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*Excerpts from Marie Lemonnier's remarkable special investigation for the French news weekly L'Obs in Tunisia (with Pascal Riché) on Guy Sorman's paedophilia allegations against the philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984).*

Talking to L'Obs on March 31, Guy Sorman said: "I remember it very well, it was at Easter 1970 [sic]. We were on holiday in Sidi Bou Saïd with Pierre Bénichou, Gilles Châtelet, and Chantal Charpentier, Olivier Todd's mistress. We were coming back from the Café des Nattes. Children of 8, 9 or 10 were running after Foucault, calling him by name. They all knew him. He would throw money at them and arrange to meet some of them in the evening, at 10 p.m., at the cemetery, which was a place people went to stroll. The cemetery was known for that, everyone knew. It was neo-colonial. "

Except that Chantal Charpentier, the only living witness to this scene, was not at that time "Olivier Todd's mistress" (she would be, but later, Todd's partner and the mother of her son Simon), but the "girlfriend" of Sorman himself, to whom she remains, she said, "very close." "I was 23 and Guy, 25." She also remembers the scene "very well", although her version is somewhat different: "We were in Sidi Bou Saïd, at Easter 1969. I had met a young man called Mohammed, very handsome, maybe 17 or 18 years old, who lived in a big house above the Café des Nattes." It was he is supposed to have accompanied her "with Guy and Châtelet" (not Bénichou) to Foucault's house (strangely, in 1998, Châtelet confided his "regret" at never having been able to meet Foucault to the *Libération* journalist Marc Ragon). "The young man slumped down on Foucault's sofa, at which Foucault said, 'Don't be a bitch!' I found that very shocking. Another time, when we ran into Foucault in the street, a host of kids aged 7 to 10 were chasing him like a flock of sparrows and calling him "Monsieur Michel, Monsieur Michel!". I didn't hear him making an assignment with them, I don't know, but he was throwing coins to at them and had a hateful attitude of satisfaction towards these kids! She adds that it was the young Mohammed who reportedly told them "what happened in the cemetery." "I have never read anything by Michel Foucault, but since then I have always warned anyone who mentions him."

Over the phone, the sociologist Daniel Defert, who shared Foucault's life from 1960 until his death in 1984, sighs: "It's totally phantasmal. Foucault is an excellent coat-hanger for rumors, he liked young men, yes, but he had no interest in children at all. He never supported Gabriel Matzneff in his fight in favor of pedophilia, he refused to sign his 1977 petition. The only question on which Foucault intervened, within the framework of the debates on penal reform, and this is why he signed another text that year alongside 150 personalities (Sartre, Beauvoir, Dolto ...), concerned the age of sexual majority, which they wanted to be equal for heterosexual and homosexual relations - which, to at the time, was not the case (15 years against 18 years). Unfortunately, his fame has provoked an unimaginable rage in a number of people. But what Sorman says does not hold water, neither objectively nor chronologically. Foucault in fact left Tunisia in October 1968 and began teaching at the experimental faculty of Vincennes in January 1969. From then on, there are no traces of him in Tunisia until the public lecture he gave on the paintings of Manet, at Tunis on May 20, 1971.

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At the university, his lectures on structuralism, Descartes and "the question of man in Western civilization" were the best attended courses. "He was the campus star. I didn't miss any of his lessons. There were up to 200 of us crammed in there", remembers Fathi Triki, who was his pupil and friend, before becoming a professor of philosophy in the same faculty. The linguist Hammadi Sammoud also testifies to his influence when he was his student: "Foucault made us discover the new criticism, he was a driving force and a mentor for us, a teacher who was never stingy with his time and knowledge, who would continue his classes in the hallways and came to chat with us at the Shilling, the Belvedere cafe. Between Foucault's Tunisian students and him, it was "love at first sight ", he declared in 1967 to the *Presse de Tunisie* newspaper, impressed by these young people who were so "eager to know". As for the public sessions on Friday afternoon, the people of Tunis came in crowds. Even the government Minister Ahmed Ben Salah, was seen there several times.

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Hamadi Moutaadi, also known as Michael, worked for ten months as the philosopher's cook and housekeeper. Retired from the hotel business, he now lives near London, England. In 1966, he was barely 19 years old. "I came to Foucault's house from Monday to Saturday, from 8 am to 5:30 pm. When I arrived, he was often already writing, surrounded by his books. He was always charming and addressed me with respect. But he never had any inappropriate attitude!", insists the former employee. He was alone most of the time, except on Friday and Saturday afternoons, when small groups of students, often two girls and three boys, came to his house to discuss philosophy. He would ask me to bake cookies for them. I was very surprised to hear the accusations from this Mr. Sorman. Not only do they not correspond to anything I can attest to, but I find it odious to attack a dead person, someone who cannot defend himself! And it is offensive to the children of Sidi Bou Saïd. The village was 700 or 800 souls back then, and no one saw him behaving badly with them. "

But now there is a cloud of suspicion. In "Sidi Bou", there is shock. The villagers have fond memories of the residence of the philosopher, which they unanimously describe as "simple", "courteous", "very well integrated into local life". His homosexuality was known. Four names are mentioned of young people he frequented, all born between 1942 and 1946. But "never" have the locals heard of such scandals surrounding Foucault "The rape of a child, even more on a grave in the cemetery, would have earned him a lynching!", insists Abdallah Mellah, 68, a pillar of the community. A neighbour recalls the old path alongside the main cemetery as once a discreet meeting place for lovers. But "raping children at night on graves would be impossible. Our cemeteries are guarded and children locked away by their parents at night". As for finding the famous "Mohammed", you might as well look for a François in France... Besides, as Sorman knows well, who writes to us on April 11, when we explain to him our vain efforts to confirm his allegations: "What you are looking for moreover, you will not find it: fifty years have passed."

