare scomparire ciò che a me è l'essenziale' (p. 113). Aldo dismisses the emergence of local gay organizations because, he says, they threaten to undo the very 'verità' he desires. Aldo desires the Arab only insofar as he confirms his own confines of who and what Arabs are supposed to do. Obedience to the European's fantasy of North Africa becomes the litmus test of Arab authenticity; thus, a European's fantasy of how North Africans should be passes itself off as who they really are.

Although most Arab men are imagined as closer to desire's natural state, those locals who approximate Italy's sexual schema trouble the text's fantasy of absolute distance. While racially inflected, this fantasy demands more from its object than simply being an Arab man. To be desirable, ethnic difference must also line up with the tourists' expectations of Arabs' sexual alterity. 'Edo, tu mi conosci', Aldo writes, 'se mi sfiora anche solo il dubbio che il ragazzo con cui sto non ami le donne, io non riesco più a provare attrazione per lui' (p. 226). Aldo's desire hinges on his belief that the man who is penetrating him still wants women. He wants to believe he is not sleeping with a homosexual.

The penises of local men, says Aldo, make little distinction between a man's anus and a woman's vagina. He comments:

> Nessun ragazzo magrebino si vergogna di fronte agli amici se è stato con un turista: tutti suppongono nel ruolo attivo. Anzi, se l'hai messo nel culo a un bianco, sei doppiamente macho. [. . .] Preferiscono me, anche se sono più vecchio, perché ai loro occhi risulto più tranquillizzante: i ruoli con me sono ben definiti *in partenza*. E loro questo lo colgono *al volo* (my emphasis, pp. 88–89).

Arabs' desire for male-male sex emerges from the urge to achieve orgasm more than a stable desire for the male body. Sex with a tourist causes no shame because it is assumed, *a priori*, that the 'ragazzo magrebino' has taken on the 'ruolo attivo', a role which increases, rather than dilutes, his virility. Crossing the national frontiers that divide home and the destination, this same-sex traveller seeks to shore up the boundary between 'macho' and 'passive', a border that, he says, homosexuals at home have begun to dissolve.

Beholden to the ideal of an itinerant penis, the tourist rejects any Arab male who takes pleasure in his anus. Because that possibility is not interior to the Italian's fantasy of North African men, the passive Arab is dismissed as a man degraded by

external influences. Gay movements, Aldo says, 'stanno distruggendo quello che in alcuni angoli della terra resta della vera bisessualità, come era vissuta nella Alessandria di Callimaco, nella Roma di Orazio' (p. 162). Aldo's fantasy inverts the idea of the Orient as a feminized lack, personifying it instead as phallic surplus that endows the tourist with what he wants at home. But, home's domesticated ways also threaten to encroach on Tunisia's archaic erotics. Sexual identity, Aldo grumbles, is ruining what is left of 'la vera bisessualità', an active/passive eros reminiscent of Alexandrian Egypt and ancient Rome. The homosexual-identified Arab is for Aldo a reminder that home's homo-/hetero- definitions might, like the Italian ex-pat, traverse the Mediterranean and come to inhabit North Africa. Despite desiring passive anal sex with local men, Aldo wants to disavow the knowledge that those men could themselves desire to be penetrated.[33] In Aldo's logic, if the penis is not choosy, the anus is rigidly homo- or hetero — open to penetration or closed off.

Interestingly, the visitor applies this judgment only to the Arab homosexual. Passive anal sex, if desired by the tourist, is fine. Passive anal sex, if desired by an Arab, is not. The texts accept within the confines of what is authentically Arab only those locals who affirm what the tourist already expected — excess, errancy, bisexuality. Since virility is what he comes in search of, and since virility is presumed to reside in the penis, the texts present the passive Arab as not man enough to be desirable. Since a plentiful phallus is thought a trait of Arab men (and, metonymically, of eros in excess), anality gets presented as proof of him not being Arab enough.

Arab men's anuses represent for Aldo a fictitiously inviolable limit.[34] As long as it is not trespassed, it seems to establish a safe distance between what is wanting (European sex) and what is self-sufficient (Arab virility), what is stuck in place and what follows eros's flux, what is endemic and what is foreign. Contrasting the homo-erratic penis, the desiring anus is read as out-of-place in North Africa. To what extent, then, does the narration of Arab sexual alterity involve not just the reading of others' bodies, but defining and policing the contours — the inner and outer boundaries one might say — of the exoticized body? How might textual production require the invocation of a 'bad' Arab against whom desirable — authentic, that is — difference might then get exalted? Anal passivity is in Aldo's fantasy a sign of feminization, diluted manhood and a troubling Western interference — not a desire naturally internal to Arab men.

