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Queer Arab Writing Across Borders: Sexual Citizenship and Acts of Belonging

Nicole Fares
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

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Queer Arab Writing Across Borders:
Sexual Citizenship and Acts of Belonging

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies

by

Nicole Fares
American University of Science and Technology
Bachelor of Arts in Translation, 2012
University of Arkansas
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, 2014

May 2018
University of Arkansas

This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

Mohja Kahf, Ph.D.
Dissertation Director

Yajaira M. Padilla, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Lisa Ann Hinrichsen, Ph.D.
Committee Member

ABSTRACT

This study provides a comparative analysis of various representations of sexuality in seven transnational Arab cultural productions: Salim Haddad's *Guapa* (2016), Rabih Alameddine's *The Angel of History* (2016), Ahmed Dany Ramadan's *The Clothesline Swing* (2017), Hasan Namir's *God in Pink* (2015), Fadia Abboud's *I Luv U But* (2016), Alissar Gazal's *Lesbanese* (2008), and Ayse Toprak's *Mr. Gay Syria* (2017). These productions demonstrate a range of experiences of discrimination and trauma experienced by queer Arab immigrants and refugees in Europe, the U.S. and Canada, as their national identities continue to be regarded as obstacles preventing them from fully integrating into the dominant liberal queer community. I argue that LGBTQ Arabs have developed different ways of achieving a sense of belonging in diasporic communities. They have also managed to bring their sexuality to the forefront of their lived experiences while tackling the many social challenges facing Arabs and especially Muslim Arabs today.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Antoine and Antoinette Fares, to my brother, Georges Fares, and to my aunt Josephine Farah, que ce modeste travail soit l'exaucement de vos vœux tant formulés, le fruit de vos innombrables sacrifices, bien que je vous en acquitterai jamais assez.

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INTRODUCTION :

A Window onto the Authors and Primary Texts

Overview:

Queer Arab Writing Across Borders examines the ways Arab LGBTQ individuals with multiple identifications develop a sense of belonging in diaspora. It centers on Arab individuals with identifications that have been politicized, romanticized, and stigmatized, and widely assumed by many to be in conflict with one another. They embody what is considered to be an oxymoron: Being Arab and queer, being a lesbian and wearing a hijab, being in between worlds and not belonging anywhere. Their position enables me to debate and critique mainstream ideas of cohesion and social capital while establishing that, in the examples of Arab LGBTQ immigrants and refugees, cohesion is not necessarily required to establish a sense of belonging. This has directed my attention towards the questions of how belonging develops: how do Arab immigrants belong to contexts, communities, and societies to which the mainstream does not consider them to belong? How do they relieve themselves from the dominant assumption that their identifications conflict? What does citizenship and belonging mean to Arab individuals holding multiple identifications? And what does it mean to belong for these Arabs who often find themselves in situations where resistance against one type of oppression, such as heterosexism, carries through into generalizing and essentializing statements about the characteristics of particular ethnic and national communities? As I take LGBTQ men and women of Arab descent as my main focus and use Europe, the U.S. and Canada as my main site of sociological study, the gestures and acts of belonging that I will be studying in this dissertation provide the answers to my questions and the means through which queer Arabs fulfill their desire for belonging in their communities. These acts also enable me to show, in the case of Syrian

LGBTQ refugees more specifically, the ways in which legal acceptance, in the form of citizenship or naturalization, differs from lived experiences of belonging. By addressing simultaneously the emotional, psychological, and social factors as well as sexuality, my dissertation bridges important gaps in the literatures of queer studies, migration and citizenship, and social psychology.

Terms such as integration, cohesion, and citizenship, are questioned when studied in relation to a multi-dimension subject because of the complexity of the individual's situation. For, the subjects of my dissertation hold identifications that are considered by larger society to not be necessarily "coherent" with one another, and as a result, these men and women often defy stereotypes and represent impossible and conflicting identifies due to their overlapping sexual, religious, national, and legal identities (Yorukoglu 114). This complex position that my subjects find themselves in provides ideal case studies to enable us to analyze and question how coherence, belonging and the meaning of citizenship relate to each other. I argue that queer Arabs have developed different ways of achieving belonging in various communities in the US, Canada, and European countries, which enable them to bring their sexuality to the forefront of their lived experiences and tackle the many social challenges facing Arabs and especially Muslim Arabs today.

I focus on three acts of belonging that LGBTQ Arabs produce within the dominant societies they reside in: Cohesion and assimilation, distancing oneself, and cultural acts of belonging. Each of my three chapters tackles one act of assimilation and utilizes specific literatures as case studies. My chapters work together to show the different ways Arab LGBTQ individuals are working toward belonging and citizenship in the countries they are residing. I aim to shed light on the non-normativity manifested in Arab-American communities, how desire is

written and felt, how queer Arab authors residing in the U.S., Canada, and Europe, write queer characters and how they attempt to reconcile queerness and Arabness in novel.

Arab cultural production in the West is flourishing, and Arab literature tackling queer topics is certainly on the rise. But to choose texts to work with, or even to research queerness in Arab diasporic culture, I had to look beyond LGBTQ articulations of Arab culture produced in the context of the U.S., Canada, or Europe. For, aside from the scarcity of such depictions, the matter of labeling and adopting gay, lesbian, queer, and bisexual identities did not attract as many supporters in Arab societies in diaspora in terms of their own representations of sexuality as they did in other societies (see El-Tayeb 2011, Georgis 2013, Massad 2007, and Katyal 2002). Therefore, while varying gender behaviors and sexual practices exist within Arab representations, it was essential for the outcome of my study to relocate my research outside the terms of LGBTQ identities, which led to broadening my perspective and hence my analysis of the texts at hand. The representations of sexualities in the literatures became richer and more nuanced as I considered its surroundings and that which triggered, affected, or inhibited LGBTQ production. To discuss the literatures and productions of Arabs in diaspora, one must therefore first look at the racialization of Arabs in the West. It is by acknowledging the continuing colonization of the Arab world by the U.S., Israel, and European countries, that one can understand the realities of Arabs, especially Muslim Arabs, in diaspora and thereby understand the anti-colonial and post-colonial ideals shaping Arab and Arab American discourses of gender and sexuality. Anti-racist and anti-Orientalist efforts are increasingly shaping Arab and Arab American discourses of gender and sexuality more than before.

My dissertation examines representations of gender and sexuality in seven Arab literature and film productions in an effort to contribute to current scholarship on queer transnational Arab

politics that move beyond the point of nationalism, inclusion, or citizenship. While such types of activism and political goals have proven effective and essential for some Arabs residing in the Middle East or the West, nationalist campaigns in the Arab world have a history of excluding women, minorities, and non-normative gender and sexual identities or subjects, both in the homelands and in diaspora. But while some nationalisms rely on exclusionary and homogenous visions, others have the potential to be empowering to minorities and culturally diverse. As I discuss queer transnational Arab politics, especially in my last chapter as it pertains to Gazal and Toprak's works, I offer critiques of nationalism, normativity, and assimilation. I highlight articulations and rejections of both Arab and American and European discourses and politics within transnational Arab sexualities, accentuating the political importance of representation and the mobility of ideology. And although other countries in the Middle East and North Africa, such as Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, and Algeria, have in the past ten years produced influential queer literature worthy of being studied and analyzed, I have excluded these regions from my main study site due to lack of sufficient data as I have instead researched extensively the different queer literatures and events in the Levant area.

I will be discussing four novels, two documentaries, and one web series: Salim Haddad's *Guapa* (2016), Rabih Alameddine's *The Angel of History* (2016), Ahmed Dany Ramadan's *The Clothesline Swing* (2017), Hasan Namir's *God in Pink* (2015), Fadia Abboud's *I Luv U But* (2016), Alissar Gazal's *Lesbanese* (2008), and Ayse Toprak's *Mr. Gay Syria* (2017). The literatures and web series included in my dissertation attend to the movements of Arab peoples, ideas, and stories across international boundaries. They relay between disparate locations, hence, in order to understand Arab culture and the movements and literatures produced within, we must consider Arab identity mobile. My research, therefore, posits the following questions: How is

Arab queerness altered by mobility? How are queer Arab bodies employed within political discourses? How are the LGBTQ Arab communities working politically to center themselves within dominant international political discourses? How do they represent themselves and other minority groups they intersect with in a foreign world bent on offensive tactics and in an Arab world that remains suppressed by colonial legacies? The texts examined in this study demonstrate a dominant concern for varieties of homosexuality, with only two examples of lesbian production. This selection in no way intends to privilege gay men. Arab Lesbian interests have yet to be as consistently thematized as Arab male homosexual interests have been. The purpose of this dissertation is not primarily to argue that the role of gay Arab writers in driving forward the timeline of the gay Arab rights movement has been under-recognized. Rather, it seeks to examine a set of recent publications by lesbian and gay Arab writers as varying responses to changing global human rights and the international queer movement.

My first chapter addresses social and political discourses as they relate to social cohesion and citizenship; the second addresses association and dissociation of identities and feelings of belonging as they pertain to homosexual Arab immigrants, and my third and final chapter deals with the networks and communities of LGBTQ Arab men and women and the challenges and representations of migrant homosexuals outside the scope of homosexual identity in Arab texts produced in diaspora. My dissertation, and especially the third chapter, posits limits to the gay identity model and its practitioners in the above-mentioned countries. Such is evident in the conflict between national movements and the constitution of healthy and stable national and international queer communities. As represented in the seven texts I discuss in this dissertation, I demonstrate how any purported link between the advancement of LGBTQ rights in these

countries and the hypervisibility of gay Arabs in international discourses must be strongly interrogated.

The Case of Queer Syrian Writing

The Clothesline Swing is written by Ahmed Dany Ramadan, who relocated to Canada in 2015 under queer refugee status. He produced his first novel after having written two short story collections in Egypt that were banned in Syria by the Assad government. His experience as a gay refugee following a narrow escape from a bloody civil war two years before writing his novel places him in a distinctive category amongst the authors on the list in terms of his personal encounters and his relationship to Canada. This has all been taken into consideration in my analysis of his novel in Chapter two. The comparisons I make between Ramadan and Lebanese-American author Rabih Alameddine are based on the following: their experiences as gay Arabs relocating to queer-friendly spaces in the West, their political and social activism as they both advocate for LGBTQ rights in their native countries, as well as the similarities of narratives in their two more recently produced novels.

As I discuss Ramadan's personal experiences and compare the latter to Alameddine's experience of being queer and Durzi in Lebanon during the civil war (1975-1990), I by no means insinuate that the two author's experiences as queer Arabs were equal in danger or gravity. To identify or behave as gay and lesbian in the Syrian revolution is to be considered subversive. They are an invisible threat, with no outwardly identifying characteristics, and thus must be rooted out of society. Homosexuals are seen to have the same servile loyalty to their sexual deviances as communists were thought to have to their foreign ideology. Prior to the civil war, the Syrian government collected information on suspected homosexuals from the secret police and delivered it to the suspect's family, virtually guaranteeing their death. Newspapers became

headlines with sensationalist threats of homosexual menace, the force which was undermining Syria's strength in the face of local and international threats of rebellion. The LGBTQ community represented a threat to the nuclear family, a threat to Arab traditional ideals and identity, as well as Muslim and eastern Christian conservatism. The corrupt and morally weak Syrian is "feminized," while the effeminate homosexual was considered morally corrupt and weak and thus had to be pushed out of the revolution and out of government. The Syrian queer resistance, however, reintegrated itself in the political movement and in history by documenting and writing the revolution as homosexuals. Feminist and LGBTQ activists involved in the Syrian revolution have increased their political consciousness and, in some cases, made their fellow nationalists aware of exploitative and oppressive behaviors towards non-normative gender and sexual behaviors. Often, however, nationalists assume that colonialism or capitalism has been the cause of this subculture's misfortunes, and some go as far as to presume that these non-normative behaviors are a direct result of the Arab World's history of colonialism and its exposure to the West.

Introduction to authors and primary texts

Saleem Haddad

Saleem Haddad is a writer and aid worker. He was born in 1983 in Kuwait City to an Iraqi mother and a Palestinian-Lebanese father. He has worked with Doctors Without Borders and other international organizations in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Lebanon, and Egypt. In addition to writing, he continues to work with international organizations on humanitarian and development projects in the Middle East and North Africa. He divides his time between the Middle East and London, where he lives with his partner.

Haddad's experience living in the Middle East contributed to his choice of the novel's title. The namesake of his novel, *Guapa*, is a bar that portrays the Arab citizen's optimism and frustration. The author experienced his twenties in the Middle East, where much of his life was centered on underground bars and coffee shops. Such spaces came to represent freedom for Haddad; freedom away from family, freedom to discuss and express ones' self freely, and freedom to lose and find one's identity. His experience and view of bars and coffee shops as political spaces of personal revolution is thus a dominant aspect of the novel. His personal relationship with media is also reflected, as his characters grapple with media and narrative and with emotionally charged words employed by media to influence and distort facts and the public's reaction to the latter. Haddad, who identifies as Arab and queer, considers himself and other queer Arabs inaccurately represented by both U.S. and European media and Arab nationalist narratives that employ the queer Arab community as means to their political ends. In his novel, characters attempt to challenge conventional narratives by establishing an independent media organization, which ultimately fails. The novel itself as a product of cultural production and the process of writing the novel represent the ambivalent relationship many queer Arabs have with dominant narratives. For as they struggle with invisibility and negative representations, they continue to fight for a space within these same dominant narratives that marginalize and decontextualize them.

Guapa

Guapa (2016) is a novel that follows a gay Arab man, Rasa, as he attempts to make sense of his life amidst political and religious turbulence. He invests his time in politics and translating for foreign journalists, and at nights, he dreams of his lover, Taymour, and thinks up ways he could bring him into his room undetected by his neighbors and his grandmother whom he lives

with. Then one morning, Rasa's grandmother walks in on the two lovers in bed together. The narrative suddenly shifts to Rasa's pain at having lost his grandmother who raised him, his lover who gets married the very next day, and his close friend, Maj, who was arrested by the police. Rasa becomes consumed by the search for Maj who is a social activist and drag queen performer at Guapa bar. Shame shrouds the narration over the following twenty-four hours as Rasa roams the city's slums and prisons, the country side and bars and coffee shops where intellectuals drink in memory of long-lost revolutions. Each location and encounter sheds light on the character's past and personal experiences, his struggle to reconcile the different aspects of his identity, and the secrets that haunt his family. Rasa is forced to accept the simultaneous disintegration and collapse of the once-hopeful political and social revolutions and his personal relationships, and is pushed to recreate a space for himself within a dominant society that has not been kind to him.

The novel employs the concept of nationalism and pan-Arab identity as many characters take part in political and social resistance. Haddad was careful, however, not to employ nationalism romantically in the novel as the reader is given the impression that nationalism and resistance become the only option for continuity and survival for many residing in the Middle East. Extremism and pragmatism thus become the survival mechanism for many Arabs. But while Guapa incorporates and builds on various political discourses, such as the politics of speaking English or French in one's Arab native country, the novel is based to a large extent on the author's personal observations and interactions during the years he lived in the Middle East. Haddad wrote the novel between 2011 and 2014 while doing field work for an NGO, therefore, many of the topics tackled in Guapa are recounts of Haddad's personal experiences during those three years, including police abuse and police reform, transitional justice, youth protests, women's rights, refugee issues, which have all informed the novel to various degrees.

Rabih Alameddine

Born 1959 in Amman Jordan, Rabih Alameddine is a Lebanese-American painter and writer. After a close encounter with a stray bullet at the rooftop of a building in Beirut, he immigrated to the United States at the age of seventeen to escape the Lebanese civil war. Alameddine stresses through his writing the necessity of exposing delusional concepts of humanity and goodness. He is vocal about his experience as an Arab gay man in the United States. After escaping death and violence in Lebanon he was met with hateful rhetoric spewed by opposing groups in the United States. He grew to know death intimately as he witnessed AIDS decimate many in San Francisco. AIDS is featured in many of his novels, including *Kooloids: The Art of War* (1998) and his most recent novel *The Angel of History*. The latter speaks of memory and loss, it highlights the abnormality in a society that encourages its people to forget and carry on. The title of the novel was inspired by Walter Benjamin's artwork, titled "Angelus Novus," which portrays an angel averting its eyes from a devastation it might have caused. Each of Alameddine's books focus on one character's life while tackling shared themes of death and sexuality, religion and sex, war and violence, art and love, loss and memory. He regards each novel as political, since he believes that that act of writing about the human condition is in itself political.

Alameddine obtained his Masters in Business from the University of San Francisco. He has authored four novels and a collection of short stories, and received the Guggenheim Fellowship (2002) along with numerous awards including the National Book Award for Fiction (2014), the PEN/Open Book award (2015), and the Lambda Literary Award for Gay Fiction (1998). Alameddine is also a social activist; he spent two years volunteering in Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon and Lesbos.

The Angel of History

The Angel of History (2016) revolves around Jacob, a gay Yemeni-born poet waiting in a hall to be checked into a mental health facility. Satan and Death take up leading roles as they fight over Jacob's soul and sanity. Satan urges Jacob to remember his past, while Death encourages him to forget. We follow Jacob through his memories of a life with a prostitute mother in Cairo, a wealthy father in Lebanon, and through the torment of a Catholic boarding school. It's in San Francisco, among the LGBTQ community, that Jacob finally finds a home. He is driven to the mental health clinic because he was hearing death, and because he was still struggling, decades on, with the death of his partner, Doc, from AIDS. San Francisco was the heart of the AIDS epidemic and is the setting for Rabih Alameddine's novel. In a way, it looks at Alameddine's own experience with AIDS in the 1980s, when the disease was at its height. And like Alameddine who lost many friends and loves ones to the epidemic, Jacob also lost his friends Greg, Loud, Pinto, Chris, and Jim. Having survived, Jacob leads a lonely life filled with a series of unfulfilling encounters in an attempt to rebuild his previous life. Eventually he loses his faith in many things, including poetry. What he wants the most is to forget and move on, and that's exactly what Satan is keeping him from doing, urging him to look back at a past that in the end might save him.

