

Swarthmore College

Works

French & Francophone Studies Faculty Works

Spring 2014

Cute Girls, Tough Boys: Performing Gender In Algerian Manga

Alexandra Gueydan-Turek

Swarthmore College, agueyda1@swarthmore.edu

[Let us know how access to this work benefits you.](#)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-french>

 Part of the [French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Alexandra Gueydan-Turek. (2014). "Cute Girls, Tough Boys: Performing Gender In Algerian Manga". *European Comic Art*. Volume 7, Issue 1. 85-111.
<http://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-french/28>

This work is brought to you for free and open access by the Swarthmore College Libraries. It has been accepted for inclusion in French & Francophone Studies Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

**Cute girls, Tough boys:
Performing Gender in Algerian Manga**

Alexandra Gueydan-Turek

Assistant Professor of French and Francophone Studies
Swarthmore College
500 College Avenue,
Swarthmore, PA 19081
Phone (cell): (203) 530-3207

Keywords: Algeria, Manga, Shōjo, Shōnen, Femininity, Masculinity, Cosplay

Abstract:

This article explores the way in which masculinity and femininity are constructed in Algerian manga, an emerging, understudied subgenre within the field of Algerian graphic art. Through the exploration of youth-oriented publications of *shōjo* and *shōnen* manga, I will demonstrate how these new local works offer a privileged form of expression for and platform to address disaffected Algerian youths. The primary focus of this investigation will be the differences (or lack thereof) between ideals of gender performances as expressed in Algerian manga and ideals of gender identity in society at large. This article will demonstrate that, while some differences manifest a desire for change on the part of both artists and readers, they certainly do not constitute radical revisions of the popular Algerian notions of masculinity and femininity. Ultimately, this study will demonstrate the limits of manga as an imported genre within Arabo-Islamic context, oscillating between the promulgation of alternative social ideals and the reinforcement of social norms.

Cute girls, Tough boys:

Performing Gender in Algerian Manga

While gender norms are reinforced by various elements in popular media and culture, the relationship between these norms and the artwork that portrays them often proves complex. One might expect popular media simply to enumerate gendered identities established in society—effectively sanctioning and perpetuating them. In practice, however, popular media often rewrites, displaces, and effectively drives gendered identities forward. This is particularly true in the case of young adult and children’s literature, which speaks to an audience that rapidly internalizes norms and will readily reproduce them.

In Algeria, Japanese comics and the corresponding local manga written to emulate them (which I have elsewhere termed ‘Dz-manga’¹), serve precisely as such a privileged site for the elaboration and development of masculine and feminine traits. Despite the fact that Dz-manga remains a niche market in Algerian publishing, it constitutes an important, rapidly growing element of the Algerian cultural landscape that is uniquely positioned to speak to Algerian youth: no other medium can currently compete with the advantages afforded by Dz-manga’s low cost of production and purchase, its visual nature, its natural ability to incorporate Algerian linguistic diversity, its young and enthusiastic readership, and its established culture encouraging publication by amateurs.² Dz-manga’s rise also benefits from the gaps left by Arabophone and Francophone Algerian literatures alike: addressing the growing number of young adult readers who were left to read canonical literature published abroad, if they were fortunate enough to be able to afford it, or short excerpts provided within school textbooks.

The marketing success of these works in Algeria may also be partly due to the conscious adherence of the Dz-manga community to precedents set by the Japanese gendered sub-genres of *shōjo* and *shōnen* manga. By openly aspiring to gender-specific narratives, Algerian manga occupy an established role within the manga community that has no analogue elsewhere within the Algerian artistic landscape. Dz-manga works, which carry the original terms *shōjo* or *shōnen* prominently on their covers, inherit many of the conventions of their parent genres: they continue to reinforce gender-specific categories, targeting only boys or only girls with dissimilar portrayals of gender roles ostensibly designed for opposite interests. This division has been captured, succinctly, by Masami Toku’s definition of the subgenres:

Regardless of the subject depicted in the story, the main theme of boys’ manga is how the heroes become men by protecting women, family, country, or the earth from enemies. The theme of girls’ manga is how love triumphs by overcoming obstacles.³

¹ Alexandra Gueydan-Turek, ‘The rise of Dz-manga in Algeria: glocalization and the emergence of a new transnational voice’, *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 4.1 (2013), 161-178.

² *Ibid.*, 163.

³ Masami Toku, ‘Shojo Manga! Girls’ Comics, a Mirror of Girls’ Dreams’, *Mechademia: Networks of Desire* 2, ed. Frenchy Lunning (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis, 2007), 19-32, 19.

In other words, (Japanese) *shōjo* manga have been originally conceptualized as a genre centering on romance, written for girls, by girls and about girls, while *shōnen* manga are designed around a strong emphasis on action and adventure that targets young male readers.⁴

Although the division between *shōjo* and *shōnen* works inherited from Japanese comics is largely echoed in gendered divisions within Dz-manga, the classification is not received without question. The most prominent manga publishing house in Algeria, for example, displays the following definitions (and disclaimers) on its inside cover: ‘Le Dz-shōnen: désigne le Dz-manga destiné aux jeunes garçons, convient aux adolescents (garçons et filles). Le Dz-shōjo : désigne le Dz-manga destiné aux filles.’ [The term Dz-*shōnen* manga refers to Dz-manga intended for young male readers, but it is suitable for adolescents (both boys and girls). The term Dz-*shōjo* refers to Dz-manga intended for girls].⁵ Despite the normative classification figuring prominently on the cover, *shōnen* works of Dz-manga are not specific to a single gender, whereas Dz-*shōjo* manga address exclusively females. This distinction creates a unique niche for Algerian *shōjo* manga, which widely disseminate narratives composed by women for other women, while *shōnen* manga address a wider array of readers and, at times, cross gender lines.

With this understanding of the genre in mind, this article explores whether Dz-manga can offer alternate role models, beyond those prescribed by broader social norms within Algerian society, or whether they simply reinforce the existing gendered order.

Minding Manners: Womanly Behavior in Dz-Shōjo Manga

In careful replication of the Japanese *shōjo* manga from which they derive, Dz-*shōjo* manga are notable for the aesthetics used to represent female characters: girls feature unnaturally large eyes frequently adorned with sparkles. Their attires often replicate some variant of those worn by Japanese school-girls, which are themselves problematic. As Mary Grigsby has emphasized, sailor suits and school uniforms risk transforming *shōjo* female characters into nothing more than ‘the object of desire’.⁶ In stark contrast to representations of women in more traditional Algerian BD—one can think of Slim’s armless Zaina and Daiffa’s imprisoned women⁷—the girls of Dz-

⁴ The classification of Japanese comics’ subgenres along this gendered binary has long evolved; now-a-day, Japanese comics are coalesced around more complex themes rather than this monolithic understanding of gender lines. Yet, the gendered and age specific classifications of *shōjo* and *shōnen* remain by far some of the most prominent categories employed abroad, where Japanese comics are now sold in translation. For an in-depth study of how the gendered categorizations have evolved in the last half century, see Fusami Ogi, ‘Female Subjectivity and *Shoujo* (Girls) Manga (Japanese Comics): *Shoujo* in Ladies’ Comics and Young Ladies’ Comics’, *The Journal of Popular Culture* 36.4 (May 2003), 780-803.