Fluidity, erotic straying, exemplifies for him the authentic Arab male. The Italian wants Arab men to exceed, not affirm, his notion of homosexual identity, all the

[33] Leo Bersani discusses the anxieties elicited by the crossing of this taboo-laden corporeal territory. Bersani links the disavowal of the rectum as a site of pleasure to fears of a masculine self, supposedly secured by a self-sufficient phallus, being dissolved via penetration. He argues that the anus is the site of masculine identity's possible self-shattering. Receptive anal sex is risky insofar as it exceeds both what men are supposed to desire (to penetrate a woman) and where that desire is supposed to come from (the phallus). Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? and other Essays* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 30.

[34] Judith Butler argues that the presumed 'impenetrability of the masculine' is a kind of 'a panic over what might happen if a masculine penetration of the masculine were authorized, or a feminine penetration of the feminine, or a feminine penetration of the masculine or a reversibility of those positions': Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 51. Elsewhere, Butler similarly asked how 'social taboos institute and maintain the boundaries of the body': *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 170–71.

while he undertakes an exclusively same-sex itinerary. 'There is no need to shed the European self', Alexander writes, 'in order to become the other — rather it is the rabid inhabiting of that self in order to better consume the other'.[35] Because the tourist can imagine his body as the space through which seemingly heterosexual men stray, he is able to enact a homosexual fantasy at the same time that he denies the authenticity of local men who identify as homosexuals. The anus, then, functions either as the means to identity's dissolution (if you're the tourist) or as the space of eros's anchoring (if you're the Arab homosexual).

The novel rhetorically lauds border-crossing as a marker of queerness all the while continuing to summon a fictive border between Arabs' active sex and European sexual identity. Presented as a border not to be crossed, the Arab male's anus remains a source of anxiety. What is threatened is not the distance between hetero- and homosexuality, but that imagined difference between Arabs' errant eros and Europe's fixed sexual identity positions — between virile plenitude and effeminized absence. Penetrating the Arab anus evokes the fear that the Arab, desired for his phallic difference, might be closer to familiar terrain (a homosexual) than the same-sex traveller ever wanted. Once entered, he has strayed from the Italian's ideal of unbroachable Arab virility.

Writing to Edo, Aldo worries about his relationship with Nabil, a young man he previously called 'macho macho' (p. 225). Before, Aldo recounted how Nabil 'mi ha fatto assumere tutte le posizioni che nel film [porno] assumeva la donna', eroticizing Nabil's imitation and simulation of hetero-sexual copulation (p. 226). Soon, Aldo begins to wonder why Nabil has no girlfriend. He proposes to introduce him to some girls: 'gli ho fatto capire che ci tengo che abbia anche la ragazza' (pp. 225–26). Even when the penetrative Arab male is exalted for a willingness to be with other males, the text still needs to present the European's body as the space through which heterosexuality strays. While the Arab is depicted as taking pleasure in sex with men, he is also expected to desire women.

Much of the tourist's longing originates in the fact that his partner is not homosexual. Being fucked by a seemingly heterosexual man allows the tourist to believe that, through his own body (in his anus), home's divide between homo and hetero is temporally collapsed. Vis-à-vis the object-indifferent Arab, the tourist aims to queer heterosexuality, while refusing to let go of virility. It is impossible to trespass heterosexuality, however, without thinking its constitutive other: homosexuality. Regardless of claims to be abandoning home's sexual binary, the tourist is compelled to allude to it as the line he is crossing. Homo- and hetero- sexuality, seemingly what the text flees from, represent an abjected foil against which erotic errancy can, then, be affirmed.

The 'realness' of these 'maschi' is proved, according to Aldo, by the inviolability of their bodies. They penetrate others.

> Lo *zamel* è quello che si fa scopare, e quando uno è *zamel* è segnato per sempre. Da molto giovani lo sono tutti, questo è normale. Poi, però, ogni ragazzo sa che per acquisire dignità di fronte al gruppo, alla famiglia (allargata), alla società, deve distaccarsene al più presto, facendosi valere, diventando lui stesso *niek*, scopatore, e dunque uomo (p. 154).

[35] Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, p. 86.

To become 'un uomo', the *zamel* must distance himself from his earlier position as he-who-is-penetrated. To be valued, he must exchange the passive role for the active 'scopatore'. The penis must displace the anus. Attracted to virility, Aldo values only those who have become *niek*.