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Not only does our investigation not lead to even a trace of supporting evidence, but it comes up against a strong argument for the defence. "In Tunisia, Michel Foucault was under close police surveillance," says François Ewald, who was his assistant at the Collège de France. Because what concerned the Tunisian authorities, much more than

his sex life, was Foucault's political activities and his support for young protesters against the regime who for some years caused turmoil in the university. The review *Perspectives* was in 1963 led by a group of students of Althussero-Marxist inspiration. Foucault directly witnessed the emergence of an insurrectional movement and came himself to live "a real political experience." For him, he once replied to Marcuse, who asked him in a tone of reproach what he was doing at the time of the barricades, "it was not May 68 in France, but March 68, in a third world country". And in his eyes, that was a much more glorious episode.

"The repression against the students grew more intense, but when the regime realized that the movement was getting strengthened, it came down on us heavily with a big wave of raids and arrests in March 68. "Almost 700 people were imprisoned", recalls Mohamed Salah Fliss, one of the figures in *Perspectives*, who was arrested on April 4, 1968. "The main leaders were tortured and charged with endangering state security." There were beatings with blackjacks and rubber truncheons, electric shocks to the genitals, rapes ..." Fliss served more than eight years in prison. Others were sentenced to fifteen years. For Tunisians, "March 1968" became a symbol of resistance to the dictatorship.

In France, Foucault had only been briefly in the Communist Party, whose dogmatism he could not stand. But the Marxism of which the young Tunisians embraced with impressive enthusiasm seemed to him "a kind of moral energy, a quite remarkable existential act". "He was far from sharing all of our positions," confirms Essayed Mazouz, a former teacher and one of the leaders of the protest. "And he wasn't slow to criticise us! But he respected our action and supported all those who suffered the injustice of a regime that had grown more brutal." Foucault, who was then discovering the writings of the Black Panthers and Trotsky, decided to help the students. His house in Sidi Bou Saïd became a place for clandestine meetings, where the people of *Perspectives* printed leaflets on a mimeo that was kept hidden among flowerpots. "Foucault had a typewriter that was not catalogued by the police, we used it to write our newsletter," says Fathi Triki. Foucault's Peugeot 404 white convertible was used to transport the pamphlets into Tunis, under the noses of the police. They could not imagine for a second that such a smart car could harbour Marxist revolutionaries ... The professor kept watch behind the wheel, while an activist distributed the leaflets across the capital. Foucault also helped pay to the costs of lawyers for the detainees. He even went so far as to hide wanted movement leaders, such as Ahmed Ben Othman, alias Othmani, whose recollections appeared in 1979 in *Les temps modernes*.

Bourguiba's men were obviously not blind to the intellectual's activities. But could they touch such a famous figure as Foucault? The secret police decided to apply pressure. The president "graciously" had a telephone line installed in his house, tapped by the regime. His post is opened. A beggar appears outside his front door. One evening, when he brings a young lover back to town (in fact, a 20-year-old informer), he even gets beaten up in an ambush. The next day, he is invited to meet by a minister. "Foucault was convinced that it was done to check that the job had been done well," says Daniel Defert. You can imagine that if there had been any paedophilia evidence against him, the government would have used it to expel him immediately! "

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When Foucault returned to France in October 1968, almost all of his students were in prison. After that, he later said, "I tried to do things which involved a personal, physical and real commitment, and which would pose problems in concrete, precise terms, defined within a given situation." On the militant level, the Tunisian experience was the trigger for his engagement in the creation of the Prisons Information Group (GIP), in 1971. On the theoretical level, it translates into *Surveiller et Punir* (1975) and his reflections on the way in which power is exercised, that word "similar to those written with invisible ink, ready to appear on paper when you use the right reagent".

When he launched his accusations against the most cited thinker in the world, did Guy Sorman think he had found the right reagent? A month after the explosion, the evidence is looking thin: stories of crimes based on hearsay (Sorman, as he has confirmed to us, clearly did not "see" Foucault raping children on graves), dates that don't match up, an accused dead for thirty-seven years, untraceable victims... The victims have also grown older in successive statements by Sorman [8-10 years originally; later 14 or 18]: "Arguing about the age of the victims or the position of the lighthouse in relation to the cemetery is not very exciting. Whether he was a paedophile or an ephebophile (where do we draw the line, Foucault himself having written that there was no hard threshold?), is that more significant than his suicidal passion for sado-masochistic practices? I'm not sure. I cannot find this case interesting nor revealing since Foucault's whole life was a transgression, which his work served to legitimate ... I am only trying to understand the relationship between the work and the author", Sorman concludes in our last exchanges, arguing that he "had been, basically, more shocked by Foucault's Orientalism than by his attraction to young men."

Was that the objective: to demolish, by scandal, the most productive thought of the 20th century? Sorman denies this. Already, however, in an editorial of January 9, 2020 published in the review *France-Amérique* where he mentioned Foucault's "little victims" (and, which like his book, at the time remained unnoticed), one is not surprised to find the champion of 1980s neoliberalism writing: "Foucault is important, but his influence will shrink when it is better known that his exaltation of freedom was by a strange coincidence, the alibi of his depravities."

For Zeïneb Ben Saïd Cherni, Professor Emeritus of philosophy at the University of Tunis, where she was a student of Foucault and member of the Perspectives group, "These attacks are a sign of a dangerous revival of conservative thinking. What Mr Sorman has done is to weaponise an ideological war against philosophy, against the left, and against socialism, as we grapple with serious socio-economic problems, a rise in fanaticism and populism." The concern of this epistemologist, who has known the torture of "roast chicken" (a technique that consists of rotating a prisoner stripped naked and crushed between two tables), the prison, and six years' ban from teaching, is palpable. Anything but bullshit.