There are two types of wars or battles in *The Angel of History*. One that Jacob has survived, AIDS, and another is the attack that the U.S. launches over the countries he grew up in. This is where the novel begins to shift to curious and audacious narratives, such as a party where a strange guest keeps a pet Arab in a cage, and of a drone that falls in love with a village boy, named Mohamed. *The Angel of History* is a novel charged with social and political commentaries and one that provides a philosophical portrayal of a mind in crisis – a battle that

all of Alameddine's protagonists in his previous novels share. It's a battle between memory and oblivion, as we wrestle every day in a society that encourages us to forget and move on.

Fadia Abboud

Lebanese-Australian writer and director, Fadia Abboud, resides in Sydney where she obtained her Bachelors in Communications Media Arts and Production from the University of Technology at Sydney (UTS). Her work is driven by her desire to tell real stories of people who don't normally make the screen, and her experience working with community arts has enabled her to tell these stories in various interesting ways, as one can see from *I Luv U But*, which are brief clips representing glimpses at a couple's personal life. Abboud is one of the founders of Club Arak, a queer Arab club featured in episode 9 of the web series. She has written and directed numerous films including the documentary, *I Remember 1948*, and the two short dramas, *In The Ladies Lounge*, which was highly celebrated at Queerscreen awards, and *Big Trouble Little Fish*, screened at Flickerfest. *I Luv U But* is in a way a personal project for Abboud, as she knows many gay and lesbian Arabs living in the closet in Australia and she considers the pride discourse not applicable to everyone, even those living in the West. She continues to co-direct the Arab Film Festival and employs her projects in the empowerment of refugees and migrants, especially in Australia.

Gazal believes *I Luv U But* to be filling an important gap in gay Arab representation. The web series constitutes a breakthrough in terms of positioning racial minorities within the international queer life and discourse.

I Luv U But

I Luv U But (2012) is a mini web series set in Sydney's vibrant multicultural communities. It follows the lives of Mouna and Sam, two young queer Lebanese-Australians who married for convenience. While they are 'out' to their friends and the LGBTQ community, they not out to their traditional families. The series is made up of two seasons, and nineteen episodes.

For Middle Eastern communities, homosexuality is generally regarded as a threat to their traditional values and national and religious identities. For the Arab communities in diaspora, this threat is more imminent, as they form a minority within such a dominant culture with differing cultural and social values. The children of Arab parents feel the pressure to keep their homosexuality private, thus gay marriages of convenience become the reality for many in the LGBTQ community. It is not that same-sex acts cannot occur, it is that everyone must keep up appearances that conform to the important principles and values of Arab society. *I Luv U But* addresses many aspects of Arab LGBTQ lifestyle, including the shame that comes with hiding one's sexual orientation in a dominant society that celebrates it, and the assumption that there's only one way to lead a healthy life as queer in the today's world. This web series also serves as a commentary on the intersection of patriarchy, traditional conservative gender dynamics, and homosexuality. It shows the scope of Abboud's knowledge and understanding of the topic as it sheds light on important layered aspects of Arab gender identities, including the definition of masculinity in question of activity and passivity, sexual identities, and motherhood in Arab culture. *I Luv U But* found a following not just in Australia, but in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, where it was nominated for Most Engaging YouTube Channel in Lebanon's Social Media Awards in 2013.

Alissar Gazal

Alissar Gazal is a Lebanese-Australian actor, director, producer, and chef. She began her acting career in Australia in 1991. She attended Australia's first Bilingual Arabic Australian Theatre Company *TAQA*, where she performed in and co-produced numerous productions. Gazal identifies as a political artist and activist, and she utilizes her art as social and political activism. Politics drives her work in many ways, whether in film or theatre, and she employs it to help the Lebanese and Arab LGBTQ communities in the Middle East and Australia. She considers humor a key tool to be employed when approaching sensitive topics and when seeking to communicate with a minority community. Gazal continues to be on the Management Committee of the Arab Film Festival and the Selection Committee for Sydney Film Festival. She is also a founding member of Sydney's Arabic Choir.

Gazal identifies as a political artist and activist, and utilizes her art for social and political activism. Politics drives her work in many ways, whether in film or theatre, and she employs it to help the Lebanese and Arab LGBTQ communities in the Middle East and Australia. She considers humor a key tool to be employed when approaching sensitive topics and when seeking to communicate with a minority community. Gazal continues to be on the Management Committee of the Arab Film Festival and the Selection Committee for Sydney Film Festival.

Lesbanese

Lesbanese (2008) is a short documentary about the lesbian community in Lebanon. It sheds light on how these women maneuver the politics of their daily lives and their survival and reactions to the Israel-Hezbollah war of 2006. It is filmed in Beirut nine months after the war as the conflict's effects have settled on the country and its people.

The women interviewed in this documentary, or “the Helem Girls” as Gazal refers to them in her credits, comprise 8 women: Faten, Jacky, Luby, Mia, Mira, Nadz, Stephanie, and Zeina. They make up a friendly cast that makes the documentary more approachable despite the sensitive topics it tackles. They describe their flirting skills and hangout spots and speak, in broken English and awkward nature but with confident posture and determined body language, about their relationships with their parents and how they live as part of Lebanon’s active LGBTQ community.

Ayse Toprak

Ayse Toprak is a filmmaker based in Istanbul. She received her Bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts in Film & TV from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, and an M.A. from the New School. Her works include “Don’t Tell Us Fairytales” (2012), “Schools on Edge” (2013), “Land Ties” (2013), and “Another Spring in Iraq” (2014). Her more recent documentaries, as with “Mr. Gay Syria” have sought to “trigger dialogue on neglected topics, brake prejudices or breach hitherto taboo subjects became her favourite medium, as well as personal and professional ambition” (festivalscope). In an interview with CNN, Toprak stated that the “Mr. Gay Syria” documentary and the pageant it documents, were an attempt by her to initiate an international conversation about LGBTQ issues in the Middle East, and especially for Syrian refugees in more vulnerable positions ().

Mr. Gay Syria

Mr. Gay Syria (2017) presents the lives of a handful of the contestants, all of them refugees living in Istanbul, as they prepare for a beauty pageant. The main focus of the documentary is two gay Syrian refugees: Hussein is a barber in Istanbul living a double life between his

conservative family and his gay identity. Mahmoud is the founder of Syria's LGBTQ movement and is a refugee in Berlin. These refugees are joined by a common goal, to participate in an international beauty contest.

As we follow the contest with Omar, the jolly cook, and Wissam, with his tight leather pants, heels, and Minnie Mouse ears, we see Hussein win the pageant but is saddened when, at the end of the documentary, he is denied a visa to compete internationally. "The contest itself is the real celebration," says Toprak. "It's part of their struggle that they want to laugh and have fun in order to stay alive. Everyone in that room felt proud of who they were" ().

Ahmed Danny Ramadan

Ahmed Danny Ramadan, was born in Syria in 1984. He is an author and journalist currently residing in Canada under status of gay refugee. He has published two short story collections in Egypt before writing *The Clothesline Swing* in English while residing in Vancouver. His work as journalist appears in the Washington Post, the Guardian and Foreign Policy as he mostly reports on the social events in the Arab world. Ramadan has become the face of gay refugee activism in Canada and has headed the 2016 gay pride parade. He is currently working with Qmunity and Rainbow Refugee, organizations dedicated to assisting LGBTQ and HIV-positive refugees in Canada.

Ramadan's coming out to his family in 2003, resulted in his need to escape Syria for his safety. He fled to Egypt, where he would have his first experience of being a refugee. However, unlike in Canada where his sexuality became a vital component of his identity and played a vital role in securing his safety, in Egypt, his sexual orientation conflicted with his hopes of finding refuge across borders. And so, he was only 'out' amidst Egypt's LGBTQ community, which, like

Syria's LGBTQ community, experienced constant harassment and police brutality. His experience of being outed by his boyfriend to his work colleagues in Egypt and the trauma that followed as he was forced to take an HIV test and reveal the result to upper management, led Ramadan to adopt the discourse of 'coming out' as a human right. He returned to Syria eight years later in 2011 surprised to find queer activism gaining ground as the initial sparks of the revolution were beginning to ignite.

The Clothesline Swing

The Clothesline Swing (2017) chronicles the journey of two gay lovers in a modern Syrian society. One of the two men, a nameless character, takes on the role of *hakawati*, a storyteller as he attempts to distract his partner from his pain as he lays on his death bed. He takes us on several journeys to his past as he contemplates his life and the choices he has made, both freely and in act of survival, as a gay man in a conservative and highly policed Arab society. The novel evidently draws on Ramadan's autobiographical information, as the protagonist is a gay man residing in Damascus during war, who utilizes his memories and experiences both as a tool for recovery and as a means of helping others.

The Clothesline Swing tackles sensitive topics of Arab nationalism, social values, police brutality, honor, war, and survival's guilt. It places the reader in a safe space, only to force him to experience the sudden shift into dangerous waters. The novel addresses memory and the art of forgetting as tool for survival. But it is not long before one is forced to look back and relive their past and make the same choices again. Fear is a constant companion throughout *The Clothesline Swing*, which helps the reader understand how fear has become embedded in the Syrian psyche, along with paranoia imposed by the secret police, which has come to manifest itself in new ways and shape the Syrian citizen.

Hasan Namir

Iraqi Canadian author, Hasan Namir, whose real name is Hasan Abood, uses his father's last name for pen name as a means of incorporating both aspects of his personality within his life. He was born in Iraq in 1987, and moved to Vancouver with his family in 1998. Namir was raised in a family of writers, as his grandfather was a poet and his aunt wrote Iraqi murder mystery novels. He currently lives with his husband in Vancouver, where he is working on his second novel, *Son of Sodom*.

As a gay Arab residing in the U.S., Namir regards *God in Pink* as a pivotal type of novel to be produced among today's events. He considers it crucial for the security of the LGBTQ Arab communities in the West, to enable active discussion of Islam and the Quran within the context of homosexuality. He believes that only through frequent discussions and the normalization of the concept of a gay Muslim can one dispel the fear that drives international LGBTQ communities to adopt anti-Islamic and imperialist discourses. Namir also wrote his first novel in an attempt to give a voice to queer individuals, such as his Iraqi friend who faced execution for being gay. The novel, thus, works as a companion to the young men and women who may not realize that there are supportive voices across the border that does not seek to impose specific queer ideologies, giving hope that there is a place for them within the transnational queer community and that their queer identity does not have to conflict with their Arab or Muslim identities. *God in Pink* won the Lambda Literary Award for gay fiction.

God in Pink

God in Pink (2015) is Hasan Namir's debut novel, which follows Ramy, a closeted university student whose parents passed away and who lives under the close scrutiny of his strict brother and sister-in-law. Ammar is the second main character who takes part in the narration of

the novel. He is a sheikh at a local Mosque and his voice adds to the novel the concepts of conservatism, religious tolerance, and the necessary questioning of one's belief system. As Ramy's brother pressures him to get married, he finds solace and counsel in Ammar, who struggles with the decision of whether or not to help our protagonist. Gabriel is another silent but recurring character throughout the novel. The choice to incorporate the Angel of Gabriel reflects yet another aspect of this novel's autobiographical nature, for Namir was inspired by Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991) as a narrative of an angel sent by God to earth during the time of the AIDS epidemic. In Islam, the angel Gabriel is depicted as the Angel of Revelation who gives important messages to the prophet Mohammed. This led to the creation of the almost theatrical angel sent in the novel to help guide the homophobic and conservative characters onto new perceptions and understandings of human nature and tolerance.

Two distinct battles take place in *God in Pink*: the internal battle that both Ramy and Ammar experience, and the U.S. occupation of Iraq. While the novel focuses on the internal conflict, the U.S-Iraq war looms in the background as casual encounters at check points occur and attacks at universities take place. The novel touches on many harsh aspects of life in modern Iraq, but offers hope for systematic change as both main characters find a way to reconcile their belief systems and national ideals with homosexuality. *God in Pink*, therefore, presents an outlet for marginalized voices and is ultimately a story about human determination and solidarity.

Theoretical Framework

Individuals identifying as LGBTQ, whether openly or from within the figurative closet, exclusively or complementarily, compose a stable component of any society. We find in the case of highly acclaimed novels by Arabs where homosexuality has been contended to form a vital

point of reference, critics have refrained from exploring in detail what that might mean as part of a specific narrative semiotics. Haddad's *Guapa* is recognized to examine homosexuality as particularly relevant to an aesthetic view of experience. Alameddine's *The Angel of History* and Ramadan's *The Clothesline Swing* present the homosexual as the paradigmatic outsider. And Namir's *God in Pink* correlates homosexuality with the repression of the individual in a society dominated by violent machismo. The type of homosexual novel examined in this dissertation deals with explicit issues of representation and narration. For, it has become commonly accepted that societies create sign systems, ideological gestures, which exclude particular manifestations of individual and social experience or represent them in incomplete and prejudicial ways. Homosexuality constitutes such form of experience, and the recent vast development of ideologically-based semiotics has provided cultural critics with tools to examine such phenomena within the context of dominant sign systems. From the point of view of the literary authors, problems related to dealing with taboo and denigrated subjects can lead naturally to a metafictional interest in making the representation and narration of such subjects one foreground aspect of a text.

The texts analyzed in this dissertation are all, therefore, concerned with the semiotics and representation of homosexuality, both in the social and in the literary text in the specific case of the novel, which is why Geoffrey Nash's *The Arab Writer in English: Arab Themes in a Metropolitan Language* (1998), has aided me immensely in my theoretical analysis of the four Arab novels. In my employment of queer theory specifically, however, I have relied on four key works in my three chapters: Dina Georgis' *The Better Story: Queer Affects from the Middle East* (2013), which has aided me in my analysis of the Arab LGBTQ literatures in relation to racial and religious prejudice; Hassan El Menyawi's "Activism from the Closet: Gay Rights

Strategising in Egypt” (2006), Jasbir K. Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), and Ritchie, J. “How Do You Say ‘Come out of the Closet’ in Arabic?: Queer Activism and the politics of Visibility in Israel-Palestine”(2010), which have laid the groundwork for my research on visibility and the pride narrative, homonationalism, international gay rights, and queer belonging post 9/11. And seeing how the queer literatures I address in my dissertation have all been produced very recently, the latter four theorists’ works have enabled me to also address new complexities of identities that these Arab gay men and women are experiencing at a time where countries, such as the U.S. and Israel, have adopted liberal queer discourses as they shame Arab states for their violent and oppressive behaviors toward their LGBTQ communities, progressiveness of nations are measured by their tolerance of gay visibility within dominant society and support LGBTQ rights as human rights.

The contemporary Arab gay novel finds itself dealing with broad social and personal concerns, so it would be surprising if there were no appearance of lesbian and gay characters and their experiences in the representative titles. Three of the seven works I discuss in this dissertation, more specifically in chapter three, “Cultural Productions: Reflections on Belonging for LGBTQ Arabs in Diaspora”, are produced by women, and for that reason, queer critique in my dissertation finds its genealogical roots in the writings of women of color and lesbian women whose work critiqued the failure of certain feminist movements to speak to race and the failure of ethnic studies to attend to gender. Judith Butler’s work on the employment of gay and lesbian rights as a symbol of freedom and modernity has influenced my analysis of the lesbian characters and Arab female and lesbian productions immensely as it insists on the inseparability of the queer struggle and the struggle against racism and occupation in order to disrupt the effects of the globalized queer ideology. I also rely on Hanadi al-Samman and Samar Habib’s works to

address the homoerotic and sexual behaviors and power dichotomy between Arabs and their non-Arab partners in diaspora, as well as the relationship between LGBTQ Arabs, especially lesbian women, and their families, especially their Arab mothers. Ilgin Yorukolgu's *Acts of Belonging: Perceptions of Citizenship among Queer Turkish Women in Germany* (2014) was essential for my dissertation, especially for my chapter one, "Inclusion and Exclusion: Immigrants and Acts of Belonging in Europe" as her research and thesis on the topics of citizenship, belonging, and cohesion of Turkish women in Germany aided in building the theoretical foundation of my dissertation on LGBTQ Arabs in diaspora. I am also influenced in my analysis of all seven works by Anzaldúa's concept of borders in *Borderland/La Frontera* (1987), which posits that the border, which Anzaldúa describes as an "open wound where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds. And before a scab forms, it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country a border culture" (3), transforms into a space where transnational feminist and queer coalitions could meet and collaborate. The border, as I argue for the Arab texts produced in diasporic spaces in the US, Europe, and Canada, is a zone positioned between transnational hyphens that signifies mobility and fluidity across boundaries. In her text, Anzaldúa utilizes "we" to include homosexual men of all races and nationalities together with lesbians: "We come from all colors, all classes, all races, all time periods" (84), indicating solidarity with transnational homosexual identities. She highlights the importance of contributions made by minorities in the homosexual community: "Colored homosexuals", she writes, "have always been at the forefront [...] of all liberation struggles in this country; have suffered more injustices and have survived them despite all odds" (85). She emphasizes the transnational queer identity and the importance of solidarity between the feminist and queer communities of the world, and especially between 'Third World' queer and feminisms of color

as she paints her nationality and race as universal and transnational: “As a mestiza I have no country [...] yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races)” (80). Erick Uslander’s “Segregation, Mistrust and Minorities” (2010) has also aided me in my research of the relationship between trust and belonging for LGBTQ Arabs across borders.