One's positionality, not the sex of one's object, matters. *Nieks'* penetrating penises give currency to their manhood. This difference is North Africa's promised value. In this gendered economy, to be penetrated means regressing to a less-valued position, swapping phallic subjectivity for anal passivity. Here, Aldo envisions the anus as a boundary that demarcates real (active) from unmanned (passive) men. This border's much-announced inviolability is, of course, fictional. The realness of Aldo's 'maschi' depends upon a denial of any similarity between their bodies and those of the *zamel*. Far from being assured by a self-sufficient penis, virility needs a denigrated opening as supplement.

This anal supplement is defensively limned as wanting — wanting a phallus for fulfillment. Real men in contrast are called 'densamente viril[i]', not open to penetration (p. 113). By presenting anality as a feminized lack, the text attempts to disavow the male penis' corporeal proximity to its supplement. Unlike with male-female relations, however, there is no physiological difference between active and the passive men's bodies. The absence of anatomical difference haunts the announced distance between the two. Such instability leads to vocal vilification of the passive man: if his body is not physiologically different then at least it will be rhetorically produced as such. Confronted with the possibility that his lover might desire only men, Aldo says, 'preferisco pensare di essermi sbagliato sulle preferenze profonde di Nabil' (p. 229).

Unable to sate his curiosity, Aldo puts Nabil's sexuality 'alla prova':

> Un legame omosessuale, un legame tra due omosessuali, sai, mi è troppo difficile — concettualmente — accettarlo. [. . .] Ma ormai temo sia troppo tardi. Le ultime volte, per metterlo alla prova, l'ho accarezzato lì dove sai che i ragazzi tunisini non gradiscono troppo essere toccati. Ebbene, lui ha gradito, anzi a un certo punto si è anche [com]port[at]o in modo inequivicabile. Così l'ho penetrato a fondo con la lingua (operazione che lui sa compiere magistralmente prima di scopare), poi con un ditto, poi con due. Non ha fatto una piega. Anzi quando se n'è andato mi ha baciato con un trasporto ancora maggiore. Se è *zamel* [un passivo] me lo deve dire con onestà, lo aiuterò lo stesso ma non può pretendere che io sia il suo amante. Se ne trovi un altro come lui. Io sono frocia nella testa e ho bisogno di pensare a un maschio vero, non a un omosessuale. Domani sera, lo costringo a dirmi la verità, gli faccio ammetere di essere *zamel,* poi possiamo rimpostare il nostro rapporto su una base di amicizia. (pp. 229–30)

Despite chiding Edo for insisting that local men admit 'di essere bisex', Aldo now insists on forcing Nabil to declare 'con onestà' that he is *zamel* (p. 128). Criticism of US-style coming-out politics, which Aldo earlier had said would destroy Tunisia's permissive silence, has vanished. A sort of gay panic — the unnerving possibility that his lover might be homosexual — pushes Aldo to demand Nabil confess his sexuality. Panic brings Aldo to test his lover's body. Penetrating him 'a fondo' with his tongue, Aldo tries to get to the bottom of his 'preferenze profonde', hoping that Nabil, like the other 'ragazzi tunisini', will not enjoy being touched down there.

Unfazed by Aldo's probing, Nabil kisses his partner 'con trasporto ancora maggiore'. Slowly increasing his transgression of Nabil's anus (first a tongue, then a

finger, then two), Aldo wants his lover to say 'no' — to declare himself the *scopatore*, not the entered *zamel*. The use of the word 'trasporto' further accentuates Aldo's belief that Nabil is now far from the man he desires. Once internal to his fantasy of 'maschi veri', Nabil is transported outside that fantasy's corporeal limits. Allowing himself to be penetrated, he has crossed a boundary that, despite the text's lauding of border-crossing, real men are expected not to trespass. Subsequently, he can no longer be considered the self-sufficient vehicle through which Aldo hopes to distance himself from home's lacking ways. This takes place, unsurprisingly, exactly at the moment when the borders securing virility have been made murky via penetration.

In using the Arabic word *zamel* to wonder about Nabil's orientation, Aldo further strives to externalize his panic, presenting it as the internalizing of North Africa's, not Europe's, sexual schema. He cannot admit that his curiosity about Nabil is a sign of his own transporting of the homo/hetero divide in all its irresolvable volatility. We are supposed to read it as a sign Aldo's acquired proximity to elsewhere's erotic difference. His discomfort with Nabil's passivity is, thus, re-presented as adherence to local distinctions (*zamel* or *niek*), allowing Aldo to insist that sex between men in the Maghreb is still ruled by the different active/passive divide. At the same time, that disavowal is brought on by his fear that sex with Nabil had represented 'un legame tra due omosessuali', something he has tried to associate with Europe and America.