⁵ This definition is featured inside the new dust jacket worn by Z-Link editions manga since 2012.

⁶ Mary Grigsby, ‘The Social Production of Gender as Reflected in Two Japanese Culture Industry Product’, *Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning: Cute, Cheap, Mad and Sexy*, ed. John Lent (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), 183-210, 198.

⁷ Slim, *Zid ya Bouzid* (Algiers: SNED, 1981); Slim, *Retour d’Ahuristan* (Paris: Seuil, 1997); Slim, *Walou à l’horizon. La dernière aventure de Bouzid et Zina* (Paris : Institut du Monde

manga appear relatively unconstrained in their movements, and they prominently display westernized clothes including sneakers, jeans and occasionally less modest outfits resembling the famous Japanese sailor suit.

Despite the frequently sexual overtones of these portrayals, though, *shōjo* characters in both Japanese and Algerian works are still portrayed as pure children, easy to control, and notably bereft of any secondary sexual features, including breasts. This physiognomy persists through a range of other significant variations in the overall style: for example, when protagonists are drawn in the *chibi* style, breasts are omitted altogether. In Algerian manga, even when characters' clothing departs from Japanese tradition to feature regional *gharb*--such as the Targui veil worn in *Nahla et les Touareg*⁸ or modern Islamic *hallal* clothing in *Nour el-Mouloud*⁹—this asexuality is maintained: breasts are implied by faint lines, at most.

In *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*, Susan Napier has written extensively about the limitations of the notion of femininity in Japanese comics. Notably, Napier explains that, rather than empowering female figures, the 'classical (Japanese) *shōjo*' only serves to perpetuate *kawaii* tropes of nonthreatening juvenile heroines notable for their naiveté and their innocence.¹⁰ Napier elaborates later on this idea, in *From Impressionism to Anime*, noting that 'cuteness is not only nonthreatening, but it is actively reassuring': the *shōjo* heroines serve to create a fantasyscape away from the demands of life.¹¹

Napier's analysis extends to the heroines of Dz-*shōjo* manga, who are characterized by their helplessness to the point of being limited by it. A clear example of this is Matougui Fella's and Salim Brahimi's *Nahla et les Touareg*. In it, the title character becomes lost in the desert during a sandstorm, loses consciousness, and is rescued by a young male Targui who carries Nahla back to his camp. Later in the story, the same boy once again comes to Nahla's rescue as she is threatened by a cheetah wandering through the camp. Nahla's helplessness is reinforced by the parallel story following her father's search for his daughter with police support. Interposed within the plotline focused on Nahla, the panels portraying the anguish of her father for his young and inexperienced daughter effectively reframe the narrative of Nahla's stay among the Touareg. What could be interpreted as a daring cultural adventure is instead cast as a naïve, infantile, and somewhat dangerous experience.¹²

Nahla's character is here defined entirely by her cuteness, without any hint of independence, strength, or heroism. Placed in an unfamiliar context, she defines herself by her incapacity to handle distress, and her need for a strong male support, whether it is offered by her rescuer, or by

Arabe, 2003); Daiffa, *L'Algérie des femmes* (Grabels : Women Living under Muslim Laws, 1994).

⁸ Matougui Fella and Salim Brahimi, *Nahla et les Touareg* (Algiers : Editions Z-Link, 2010).

⁹ Hanane Bennediouni, *Nour el-Mouloud* (Algiers: Editions Z-Link, 2011).

¹⁰ Susan Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 154.

¹¹ Susan Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 129.

¹² This may echo the longstanding legal positions of women within the Algerian society. In spite of a constitution that attributed them equal rights, the 1984 Family Code ratified women's position as minors *vis-à-vis* their fathers and husbands. The Code was partially revised in 2005 reinforcing women's rights, abolishing the concept of matrimonial guardian.

the father to whom she longs to return. Moreover, Nahla twice evokes the term *kawaii*, meaning “cute,” when describing animals she encounters: ‘il est trop mimi “kawai”!!!’ This intrusion of a Japanese term into a French-language text explicitly conjures up the complex overtones of the Japanese notion of *kawaii*, originally derived from a word for ‘helpless’ or ‘woe’ in Japanese¹³, but currently used by *mangaka* (manga artists) and *otaku* (manga fans) to represent “cute” girls in popular culture who look to others for physical and emotional guidance.

Gender binaries in *Nahla et les Touareg*, are further reinforced through elements other than Nahla’s character which appear to be much more than a stylistic inheritance from Japanese comics. Elsewhere, for example, the depiction of the Touareg tribe’s traditional daily life (occupying over two-thirds of the narrative) adheres strictly to gendered social roles. After being rescued by the young and handsome Targui, as Nahla is being nursed back to health, elder Targuiates use the opportunity to teach Nahla the role that women occupy within the tribe:

- Ma petite sache que chez les Touareg, la femme joue un rôle très important.../C’est elle qui s’occupe de l’éducation des enfants, de la confection des vêtements et de l’approvisionnement en eau.../ C’est elle aussi qui fabrique l’Imzad à partir d’éléments naturels [...]
- Est-ce que tout le monde peut jouer de l’Imzad?
- Justement, non ! Cet instrument est exclusivement réservé aux femmes ! C’est la tradition qu’on a héritée depuis des générations. Les hommes par contre peuvent des fois accompagner la joueuse d’Imzad en chantant...
- [—Little one, you should know that among the Touareg, the woman plays a very important role.../She is the one who takes care of educating the children, sewing the clothes and supplying the water.../ She is also the one who makes the Imzad with items from nature [...]
- Can anyone play the Imzad?
- Actually, no! This instrument is only meant for women! This is the tradition that we have inherited from generations. Men, though, can sometimes sing along with the Imzad player...]¹⁴

Here, Fella and Brahim explicitly confront Nahla with a traditional gendered division of the tribal space: men are cast in the role of women’s champions, while women are seen as potential mother figures in charge of the domestic space, childrearing, and the transmission of oral culture. These same divisions reappear later, when Nahla and her rescuer, traveling on a camel, come across a group of women singing and playing the *Tindé* (a percussion instrument). Nahla is invited to join the group, but her male companion cannot: the gendered roles within Targui society are reified into a spatial arrangement that precludes social interactions between men and women.

¹³ Kanako Shiokawa, ‘Cute but Deadly: Women and Violence in Japanese Comics’, ed. John Lent, *Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning: Cute, Cheap, Mad and Sexy*, ed. John Lent (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), 93-126, 100.

¹⁴ Op. cit., panel 40.