As I discuss the changes in identifications for Muslim Arabs in the U.S. and Muslim Arabs in Middle East countries in Chapter two, “Dissociation and Ambiguity as Acts of Belonging”, I rely on Lynn Staeheli and Caroline Nagel to debate the dominant views in the social cohesion discourse concerning political activism and integration of Arab immigrants, as well as on Amin Ash’s “Ethnicity and the Multicultural City: Living with Diversity” (2002) to establish political activity as a means of communication to establish social cohesion. I utilize Fatima el-Tayeb’s book *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (2011) to discuss the body and disease as tools of establishing cohesion among LGBTQ Arabs and other LGBTQ minorities in diaspora and employ Nadine Naber’s “Ambiguous Insiders: An Investigation of Arab American Invisibility” (200) to address feelings of invisibility, ambiguity, and disassociation.

Cultural texts have a tendency to position homosexual characters as the locus of social alienation and authoritarian repression. Although the texts selected deal with the “problem” of being homosexual in Middle Eastern society and the “obstacles” brought on by the intersectionality of sexuality and nationality in diaspora, they are less concerned with personal dramas and more so with the continuities between social dynamics and details of personal orientation and behavior that clash with those dynamics. Thus, within queer novels that address

questions of historical awareness, a link is formed between individual experience and dominant social structures. Such clash moves beyond the simple matter of the individual whose sexuality is at odds with patriarchal, heterosexual society, since one could argue that all gay and lesbian writings resolve around this fundamental question. Rather, in the case of queer Arab novels, the details of characters summon specific issues of Arab societies. This is obvious, for example, in the case of Ramadan's *The Clothesline Swing* where exists an extension of the correlation between sociopolitical and sexual repression in the death of one of the gay characters as an act of political protest. Such novels entail an analysis less in regards to the personal biography of their protagonists and more as features of social history.

Since critical scholarship on queer Arab writers residing in the U.S., Europe, and Canada, remains generally scarce, and since the primary works I employ in my studies have yet to be studied, both in connection to one another and due to their recent dates of publication, I hope that my comparative study will constitute a modest contribution to the field of queer Arab studies. My analysis is somewhat restricted due to the deficiency of scholarship on these texts and authors. That said, with the gradually increasing amount of scholars interested in gender studies in the Middle East, contemporary queer Arab writing is bound to grow and incorporate more diverse voices that can further contribute to this work.

Chapter I

Inclusion and Exclusion: Immigrants and Acts of Belonging in Europe

The term “social cohesion” is associated with concepts that have gained popularity in European, American, and Canadian social sciences and amidst policy discourses since the early 2000s (Baun and Marek 1). The Canadian federal government, for instance, has established a “Social Cohesion Research Network” that has become one of the most active research networks worldwide today (Stanley 2003). The European Union and the council of Europe have also focused on the issue of social cohesion through their public policies, as the European Union’s Cohesion Funds has become one of the most funded programs annually (Jeannotte, 2000 cited in Chan et. al. 2006: 1). International organizations have also adopted the concept of social cohesion within their policies. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the Council of Europe and the United Nations Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), for instance, have recently voiced their commitment to social cohesion, as they view the latter to be essential for eliminating intolerance and discrimination, maintaining international peace and stability, as well as contributing to educational development and growth (Junuzović 2012). To add, “social cohesion” as a term and concept, has been integrated within political discourse to achieve specific political agendas. The U.S. president Donald Trump has cut the U.S. annual immigration intake in half, framing his actions as necessary to protect the nation’s social cohesion: “high levels of immigration have damaged social cohesion in Europe,” Stephen Miller, the president’s policy advisor stated, “and threaten to do the same in the U.S.” (Lauter and Bennett 2017). In the United Kingdom, the period a spouse is required to spend in the country before being granted settlement rights has increased from two

years to five in effort to promote community cohesion (Fabb 2013).

Margit Mayer argues that within terms of economic research and politics, “inclusion” has come to replace “equality” and “social cohesion” has come to replace “integration” (Mayer 112). These categories that have come to replace the terms used dominantly in the past, focus onto non-economic conditions for economic performance. Urban problems, for instance, stop being viewed as result of urban decline and become obstacles to social cohesion and healthy competition, which in turn leads to social and economic exclusion. When previously commonly-used terminology is employed in discourse, therefore, it is introduced along with new terminology in such a way that “concepts such as security, integration and cohesion are all lumped together within a causal relationship” (Yorukoglu 31). Presented as such, integration becomes integral to security which in turn appears necessary for cohesion: “non-integration, in turn, is feared to have an unfavourable effect on societal cohesion” (Vasta 3). It has become difficult to discuss coherence without alluding to concepts of social order, stability, security, and integration (Holton 2001), all of which are terms that are not easy to define. But it is through such terms that social cohesion is measured: “[...] generalized social trust, trust in institutions, political participation, the degree of involvement in associations and outsider-group hostility” (Lægaard 455). It is as a result of these concepts and methods of evaluating cohesion that immigrants are adopting new ways to integrate within society, or at least to demonstrate to officials and their society that they apply these public policies in order to live together in cohesion.

In the first and second parts of this chapter, I highlight main changes in social sciences and political discourses as they relate to the concept of cohesion, which ultimately resulted in the shifting of the primary focus from the maintenance of group relations to values shared by group

members at the expense of relations with those who might not share these values and meanings. I rely on Ilgin Yorukoglu's *Acts of Belonging: Perceptions of Citizenship among Queer Turkish Women in Germany* (2014) to pinpoint main problems with the mainstream understanding of social cohesion today, while establishing that, in the case of Arab LGBTQ immigrants and refugees, cohesion is not necessarily required to establish a sense of belonging. In the third section, I discuss sexual citizenship and the price of cohesion for Syrian refugees in Europe and Canada today, which includes the exclusion of the histories of imperialism, colonialism, and racism from queer refugees' narratives of sexual identity formation and migration. I employ Ahmad Danny Ramadan's novel *The Clothesline Swing* (2017) as example of type of cohesion for this queer Syrian refugee author, and use Geoffrey Nash's *The Arab Writer in English: Arab Themes in a Metropolitan Language* (1998) to examine English works by Arab authors and poets. I move on to Hasan Namir's *God in Pink* (2015) in the fourth and final part of this chapter, where I discuss cohesion for Muslim Arabs in the U.S. and how trust in institutions plays a key part in establishing cohesion for Muslim Arabs.

I. The Politics of Cohesion: Social Sciences and Political Discourses

In spite of the widespread use of the term "social cohesion" in academia and policymaking, a large body of academic work directly addressing cohesion criticizes the lack of a widely accepted theoretical definition of the term (Yorukoglu 33). Due to the absence of such a definition, operationalization and measurement come out inconsistent across studies. Peter E. Mudrack justly dubs the present-day large literature on social cohesion "a legacy of confusion" (Mudrack 37-49), and Beauvis and Jenson argue that cohesion, which they dub a "quasi-concept," will be "judged not only by its analytical rigor but also by its utility, and this will be 'challenged, rejected and dismissed by those who have other ideas how the future should be

designed” (30).

Until recently, when cohesion has been defined with regard to the social, social scientists have emphasized the duration of a person’s membership (Yorukoglu 39). Cartwright defines cohesion as “the degree to which the members of a group desire to remain in the group” (Cartwright and Zander 91). The emphasis, then, is placed on the continuity of group membership. Value is located in the fact that members of a society stay together rather than the elements that ultimately keep them together. Social cohesion thus becomes more of a resistance “to disruptive forces” (Gross and Martin 1952: 554), which signifies a reliance on the relational bonds between individuals and social groups. This in turn implies an acceptance of inevitable conflict and incompatibility that may arise in a society and culture, but the importance is placed on the ultimate result: the continuation of that society and culture. More recently, however, the definition has shifted to an emphasis on the process itself, “involving a sense of commitment, and desire or capacity to live together in some harmony” (Jenson 15) and the behaviors that ultimately lead to the end goal of social cohesion: “[Cohesion] is the property by which whole societies, and the individuals within them, are bound together through the action of specific attitudes, behaviors, rules and institutions which rely on consensus rather than pure coercion” (Green et al. 18).

Therefore, social science has more recently shifted its focus onto the persistence of social cohesion. Ilgin Yorukoglu suggests in her study of the perceptions of citizenship among queer Turkish women in Germany that this more recent shift can be divided into three categories: the “Durkheimian” approach, the social capital emphasis, and the multicultural and cosmopolitan models (40). The Durkheimian model emphasizes factors that keep society together as a solid and unanimous whole, such as social norms, belief systems, and values. It is these elements that

maintain the reproduction of social order. Central to the Durkheimian concept of social cohesion is the notion of “collective conscience” (Yorukoglu 40), which essentially dictates that a society’s education system transmits a set of common values and rules to the members of that society, which ultimately leads them to cohesion with each other: “While a traditional society, with higher collective conscience (i.e. shared beliefs and moral attitudes) operates as a unifying force to create what Durkheim called mechanical solidarity, modern society with its division of labor is both heterogeneous and yet held together in organic solidarity by an interdependency between individuals as well as institutions” (Yorukoglu 41).

The Durkheim approach thus suggests individualism as a defining feature of modernity, thereby leading to Yorukoglu’s second category, the emphasis on social capital. The basis of the different and distinct types of societies is the set of social norms, values, and belief systems that each society develops: “Even though individualism in modern societies seems to suggest a weakened value system and lack of social integration, individualism itself has become a central value in these societies” (Yorukoglu 41). And, consequently, for a society to be successfully cohesive, the members of that society must cooperate, which in turn presumes a general consensus, or agreement, among its members over basic values.” (Giddens 109). However, this approach, which consists of emphasizing individualism in society as integral to social cohesion, equally emphasizes “the phenomenon of multi-membership” (Yorukoglu 42), which the Durkheim approach fails to do as it prioritizes the unifying facets of membership.

The two models that Yorukoglu groups into a third and final category promote ethnic diversity and heterogeneity: Multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. The definition of social cohesion has been altered by these two models to apply to modern life. What has also affected the understanding of social cohesion as well as the discourse of inclusion and exclusion is the

relatively-recent social movements that have organized around identity politics (Yorukoglu 44). Despite multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism being relatively old philosophical perspectives, Yorukoglu argues that they are essential to the recent discourse of social cohesion as it centers on cultural diversity, immigration, and integration. Obstacles have risen with both models, however, the inevitable unequal distribution of power, and aggressive competition between minorities for economic and socio-political resources, to name a few (Yorukoglu 45). However, an important question that these two models pose that other models do not: who belongs and who does not? Relevant to this paper is that cosmopolitanism is based on the concept of fluid identity, which glorifies and romanticizes a system of rights that forgoes national democracies and the categorizations of cultures and populations. There two types of cosmopolitanisms, “liberal cosmopolitanism” and “political cosmopolitanism,” and both assume that the Western-liberal democracy is the only viable and available option to experience democracy and the best foundation for the wellbeing of the people (Yorukoglu 45).

II. The Problem with Cohesion: Mainstream Understandings and Social Policies

The grouping of a people within common territory, interaction, and culture, is called a “society”, and this society is grouped into solid wholes called “cultures.” Granted, the definition of culture is highly contested among cultural theorists (Lysgard 181). According to Stuart Hall, for instance, culture is not what the elites in society favor, such as classical music of the fine arts, but rather culture is experience lived, interpreted, and defined (2006). In his book, *The Long Revolution* (1961), Raymond Williams defines culture as similar to how a sociohistorical experience is defined. He sees the foundation of a cultural community to exist within the shared definitions of historical experiences, because individuals associate themselves and establish a sense of belonging to a community due to the shared experiences within this community that are

understood and defined the same among all or most of its members (Williams 1961). Yorukoglu argues that the members of a society and culture are referenced and discussed in such a generalized way that coherence among its members becomes assumed and demanded (37). She goes on to argue that the concept of different cultures as independent and separate from one another leads, on the other hand, to the assumption that they are inherently incompatible with each other and seemingly incoherent to one another (37). This method of conceptualizing and representing different cultures and their separate values has been utilized in politics today to achieve extreme political agendas. Cohesion, however, alludes to the coexistence of multiple elements, which demands a certain level of understanding and common values among a group of people. And with so much importance placed on the cohesion of the different elements and values that ultimately form the cultural system, society is viewed as based on a set of shared values and beliefs that every behavior and practice is expected to explain or refer to another. A person's religious identification is assumed to allude to that person's political stance, for instance, which then carries with it other elements and characteristics that otherwise would not have been connected. The same is expected when individuals who subscribe to the same religion must belong to the same political group or party, when the opposite could be true. For, a person could vote for a secular political party while personally identifying with a religious belief system. Romanticizing the concept of "cohesion" as necessary for a society, thus, prevents the understanding of an individual as a complex entity with multiple identifications and conflicting meanings.

The mainstream understanding of cohesion suggests that without integration, a healthy and complete society cannot exist. Individuals and citizens are expected and demanded to integrate into a sum of values, ideologies, and behaviors. Integration and social cohesion are

increasingly used interchangeably so that lack of one signifies lack of the other. And more often than not, what is stressed and often debated is the absence of cohesion or integration and not the presence of it. When leaders of nations speak of the lack of cohesion and implement policies to increase cohesion in society, one wonders how they were able to measure cohesion in the first place. It seems that social cohesion is only perceptible when there is a lack of it.

Today, in Europe, Canada, and the U.S., certain specific criteria are directly connected to the success of social cohesion. These “liberal values” (Yorukoglu 49), which include respect for diversity, inclusion, equality of opportunity, sexual diversity, and so on, bring what Yorukoglu argues is mere beautification and romanticization of the concept of cohesion (49). It is rather easy and tempting today to conflate liberal values and ideologies with social cohesion. However, the latter does not necessarily result in or bring with it liberal values. As many have argued, mainstream interpretations of cohesion lead to ineffective and harmful policies (Yorukoglu 2014; Hearly 2015). And as a result of this massive adaptation of mainstream definitions of social cohesion, a general consensus has been adopted on a negative relationship between social cohesion and diversity (as I have briefly discussed in part I of this chapter). This negative association has been employed within political discourses of policy making, which represent social cohesion and integration as integral assets to work to obtain and preserve and have a tendency to eschew diversity by introducing “integration and social cohesion” as assets to be obtained, and maintained, and the benefit of which would be enjoyed by all members of society (Vasta 2007). Thus, due to the generalized definition of social cohesion and its correlated general values, a lack of social cohesion is explained as a result of individuals in the society who did not obtain or maintain these common values. And in order to restore cohesion, these individuals must be identified. This “selection process” is achieved through citizenship tests, integration

contacts, and sanctions in some countries (Vasta 2007).

The U.S. and the U.K. are two nations that have stressed the need to take an English language test as part of the process of obtaining citizenship (Blackledge 2009; Kennedy 2014). Heather Benbow analyzes The German Citizenship Test, which is required by many states in Germany (2015). The test serves as a selection process for applicants from a Muslim country and was implemented in 2006 in an attempt to determine the Muslim applicants' attitudes to European, and more specifically German, values. The German Citizenship test is composed of thirty questions that serve to discern the applicants' viewpoints and measure their tolerance level of various topics including but not limited to, women's rights, homosexuality, Jewish identity, and Islamic terrorism (Benbow 115). Ultimately, this test serves to confirm that Muslim individuals are a potential threat to certain German values that are deemed liberal, such as gay and lesbian rights. The test has also been supported by many in the German community, including LGBT individuals and Muslim citizens as a mere method to protect the fundamental liberal values of German society (Yorukoglu 53), thereby insinuating that immigrants must only be granted German citizenship if they demonstrate total adherence to German values and as a result integrate successfully in society.

The employment of gay and lesbian rights as a symbol of freedom and modernity has been addressed and analyzed by many scholars (Stychin 2004; Puar 2007; Hariwaron 2008; Butler 2008). International human rights organizations are calling for the application of international human rights principles to LGBT people globally. As human rights have become an indicator of the progress of nations, gay rights have become a mark of modernity, and the acceptance of gay rights as a mark of embracing modernity, but this acceptance is framed discursively through casting other countries and religions— specifically Muslim and Arab

immigrants to the West—as traditional and backward (Puar 2007; Butler 2008). Western countries are using their status as sanctuary for LGBT Arabs as a form of sexual exceptionalism, and the liberal gay politics of visibility employed by the West when discussing Middle Eastern LGBT communities, and more recently Arab queer refugees, are ultimately about the “[development of] a righteous critique of power from the perspective of the ‘injured’ (queer) victim, who demands the protection of the benevolent state from the ‘social injury’ of homophobia” (Ritchie 562). The only acceptable visible queer Arab is the victim, which is why Judith Butler, among other academics and queer activists who interrogate the “Western male white-dominated organizations that advocate for the protection of victimized queer Arabs” (Georgis 558), insists on the inseparability of the queer struggle and the struggle against racism and occupation in order to disrupt the effects of the globalized queer ideology that has labeled the Arab LGBTs as victims and has rendered the queer Arab as acceptable and visible “only insofar as they mute or repudiate their Arabness” (Ritchie 560). Employed in the discourse of Syrian LGBT refugees, and queer Arab refugees in general, liberal gay politics of visibility thus render the Arab “even on the metaphorical level of sexuality, the victim of the Western Phallus” (Lagrange 189).

The U.S., Canada, and certain European countries, especially Germany, have become primary destinations for individuals applying for refugee status on the basis of their sexual orientation. LGBT Arab refugees, however, and those who work with them, are involved in a system founded on highly malleable, historically and socio-politically specific sexual terms and identities that benefit distinct gendered, classed and raced interests and, thus, place LGBT Arab refugees, or any refugees from non-North American societies for that matter, in a particularly vulnerable position.