Once desired for its capacity to disorient heterosexuality, the anus now stirs up the concern that it, too, might offer proof of a subject's homosexuality. Since Aldo wants to imagine Nabil as liking women, too much queering of his presumed heterosexuality unsettles the Italian. Aldo's use of the Arabic term ends tragically: Nabil, upset by Aldo's pejorative interpellation, murders his lover. Presuming that *zamel* and 'omosessuale' are interchangeable terms, Aldo insists on applying an emasculating label to Nabil, a label that locals had earlier used to deride Aldo's availability for passive sex. Despite transplanting his life to Tunisia, Aldo fails to consider the negative connotations conveyed by *zamel*. A breakdown in trans-lation — the crossing from one side to another — ends in his death.

Discussing the dissolution of the border between *zamel* and *niek*, Aldo confesses that his macho lover could have in truth been 'omosessuale'. This realization leads to his attempt to fix Nabil as *zamel*, insisting on his erotic distance even as he names the possibility of Nabil's proximity to category of the homosexual. In interpellating Nabil as *zamel*, Aldo strives to re-erect the very boundary — a line separating static European identities and itinerant Arab erotics — that is, now, infringed. Gendered ideals of proper masculinity and femininity represent, then, a limit to Aldo's exultation of trespassing. In his fantasy, Arab men should not cross certain borders — should not, that is, let themselves be entered.

In contrast to the tourist's transgressive anality, the Arab anus, once it has become a site of sexual subjectivity, is denigrated as proof of the local's internalization of Western sexual *mores*. If a phallic desire for satisfaction leads to no fixed sexual object (a man or a woman will do), anal desire is read as a sign of desire bound to one object. Because the tourist wants to believe Arab men do not distinguish between objects, the Arab homosexual is denigrated as both a failed Arab and undesirable. Indeed, the tourist sees his desires as inauthentic because the local homosexual has failed to authenticate a European's fantasy of Arab men's homoerratic difference.

At first critical of Europe for confining same-sex erotics inside the homosexual, Aldo now tries to cordon off anal desire within a similar figure. Filtered through a gay gaze, the Orient remains the incarnation of a libertine sensuality no longer present in Europe. Although such a move queers the inherited imaginary of North Africa (traveller = male/penetrator, Orient = feminine/penetrated), the North African is now the metaphor of queerness's stray. Depicted as free-moving, the Arab male actually gets fixed in place — made into the icon of erratic, pre-modern and, yes, post-modern difference. Still, as Bhabha reminds us, there is always something the stereotype cannot contain, a surplus it seeks to hold back. Aldo's fetishism strives and fails to dispel an unexpected excess. Queerly enough, this is the possibility of encountering sexual identity.

Same-sex tourists' fetishizing of Arabs, I have argued, responds to their own homoerotically-charged gay panic: he isn't gay, is he? Given all this, a nuanced queer critique of same-sex tourism is direly needed. A queer critique would unpack the utopian eroticizing of racial, cultural, and class differences. A queer critique asks how both homophobia and homonormativity might cause some sexual subjects to chase affirmation abroad. It would also push us to consider which bodies, in pursuit of queer affirmation, are made into consumed commodities and which bodies' movement is enabled by capital. This critique would resist the lure of presenting elsewhere as the fixed embodiment of errant desire. A queer critique would refuse to see the West as bound only to homogenous homo- and hetero- identities. It would engage homoerotic racism and homophobic xenophobia without presuming an easy homology between the two.

A queer critique would challenge the fiction of the timeless heterosexual nation limned against the foreignness of homosexuality. It would seek alliances across differences without dismissing disparities. This inquiry would confront the fetishizing of racial difference in the service of exalting the desire's fluidity, while not assuming the universality of the same-sex models customary in much of the United States and Europe. Such a critique would question the implications of imagining queerness, both in fictional and theoretical texts, via metaphors of travel — transgression, border-crossing, and straying. Who is allowed to travel? Who gets made into a ventriloquized metaphor of errancy? In short, it would demand queering the very act of queering. Ultimately, this critique would pose a crucial query: how has queering, the textual and critical practice of collapsing the homo/hetero- binary, repeated racist fantasies in its flight from normativity?