Interestingly, throughout Fella and Brahimi's work, this same spatial division is reinforced by the composition of the panels: rarely do men and women share the same frame. Only Nahla is allowed to travel between the two spaces, but she does not do so as a subversive character; instead, she serves as a guide to a Targui fiction. As Nahla crosses between gendered spaces, she is not able to blur the boundaries between them; rather, she sanctions the gendered daily activities and structures that ensure the equilibrium of Touareg society. In addition, the reader notes that it is only after her initiation into Targui culture and her affirmation of its values that Nahla is safely returned to her father and allowed to continue her trip. Although not explicitly stated, it appears as if *Nahla et les Touareg* advocates a return to traditional culture rather than any questioning of difference. Taken together, the front and back covers, reinforce this notion: their images present Nahla first as a stereotypical *shōjo* character wearing a Japanese schoolgirl outfit, then as a Targuiate, with her traditional regional *gharb* and jewelry – but never as a hybrid character (Fig.1).

In the same way that *Nahla et les Touareg* counterposed *shōjo* manga themes and styles against a traditional background to explore contemporary cultural issues, *Nour el-Mouloud* [The Light of the Birth] follows Amina, a young female protagonist, through her family's preparations to celebrate Aid al Mouloud (the birth of the Prophet Muhammad). Bennediouni's moralized retelling of the family's conflicts advances a clear agenda: Amina's desires to host a traditional candlelight procession are explicitly contrasted with her brothers' wishes for a Westernized celebration that includes fireworks. The central confrontation between Amina and her brothers allows for a marked division into gender roles: Amina's disruptive brothers are dismissed in the spirit of 'boys will be boys', while Amina is cast in the role of a second mother figure, educating her younger siblings. While the parents only play a minor role in the story, they, too, highlight these norms: Amina's father is only portrayed once, reading the newspaper and refusing to discipline his sons, while Amina's mother takes charge of the homemaking, as she occupies her kitchen, wearing an apron, a cooking glove or a spatula (Fig.2). When the younger brothers misbehave, Amina inherits her mother's responsibility to ensure that they not ruin the celebration. In one panel, Amina even brandishes a frying pan at her siblings, thus becoming her mother's younger and more violent doppelganger. Elsewhere, Amina is cast as a school teacher who educates her siblings—and through them the readers—about how to make a *benara* (a traditional candle-lit lantern).

Reproducing a conservative and somewhat *dépassé* vision of female confinement within the household, *Nour el-Mouloud* promotes stereotypical judgments about women's roles: women are assigned a higher status only when it comes to the home and child-rearing. Although this representation does not leave women entirely powerless, family is still regarded as the linchpin of Algerian society. As Susan Slyomovics notes, 'the site of the domicile and domesticity is not where female resistance and subversion is played out'.¹⁵ Instead, Slyomovics asserts, it is the public (male-dominated) space that offers a site where women have recently gained leverage. Despite the authority that Amina appears to wield inside her parents' home, *Nour el-Mouloud*, the heroine advocates solely for traditional values and is unable to defy the usual gender roles effectively.

¹⁵ Susan Slyomovics, "'Hassiba Ben Bouali, If You Could See Our Algeria': Women and Public Space in Algeria', *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint*, ed. Suha Sabbagh (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2003), 211-220, 220.

Along with *Nahla et les Touareg*, *Nour el-Mouloud* thus offers a didactic, yet fashionable way to view contemporary cultural concerns in Algerian society.¹⁶ Both of these Dz-*shōjo* manga present their female readers with edifying narratives meant to educate as well as to entertain. In this respect, Algerian *shōjo* manga differ significantly from their parent genre: while Japanese *shōjo* comics have been credited with the revision of normative gender and heteronormative sexuality, Algerian *shōjo* manga, by contrast, appear burdened by social control over (proper) female behavior and (lack of sexual) education. While Japanese manga create a fantasy space where reading pleasure is freed from societal norms, Dz-manga instead support the norms of their cultural context.

Alternative Masculinities: Tomboys, Lover Boys and Jocks in Dz-Shōnen Manga

If Dz-*shōjo* manga appear to follow the original Japanese model in perpetuating a sharp separation of female readers and interests, the same cannot be said for corresponding *shōnen* works. Despite the normative classification prominently displayed on their covers, Algerian *shōnen* works cannot properly be read as intended for either males or females. This openness appears to be broadly true throughout the body of Dz-*shōnen* manga. In its most overt expression, a gender-neutral readership is explicitly encouraged inside the dust jacket of newly published Z-link works. More generally, though, fluidity in the *shōnen* genre appears to be the norm in the Algerian manga community. This was particularly brought to light in the recent publications by Matougui Fella, one of the co-authors of *Nahla et les Touareg*. Following the 2010 publication of *Nahla*, Fella published her first *shōnen* manga, *Ghost* (in English in the original)¹⁷. As one of the first Algerian female artists to work within a genre more typically associated with men, Fella's work in *Ghost* has been able to destabilize gendered discourse delineated along the lines of *shōjo* and *shōnen*.

Outwardly, *Ghost* follows the stylistic conventions of Japanese *shōnen* manga, with a fast-paced action-oriented storyline, a plot focusing on male heroism, and little—if any—romantic tension. At the center of the work is Najib, an adolescent boy who is gravely injured while defending a young girl against a thief. In a coma, Najib finds himself transported to a fantasy world where humans can unite with their spirit birds, *hatu*, to morph into hybrid beings and battle against monstrous creatures. The subtext of *Ghost*'s plotline is a criticism of violence within Algerian society – a message which, while important, is not unique within Dz-Manga. What sets *Ghost* apart from earlier *shōnen* manga is how it destabilizes gender identity.

Alongside the male characters in *Ghost*, Fella's fantasyscape features an array of strong female figures, both positive and negative. Of particular interest is Mouna, a central character who appears in the first panel of the alternative universe, and who ultimately evolves to become Najib's alter ego. It is Mouna who saves Najib's life during their first encounter, initiates him into the ghost world and guides him through it, teaching him about his *hatu*. She is also the one who helps him remember the events that led him there. Mouna's appearance thus reverses the

¹⁶ For an in-depth study of *Nour el-Mouloud*'s critique of the role of consumption and foreign elements making their way into religious rituals, see Alexandra Gueydan-Turek, op. cit., 168-169.

¹⁷ Matougui Fella, *Ghost* (Algiers: Editions Z-Link, 2012).

traditional male-hero narrative established at the outset of the story: Najib the savior, only shortly after he risked his life to defend a young girl being mugged, becomes Najib the rescued.

The parallel between the two protagonists extends outside of the plotline and into the paratext: Mouna and Najib share equally prominent spaces on the front cover illustration (Fig3). Together, their likenesses recall representations more typical of *shōjo* works, which feature couples and announce the implicit love interest between those featured. Fella's cover transposes the romantic intrigue from *shōjo* works in a manner atypical of *shōnen* manga (although it is worth noting that the actual romance in *Ghost* is barely developed in the plotline). In the context of the Algerian publishing market, male-oriented publications are perhaps not as restrained by public notions of morality as works written for females.