III. Writing Arab Sexuality in English: Sexual Citizenship and the Price of Cohesion

Ahmad Danny Ramadan's novel, *The Clothesline Swing* (2017) is published by Nightwood Editions. It is the story of an anonymous Muslim man who refers to himself as the *hakawati* (storyteller in Arabic) because he spends his days recounting stories to his dying lover: "This is your life," death tells the *hakawati*, "you will be sitting at the bedside of your loved one as he dies, and slowly, you will tell him stories, trying to keep him away from my final touch" (32). He often tells his lover memories of his past in Syria and Egypt, but even when he recounts stories of fictional characters, such as the story of Evelyn McHale who committed suicide by jumping off her balcony, his lover could still identify the original characters in the stories, as he identified Evelyn MacHale as the *hakawati*'s mother (34). The *hakawati* is often accompanied by ghosts, most often of Death and of his mother. He remembers his life with his abusive mother whom he escaped, and his life with his father who beat him to near death for "coming out" as gay (88). He speaks of his life in Egypt where his eight friends outed him then beat him to a pulp in a mall (30), then back to Syria where he reunited with his lover, and to Lebanon as a "displaced Syrian person" (189), and then finally to Vancouver as a refugee.

The *hakawati* and his lover both are Muslim, and Syrian, and both met in Syria and immigrated to Lebanon, then to Canada together. He often describes their physical encounters: "That night in the tub, I made love to you as if I were reciting poetry about the beauty of Damascus. I woke your sense with opening lines and flirtatious gestures" (16), and speaks of the lengths they had to go to be close in Syria: "The sweetest kisses," the *hakawati* states, "are the ones we share in forbidden places" (Prologue 11). Mehammed Mack sees a progress in any writing on Arab sexuality by an Arab author, since it distracts the reader from the pages of the

still continuing publication trends in international LGBT publishing that give platform to the “Western” narrator giving accounts of their sexual encounters in the “‘lands of Islam,’ from the spotty scholarship (or sex tourism literature) edited by Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer to the recent collection *Gay Travels in the Muslim World* by Michael Luongo” (326) [emphasis included]. European and more recently Canadian gay magazines, like *Têtu* and *dailyxtra*, single out authors, like Abdellah Taïa and more recently Ahmad Danny Ramadan, as courageous gay rights pioneers for their homelands (Dryef 2009; Ramadan 2016). *Dailyxtra* went as far as to dub Ramadan “Trump’s worst nightmare” (2016). Their coming out interviews are common, and their traumatic experiences in their homelands are often positioned alongside images of them at gay pride parades (Browne 2015). What these magazines and newspapers often omit, however, are the historical precedents that produced literatures celebrating non-identitarian homosexual practices. Khaled el-Rouayheb, for instance, is one author who has documented a wealthy Arab and Muslim heritage of same-sex male and female sexualities that does not associate nor assert the homosexual identity, “he details a homosexual praxis that places a greater emphasis on inter-generational dynamics, on aesthetic appreciation of the male form, and roles that may shift with age” (Mack 324).

Geoffrey Nash, in his book *The Arab Writer in English: Arab Themes in a Metropolitan Language* (1998), examines the writings of Arab authors and poets who composed many of their works in English. He speaks of Gibran Khalil Gibran as one who preferred to frame his message in universal terms that would endear him to English-speaking readers by its spiritual appeal (62). In turn, Ramadan utilizes themes and terms that, as I have previously discussed in part II of this chapter, represent progress and modernity to the English reader and whom many, especially those seeking to read the tale of a Syrian refugee, would most likely favor; such topics as human

rights, women rights, and more dominantly, gay and lesbian rights. Ramadan also uses “the evocative power of his Arab mystical heritage [...] to enhance his message” (Nash 384) for instance by comparing himself throughout the novel to Scheherazad, a powerful character in *One Thousand and One Nights* that is highly contested among many Arab feminists. She regales the Sultan with stories every night without revealing the ending thereby keeping him from killing her as he wants her to continue the tale the next day, and keeping him from killing other virgins in the land as well: “Scheherazade did not love the sultan. She didn’t want to fix him. She murmured her stories to keep her neck away from the hands of the swordsman” (Ramadan, 33). Ramadan is vague in his description of the political situation in Syria. The former Syrian president Hafez al-Assad appears to the *hakawati* speaking of his father and his love for Syria and his people (154) but aside from brief narrations of historic periods in the Middle East, such as Hafez al-Assad’s rise to power (159) and the Palestinian refugee crisis in Lebanon (189), the *hakawati* remains focused on his personal encounters in mostly Egypt and Syria, and later in Beirut and Vancouver. He speaks of his Christian lesbian friend, Maryam, and her attempt to escape marriage by having him pose as her husband (140), and of his memory of his mother left weeping on the streets of Damascus after a man slaps her (112), as well as of his many other memories of personal trauma and abuse. Although the author does not necessarily portray himself as passionate about the Syrian cause of liberation from the Assad regime, he does paint himself to be deeply committed to the Syrian gay cause of equal legal and social rights. He, in various ways frames his appeal to the Western audience’s ethical sense of rights: “[...] the police running after another person to arrest. They would pull on the prisoner’s shirt and drag him to the ground while the women in his family wailed in agony from their windows, tightening their white scarves upon their heads” (Prologue 15). He yearns for help and interference from the

outside world as support for queer Syrians: “We queers were the loneliest people in Damascus” (250). Ramadan has positioned himself as an avowedly-invested mediator between lesbian and gay Arabs, in the Middle East and the West, pleading for Arab modernization and Canadian support. After leading the Vancouver Gay Pride Parade in 2016 (Takeuchi 2016), Ramadan gave a speech in which he pleaded to the gay rights organizations present. He spoke of the Arab gay and lesbian individuals forced to remain in the closet in the middle east: “Like all of us they deserve to find what they’re looking for” (Johnson 2015).

In *Desiring Arabs*, Joseph Massad not only criticizes the “distorted” political and journalistic representations of Arab sexuality that focus on oppression, violence, intolerance, and phallocentrism, he also emphasizes the potential Arabic literature and cinema has to change the current dominant view in Europe and the U.S. of Arab sexuality into a less judgmental and alienating view (319). In key ways, literature has been able to answer the demand for sexual knowledge; it could also complicate “sexual assumptions about the Arab/Muslim world and introduce another story in their place, perhaps less bleakly realist, more stylistically adventurous, and amenable to what cannot be easily explained or categorized” (Mack 322). Literature has been able to represent a fuller scope of sexual diversity, but it remains lacking today for Arab sexuality in that it continues to produce an abusive ethnography occupied with classification and truth claims of Arab and Muslim abuse of women and LGBT in the Middle East. While European, American, and more recently Canadian publications have tended to present gay Arab immigration as an inexorable march toward greater visibility and freedom of sexual disclosure, one hopes that more become aware of the globalization of homonormative discourses and how they jeopardize the specificity of Arab and Muslim sexual practices and attitudes. The homonormative discourses dominant today and which are being adopted by young generations

worldwide denote latent but unacknowledged class and racial privilege (Mack 325), positing in particular a universal drive toward “outness” and independence from family. Such homonormativity aspires to “move beyond a more undefined, working-class, non-globalized sexuality” (Mack 325)

As attention and criticism have been directed toward the discriminations LGBTQ individuals are facing in the Middle East, little has been written about the trials of Syrian LGBTQ refugees in Western countries. For, after facing persecution and violence in their home countries, and enduring challenging transitions to neighboring states, the refugees given access into countries in Europe, Canada, and the U.S., face political, socioeconomic, and psycho-emotional stresses. In Ramadan’s novel, the *hakawati* recounts in detail the many sad events he has encountered in the Middle East, yet he seems to steer clear from recounting any unfortunate memories of his life as a refugee in Vancouver. He briefly mentions missing his apartment in Beirut and a brief feeling of not belonging to the Canadian culture: “Neither of us could admit it, but I missed our home in Beirut, while you missed your family home back in Damascus [...] Whenever we met someone new, all they wanted to talk about was the weather and the traffic; it was part of this new strange culture we found ourselves in” (121). But aside from that instance, his life in Vancouver is painted as his salvation from his life as a gay man in the Middle East: “You’ll be sponsored to come to Canada by a group of Canadians who will take care of all of your needs for a year’ he said, glowing at the privilege his country had given its citizens, ‘You’ll be able to live here out of the closet, openly, and celebrate your love’” (190). His salvation is described as lovers finding one another. He speaks of being afraid to lose his city, afraid of it being taken away from him, which would ultimately result in his return to Syria: “Like a new lover, we embraced Vancouver; we didn’t think of our futures or hopes, we just lived the

moment. [...] We walked up the hill and refused to jaywalk the streets, even when there were no cars. We wanted to be model citizens and we feared that breaking any law might cause them to take away our new city from us” (120-21).

On the other hand, collected data contradicts the general impression that Muslim immigrants are given the opportunity and a welcomed fair chance to integrate within Canadian society and culture. Statistics Canada reports a 253% increase of hate crimes against Muslims in Canada since 2012 (Minsky 2017). The Angus Reid Institute has also published a set of opinion polls on between February 16th and 22nd, 2017, related to the coherence between the Muslim Canadian population and the Canadian population of other faiths. The polls state that 46% of Canadians view Islam and clothing associated with the religion unfavorably compared to how they view other religions such as Christianity and Buddhism, and 32% of Canadians completely oppose their sons or daughters marrying a Muslim. Another poll shows that 25% of Canadian believe that their country should have taken a similar stance to U.S. president Donald Trump’s on the refugee policy, while the majority believe that the 2017 refugee targets should have been decreased, as opposed to its increase to 55,000 refugees (Angus Reid Institute). The numbers are not as bleak, however, as the polls conducted by Germany’s Stern magazine, which assess coherence between Muslims and Christians in Germany. The polls were published in 2015 and show that one in eight Germans are willing to join anti-Muslim marches, and 29% of German people believe that Islam is having a negative influence on life in Germany (Reuters). Two previous polls in 2006 by Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung show that 82% of Germans are concerned with the rise of Islamic extremism, and 51% of Muslims in Germany believe that “most” or “many” Europeans were hostile to them (The Economist).

To be granted refugee status on the grounds of sexuality (referred to here as “sexual citizenship”) is to enter a highly charged discursive arena that has existed since the U.N. Convention of 1951 (McGhee 145). The main controversy surrounding this topic is on account of granting individuals asylum for persecution due to their belonging to a certain social group, making this provision the most contested in refugee law. To be granted refugee status, applicants must testify in person, which is an act charged with the promise of “freedom” and the threat of deportation. Adding to the complicated process and challenging experience are the governmental measures that restrict the right to asylum (Murray 2016, 4). LGBT Arab refugees also face daunting challenges negotiating a system that questions the authenticity of their sexual identity. These questions of legitimacy are constructed by consistently evaluating bodily appearances, conduct, and narratives to determine their suitability in Western homonationalist sexual categories (Puar, 2007). These modes of evaluation and investigation of the queer refugee’s body across spaces and times create significant challenges for the refugees placed within the determination process (Murray 2014, 29). Queer Arab refugee claimants, then, become classified by the legislators and Western governments as either unworthy claimants or as poor victims begging to be saved from the tyranny of their own cultures, communities, and nations. Sexual-orientation persecution, like gender persecution, as deployed in refugee discourse, can function as a deeply racialized, culturally essentialist concept in that it requires Arab LGBT people to separate their experiences of sexual violence from their experiences as colonized people (Murray 2014, 24). Their application for asylum often entails generating a racialist and colonialist discourse that critiques their native state “while participating in an adjudication process that often depends on constructs of an immutable identity refracted through reified colonialist models of culture shorn of all material relations” (Luibheid 179). To add, as mainstream LGBTQ groups

and human rights organizations seek to support queer refugees, they may inadvertently utilize the refugees' statements and claims in ways that sustain homonationalist discourses that preserve "a narrow concept of diversity defined in terms of freedom and choice ... that not incidentally chime with a neoliberal free market ideology whose inherent exclusions are harder to name" (qtd. Murray 2016, 29). Nevertheless, as refugees encounter homophobia and racism in their daily lives in Western countries, the homonationalist discourse will expose the selective dynamics of asylum procedures and interpretations, as well as the role they play in supporting the privileges of neoliberal states (Goldberg 2008). But what is more important is the exclusion of the histories of imperialism, colonialism, and racism from queer refugees' narratives of sexual identity formation and migration that "we are not able to see how these systems of domination produce and maintain violence against racialized sexual minorities both within and beyond national borders" (Goldberg 2008, qtd. Murray 2016, 24).

Citizenship, regardless of its various definitions derived from typologies of states as legal and political concepts distinguishes the individuals who belong to the culture and society in question from those who are not entitled to belong. The rules and criteria for granting an individual citizenship, "naturalization", are often challenged and altered, and as a result, more recent discussions have transformed these rules and criteria to become more "inclusive" and "human rights oriented" (Yorukoglu 62). Citizenship remains, however, despite challenges and alterations, centered around the idea of modern citizenship that renders certain groups and individuals included and others as outsiders. The latter is a dangerous result as it enables discourses "around migration, integration and citizenship to abuse the emotional aspect such as fear of 'the other'" (Yorukoglu 64. See also Said 1979; Labib 2007; Puar 2007; Ritchie 2010).

IV. Security and Integration: Cohesion for Queer Muslims in the U.S. and the Middle East.

Ramy, the protagonist in Hasan Namir's *God in Pink* (2016), which is a psychological fiction published by Arsenal Pulp Press, is a closeted Muslim university student in Iraq. He lives with his older brother, Mohammed, and his wife, Noor, who have raised him since their parents died. Ramy's unorthodox behavior, his refusal to marry, and the one incident when Noor saw him in the arms of a male colleague in a car, all led his strict brother and sister-in-law to exert further pressure on him to marry. As they began introducing him to available girls to make his final decision for marriage, Ramy makes a desperate attempt to seek counsel by contacting the sheikh at their local mosque, Ammar. The latter is then placed in a dilemma between helping young Ramy with his predicament to come out or leave the country in order to live freely as a gay man, or to follow the teachings of the Qur'an, which ultimately leads him to question his own belief system.

As'ad AbuKhalil posits that "the construction of modern masculinity in Western societies was not similar to that in Eastern societies. The rigid lines of separation and distinction between males and females, or between homosexuals and heterosexuals, were lines of qualitative moral designation. Males and heterosexuals represent the ideal social and natural roles, from the standpoint of established clerical opinion" (101). In her article titled "Violence, Sexuality and Women's lives" (1995), Lori Heise makes the astute observation that in numerous cultures, men seek to prove themselves to belong to the esteemed category of male. She attests that by not being a man, one is reduced to the status of woman or queer. Pink, a dominantly feminine color as of the late 1940s (Maglaty 2011), is prevalent in Namir's novel. Aside from placing in the title of the novel, *God in Pink*, it is also the word that the protagonist, Ramy, chooses as a secret word

between him and the Sheikh: “I ask you now to talk about homosexuality next Friday – and condemn it. Please. Condemn it. But if you mention one word, then I’ll know you want to help me. One word” (21). It is also the word he uses to identify himself when he first meets the Sheikh in person: “I can’t find the words; this is more difficult than I thought it would be. I finally blurt out, ‘Pink.’ Sheikh Ammar’s eyes widen as he silently stares at me” (100). He struggles with pink as he struggles with accepting his sexuality: “Drowning in a sea of pink, I struggle, fighting to make it to shore” (59). And towards the end of the novel, when the sheikh finally succumbs to his own homosexuality, which he had been suppressing for years, the color pink is coupled with the shaving of the Sheikh’s beard, the latter being another symbol of masculinity, which the sheikh rejects: “I have a revelation. I go toward my night table and retrieve the trimmer that I sometimes use. I turn it on and begin to remove all my facial hair” (143) and the last scene in the book, which is the final time Ramy sees the sheikh, he “notice(s) the smears of pink lipstick on his face” (150). Heise addresses in her article the difference between being a male and being a man. She concludes that a distinction exists between "man" and the inferior category of "woman" which is connected to the question of orientation of desire and eroticism as expressed by the heterosexual and homosexual binary (121). Gibson and Heise both consider these questions to be vital in the construction of masculinity in the predominantly heteropatriarchal Arab-Muslim societies (Gibson 50). However, there is a sense of pride in the male femininity found in the novel, as displayed by the sheikh, signaling a reclaiming of the terms that were once derogatory.

Cervulle and Roberts argue that masculinity survives by making itself unrecognizable and concealing its name (53). Arab-Muslim masculinity as a research field has remained "unrecognizable" in that it is difficult to comprehend what it is, how it is constructed and how it

is regulated. There is a need to deconstruct Islamic masculinity, however, in order to "render Muslim men visible as gendered subjects and show that masculinities have a history and are part of gender relations in Muslim countries" (Ouzgane 1). The novels of Ahmad Danny Ramadan and Hasan Namir, through an open broaching of male homosexuality, question the roles and performance of masculinity in predominantly Arab-Muslim communities. Their novels embody the "distinction made by modern Western 'sexuality' between sexual and gender identity, that is, between kinds of sexual predilections and degrees of masculinity and femininity, [which] has until recently had little resonance" (Dunne 8) in Arab-Muslim nations. They also provide a vital alternative not just of masculinity but also of male sexuality and eroticism (Gibson 52).

I am going to move on now to another equally, if not more essential, element of social cohesion for the Muslim Arab immigrant: obtaining legal residence as a sign of integration. The characters speak of immigrating to seek salvation and freedom. Ramy, in *God in Pink*, goes as far as to justify the U.S. invasion of Iraq as a way to free gay Iraqis: "Ever since America invaded our country, we hear more and more about sex, nudity, superficial values. And yes, *lotees*. Before, these things didn't exist here.' / 'Why can't you see it as freedom?'" (104) [emphasis included]. As for the *hakawati* in *Clothesline Swing*, he speaks of immigrating to Canada because he is not able to integrate in Lebanon, and compares his future in Lebanon to that of the many Palestinians who sought refuge in 1948 and still have not been granted Lebanese citizenship (189). Criticizing the label "displaced persons", he describes himself as a lost keychain and speaks of his loss of trust in everyone and everything around him, even in his religion: "We felt as if we were someone's keychain, and that person displaced us. They looked for us on the coffee table and under the kitchen sink; they searched for us in the pockets of

jackets and pants. We were never found. We lost our faith in our owners, and we lost our faith in the gods who put us in this place to begin with (189).

Trust is a key element in social cohesion as expressed in both novels repeatedly. Ramy speaks of not being able to trust anyone in Iraq, not even his brother, and moving to another country and becoming a citizen of that country gives him a chance at trust. His trust, however, develops from a lack of trust in institution, to lack of trust in his society, to lack of trust in the immediate people involved in his personal life (his friends and his family), to a lack of trust in religion and God. Seeking guidance from the local sheikh was his attempt at maintaining that last trust that would enable him to live and survive in Iraq. Ramy establishes early on that the Iraqi government is not to be trusted. The army and police are always shutting down clubs, and abusing gay and lesbian people. His last male lover, Sammy, is raped and killed by an Iraqi officer (144), which drives Ramy to finally succumb and marry Jameela and ultimately father a son with her. His distrust of institutions is not exclusive to Iraq, as he describes on multiple occasions the rape of young gay men by Hebrew-speaking men: “Speaking in Hebrew, the boy yells at them. [...] One grabs the boy and cuffs his wrists together. The other rips the boy’s robe off as he cries out. They push the boy’s face against the wall. I shut my eyes and pray in silence” (58). While it is safe to assume that the Iraqi protagonist’s distrust of the Israeli government and institutions is not surprising, the placing of these scenes randomly throughout the novel leads me to the assumption that Ramy not only views his country as abused and corrupted, but rather the Arab world as a whole as abused and raped, and, as a result, weakened and corrupted signifying a distrust in Middle Eastern and Arab institutions as well. Ali, Ramy’s first boyfriend, pleads with Ramy to go with him to Turkey: “I can’t live here anymore. It’s not safe for me” (19). He tells Ramy that he is the only person he could trust. Ali saw immigration as a final salvation,

which is why he commits suicide when Ramy refuses to run away with him (20). This shows a deep sense of need for trust by the Arab immigrant in order to feel a sense of cohesion within a society or culture.

Trust is “like an emotional inoculation against existential anxieties” (Kinnvall 746). Trust is often used along with other terms such as safety, fairness or reliability of institutions as well as individuals. Erick Uslaner, in his article titled ““Segregation, Mistrust and Minorities” (2010) explores the relationship between trust and belonging. He identifies three types of trust: Strategic trust (between individuals concerning specific events), generalized trust (trust in a larger society), and particularized trust (ties to an ethnic or religious community). He comes to the conclusion that what he calls “strategic trust” gravely shapes individuals’ sense of belonging to a community/society. Strategic trust is when an individual trusts that what they expect from another will be done. Although trust between individuals and institutions is not specifically related to social trust (trust between citizens), it directly affects the trust of the immigrant to their surroundings. The government of the country one immigrates to does not necessarily need to be a “good government”, but the mere trust that the state institutions in one’s country will be fair and competent will result in a more positive integration experience for the immigrant, which will in turn aid the development of social solidarity and collective identity (Huysseune 2003). In other words, individuals who show trust in a country’s institutions also show trust in that country’s larger society:

[Trust] is what keeps us hopeful, what lets us sustain courage, what helps us go on. It is what gives stability to our insecure and unpredictable lives. Probably a more intriguing quality of its relationship with a sense of belonging, however, is that trust in larger society does not only seem to affect one’s sense of belonging to that said society. It also strengthens the individual’s ties to [ethnic or religious] community one might be identifying with. Individual experiences of inequalities and discrimination, family and network based differences as well as different ways of interpreting all this matter in building, maintaining or losing trust (Yorukoglu 107).

For the Muslim protagonists in both novels, trust in the institution of religion, specifically trust in Islam, while did get shaken, did not break. When all other trust has failed, their trust in Islam survives. Perhaps this serves as an indication that, for many gay Muslims immigrants in Europe, Canada, and the U.S., their religion needs to remain part of their identity in order for them to survive in their new societies and cultures.

Concluding Thoughts on Cohesion in Today's Democratic Societies

The definitions of cohesion, and for that matter definitions of identity, are fluid and open to the intricate assemblages of diverse facets of one's identifications, including ones that seemingly contradict each other. Democracy demands relations of inclusion and exclusion owing to the formation of a specific group of citizens. This leads to a political other who is automatically excluded from "the borders of the sovereign unity of 'us'" (Yorukoglu 58), and leads to a cultural uniformity that enables individuals "like us" to be included within our society. That also gives room for hostility against people within society, as the "friendly enemy" as opposed to the enemy outside. Chantal Mouffe proposes that agonistic confrontation (what she defines as antagonism between adversaries, as opposed to enemies, creating paradoxical "friendly enemies" (13), is democracy's very condition of existence (103). The conflict that could result from such hostility could be very violent, altering one's relation to 'home', to land, to community, "possibly making 'here' become strange" (Ahmed 160). The denial of conflict, ambiguity, antagonism and anxiety in favor of idealized characteristics such as coherence, wholeness and consistency has affected not only our sense of being with others but also the sense of our being among others. Ideally, cohesion must include acceptance, respect, and willingness

to engage with difference. It must acknowledge and address inequality so as to maintain, or strive to maintain, social justice.

Chapter II

Dissociation and Ambiguity as Acts of Belonging

Belonging differs from citizenship. One could obtain legal citizenship yet lack belonging. Acts of belonging denote acts not only directed towards institutions or state, but which are also acquired through and directed towards personal and intimate relations. Thus, such acts of belonging could be political as well as refer to individual acts that seek to assert a belonging to the entity in question despite the conflict of the individual's multiple identifications. Ilgin Yorukoglu suggests that the act of belonging itself is capable of (re)producing the belonging to the group and to the identify which is identified with the group, and is regarded as indication or evidence of the individual's belonging (63). Through these acts of belonging, individuals momentarily alleviate the lack of coherence that results from their multiple and conflicting identifications. While the latter acts are not expressly political and are not fixed with a particular political agenda, they do present vast political possibilities.

Citizenship as a legal and political notion, regardless of different interpretations proceeded from typologies of states, distinguishes individuals who belong to the entity in question from those who are deemed unsuitable of belonging. The rules and measurements for granting citizenship to those who were born outside a state's border, might be questioned and challenged, and their language might be rendered more "inclusive" and "human rights oriented", but the general concepts and ideas behind naturalization remain unaltered, and that is to make certain groups and peoples outsiders (Yorukoglu 64). In addition, the lack of consideration of the socio-psychological elements and the intersection of the axes of gender, race, and sexuality, lead and enable the dominant political discourse around migration to induce the strong "fear of the

other” in society (Ropeik 2017). Migration and citizenship literature would profit, therefore, from addressing the psychosocial aspects and giving significance to the role emotions play in expressing and recreating identifications (Yorukoglu 65). Identifications, the sense of Arabness, sexuality, gender, whiteness, religion, and so on, are contested culturally and politically, and are also impacted and shaped by the emotional self (Chodorow 72). Therefore, citizenship in the contemporary political context must be addressed in a manner that situates citizenship within the wider frame of the feelings of belonging.

In this chapter, I focus on Rasa and Jacob’s feelings of belonging as they situate their identities in a wide and vague context, in two novels addressing Arab queer belonging in the homeland and in diaspora. I begin with Saleem Haddad’s *Guapa* (2016), where I pinpoint the ways the main character distances himself from any clear affiliation to a certain nationality, as he claims belonging to certain groups throughout the novel and then respectively dissociating from all identifications to these groups. I discuss the changes in identifications for Muslim Arabs in the U.S. and Muslim Arabs in Arabic-speaking countries, I use Lynn Staeheli and Caroline Nagel’s two research papers: “Topographies of Home and Citizenship: Arab-American Activists in the United States” (2006) and “Integration and the Negotiation of ‘here’ and ‘there’: The Case of British Arab Activists” (2008) to debate the dominant views in the social cohesion discourse concerning political activism and integration of Arab immigrants, as well as Amin Ash’s “Ethnicity and the Multicultural City: Living with Diversity” (2002) to establish political activity as a means of communication to establish social cohesion. I move on, in the second part of this chapter, to Rabih Alameddine’s *The Angel of History* (2016) and highlight the main ways the protagonist claims dissociation and experiences his identify in the absence of all available identities. I rely on Fatima el-Tayeb’s book *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in*

Postnational Europe (2011) to discuss the body and AIDS as tools of establishing cohesion among a certain group that, while excluded from the dominant society and from international hegemonic communities, remain a tightly knit group with a strong sense of identification and belonging. I also employ Theri Pickens' *New Body Politics: Narrating Arab and Black Identity in the Contemporary United States* (2014) and Sylvia Terzian's *Arab Pluralities and Transnationality: 'A Crisis of Diasporic Consciousness' in Arab North-American Fiction* (2013) to make a case for hospitals and illnesses as means of addressing and working through displacement. And finally, I employ Nadine Naber's "Ambiguous Insiders: An Investigation of Arab American Invisibility" (200) to address feelings of invisibility, ambiguity, and disassociation dominant in the two novels analyzed in this chapter.

I. Homosexual Arabs Across Borders: Transnationalism and Ambiguity

Guapa is a literary fiction novel written by Saleem Haddad and published in March of 2016 by Penguin Random House. The novel takes place in an unspecified Arab country, and centers on a young translator, Rasa, and his experiences as a gay Arab man in his country of birth, and later on in the United States of America. Revolution is sweeping through the streets of this Arab country that is also struggling to take in the large number of refugees escaping the neighboring civil war (31). The city where Rasa lives with his grandmother and their house keeper is divided between west and east. The west represents wealth and progressiveness, it is where the rich live and where shopping malls and Western embassies, such as the U.S. embassy, are located "fortified by tanks, armed guards, and large concrete roadblocks that have annexed the sidewalks around it" (67-68). The east on the other hand is where the poor and the neglected live, it is where the municipality digs up roads and neglect to rebuild them (22), it is where there

are power cuts and festering resentment. Rasa remembers how the protests started: “[...] the country was changing. In al-Sharqiyeh, everyone was angry about the markets opening and the rise in the cost of bread and fuel. They went out in the streets, shouting and burning tires. They stormed downtown and threatened to march all the way to the western suburbs” (59). He and his friends took part in the protests at first, as he remembers calling out to all Arabs abroad for support in an interview on CNN: ““You can come back now! We need you to help us rebuild!”” (15), but their excitement soon diminished as the protests grew violent (48) and the messages and slogans became more religious and extreme (85). The revolution he hoped to identify with soon became “a crisis” (51). When he left back to the U.S., where he once lived as an international student, the people of this Arab country were stuck between authoritarianism and terrorism, militarism and neoliberalism.

In *Guapa*, Rasa is determined to belong somewhere, anywhere. He attempts to identify with different groups and nationalities, endeavoring to make a place for himself in both the U.S. and the Middle East. And while he makes blunt remarks of identification repeatedly throughout the novel, he ultimately contradicts these statements and dissociates himself from all identities and affiliations presented to him. At the beginning of the novel, for instance, Rasa speaks of his conscious decision to identify as Arab. And as a result, he moves back to the Middle East from the U.S. and attempts to experience life as he sees other Arabs live it: “My American education had given me a way to analyze my people. I felt I was mixing with the true salt of the earth, the authentic Arab voice” (18). His lifestyle soon places him in the role of an outsider, however, for he lives a somewhat privileged life in the city where he spends his mornings watching Oprah (14), his days working for an American newspaper translating into English, and his nights at gay pubs and bars. English is emphasized as the language he chooses to work with and use on a daily

basis, which further underlines his position as an outsider and hinders his integration in the Arab community: “[...] Ahmed says in Arabic. ‘I understand and speak English, but I prefer to speak only in Arabic. Please explain to her that in our country the elite speak English to appear sophisticated and differentiate themselves from the lower classes. So for me to speak English in my home would be treacherous” (80). Rasa admits that speaking English “made [him] a different person” (190), but that “Arabic [...] was like a dead world. [...] The Arabic that was shoved down our throats was rigid and alien” (191). His identification as an Arab is further undermined as he admits to not trusting anyone in his Arab country: “Be watchful, be vigilant. Don’t trust anyone” (18), Rasa tells his coworker on their way to get their transvestite friend out of prison. He lists the many problems and ailments of this Arab country, such as censorship (163), homophobia (102), sexism (85) to name a few, and speaks of having to hide his homosexuality and true beliefs in order to survive (134). He soon clings to his identify as gay and dissociates from his identity as Arab as he consciously sheds the elements that in his opinion highlight his Arabness: “I think [...] about how Arabs kill themselves for the sake of their pride. Fuck my pride. What is my pride worth if I am dead?” (137).

Rasa explains that his choice to move to the U.S. is to explore his homosexuality more freely: “But in coming to America I had another goal in mind: to explore this unknown world of gayness, to observe it and try it on for size and see if it really was for me. I had arrived in America as me, but I was determined to transform into something better” (153). And although he does not build any further on his explorations and experiences as a homosexual man in the U.S., he does describe his attempts to integrate and make a home for himself, which proves to be difficult as his Arabness gets in the way. He explains that he is always seen as “the by-product of an oppressive culture, an ambassador of a people at war with civilization” (161). Rasa’s

transnationalism plays an essential role in his integration and life in the U.S., and it shapes his choices and identifications with certain people and groups, as well as his attempt to strengthen and reconcile his relationship with his Arab country and the U.S.

For over a decade, Arab immigrants' connection to their countries of origin has been the focus of multidisciplinary academic studies and has increasingly occupied the center of politicians' concerns over social cohesion (Nagel & Staeheli 2008: 418). While traditional notions of immigration suggest "a bipolar relation between sending and receiving countries" (Voigt-Graf 28) and investigates the experiences of immigrants as confined to their countries of residence, the concept of transnationalism, as utilized in both novels discussed in this chapter, suggests that "contemporary immigrants live their lives simultaneously in multiple locations through social networks that transcend national boundaries" (Nagel & Staeheli 2008: 419). Nagel and Staeheli, in their study of British Arab activists, posit that "the creation of transnational social spaces suggests a fundamental disruption of the 'normal' trajectory of integration by which immigrants become members of national societies" (419). This disruption ultimately hinders immigrants from integrating in society. Early studies on transnationalism stress the tension and incoherence between transnationalism and integration. Michael P. Smith (1994), for instance, describes contemporary migrants as being in a state of "deterritorialization" and "betweenness", as they "have neither entirely left their country of origin nor fully oriented themselves to their new circumstances" (20). Rasa identifies with his mother, who "spent more than half her life in America, was still somehow unable to be truly American. She was a half-formed thing, a freak and an outsider, neither American nor Arab, stuck somewhere in between" (175). He describes his feelings of being split between the Arab World and the U.S., of feeling driven to connect and explore his Arabness now that it is under attack: "Having discovered my

Arabness in America, and then quickly finding it under scrutiny and then under attack, [...] I enrolled in an elective course called Politics of the Third World” (204). As a result he becomes politically active and explores Arab nationalist ideologies in attempt to mend that split (163). His attempt, as I will discuss further below, fails, for the novel treats transnationalism and integration as opposing social forces and opposing theoretical frameworks that ultimately lead Rasa to ambiguity and disassociation.

A common belief within the discourses surrounding transnationalism and integration is that transnational behaviors and networks “render traditional models of migrant integration problematic, insofar as they indicate that immigrants’ social and political lives are organized across state boundaries rather than exclusively in the boundaries of a receiving country” (Baubock 2003, qtd Nagel & Staeheli 2008: 419). While there exist apparent tensions and oppositions, scholars are recently exploring the “simultaneity of transnationalism and integration” that transpire through immigrants’ involvement in political communities (see Nagel & Staeheli 2008 and 2006; Fitzgerald 2004; Amin 2002). Staeheli and Nagel demonstrate in their 2006 study of Arab-American activists in the United States that immigrants often engage in the politics of “here and there” (1604). In *Guapa*, while Rasa establishes close emotional and material relationships with Arab communities in the U.S. and participates in ethnic and racial politics (217), the relationships that Arab immigrants forge with their countries of origin vary, for clearly not all Arabs in the U.S. are actively invested in the political state of their Arab countries: “I’m glad you’re political,” Leila said. “Most of the Arabs who come to America spend their days smoking weed and getting drunk in casinos” (213). Not all Arab immigrants have a wholly pragmatic attitude toward their membership in American society nor maintain contact with their countries of origin, as we ultimately see with Rasa who engages in transnational ways

of being, but fails to establish transnational ways of belonging. Scholars have explored the many layers of identity that guide Arab immigrants' political participations and relationships with homeland and host society, shedding light on the changes in political identity and political claims that result from these engagements (see Nagel & Staeheli 2006 and 2008; Amin 2002). For Rasa, for instance, he identifies early on with Arab activists (167) and his political identity grows more religious yet uncertain. Referring to a family advocating an Islamic state, he declares: "I am like them: misunderstood, vilified by the regime and the media" (90). As he is later deemed, however, westernized by the Arab community in the U.S. (243) and as he finds their views and politics not to mirror his own (213), he withdraws from the religious and political activities of the Arab American community and seeks to find coexistence and balance between his homeland and U.S. society. Arab Immigrants belong to various communities and have many political objectives, and while the tensions between different memberships are undeniable, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Fitzgerald 2004).