From a marketing standpoint, Fella's decision to divide the space on the front cover between male and female characters allows her to reach out to readers of both genders, blurring the definition of Dz-*shōnen* manga. Perhaps more importantly, though, her cover design reasserts the presence of a strong female character in an otherwise male-dominated world. Mouna's presence, in fact, replicates a gesture being made by Fella herself, who, by taking on the form and the voice of her male protagonist Najib, is able to draw upon a socio-political status otherwise unavailable to her. Simply put, Fella's use of the *shōnen* manga genre plays out a female-to-male transformation that enables the artist (and her female readers) to explore a position of power outside of the narrow constraints of modern Algerian expectations for the female sex.

Fella's escape from the usual gender constraints of Algerian society is further developed through the female-to-male gender fluidity portrayed in the female character Mouna. When we first come upon Mouna, she is in fact a boy, although she rapidly returns to her 'normal' appearance in order to escape a female demon and save Najib (Fig.4). In her ability to undergo a total gender shift, Mouna brings to mind other well-known manga characters who break through typical gender binaries: Ranma, from the eponymous manga *Ranma ½*, and Sailor Uranus in *Sailor Moon*.¹⁸ In contrast to the Japanese trope, however, Mouna's male drag is very short-lived, as her masculine appearance (paradoxically) deprives her of her full physical strength. Aside from her short stint as a male, Mouna is very feminine in appearance: with long hair, a tunic-skirt and leggings, she is even identified as a 'pretty' girl.¹⁹ Once she returns to her female form, furthermore, her behavior is 'feminized', as well: she no longer engages in 'tough guy' action, preferring instead to run (or fly) away from problems rather than confront them, like Najib. It is as if the male form alone gave Mouna her moral strength. In her female form, Mouna even calls

¹⁸ Ranma is a young boy who is cursed to change into a girl when he touches cold water; hot water transforms him back to his masculine self. Sex changes are often used as a device to advance his goal. Sailor Uranus (or Haruka Tenoh) is a tomboy who acts as a support character to the main protagonist Sailor Moon. See respectively Rumiko Takahashi, *Ranma Nibun-no-Ichi* [*Ranma ½*] (Shogakukan, 1987-1996) and Naoko Takeuchi, *Bishojo Senshi Sailormoon* [*Sailor Moon*] (Kodansha, 1992-1997).

It is not my intention here to attempt to compare Dz-manga's performance of gender fluidity with the abundance of queer elements in Japanese manga. Although it is possible that the gender transformation in *Ghost* might be derived from broader trends in Japanese manga, its expression appears to be unique within Dz-manga.

¹⁹ Op. cit., panel 30.

twice upon Najib to save her from aggressors. As a result, *Ghost* ultimately does return to the typical codified *shōnen*-manga narrative, where male heroism is built upon female protagonists in need of a rescue.

If gender bending plays only a small part in *Ghost*'s storyline, it is still impossible to ignore its inscription in the narrative as a device to complicate the typical model of heroism that *shōnen* manga encapsulates for boys. The same holds true for the atypically feminine roles (as a male fighter, or a double to Najib) that Mouna occupies at the beginning of the manga. They draw attention to the incursion of the feminine into a male environment. Indeed, the ironic twist introduced by Mouna's gender switching—the fact that the female appearance of the protagonist supersedes a masculine one—effects a mockery of male dominance within *shōnen* manga and of broader societal expectations.

A similar theme appears in Natsu's *Degga*,²⁰ another *shōnen* manga that undercuts masculinity. *Degga* follows an adolescent protagonist, Salim, through his preparation for and participation in the annual bloodsport contests between sheep arranged in Salim's community during the celebration of Eid-al-Adha. Despite Salim's aspirations, he repeatedly loses because of the feeble creatures that his father spares him for the fights. The bulk of the narrative centers around Salim's dreams to transform 'Coton', an ailing creature, into a victor, modeled after the cyborg Eva 5 from the Anno Hideaki's manga series *Shinseiki Evangelion* [Neon Genesis Evangelion].

Salim's adventures implicitly question the politics of masculine performance that underlie blood sports in Algeria. Sheep fights are public displays of virility. Characters like Salim feel that they must fight to attain value in the eyes of others. Salim hopes to win as an outward reflection of his desired masculinity: he hopes that the power, speed, and combativeness of his sheep will reflect on him as its owner. As the story evolves, the inability of Coton to rise to this occasion drives home Salim's symbolic struggle with societal codes of masculinity. In Salim's mind, this struggle is portrayed through starkly contrasting images: while Salim dreams to be the fierce pilot of 'Coton/Eva 05',²¹ he is acutely aware of being the owner of a gentle Coton whose name mirrors his *chibi* drawings and his sweet inclinations. Faced with these two incommensurate ideas of himself, Salim grows increasingly insecure, eventually refusing to participate altogether in the fights.

Yet, Algerian codes of masculinity reassert themselves because Salim must uphold the family honor. To coerce him to participate, Salim's parents take recourse to a trick, dressing his sister, Maria, as a boy, Mario (Fig.5). In a brief panel showing Maria's dubious performance in drag, Mario makes an overtly familiar appeal to him in dialectical Arabic: 'Oué kho... "Matkhesserch". Appelle-moi "Mario"' [Hey bro... What you lookin' for! Call me "Mario"]. Confronted with the possibility that Maria/Mario might take Salim's place as the new family son, Salim feels he must participate in the fights to regain his prime status. Although Maria's drag is as short-lived as Mouna's, it carries humor not only in the superficial characteristics of male drag, but also in the underlying criticism of first male-born status in the Arabo-islamic family.

²⁰ Natsu (Mohamed Aidaoui), *Degga* (Algiers: Editions Z-Link, 2009).

²¹ The name that Salim gives to his sheep, 'Eva 05', stands among other details drawn from Anno Hideaki's *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1996) which recounts a war waged by teenagers piloting humanoid cyborgs called 'Evas' against evil invaders.

The destabilization of privileged male status in *Dz-shōnen* manga mirrors the anxieties linked to masculinity that arose due to recent socio-economic shifts. Indeed, within the past decades, changing socio-economic patterns— with the disappearance of the welfare state, a sharp decrease in manufacturing, and the rise of outsourcing—have led to an overwhelming sense of economic insecurity and an upsurge in unemployment, particularly among young men in Algeria.²² These factors have challenged traditional expectations associated with gendered roles and, in particular, those relating to the construction of manhood.²³

As Cathie Lloyd notes, this worldwide phenomenon is acutely felt by working class males in Algerian society.²⁴ In lieu of Arabo-Islamic notions of manhood predicated on (symbolic) violence toward women, young Algerian men have had to accept their limitations as a potential head of household. In other words, even while men continue to hold a legally and culturally dominant role, ‘the world changing structures of production and reproduction, shifts in education, and the labour market, and family organization have weakened the ‘traditional’ role associated with male dominance such as the role of breadwinner and head of the family, giving rise to the idea of masculinity in crisis or at risk’.²⁵

The manifestation of this shift is somewhat paradoxical in Algeria: young boys and girls are still expected to reproduce traditional norms of socially acceptable masculinity and femininity although economic changes deny their ability to do so. This disjunction or, ‘crisis of masculinity’ to paraphrase Lloyd, is exacerbated by the blurring of the traditional separation of genders: with an increasing number of women pursuing education and entering the labor force, men’s relative powerlessness is directly compounded by a new, uneasy physical proximity.²⁶ This crisis of manhood is embodied in popular discourse by the figure of the *hittiste*, a young unemployed man with no space or activity of his own. Rejected both at home and in society at large, *hittistes*, in Algerian Arabic, are those reduced to propping up the walls of urban centers).