Immigrants' relationship with the Arab world and their sense of empathy and responsibility toward their native countries and to Arab people in general is strong and dominates their relations and behaviors. Rasa's Arab friends in the U.S. speak of their deep emotional attachment to the Arab world and seek to prove their commitment to the Arab people: "I feel like it's important we [protest] [...] People are dying out there," says Rasa in support of his Arab American friends' protest of then-President Bush's invasion of Iraq (211). Some go out of their way to stand out as Arabs physically: "The bar was noisy and full of Arabs. They were Arabs, yes, but they looked unlike anyone else back home. None of the women had straightened their hair, choosing to leave it in a tangle of curls. The men all had unkempt beards and kaffiyehs wrapped around their shoulders" (216). This strong emotional attachment to their places of origin

drives their involvement in numerous activities that connect them directly and indirectly to the Arab world. But while Arab immigrants have a clear affinity with and dedication to the Arab world that manifests itself in their activism, many, including U.S. politicians, regard social cohesion as threatened by the activism of Arab communities, which are seen as overly focused on the Arab world (Nagel & Staeheli 2008: 422). Arab activism in the U.S. is viewed as isolating the Arab immigrant community, both politically and socially, from the U.S. mainstream, which ultimately leads them to be regarded as foreigners and outsiders by the dominant society (Nagel & Staeheli 2008: 422). This isolation is ascribed to cultural and linguistic barriers and to the community's lack of experience with democracy, and their unwillingness to regard the U.S. as their permanent home (Nagel & Staeheli 2008: 423). The latter is echoed in the novel when Rasa calls for Arab immigrants abroad to return home to the Arab World (15). This view mirrors current discourses among politicians about minority self-segregation, which propose that integration and social cohesion is rooted in the immigrants' participation in their place of residence rather than on cultural membership (Nagel & Staeheli 2008: 425). Nagel and Staeheli suggest, however, that the assertion of cultural difference is not a threat to social cohesion and integration but a precondition for them (2008: 425).

As established by many, including the eighties generation of Arab immigrants to the U.S., Arab immigrants cannot establish a healthy integration within U.S. society if their religions, practices, and outward appearances are not acknowledged and evaluated positively (Nagel & Staeheli 2008: 425; see Naff 1985; Jackson 1997; and Suleiman 1988). Rasa describes his appearance and culture as being either criticized by Americans: "Americans [...] who 'd had little contact with Arabs and looked at me with mistrust and fear" (187), or exoticized in a manner that places him in the role of an outsider in U.S. society: "This *Arabness*. This

Muslimness. This was all new. A new marker of difference” (161) [emphasis included]. Rasa speaks of his feelings of isolation and invisibility: “Confronted with my American isolation, I feel very close to nonexistence” (165). And while he yearns for “brief respite from isolation” (176), he rejects notions of cultural sameness: “Now that I was in America, where the s hissed with ease from the mouths of everyone I met, [...] I longed for that unwelcome e in all its vulgarity” (175). This outlook on integration is significant in the context of *Guapa* as new modes of nationality and citizenship and the multiplicity of political memberships among Arab immigrants and Arab Americans are seen to challenge citizenship and nation state where Arab Americans and Arab immigrants are seen to be resisting integration through special segregation and transnational affinities (Tambini 2001). Rasa, an immigrant of an affluent social class, has a dark complexion that discloses his Arabness. According to Fatima el-Tayeb, an immigrant in Rasa’s situation would have two impossible options: To identify as a member of the national community, which is a position that inevitably clashes with his assigned status as the Other: “‘Where do you live?’ the immigration officer asked me as I handed her my landing card. ‘Here,’ I replied. ‘Sir, you don’t live here,’ she said. ‘You study here. Where do you live?’” (183). Or to accept his status as a migrant and foreigner (El-Tayeb 169): “‘Just write down I’m a Muslim’”, he responds to the immigration officer, “‘That’s what you want to know, yes? Write down: I’m a Muslim” (183). As an outsider, he begins to Identify with other alienated and excluded communities in the U.S. (217). For Rasa, the novel ends with a clear statement of alienation from all that he attempted to identify with: ‘Let’s protest. Against who?’ ‘Against everyone. Against everything.’ ‘Sounds good’ (354). The end is left fragmented and unclear, and the protagonist is left without a sense of belonging to a nationality, a people, or a country.

Scholars suggest that integration requires dialogue and bridge-building between equal groups residing in one country, which is a perspective similar to the notions of cosmopolitan and multicultural citizenship (see Appiah 2006; Amin 2002) that emphasize commitment to place. The groups' political practices are seen as "simply mixtures of social groups with varying intensities of local affiliation, varying reasons for local attachment, and varying values and cultural practices" (Amin 972). Integration is thus not an indicator of social cohesion and homogeneity, but an establishment of opportunities for "dialogue with others as equals, so that mutual fear and misunderstanding may be overcome and so that new attitudes and identities can arise from engagement" (Amin 972). The question is, then, whether U.S. society is capable and willing to take into consideration the multiple identities and affinities of its Arab immigrants in its quest for democratic inclusion (Nagel & Staeheli 2008: 428).

Numerous studies have attempted to explore the relationship between the politics of homeland and host society, and have questioned the presumed opposition between integration and transnationalism that dominated discourses and accounts of immigrants' connections to their countries of origin (see Allen & Turner 1996; Favell 2001; and Nagel & Staeheli 2006 and 2008). They emphasize dominant discourses of social membership, and highlight the ways in which immigrants respond to these discourses and perform as members of the host society. The emphasis on social cohesion and integration disregards the pragmatic and emotional attachments immigrants form with the U.S. For, in addition to the commitment and affinities retained by Arab immigrants to their countries of origin, they also retain attachments to the "here" that are produced from daily life (Nagel & Staeheli 2006: 1604). Rasa speaks, for instance, of his dorm room and then his studio apartment in the U.S., of his close friends and the nights he spent reading at the library, he also speaks of daily television shows and of long walks in the city. He

also remembers his family and friends in the homeland, his morning coffee on the balcony and the regular cafes and pubs he frequented with his friends. Rasa's attachments to the here and there are not taken into account by neither mainstream U.S. society or the Arab-American community. He is excluded from representation and is thus forced yet again to re-examine his identity and belonging (243). Such attachments ought to be the basis of public discourses of integration, rather than hypotheses of self-segregation and cultural isolation.

II. Gay Arab Belonging: Dissociation and Invisibility

The Angel of History is a psychological fiction written by Rabih Alameddine and published in October 2016 by Constable and Robinson Press. It tells the story of Jacob, a gay Yemeni-born poet living in San Francisco in the early twenty-first century. As he waits to check into a mental health facility, Satan and Death perform an intellectual duel for Jacob's soul and sanity. Satan urges Jacob to remember his past, while Death would rather he forget the past: "Death can ruin everything with a single touch. Oblivion is his trade" (86). Slowly and agonizingly, he remembers his childhood growing up in various countries brought up by women of various nationalities. He remembers his mother and father, and his journey to the US. A large portion of the novel is dedicated to remembering his experiences as a gay Arab man in San Francisco, where he once found belonging among the LGBT community. He narrates his increased struggle to integrate within American society as a gay Arab man after the fall of the World Trade Center Towers in September 2001: "[...] you don't want to live in this country with an Arabic name, you really don't. You get humiliated at airports, insulted at grocery stores, threatened at gas stations, no, you don't want an Arabic name" (102). Jacob is accompanied by

saints, fourteen in total, and he references them throughout the novel in connection to different experiences and challenges:

Saint Agathius if you had a headache, Saint Barbara if you had a fever, Saint Blaise if you had a sore throat, Saint Catherine if you died suddenly, Saint Christopher if you suffered from plague or fear of flying, Saint Cyriac if you had an eye infection or temptation while dying, Saint Denis if you wished to visit a prostitute in Paris, [...], Saint Margaret if you were pregnant, Saint Pantaleon who was always on call, Saint Vitus if you had epilepsy, and basically all of them if you had bubonic plague or AIDS (80).

He thus makes clear early on that his relationship with the fourteen saints resulted from his need for their support following the AIDS outbreak, which I will go into in more detail in the following pages, and during the illness and death of his life partner.

In recent years, the U.S. and European countries have included in their publications an increasing number of literatures by Arab writers (Darraj 123). Since September 11, 2001, the work of Arab writers has received increased attention as more readers seek to understand the Arab people and culture. Arab Anglophone literature, such as Haddad's *Guapa* and Alameddine's *The Angel of History*, has thus come to play an important role as it "bypasses the need for translation and, poised between East and West, speaks directly to English-speaking audiences about the world on the other side of the divide" (Darraj 124). Political events of the recent decade, along with the rise of Arabs emigration to the United States and European countries (Zong & Batalova 2015), and more recently the flow of Syrian refugees into Europe, Canada, and less so into the U.S., have altered the geographic, political, and literary landscapes, thereby altering the content and production of Arab Anglophone literature.

Arab and Arab Anglophone literature often focuses on politics, conceivably due to the war, colonialism, and religious strife that have forever impacted and altered the region of the Middle East and North Africa in the past century (Darraj 124). It could be argued that any production by an Arab writer is inherently political, which to some degree affects the message

and content of the literature. Beyond this, however, Arab writers are exploring other themes, such as experience of not belonging to one place (Darraj 124). Rabih Alameddine is an author whose experimental and provocative work has attracted ample attention and popularity among English readers with his examination of identities (Guernica 2014). His novels appear prominently in discussions of contemporary Arab Anglophone literature due to his commercial success and critical acclaim. Although Alameddine explores a variety of themes including sexuality, madness, and AIDS, most of his characters explore the experience and implications of exile and displacement: “He left all [...] when he immigrated to America. The lamp was a shining allegory of what he lost, what he abandoned, dishonored” (57). Some characters have left Lebanon to escape the civil war of 1975-1990 (see Alameddine’s *The Perv: Stories* 1999), while others are displaced due to familial conflicts or sexuality (see Alameddine’s *I, the Divine: A Novel in First Chapters* 2002; and *Koolaid: The Art of War* 1998). In *The Angel of History*, Jacob’s mother while pregnant was forced to leave Lebanon to Yemen, where she gave birth to her son. Then they both left Yemen to Egypt, and Jacob left back to Lebanon, then from Lebanon he went to the United States. Situating yet another character in exile and displacement, however, underlines these themes as a gateway to Alameddine’s critiques of Lebanon and the U.S., and to the condition of exile and exclusion.

Transnational fiction, such as Alameddine’s *The Angel of History*, tends to illustrate a deepened nostalgia and a need to recover and define a sense of “home,” and Arab Anglophone fiction has garnered most of the attention of this literature (Darraj 126). That need to reconnect often contradicts the feeling of ultimately not belonging to that “home,” whether or not one reaches or reclaims it. While the protagonist in *Guapa* is depicted during the process of returning to a country he thinks could be home, in *The Angel of History*, Jacob searches for his home in

between places, which is an unsettling and awkward space to be in as it results in exclusion and alienation. Much like his mother who has experienced the clash of two cultures, Lebanon where she met his father and Yemen where she was born and raised (16), Jacob experiences his identity in the absence of all available identities. By pointing out the various identities of others—race, nationality, religion, and so on—Jacob identifies himself by what these identities are not. The only instances, as I will discuss in more detail below, that he identifies directly with an identity, is when such identity is no longer available or present for him to be part of, or when the identification is made in an overly generalized manner to denote ambiguity and therefore lack of specific identification. By dissociating from specific identities, Jacob builds on his feelings of exile and invisibility that were generated and developed in the various Arab countries and nourished later on in the U.S.

Much like Alameddine himself who dissociates from strict national and religious identities (Alameddine 2017), Jacob refuses to belong to any specific nationality and instead speaks of belonging and identifying with several as a “congenital immigrant” (15). “Exiled while still in utero” (17), he grew up immigrating from one country to another in the Middle East and North Africa region, before finally settling in the U.S., and as a result he identifies as an Arab from all Arab countries: “I was all Arabs, look how dark” (11). Born to a Lebanese father and Yemeni mother (11), he was brought up by women of various nationalities who influenced his identity and whom he also identifies with: “my lovely aunties, short and tall aunties, white and black, voluptuous and boyish, Egyptian, Ethiopian, Uzbek, Indian, Yemeni” (43). While he identifies with many nationalities and ethnicities, he dissociates himself from any specific citizenship or race: “I was born homeless, countryless, raceless, didn’t belong to either my father’s family or my mother’s, no one could claim me, or wanted to” (15). By being ambiguous

and claiming “universal” belonging: “You ask what I remember of my mother’s country? I remember nights falling so fast you felt as if you were bungee jumping. Stars above, impervious stars and more stars, aw-inspiring, infinite and indifferent, [...] I was a child of the universe” (19), Jacob represents the invisible Arab gay man in the Arab World and American societies. Homosexual Arab immigrants’ feelings of invisibility, disjointedness, and marginality often go unrecognized by mainstream American society (Erickson & Al-Timimi 319). The problem of invisibility has been established in Arab American literature (Naber 2000). Erickson and al-Timimi have identified in their assessment of the mental health services provided to Arab Americans, that invisibility is a major source of concern with regard to mental health services for Arab American therapy clients (319). They have also noted that the lack of recognition the Arab American community has as an identified ethnic minority group in the U.S. hinders the development of a positive individual ethnic identity and cohesive group identity (Erickson & Al-Timimi 313). Therefore, feelings of invisibility are problematic for the Arab American individual and community with regards to identity development, and they are further heightened for LGBT Arab American individuals. Sexual minority individuals of Arab and Middle Eastern descent thereby feel invisible on two fronts, ethnic and sexual.

In *The Angel of History*, Jacob is the only Arab gay man. Jacob is in fact the only Arab man in the novel, aside from his Lebanese father who abandons him and his mother early on in the story. As for the Arab women he remembers often and who impacted his identity and relationships, they are prostitutes who entertain American and European expatriates: “I mention your countrymen, Doc, not to make you feel terrible [...] Your people and the Europeans loved watching Auntie Badeea, were mightily entertained, made sure to arrive early whenever they were bringing a newbie so he could witness her great art, but when it came time to withdraw into

the private rooms, they redirected their buzzard eyes, they chose to fuck my mother, they sure did” (44). The only visible Arab woman in this novel is the exotic other: “In a small wooden bowl she mixed galena and other powders for the kohl before her rapt audience, outlined her eyes with a pencil-shaped stick of ivory. European men, Eastern and Western, weren’t the only ones dazzled by the theater, Americans soon joined them” (44). Similarly, Jacob as Arab male was objectified from an early age by Americans and European men. He speaks of his “nonthreatening exoticness” that continued to attract men to him once he immigrated to the U.S. (45) Jacob describes two personal sexual encounters - The first encounter he describes is his rape as a young Arab student by a French nun in a Catholic school: “Before the sun rose, my nun played with my erection, she climbed on the bed, lifted her tunic, and fell on her sword” (71). The other sexual encounter Jacob describes is a sadomasochistic one between him and an American man who beats him and abuses him verbally. It is a sexual relationship where Jacob, the only Arab man in the novel, is dominated by his American lover: “Ready for more, faggot boy, the master said, you’re too dark for me to admire my handiwork, I should bleach your ass next time [...] the riding crop was so painful, filled with utter woe, I rose on my knees, howled across time, even Saint Denis flinched” (128). Jacob rejects any identification as an American, even after years of living in the U.S. and committing to his American partner: “I should tell you, though, that I wasn’t American, we may have thought I was, but it was not so, it never was” (100). He discloses the reason behind his dissociation from American identity to be the maltreatment of the U.S. of the Arab world: “You Americans are so fucked up, Doc, so fucked up, you have no clue how cruel you are, clueless cruelty” (45).

Further sustaining the feeling of invisibility, Arab Americans have often indicated an ambiguous or blurred racial identity (Naber 50). Many Arab Anglophone authors and poets have

explored and emphasized their feelings of embodiment through identifications with other racial minority groups. Suheir Hammad, for instance, explores the relationship and similarities between her own experiences of dispossession as a Palestinian-American and those of African-Americans through her poetry (see *Born Palestinian, Born Black* 1996). Jacob in *The Angel of History* expresses this similarity between his experience as Arab in the U.S. and the experience of African-Americans on various occasions throughout the novel. For example, he says in a passage where he recounts a sexual encounter with a white American male who called him “sand nigger” that in fact everywhere he went he was seen as a nigger and an outsider: “Sand nigger because I was an Arab, nigger because I was black” (128). Rasa in Haddad’s *Guapa* also speaks of his skin being a marker for him, that he would be forever seen as different and an outsider (161). It is not uncommon for Arab immigrants to identify or present themselves as another racial minority in their host societies. Most Arab Americans seem to identify with other racially marked groups, such as African Americans, Native Americans, and Chicano(as)/Mexicans (Naber 51). This connection between Arabs and other disenfranchised racial minorities is not made only within the Arab community, however. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, news media and politicians have utilized blatant racialized discourses to address the emerging immigrant ghettos in the U.S. and European countries, with an emphasis on youth violence (Yorukoglu 140). Scholars have also been making comparisons between the “poor and undereducated Muslim immigrants” in Europe and African Americans who “have adopted a variant of politicized Islam, the Nation of Islam” (Joppke 2009, qtd in Yorukoglu 140). In her book, *European Others* (2011), Fatima El-Tayeb stresses the importance of understanding that what ties the Arab and other ethnic and racial minority groups together is not their blackness or brownness, it is whiteness which ties them together, and it is whiteness that remains “the forever unexplored norm” (116).

Scholars have argued that, in the U.S., racial identity is taken to be exclusive to people of color: “When we speak about race, it is in connection with African-Americans or Latinos or Asians or Native People or some other group that has been designated a minority. ‘White’ is seen as the default, the absence of race” (Lalami 2016). Whiteness as the norm plays an essential role in sustaining social privilege and creating commonality among the marginalized others (Guess 650). Teresa J. Guess establishes in her study of the social construction of whiteness that the social construction of “race” and whiteness and their significance socially are closely related to the history of American social organization (654). Herbert Blumer observed that the organization of American race relations came to be as a result of the intersection of three events in history: “the conquest of the Indians, the forced importation of Africans, [and] the more or less solicited coming of Europeans, Asians, and Latinos” (Lyman 25). Race as a concept is socially constructed and based “socially, and certainly scientifically, on outmoded beliefs about the inherent superiority and inferiority and superiority of groups based on racial distinctions” (Guess 654; see Montago 1953; Gossett 1963; Bernal 1987; and Bennett 1988). During the early twentieth century, that racial ideal was redefined as the norm toward which everyone must strive and the “affectionate, reproductive heterosexuality of ‘normal’ married couples became increasingly central to legitimate membership in the nation” (Carter 1967, 150). Julian B. Carter builds in her book, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America* (1967), that, because its overt concerns were love, marriage, and babies, normality discourse facilitated white evasiveness about racial inequality. The apparent focus of normality on sexuality provided a superficially raceless ideological construction that white individuals could and did use to elude engagement with the unequal relations of power that continue to affect current life in the U.S. today (Carter 1967).

While the US Census Bureau defines Arab Americans as white and/or Caucasians (OMG 1997a), they are perceived and defined in social contexts as non-white (Naber 50). Despite the fact that many Arab Americans pass as white by their outside appearances, for others race plays a rather significant and negative role in their lives. Some Arab Americans choose to be identified as nonwhite or persons of color to differentiate themselves from white/Caucasian European Americans and to affiliate themselves with other racial minority groups, as discussed above. Nadine Naber argues that Arab Americans employ the labels *nonwhite* and *persons of color* as a “political strategy for claiming their rights in the face of racial/ethnic or religious discrimination [...] in a process of identity affirmation” (51). Arab Americans are therefore reclaiming and redefining the meaning of the racial terms Arab, Middle Eastern “on their own terms, in the face of the state’s and the media’s distortion of their identities” (Naber 51). Not all Arab Americans, however, have the choice to adopt or reject whiteness. Jacob, who describes himself as dark skinned (128) is phenotypically marked as nonwhite. After the fall of the World Trade Center Towers, and as the political crisis escalated between the U.S. and the Arab world, American politicians and media increasingly portrayed the Arab people as terrorists and the enemy (Shaheen 2015). The general U.S. society became impacted by negative media images of Arabs and the Arab world, which affects the way Arab Americans are viewed within society as they become marked as different and even inferior to what is accepted as white (Naber 52). When an Arab American’s ethnic or Muslim identity is revealed, media-created myths of Arabs ultimately surface and obscure people’s consequent impressions of Arabs, which marks Arab Americans’ lived experiences and identities in any social context, even among other people of color and minority individuals. While Jacob identifies with other ethnic and racial minority groups in the U.S., mainly through common experiences of discrimination and isolation, he experiences

prejudice against his Arabness from other minority groups, specifically from the LGBT community. For, in addition to the significant body of literature that has established and discussed the prejudice that the general U.S. society has towards Arabs and Muslims in the U.S., there exists a growing body of research addressing the discrimination Arabs face within minority groups (see Derous & Ryan 2009; and Widner & Chlcoine 2011). Jacob speaks of the racism that he has encountered in the U.S., specifically from the LGBT community, that hinders his integration into the U.S. community: “Frosted Tips looked at me as if I were carrying an AK-47, they all saw me that way, an Arab faggot terrorist” (33). But unlike Rasa and his Arab American friends, in *Guapa*, who identified with Native Americans, as Rasa’s friend in one instance called for Arab Americans to join forces with the Native American community: “We must build more solidarity with the Native Americans (217), Jacob identified with a forgotten minority group in the U.S., the older generation of the LGBT community.

Jacob differentiates between the new generation that forms the current LGBT community in the U.S. and the older generation that he found home in, which formed the U.S. LGBT community of the eighties. This previous LGBT generation had forged a gay culture with its own language, customs, heroes and heroines, and paved the way for the current generation of LGBT community to enjoy visibility and other rights. Their struggles and politics are sidelined and their experience, as with the AIDS epidemic, are regarded as a part of history, concluded and forgotten (Chauncey 1994). The younger LGBT generation only emphasizes Jacob’s feelings of invisibility and marginalization: “You with your righteous apathy, how can you allow the world to forget us, to delete our existence, the grand elision of queer history?” (32). Homosexual Arab immigrants often experience discrimination in the contemporary LGBT communities of the U.S., Canada, and Europe, as their national identities continue to be regarded as obstacles preventing

them from fully integrating into the queer community (Jones 2016). Homosexual Arab immigrants, and homosexual Muslims, are gradually coming to the realization that the intersectionality of their sexual orientations with their Arab identities are problematic for them as they encounter prejudice and lack of acceptance from the mainstream LGBT population (Gray et al. 2015).

Jacob speaks of finding home and identifying with the older LGBT community, and refers to himself as united with the community that was ravaged by the AIDS epidemic: “she died of AIDS, just like all of us, she was just like us, and I felt so guilty for hating her” (46). Jacob, on the other hand, was not infected with HIV: “I was never infected, I said, I deserved the disease most, but the virus never visited me, or maybe it did, and then the Fourteen Holy Helpers cured me, kicked the virus and its malicious affiliates out” (175). He is left feeling guilty for surviving and further lonely and marginalized in society. The novel unravels over the period of one day in a mental hospital where Jacob awaits admission. Theri Pickens, in her analysis of the feelings of embodiment and displacement in Alameddine’s novels, finds that instead of pathologizing exile, the author employs hospitals and illnesses as a means of addressing and working through displacement (67). Thus, hospital scenes, such as the one that takes place in the Crisis Psych Clinic (7) in this novel, suggest that exile is tied to both memory and illness. Jacob rejects the idea of normalcy or belonging as a state to which he should aspire, he is instead most at home in himself when he is in a state of difference and exile.

In *The Angel of History*, the psychological state of exile is configured in relation to the AIDS epidemic: “AIDS, I said, AIDS killed all of us” (174). The parallel between psychological illness and the diseased queer body illustrates the way in which experiences of prejudice, alienation, and invisibility in the new country influence the reconstruction of identity through the

traumatic memories acquired in the homeland (Terzian 115). Trauma theory was conceptualized by Cathy Caruth, Geoffrey Hartman, Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub in the 1990s, but had gathered much negative critique due to what Roger Luckhurst deemed in his book, *The Trauma Question* (2008), as the theory's many inherent inconsistencies, controversies, contradictions, and limitations for literary studies (Visser 251). One of the major weaknesses of trauma theory, as Luckhurst concluded, is the theory's blind spot to politics and "its shocking failure to address atrocity, genocide, and war" (213). Since then, trauma has been acknowledged to be less coherent in cause and effect, but still negatively affecting individuals and communities, "forcing open pre-existing fault lines" while establishing and asserting a sense of belonging, kinship, and mutual trust (Erickson 1994, 236). These two opposing consequences may occur alone or in combination, as is the case for Jacob whose trauma caused by war and the AIDS epidemic resulted in kinship and belonging towards his LGBT community.

Various crises in the novels such as the AIDS epidemic, the lived experience of war, and psychological breakdown, are irrevocably linked to what Sylvia Terzian refers to as "the diasporic crisis of consciousness" (15), which expresses, through the body, the struggle between memory and concrete reality. The paradoxes of Jacob's life in the U.S., Egypt, and Beirut, during and after war and during and after the AIDS epidemic, left a long and lasting impact on his physical and mental health. And his memory plays an essential role in reconstructing the events and stories of his past thereby shaping his present. Historical narratives grow out of and inform "the collective understandings of causations, responsibility, and obligation through which we, as a society, think about and respond to trauma" (Gabriel 2). Trauma thus operates not only at the individual level but also at the level of collective memory and social behavior. It has been established by many theorists that certain cultural groups, of different racial, ethnic, or sexual

minorities, experience a form of collective trauma as a result of prejudice, injustice, and discrimination (see Farrell 1998; Eyerman 2001; and Cvetkovich 2003). The individual experience and the collective memory intertwine in important and complex ways. In regards to the topic of my dissertation, however, Jacob's personal trauma and consciousness are expressed through mental and physical illness, as established above, for he constantly self-medicates and is hospitalized, and through the struggle between memory and reality as he spends his time remembering the past and carrying conversations with the devil.

Jacob identifies with the crisis of the AIDS epidemic and the people's resulting experiences of alienation, struggle, trauma, displacement, and ultimately their choice to distance themselves from dominant society. Katrien De Moor also finds that among the diverse resistance strategies to the moralistic representations of AIDS and the stigmatization of people with AIDS, two modes of resistance intersect the most within these narratives: sick role subversion and humor (737). Sick role subversion in AIDS narratives constitutes a movement away from an emphasis on the person with AIDS as a "compliant, passive medical object of care towards the sick person as the subject, the active agent of care" (Kleinman 1988, qtd. De Moor 738). The dark sense of humor prevalent in *The Angel of History* on the other hand, functions as "a potentially anti-sentimental, anti-redemptive and anti-moralistic strategy" (De Moor 738). Employed through the act of writing, sick role subversion and humor represent the principal way in which "cultural practices are actively participating in the struggle against AIDS" (Crimp 33). In *The Angel of History*, Jacob has lived as a gay Arab immigrant in the US LGBT community during the AIDS epidemic of 1981. For him, a poet and a novelist, writing becomes a practice of resistance, for while "ill people still surrender their bodies to medicine, [they] increasingly try to hold onto their own stories" (Frank 16). The activity of writing then functions as "a sick role

rebellion” (De Moor 739) as it constitutes a rejection of “the narrative surrender” that would have otherwise had individuals telling their or their loved ones’ illness story strictly in medical terms (Frank 6). These modes of resistance have created a sense of solidarity, community, and integration during the AIDS epidemic for U.S. LGBT individuals regardless of background and race (Meyer 677).

In the specific context of the protagonist’s survival of historical and personal trauma, the act of writing is critical for the reconciliation of Jacob’s identification of home with the past and present. Writing is self-reflexively deployed as the fundamental outlet for working through trauma, which accounts for the novel’s highly fraught and fragmented narrative. After his partner, Doc, dies of AIDS, Jacob begins to write about his life. Memory is presented as highly complicated and troubled in these narrative attempts to reconcile historical trauma with personal trauma. For Jacob, the present is as chaotic as the past, and both are linked by memories of loss and suffering that are entangled with a nostalgic longing for a distant past. The predicament of being an Arab immigrant is thus presented as being stuck in an impossible position between the Arabic-speaking world and America, both of which represent two difficult alternatives. This tension is further made apparent through the slippery relationship between memory, fantasy, and fiction in the novel; for, a substantial portion of the novel makes up a conversation between Death, Satan, and the fourteen saints. This relationship presents additional insight into the experience of gay Arab immigrants, as they find themselves positioned between the trauma of homeland and the experiences of pain and exclusion in the host country. The paralleled narratives of AIDS and diaspora give a deeper understanding of the contested identities of Arab immigrants and refugees.

Concluding Thoughts

Rasa in Hadda's *Guapa* and Jacob in Alameddine's *The Angel of History*, both situate their identities in a wide and vague context. However, Rasa makes blunt remarks of identifications and belonging to groups throughout the novel, he ultimately contradicts himself and dissociates from all identifications and affiliations Available to him. Jacob, on the other hand, who searches for his home in between places, ultimately experiences his identify in the absence of all available identities. By pointing out the various identities of others-race, nationality, religion, and so on-Jacob identifies himself by what these identities are not. The only instance when he does identify and claim direct affiliation to a group, it is a generation of American LGBTQ that to him is long gone, forgotten by the younger LGBTQ generation and erased by the AIDS epidemic. For both characters, their identifications are either made when an identity is no longer available or present for them to be part of, or when the identification is made in an overly generalized manner to denote ambiguity and therefore lack of specific identification. By dissociating from specific identities, both Rasa and Jacob build on their feelings of exile and invisibility.

Dissociation from identities - such as from nationality as Rasa does, and from religion, citizenship, and race, as Jacob does - acts as a reminder that this dissociation remains directly connected to the identity it references. We find this also in Ramadan's *The Clothesline Swing*, where Rasa dissociated himself from the war in Syria and from the identity of refugee (see chapter I, p. 37). Yet, the identification being rejected or removed acts as a frame of reference for the individual to be able to dissociate one's self. Phrased differently, dissociation from a specific identity or group cannot be thought of without that identity or group from which one is dissociating or withdrawing. Therefore, even though Rasa and Jacob separate themselves from

various identities and challenge the principles presented by them, they cannot help feeling as representatives, to a certain extent, of Arabs in the U.S. and of American culture in the Arabic-speaking world. As well as representatives of multiple ethnicities, races, and religions in different social contexts. Acknowledging this inconsistency makes it easier to understand the Arab immigrant's experiences with rejection and doubt, behaviors of withdrawal from family and society, and conflict and dissociation from identities, groups, religions and entities in diaspora or in the homeland. To understand this is also to understand that Arab immigrants carry various experiences and backgrounds, and have various and conflicting interpretations of their own identities. Despite Arab immigrants sharing cultural experiences and codes within the same community, they still do not represent or embody the Arab culture "as if they had swallowed it whole" (Yorukoglu 113) the way that some Arab refugees and immigrant, as is the case of Ahmad Danny Ramadan, are presented (see Chapter I, p. 36-38).

Chapter III

Cultural Productions: Reflections on Belonging for LGBTQ Arabs in Diaspora

The past decade has seen a rise of a global gay rights movement and a push for international LGBTQ rights in many parts of the world. International human rights organizations are calling for the application of international human rights principles to LGBTQ people globally (Thoreson 324). This movement of globalization has located itself in the realm of gay rights, where the internationalization of human rights has become a prime indicator used to evaluate the “progress” of nations (Stychin 951). The movement has also led to the globalization of same-sex sexualities as identities. This international model of sexual identity is problematic, for as Sonia Katyal notes, “some cultures view homosexuality as an activity, not an identity” (12). And while the past few decades has seen an emergence of openly self-identifying gay and lesbian individuals who define their public sexual identity along the lines of their sexual orientations, many activists and scholars in Europe, the U.S. and Canada, often fail to recognize that arguments for legal protection on the basis of sexual orientation often collide with, rather than incorporate, these preexisting social meanings of same-sex sexual activity. In other words, the assumed equivalence between sexual behavior, sexual orientation, and sexual identity, fails when applied in a cross-cultural framework (Katyal 99).

The idea of a universal paradigm for sexual identity, which then becomes promoted as a universal global human rights fixture, renders all sexual acts, regardless of their motivations, as having similar significance in global civil rights terms. However, imposing a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity on individuals who may engage in same-sex sexual behavior, but “who do not fit a substitutive paradigm between identity and conduct”, can be unduly confining and exclusionary (Katyal 115). And apart from sexual acts having no inherent meaning per se, they

“carry different meanings in different cultural and temporal contexts, it is thus largely impossible to universalize clear definitions of identity and the relationship between act and identity is not nearly as ‘fixed’ as the model of gay personhood presupposes” (Katyay 194). Therefore, focusing on sexual identity-based protections, which are not always palpable to some cultures, can be very limiting and in many cases, alienates many who don’t subscribe to sexual identities but deserve these protections, creating a system of “gay-identity politics [sweeping] the world, like so much of Western commercial culture, but [that] may also prove as repressive and imperial as the old bigotries already in place” (Browning 28). In the case of Syrian LGBTQ individuals, for instance, many choose not to apply for refugee status on the basis of their sexual orientation as they don’t consider themselves to belong under the specific sexual identity of gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or other (Kennedy 2012). For many LGBTQ Arabs in diaspora, they often find themselves having to come out in order to better integrate within the LGBTQ community of the country in which they reside (Mormann 2015), and as a result risk losing their ties to their native communities, at home and in their host countries. The Pride narrative advocated in the U.S., Canada, and Europe, and which I will go into in more detail in section II of this chapter, advocates increased visibility for the LGBTQ community as a social group and a community as a way to promote their self-affirmation and equality rights. Focusing on identity-based protections has, therefore, proven to be an unsuccessful method of attaining equality for sexual minorities (Katyay 100). This method of protection becomes limited when applied in a cross-cultural context, which reveals the inherent contradictions of the global gay rights discourse. In order for the global gay rights movement to succeed and the protection of sexual minorities to be effective internationally, they must, therefore, take into account sexualities and sexual behaviors outside the traditional categories of sexual orientation and recognize that “many individuals who fall

outside of neatly circumscribed categories of sexual identity are just as deserving of a model of liberation that includes them” (Massad 231).

In this chapter, I will begin by analyzing Turkish director Ayse Toprak’s documentary *Mr. Gay Syria* (2017). I will discuss her documentary as an example of a cultural production that makes an attempt at cohesion within the international gay rights movements gaining momentum in Turkey and Lebanon. These movements advocate the Pride narrative but have proven problematic and dangerous to the LGBTQ populations in the Middle East. The second part of this chapter pinpoints main problems with the Pride narrative that is dominant in LGBTQ communities and mainstream societies in the U.S., Europe, and Canada. I relate that back to Toprak’s documentary before I move on, in the third section, to Fadia Abboud’s web series *I Luv U But* (2012), which I use as an example of an Arab cultural production that displays attempts at integration and social cohesion for Arabs in diaspora who feel the need to belong in both their local Arab communities and the mainstream LGBTQ communities without having to come out. I move on to Alissar Gazal’s *Lesbanese* (2008) in the fourth and final part of this chapter, where I discuss Lebanese lesbian women’s efforts at belonging within Lebanese society while attempting to reconcile their Lebanese culture and their religions with their sexual orientations.