It should be noted that the figure of the *hittiste* does not typically appear in *Dz-shōnen* manga. As in *shōnen* manga published elsewhere, these works focus on the triumphant acts of courageous male figures. Nevertheless, the same challenges which drove Algeria’s crisis of masculinity (and led to the social category of the *hittistes*) lie at the core of most *Dz-boys’* manga. Their response to these changes is particularly important not only for the genre of *shōnen* manga, but also its ability to speak directly to the demographic group most challenged by this crisis.²⁷

²² Raewyn Connel, ‘A Thousand Miles from Kind: Men, Masculinities and Modern Institutions’, *The Journal of Men’s Studies* 16.3 (Fall 2008), 237-252.

²³ See, for example, Deniz Kandiyoti, ‘The Paradoxes of Masculinity: Some Thoughts on Segregated Societies’, *Dislocating Masculinity. Comparative Ethnographies*, eds. Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne (New York: Routledge, 1994), 197-213; Cathie Lloyd, ‘New Constructions of Masculinity. Understanding the Dynamics of Conflict: Insights from the Case of Algeria’, *Al Raida* 21.104-105 (Winter-Spring 2004), 46-51.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁷ Algerian youth under 15 years old represent 28.1% of the population, while adolescents and young adults between the age of 15 and 24 account for 18.1%. In total, 46.2% of the Algerian

Said Sabaou's series *Mondialé!*²⁸ is among the more popular recent Dz-manga to emerge in this vein. Written in the 'sporty manga' subgenre, which focuses on male characters pursuing their passion for collective sports or martial arts, *Mondialé!* centers on a male protagonist, Amine Selmi. At the beginning, Amine looks like a street thug, skipping class to play soccer in the streets of his poor Bab el Oued neighborhood. He rapidly rises, though, to become a professional player in the Mouloudia club (among the most famous and oldest football clubs in Algeria). At first, Amine's arrogance limits his contribution to the team. With each passing episode, however, Amine comes to recognize the negative impact of his attitude – in the process, learning how to control himself and to develop a team spirit. In one episode, for example, Amine is publically called out by his coach and one of his teammates as a lesson to show how much his own game depends on his respect for the authority of his trainer and his ability to work alongside his teammates.²⁹ Although Amine's pride is initially hurt (and he abruptly quits the game), he decides to practice on his own, and later returns to the team stronger and more motivated, his combativeness transformed into a healthy sense of competition.

Both Amine's character and Amine's journey conform closely to the typical conventions of original Japanese *spokon* [sport] manga. As in that genre, Amine must overcome social and personal obstacles to fulfill his dream and help his team, the Mouloudia club, recapture its position at the top of Algerian Division I soccer. Like typical *spokon* protagonists, Amine is cast as an unlikely but gifted young hero who must prove himself through rigorous training and moral improvement. Furthermore, the illustration carefully follows *spokon* style, focusing on highly choreographed matches with jarring frame layouts, blurred images, and speed lines.³⁰

Yet, Amine's character also echoes the very 'crisis of masculinity' that Lloyd identified in Algerian society. His early behavior, in particular, arises from the outward expression of a violent masculinity, which Nadia Tazi has termed *rujuliya*. By transposing these concerns into the context of *spokon* Dz-manga, Sabaou creates an affirmative reaction to Algerian challenges to masculinity: against the same social backdrop, Amine works with his teammates and gains insight into a more generous expression of the self. The self-control and respectability that Amine ultimately exemplifies allow him to redirect the *rujuliya*'s energy toward the common good.

In the opposition between *rujuliya* and a community-focused masculinity, current Algerian social norms tend to fall heavily on the side of *rujuliya*. Nadia Tazi believes however that both aspects converge within a more complex idea of masculinity. This vision is reflected clearly in *Mondialé!*: the two facets of Amin's attitude are in no way exclusive.³¹ Their equilibrium as it is portrayed both by Tazi and in *Mondialé!*, speaks to a specific ideal of a reformed community in Algeria (Fig.6). To paraphrase Frenchy Lunning's interpretation of *spokon* manga, the mastery

population is under 25 years of age. See 2013 CIA estimate, Data source:

<<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ag.html>>.

²⁸ Said Sabaou, *Mondialé ! L'éveil* vol.1 (Algiers : Lazhari-Labter Editions, 2010) ; *Mondialé ! L'ascension* vol.2 (Algiers : Lazhari-Labter Editions, 2011).

²⁹ Ibid. vol. 2, 75-102.

³⁰ Frenchy Lunning, *User Enhanced* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2011), 183.

³¹ Nadia Tazi, 'Le désert perpétuel. Visages de la virilité au Maghreb', *Intersignes* 111-112 (Spring 1998), 27-58.

of the sports in manga is not measured in terms of specific sporting accomplishments, but rather by how the hero can ‘save...members of [his] virtual family’ (i.e, his teammates).³²

The projection into the football stadium of proper masculine behavior focused on defending the ‘virtual family’ could be read as a microcosm of Algerian society. Notably, it connects the extreme popularity of football with *hittistes* dreaming of stardom, in the spirit of Zinedine Zidane. As Mahmoud Amara has noted, football in Algeria is a sport inherited from the ex-colonial power and deployed in the process of nation-state formation. It therefore creates the conditions for ‘imagined community’ as described by Benedict Anderson.³³ Understood in this way, Amine’s journey from the gutters of Bab el Oued to the prestigious Mouloudia club advances a certain code of conduct that ultimately consolidates and protects the community (not only the team, but also the nation as a whole) against the phenomenon of the *hittistes*. Dz-sporting *shōnen* manga thus symbolize a normative ideal for the young male community. They serve not only as a model for proper behavior, but also a vehicle for practice of proper masculinity in society at large.

Sabaou’s more recent *shōnen* manga series, *Houma Fighter*, similarly orients its stories towards the construction and promotion of a new, more positive masculinity.³⁴ The first installment of the series centers around Sofiane, a professional kick-boxer who, once barred from competition for being overtly violent with his opponents, believes that he has no choice but to cross the Mediterranean and to become a *harrag* (an illegal immigrant who crosses from the Maghreb to Europe via a small boat). To finance his trip, he participates in underground mixed-martial-arts tournaments. As I have argued elsewhere³⁵, streetfighting ‘offer[s] a reversal of the *harraga* motif’. It not only instills values of friendship and sport ethics, but also allows Sofiane to channel his violent impulses into competition. By the end of the first volume, Sofiane abandons his plans to immigrate and decides instead to use the tournaments’ money prizes to court his beautiful neighbor.

The plot of *Houma Fighter* follows the same basic trajectory as *Mondialé!* An underdog trains, competes and learns to transcend his (moral) limitations. Evolving from a “macho man” whose masculinity is constantly on display, Sofiane works to acquire self-control. His character thus acquires respect for physical strength instead of idealizing aggression. Through the course of the narration, Sofiane moves away from another *hittiste*’s dream (emigration to Europe), toward a ‘respectable’ social status (marrying the woman he loves). In an Algerian society where most male youth are unemployed or under-employed and cannot find the means to adopt a similar position, this storyline implicitly calls attention to the need for social reform, and a broad reassessment of social values (Fig.7).

To be fair, the goal here is not to equate a need for reform with the desire to marry. *Houma Fighter* is far from a blurring of gender lines or the boundaries between masculinity and femininity. Still, it starts to move in that direction: *Houma Fighter* echoes the hopes of a new

³² Op. cit., 183.

³³ See Mahfoud Amara, ‘The Muslim World in the Global Sporting Arena’, *Brown journal of World Affairs* 14.2, (2008), 67-75, 68; Mahfoud Amara, *Sports, Politics and the Society in the Arab World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 94.

³⁴ Said Sabaou, *Houma Fighter: Round 1* vol.1 (Algiers: Editions Z-Link, 2012).

³⁵ Op. cit., 169-170.

generation for whom stability cannot be attained without mutual respect among members of the society, as embodied in the motifs of love marriage. The dynamic between Sofiane and his future wife, also support this system of values. In the romantic subplot, Sofiane proves all the more conscious of his *lacunae* as he compares himself to Zahia, an educated schoolteacher whose position is far superior to his own. Sofiane's anxiety is not due solely to his affection; he is also conscious of his marginalized role in society.

In fact, a strong female protagonist also appears in *Mondialé!* Samia, a talented student in Amine's high school class, continually worries about his future. She lectures him on leaving school and slaps him for not letting her know about his new career plans. Amine recognizes her authority when he explains how the success of his career will prove to her that he deserves to be her 'friend'. This is not an idealized portrait of gender equality: Samia is formulaically represented as a cute hysteric with a short fuse. Nevertheless, her presence alone emphasizes the fact that, when stripped of his football attire, Amine is left with little social power (Fig.8). He is effectively a puppet in the hand of his love interest. In both cases, the awkward attraction between the hero and a young female, although essentially a comic device showing how clueless the main male protagonist can be, also critiques Algeria's approach to dating.

In addition to the misdirected and misunderstood masculinity portrayed in Sabaou's works, there is a darker side to the Algerian notion of masculinity, and some *Dz-shōnen* manga give ample space to the destructive effects that this dominant expression of virility can have on women. A particularly notable example of this is Natsu's *The story of my life* (in English in the original),³⁶ which follows a 17-year old female protagonist named Amel in her struggles against her grandmother's plan to marry her to a cousin.

The plot in *The story of my life* is minimally developed, and occasionally appears to be nothing more than a simple vehicle for irreverent comedy (the grandmother, for example, unleashes a campaign of harassment against Amel by texting 'Epouse Zoubir, L♥V' [Marry Zoubir, LUV], writing Zoubir's name on the bathroom mirror, or covering the walls of Amel's bedroom with his name and pictures). Nevertheless, the larger message is not lost: *The story of my life* directly refers to the practice, still common in Algeria, of arranged marriage to family members. When the grandmother is not engaging in whimsical propaganda, her message is direct and grim. She explains that, as a young, unmarried female adult, Amel will not be seen not as a maiden anymore, but rather as a '*bayra*', or an old maid [*vieille fille*].

Natsu's comic take on an enduring, painful tradition further suggests that this very tradition is under attack and will likely disappear in time. Arranged marriages are fundamentally incompatible with the worldview of educated young girls like Amel, and Natsu humourously expresses the need for the older generation's expectations to evolve. At present, the institution of arranged marriage *is* in a state of flux in Algeria: the 2004 legal changes made to the Family Code finally began to allow women to marry without the consent of a male guardian, but familial consent from male and female elders remains a social pre-requisite. The wide acceptance of Natsu's story suggests that even five years after the Family Code had been revised, autonomy within the Algerian marriage scene remained a major social concern, as it does today. Perhaps optimistically, the success of this work stresses how effective Dz-manga has become as a vehicle

³⁶ Natsu (Mohamed Aidaou), *The Story of my life* appeared as a serial in the Algerian comics journal *El Bendir* (Algiers: Ed. Dalimen, 2009).

to voice challenges to some prevailing norms: the first serialized installment of *The story of my life* received the *Prix du meilleur jeune talent* [Prize for the Best Young Talent] at the 2009 FIBDA, earning institutional support from national, state-sponsored cultural authorities.³⁷

Performing Gender: Beyond Manga in Algerian Cosplay

Judging only printed works, it is safe to say that the narratives of both *Dz-shōjo* and *shōnen* manga remain fairly conservative in their engagement with masculine and feminine roles within Algerian society. When larger societal trends related to the reception of these works are considered, though, the situation is considerably different. Alongside *Dz-manga*, Algerian manga fans have also become enthusiastic supporters of cosplay competitions. Cosplay (a portmanteau of ‘costume’ and ‘play’), is a globally common practice where Manga and anime fans express their support for various works by dressing and acting like characters from manga, anime or video games. In Algeria, such cosplay competitions have enjoyed much institutional support, enjoying a prominent position at the annual FIBDA festival, as well as the organizational support of specialized Manga publishing house, Z-Link Editions.³⁸ At these competitions, Algerian adolescents—boys and girls alike – have often adopted personae (occasionally risqué) from Japanese manga series.

Although cosplay may seem to be about the pure pleasure elicited from the mimicry of famous *personae*, it has also been studied as a tool of gender performance and subversive gender identity. According to Frenchy Lunning, cosplay and gender performance are bound together by their common pursuit of an idealized vision of the self.³⁹ In a patriarchal Algerian society, where women are nonetheless gaining increased independence from male relatives and access to higher-status jobs, cosplay competitions have emerged as a limited, but safe alternative space for women to perform non-normative identity. This performance has been able to sneak ‘under the radar’ of the Algerian gender norms, evolving under the pretense of homage to a given fictional character, rather than as a subversion of gender roles.

During the 2011 FIBDA, for example, the two female cosplayers who were rewarded for their costumes both embodied characters diametrically opposed to the stereotypical *hijabi* girl, characterized by her headscarf and outward adherence to the rules of Islam. One dressed as Deidara, a male member of the criminal ninja organization of the Akatsuki. Building on the popularity of the *Naruto* manga series, she was able to gain noncontroversial acclaim while

³⁷ FIBDA’s winner for Young Talents (18-35 years old) receives a prize of 200,000DA (\$ 2,524), in comparison to the World Bank estimate of Algeria’s 2011 gross national income per capita at \$4,470.

³⁸ The first public cosplay took place at student-lead festival ‘Magame,’ at the University Bab Ezzouar (periphery of Algiers) in 2007. However, it is only since 2011 that public performances have taken place as part of official festival such as FIBDA. Starting that year, and every year since then, the most prominent editor of *Dz-manga*, Z-link Editions, has sponsored such an event offering monetary prizes to the best costume.

³⁹ Frenchy Lunning, ‘Cosplay, Drag and the Performance of Abjection’, *Mangatopia: Essays on Manga and Anime in the Modern World*, eds. Timothy Perper and Martha Cornog (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO), 71-88.

engaged in female-to-male cross-dressing. The other prizewinner dressed as Misa Amane, a sexy pop star from the Japanese horror manga *Death Note*³⁹, with a costume that allowed her to portray hyper-femininity as both sexual and violent. Outside of such a context, Algerian society would be harshly critical of teenage girls adopting either of these stances. Both the Deidara's dominance and Misa Amane's seductiveness are otherwise quite inimical to the Algerian mores that seek to confine women to the role of forbidden objects of male desire.⁴⁰

The cosplay events 2012 FIBDA also featured a staged fight between a male and a female *otaku*, dressed respectively as Monkey D. Luffy (the main character of Eiichiro Oda's manga and anime series *One Piece*), and Chun-Li (a notable female character from Capcom's *Street Fighter* videogame series). Both of these characters are widely regarded as somehow unconventional: while sympathetic, the gangly physique and grotesque demeanor of pirate Monkey D. Luffy contrast sharply with the handsome tough guy *shōnen* hero. Meanwhile, Chun-Li is the first female playable in a fighting game, defying the generic videogame assumption 'that men are aggressive and powerful and that women are not healthy, whole persons, but sex objects, eye candy, and generally second-class citizens'.⁴¹ Despite her strong sex appeal, Chun-Li occupies an overwhelmingly masculine digital space, and hardly lends herself to objectification or abuse—among gamers, she is better known for her strength than her femininity.

The staged combat between Chun-Li and Monkey D. Luffy consciously disrupts social expectations and ideas of gender. In Algeria, a publicly staged performance featuring a female resisting and dominating a male strikes as a controversial move highlighting the superficiality of the hierarchy between the sexes in Algeria. The comparatively warm reception of this performance hints optimistically at the changes that Algerian society—and the status that women occupy within it—are now undergoing.

Many aspects of cosplay in Algeria correspond to what has been identified by Frenchy Lunning as a drag performance. Her notion of cosplay drag performances does not necessarily require an inversion of gender. After questioning whether 'a simple cosplay' (with, for example, a girl playing a female *shōjo* or *shōnen* manga character) can still be drag, Lunning concludes that, regardless of gender alignment, cosplay performance is essentially 'playing gender mutability

³⁹ Tsugumi Ohba and Takeshi Obata, *Desu Nōto* [Death Note] (2003-2006).

⁴⁰ This photograph can be viewed in 'Déguise-toi et gagne:Concours Cosplay Z-Link 2012', *Liberté* (21 August 2012) < <http://www.liberte-algerie.com/culture/deguise-toi-et-gagne-concours-cosplay-z-link-2012-183955> >

⁴¹ Karen E. Dill and Kathryn P. Thill, 'Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions', *Sex Roles* 57 (October 2007), 851-864, 854, quoted in Kai-man Chang, *Disrupting Boundaries of Desire* (Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest, 2008), 87. Chang ends up replicating Dill and Thill' argument according to which Chun-Li's overtly sexualized character reinforces a patriarchal view of women's role; in addition, according to Chang, Chun-Li's Chinese-born character enables a feminization of China in a Japanese game. While this may be true, neither Chang nor Dill & Thill take into account the displacement and reappropriation to which this character lends itself, when portrayed by female *otaku* in less inclusive societies. I would argue that the signs projected by the protagonist of Chun-Li lend themselves to quite a different interpretation when read in regard to the hardship many women still encounter in today's Algerian society.

under the guise of character, rather than any gender specificity.’ ‘The cosplay performer,’ continues Lunning, ‘creates an occasion for the citation of hypostatized identity and genders [...] a nonnormative parodied gender identity as a classification, a type, and a totality, complete with the sets, lights, and costumes that simultaneously shuts down and releases deconstructing emergence of meanings. The drag identity becomes a series of snapshots of shifting gender illusions made possible by the release of the founding identity: it is a flickering series of momentarily stabilized spaces that are fundamentally unstable.’⁴² Even when the cosplay performance imitates an idealized heteronormativity and reinscribes gender binaries, it does so in an overtly exaggerated performance that always already destabilizes heterosexual norms. Furthermore, cosplay performers from borrowing cultures—such as Algerian youth playing Japanese manga characters—deliberately disrupt the location of their identity and break away from their conventional male/ female spheres of reference. Cosplay thus speaks not only to the freedom of self-representation – a ‘release of the socially attributed identity’⁴³ – but also to the open-ended potential of performing the self as gendered Other.

Although it is too early to speculate how this type of non-traditional gender performance will influence Algerian society, it stands in stark contrast from mainstream Algerian life, where boundaries of identity remain firmly fixed, and there is little (if any) tolerance for the blurring of gender lines. In a country where the social fabric of gendered identity is so tightly woven, it is perhaps inevitable to find a certain fraying at the edges, a temporary and localized unraveling.

Although cosplay performances inspired by Japanese manga provide an alternative space, Japanese-inspired Algerian comics remain closer to societal gender expectations. While Dz-manga blend in the overwhelming influences of its Japanese parent genre, they relegate those influences to the background or to detail, privileging Algerian cultural practices where the two conflict. As inviting and open as it seems, the format of Dz-manga manage to retain much of the cultural specificity of Algerian cultural products, especially in their treatment of gender. Their less furtive written gestures acknowledge rather than contest daily social reality.

On the one hand, Dz-*shōjo* manga offer relatively little transformational ability to female artists and readers who might hope to find an alternative space in print. Despite the unique platform that girls’ manga provide in Algeria, its practitioners appear unable to escape dominant gender narratives, female artists and readers still subject to the negative connotations ascribed to their sexuality. As demonstrated in *Nahla et les Touareg* and *Nour el-Mouloud*, plotlines and characters invariably reify the male-dominated couple and the myth of a female identity defined by motherhood. In Dz-*shōjo* manga, women draw themselves according to patriarchal codes and gender roles that preserve – rather than challenge – prescribed ideologies.

On the other hand, Dz-*shōnen* manga appear to mirror Algeria’s ‘crisis in masculinity’ through its peculiar representations of alternative masculinities. Whether viewed through the eyes of tomboys, repentant jocks, or girls in drag, the ‘traditional’ performance of masculinity in Algeria is relentlessly challenged. Although the works studied here reassess virility and *rujuliya* at the

⁴² Op. cit., 81.

⁴³ Op. cit., 84.

heart of Algerian manhood, none proposes a clearly viable alternative. Despite a perceptible urge to revise contemporary performances of masculinity, the disparities between *Dz-shōnen* and *Dz-shōjo* manga replicate the unequal relationships between the sexes that persist in daily life. Above all, Algerian manga seem to have reached critical and popular acclaim because they provide their readers the comfort and amusement of exploring fantasy characters who are much like themselves.



Figure 1 Matougui Fella and Salim Brahimi, *Nahla et les Touareg*, (Algiers: Editions Z-Link, 2010), Front and back covers. © Editions Z-Link. Nahla appears on the front cover dressed as a typical character from Japanese comics, and on the back cover wearing a *Targuiate* veil.



Figure 2 Hanane Bennediouni, *Nour el-Mouloud* (Algiers: Editions Z-Link, 2011), Panel 9. © Editions Z-Link. Amina's mother is depicted with the accoutrements of her domestic role: an oven glove, apron and slippers.

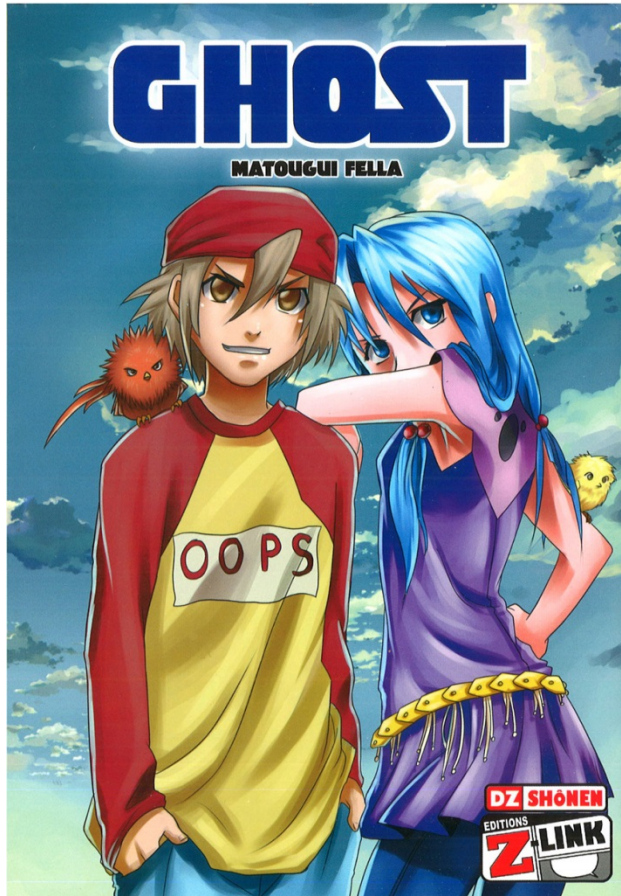


Figure 3 Matougui Fella, *Ghost* (Algiers: Editions Z-Link, 2012), Front Cover. © Editions Z-Link. Najib shares the front cover with Mouna.

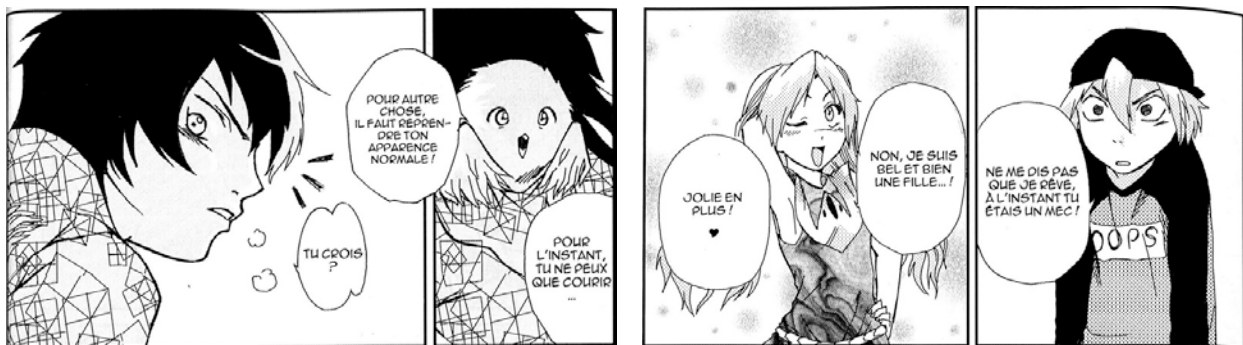


Figure 4 Matougui Fella, *Ghost* (Algiers: Editions Z-Link, 2012), Panel 24, frames 1-2 and panel 27, frames 1-2. © Editions Z-Link. Mouna transforms herself from a powerless boy to a pretty girl.



Figure 5 Natsu, *Degga* (Algiers: Editions Z-Link, 2009), Panel 60, frames 1-5. © Editions Z-Link. Salim recognizes his younger sister in drag.



Figure 6 Said Sabaou, *Mondialé ! L'ascension vol.2* (Algiers: Lazhari-Labter Editions, 2011), Panel 37, frame 3. © Lazhari-Labter Editions. The coach explains that the country is full of talented young men who only need some help to become the glory of Algerian society.

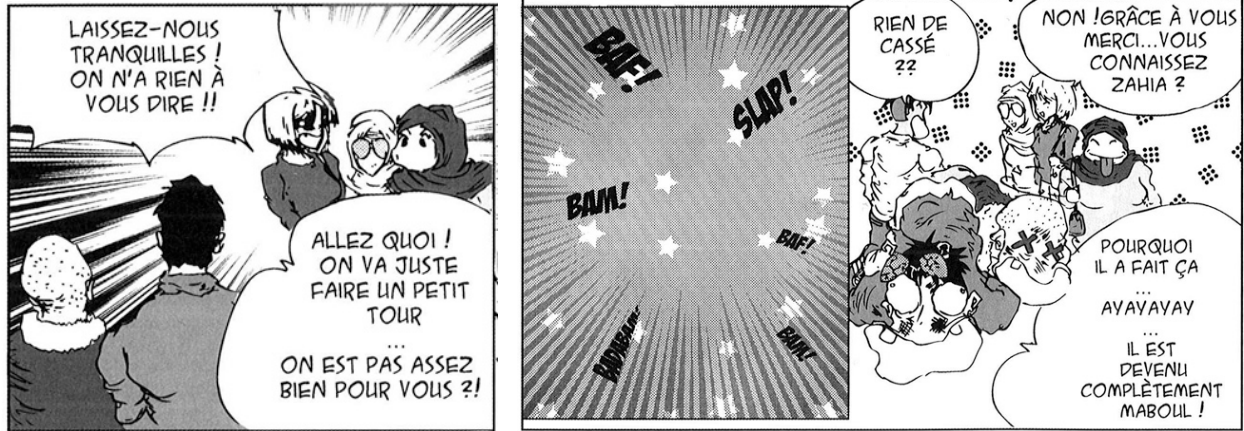


Figure 7 Said Sabaou, *Houma Fighter: Round 1* vol.1 (Algiers: Editions Z-Link, 2012), Chp. 3, panel 3, frames 1, 4-5. ©Editions Z-Link. Sofiane rescues Zahia as she and her colleagues are being harassed in the street by his *hittiste* friends.



Figure 8 Said Sabaou, *Mondialé ! L'ascension* vol.2 (Algiers: Lazhari-Labter Editions, 2011), Panel 42. © Lazhari-Labter Editions. Outside the football field, Sofiane is emasculated by Samia.