I. Mr. Gay Syria: Homosexual Arabs and Gay Arab Refugees in the Middle East

At no other time has global gay rights been regarded as more successful on the global front, and more deeply contested. Amid civil wars and events taking place in the Middle East, Arab LGBTQ communities have grown more apprehensive of their future. Queer activists and refugees continue to rely on social media to reach the Middle Eastern and international LGBTQ communities. Social media also serves as a method for them to come to reconcile their identities

as queer, Arab, and refugees, and to discuss and understand their experiences outside their native countries (Kilbride 2014). As over one million Syrian refugees reside in Lebanon, and as close to three million reside in Turkey (unhcr.org), many Syrian LGBTQ refugees, as with Omar in *Mr. Gay Syria* (2017), view their current situation as temporary as they seek asylum in European countries and Canada. Queer Syrian individuals struggle to survive in Lebanon and Turkey due to various factors including discrimination, the high cost of living, and lack of support. The majority of Syrian refugees in the Middle East register with UNHCR to access support, and it is unclear exactly how many Syrian LGBTQ refugees currently reside in Turkey and Lebanon because most of them do not disclose their sexual orientation for fear of encountering discrimination and violence from their families and the conservative elements in societies (Du Verdie, 2014). Although Lebanon's LGBTQ community is growing in prominence due to organizations such as Meem, Helem and MOSAIC, and Turkey prior to president Recep Tayyip Erdogan's term has seen growing rights for their LGBTQ community (Fox 2017), homosexuality remains taboo in the two countries' mainstream societies. In the case of Lebanon that is an economically troubled country, and in Turkey that is growing to be more conservative after Erdogan's rise to power, many gay Syrian men struggle to provide food and shelter for themselves and their families and are forced into prostitution as means of survival (Du Verdie, 2014).

Director Ayse Toprak states that nearly thirty of the gay Syrian men featured in her documentary are sex workers (Gilbey 2017). Due to the financial hardship and difficulties refugees can encounter accessing services, LGBTQ Syrians are increasingly reliant on the help of others. Turning to Syrian communities in Lebanon and Turkey proves problematic for them, as members of these communities often endorse values from their country of origin that

are homophobic or conservative. Reduced to depend on others for survival leaves many LGBTQ Syrians at risk of being abused and, if they are in need of protection, limited support is provided to them by foreign states. In the case of gay refugee Mhammad Wisam Sankari, for instance, he reported many threats by violent male groups before he was found decapitated in Istanbul in 2015. No protection was provided to Sankari despite his many attempts to seek help from the Turkish state, and little continues to be done following his death, as no arrests were made by the Turkish police (Moore, 2016). Toprak sheds light in her documentary on growing violence against the Turkish LGBTQ community in general and Syrian gay refugees in specific: “There are lots of hate crimes where people are beaten up or thrown into jail. They’re facing extremist groups, they’re hated by the regime, and they really have no space to breath” (Springer 2017). LGBTQ Syrians are therefore growing more unsure of their safety in the Middle East and the majority of them are seeking asylum in European countries hoping to gain access to more secure and LGBT-friendly spaces.

Mr. Gay Syria (2017) is a French-German-Turkish co-production by Antoine Simkine (Les Films d'Antoine), Christine Kiauk, Herbert Schwering (Coin Film) and Ekin Çalışır (Toprak Film). It premiered on June 2017 in England at the Sheffield Doc/Fest, and has since been shown in numerous countries and cities around the world, including Chicago, Illinois, where I had the opportunity to watch it on October 2017 at the Chicago International Film Festival. The documentary unfolds over the period of seven months, in Turkey, Malta and Germany, as a number of Syrian refugees prepare for the Mr. Gay Syria pageant. *Mr. Gay Syria* presents a handful of Syrian refugees, all taking part in the contest, except for Mahmoud Hassino, who organizes it from Berlin. Hussein is a hairdresser living in Istanbul. While he is the main focus of this documentary, his face is kept hidden because he is married with an infant

daughter. Mahmoud Hassino is a rather well-known Syrian refugee and activist residing in Berlin, and he conceived of and organized the beauty contest featured in Toprak's documentary. Omar, is a cook who lives with his boyfriend Nader, and who is waiting to hear back about his asylum application to Norway. Finally, Wissam is an extravagant dancer who plans to win over the judges with his Minnie Mouse ears, heels, and tight pants. The winner of the contest would travel to Malta to represent his country in the Mr. Gay World pageant. Out of all the contestants, Hussein has the most at jeopardy by participating in the contest. Aside from being married with a young daughter, he would face severe and perhaps even deadly consequences were his conservative family members to find out that he is gay. Hussein does win the Mr. Gay Syria title in the end, but he is unable to travel to Malta to participate in the Mr. Gay World competition as he is denied a visa. The director phrased that last incident as a matter of a human rights violation by the state of Malta and the pageant officials towards Hussein: "The organisation says it's not just a beauty contest, but it's all about human rights [...] I think they were actually scared of having a Mr Gay Syria in there. For the honour and the symbolism, they could have given him the prize. Instead, they said: 'No, he has to be here in person.'"

Mahmoud Hassino, who organized the Mr. Gay Syria pageant, is a Syrian refugee who created a popular LGBTQ blog in Syria prior to the revolution of 2011. He is also a Syrian journalist, gay rights advocate, and the founder of Syria's first gay magazine, *Mawaleh*. Hassino was one of the Syrian activists responsible for organizing anti-government protests in which the Syrian LGBTQ community gathered in the rise against President Bashar al-Assad, in the hopes that they would gain rights as an LGBTQ community in the new government (Erich, 2012). Their ambitious plans came to a halt, however, as the revolution turned into a civil war where all parties involved distanced themselves from the LGBTQ community and went as far as to target

them as a campaign tactic to gain support from the mainstream Syrian community (Hamwi, 2011). Upon moving to Berlin, Hassino began working to increase the visibility of Syrian LGBTQ refugees in the Middle East. According to an interview with Migrant Podcast, Hassino spoke of his efforts to provide exposure to Syrian gay refugees like him in attempt to show their ability to integrate within LGBTQ communities in countries such as Germany, Canada, and the U.S. The episode, in which Hassino represents “migrant Syria”, places Syrian LGBTQ refugees in the position of a people capable of progressiveness and hungry to adopt the Pride narrative as it is their dream to live in a gay-friendly countries and access gay-friendly spaces (Migrantpodcast). Hassino hoped, by creating the Mr. Gay Syria contest, to distance the image of Syrian LGBTQ people from that of violence and war: “To them” Hassino said to his two friends in *Mr. Gay Syria*, “gay Syrians are being killed by ISIS. What about the people here?”. In fact, aside from two or three mentions of the war in Syria, both Hassino and Toprak have succeeded in placing the Syrian war and the refugee status of the contestants in the background of the documentary where the Mr. Gay Syria contest takes spotlight. Toprak explains the decision to dissociate the contestants from the neighboring war and from the image of them as struggling refugees because Hassino “wanted the world to know about the living gay Syrians, not just the dead ones” (Gilbey 2017). This act of distancing the Syrian gay contestants from the Syrian war and the refugee crisis serves as an attempt at belonging for these men within the LGBTQ community in Istanbul, and more generally internationally.

In *Brown Skin, White Masks* (2011), Hamid Dabashi analyzes Nafisi’s *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) and describes the novel as a “titillating tale of a Persian harem with the women waiting for the US marines to rescue them from their own menfolk” (12). Dabashi refers to Nafisi as “a native informer” who “provided [services to] the US imperial project under George

W. Bush's administration" (12). He goes on to explain that many of these emigrants and refugees were "adopted by the US military (Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr and Ray Takeyh), or by key figures in the military establishment (Azar Nafisi and Fouad Ajami), or by neoconservative think-tanks (Ayaan Hirsi Ali), or in a few cases by no one in particular (Salman Rushdie and Ibn Warraq) because they provided a cover of legitimacy to American imperial designs on the Islamic world. They have undertaken their activities in the honorable name of defending the human rights, women's rights, and civil rights of Muslims themselves- and the relative lack of those rights in Muslim countries gave them the space and legitimacy they required." (17) Fatima el-Tayeb employs the native informer concept when discussing Hirsi Ali, Fadela Amara and other women who were the first to be granted a public voice in European affairs only when speaking about the threat of Islam as they "contribute to and depend on this segregation by presenting themselves as brave travelers between incompatible worlds, as necessarily separate from the mass of the women in whose name they speak- and on whose silence they depend in order to continue to fulfill this function for a white (neo)liberal audience. Muslim women as independent actors have no place in this conversation, in particular if they are critical of it" (2011, 101-103). Similarly, Syrian LGBTQ activists and refugees, such as Hassino as discussed in this chapter and Danny Ramadan as discussed in chapter one of this dissertation, are granted a public voice only when speaking as fighters for the Pride cause in need of protection from the radical Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East. Through the Mr. Syria pageant and the *Mr. Gay Syria* documentary, Hassino and Toprak seek to draw international attention to the plight of LGBTQ Syrians in the Middle East as they struggle for rights and visibility in their host countries. Gay rights and human rights are terms used interchangeably in *Mr. Gay Syria* and in interviews with Toprak and Hassino. The rights these gay Syrian men are seeking are regarded as basic human

rights, and to fight for these rights is to be recognized as a fight for the rights of humans. Mahmoud Hassino posted on social media, for instance, of Toprak's documentary winning a human rights award on August 20th, 2017, "HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD goes to Mr Gay Syria at #SarajevoFilmFestival", [capitalization included] for his work in raising awareness of the plight of Syrian LGBTQs in the Middle East (Hassino Twitter 2017; Economou 2017). The only visible gay men in this discourse are victims of the backward and conservative Middle Eastern societies that ultimately strips away these men's rights and forms victims out of them. And the voice of Hassino and other Syrian Gay activists ultimately represent the voices of all Syrian LGBTQs who are seeking refuge and support from what are considered to be tolerant and progressive nations of countries such as Germany and Canada (see Ritchie 2010; Georgis 2010 and 2013).

As human rights have become an indicator of the progress of nations, gay rights have become a mark of modernity, and the acceptance of gay rights as a mark of embracing modernity, but this acceptance is framed discursively through casting other countries and religions— specifically Muslim and Arab immigrants —as traditional and backward (Puar 2007; Butler 2008). The majority of Arab states continue to outlaw homosexuality, however some states do not apply these laws onto their citizens, such as the Lebanese state, where they consider such laws as outdated. While states, such as Jordan, went as far as to legalize homosexuality, many of the countries that have not done so contain pockets of acceptance that mainstream society does not attack and leaves available. In the case Lebanon, for instance, social acceptance of homosexuality has enabled gay bars and pubs to open in cities across the country (Boushnak et al. 2017). Legal protection against harassment and abuse is also provided to LGBTQ victims when needed thanks to non-profit organizations put in place to provide legal protection to the

Lebanese LGBTQ population and work towards furthering their cause (Boushnak et al. 2017). Therefore, while work needs to be done to better the conditions of gay people as a whole in the Arab world, progress is already taking place in many Arab countries, and social acceptance of homosexuality is growing. However unlike the stance that Ahmad Dany Ramadan has taken advocating foreign support many have argued (see chapter 1, page 39), the changes to the conditions of Arab LGBTQ individuals must not “come from Westerners or Westernized Arabs” but it needs to take place from within (Massad 105; see Georgis 2013; Needham 2013; and Saleh 2015) where Arab queer struggle would take on a more relatable and relevant shape to the queer Arab population. For instance, for the Palestinian queer population, their struggle cannot be inseparable from their resistance to Israel’s occupation of their homeland. And for the Syrian LGBTQ population today, their cause is directly related to the civil war and the Assad regime that remains in place (I go into alternative discourses to the Pride discourse and the coming out narrative in the final section of this chapter).

European countries and the U.S. and Canada, are using their status as sanctuary for LGBTQ Arabs as a form of sexual exceptionalism, and the liberal gay politics of visibility employed by these countries when discussing Middle Eastern LGBTQ communities, and more recently Arab queer refugees, are ultimately about the “[development of] a righteous critique of power from the perspective of the ‘injured’ (queer) victim, who demands the protection of the benevolent state from the ‘social injury’ of homophobia” (Ritchie 562). The only acceptable visible queer Arab is the victim, which is why Judith Butler, among other academics and queer activists who interrogate the “Western male white-dominated organizations that advocate for the protection of victimized queer Arabs” (Georgis, 2010, 558), insists on the inseparability of the queer struggle and the struggle against racism and occupation in order to disrupt the effects of

the globalized queer ideology that has labeled Arab LGBTQs as victims and has rendered the queer Arab as acceptable and visible “only insofar as they mute or repudiate their Arabness” (Ritchie 560). Employed in the discourse of Syrian LGBTQ refugees, and queer Arab refugees in general, liberal gay politics of visibility thus render the Arab “even on the metaphorical level of sexuality, the victim of the Western Phallus” (Lagrange 189). As shown above, the director and the characters inside her documentary reference their human rights and gay rights synonymously, and the Syrian gay men are shown as victims fighting for their right to visibility and gay rights: “In this film they are not victims they are super powerful and they are saying ok, we’re going to do something about it, we’re going to change the way we live” (Levant Research Institute 2017). Coming out is thus painted as a solution for these men and ultimately a unanimous goal that the members of the Syrian gay community (as well as the Turkish gay community and other Middle Eastern gay communities) must strive to attain.

Mahmoud Hassino phrased the choice the contestants have made to enter the Mr. Gay Syria contest as one “arrived at courage by way of despair” (Levant Research Institute 2017). *Mr. Gay Syria* opens with the 2016 Gay Pride Parade in Istanbul being violently halted by the Turkish police. This opening scene shows the Turkish police assaulting people with rubber bullets and tear gas, and civilians attacking the Turkish LGBTQ community and other supporters attending the Gay Pride Parade. This scene is quickly followed by images of the gay Syrian men supporting and encouraging each other in effort to promote continued resistance to oppression and homophobia. Indeed, It takes courage to come out. Hussein, for instance, applies for the Mr. Gay Syria pageant despite knowing well that visibility as a gay man would only bring him danger. At one point in the documentary, Hussein receives a threatening phone call from his father and mother who discovered his intent to participate in the pageant. And in his interview,

the pageant judges ask him: "Is it out of courage or despair that you're attending this contest?" And he responds: "Despair, turned into courage." However, as I discuss in chapter two, to separate one's self from an identity or a label serves directly to connect the person to that identification. To speak of courage, therefore, as associated with the Pride narrative, is to then directly associate the closet with shame and fear. To be in the closet for these men, is to live in oppression, be it under the Asad regime in Syria, or Erdogan's regime in Turkey, or under any of the many 'oppressive regimes' in the Middle East. In this discourse, visibility and coming out is the formula presented for these men to combat this oppression and homophobia.

II. The Closet for Homosexual Arabs in Diaspora: Belonging Despite the Pride Narrative

Many theorists have addressed the fallout of the employment of the concept of "coming out" within postcolonial societies (see Georgis 2013; Ritchie 2010; Puar 2007). Queer Pride, as epistemology, has dominated queer history and queer discourse and identity in the U.S. and European countries. Not subscribing to queer Pride is to be left with "the proverbial closet of shame" (Georgis, "Thinking Past Pride", 240), which represents a life without freedom or future as a queer person. To have queer Pride is to dare to live one's life visibly; Pride is, thus, a speech act. As Michel Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality* (1980) "what characterizes modern sexuality is that it is a truth to be discovered and, once knowable to the self, it becomes incumbent upon the self to confess it to the outside world, even a priest or a doctor" (34). The demand to confess one's queer/homo-sexuality is done both privately and publically. It does not suffice to come out to one's self, coming out to your family is what is expected, then coming out to your friends, and gradually to your society. Once you come out to yourself, you are then

expected to come out to the world. Queer Pride is about sharing with others the part of your identity that has perhaps excluded you from your community and your family; “the ethos of pride has certainly won rights—rights I would not want to lose. But this very ethos is now implicated in a colonial discourse that fails to see that the right to come out and the right for legal changes are not the only strategies for queer becoming” (Georgis, “Thinking Past Pride”, 240).

Historian George Chauncey locates the concept of coming out of the closet in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, when young women in the upper-class societies of the U.S. and Europe would be formally introduced into society upon reaching the age of maturity (1994). He establishes, however, that the coming out narrative focuses on the space left behind as opposed to the new world gay individuals are entering. Chauncey also maintains that gay men in the U.S., specifically in New York, had a “sustained and enhanced [...] communal ties and group identity” (15) before the adoption of the Pride narrative. The coming out model, nonetheless, is widely used today by LGBTQ communities in the U.S., Canada, and European countries, in their discussions of queer sexual identities and the legal rights of their counterparts in queer communities around the world. This renders the discourse of LGBTQ and human rights in the international context very specific. Publically declaring and expressing ones’ identity has become critical for the success and advancement of global LGBT rights. In such cases, identities are not immediately recognized, and therefore expression of identity is necessary to render it visible. In Toprak’s *Mr. Gay Syria* for instance, the opening scene of the Gay Pride Parade in Istanbul shows Syrian men carrying signs in Arabic that refer to gayness as identity: “I am gay, this is my identity” [personal translation]. Instead of it being a personal choice, this substitutive model, where identity replaces behavior, renders coming out an essential political instrument to building a community. In this relationship between identity, conduct, and expression, “the focus

on an outward expression of a gay or lesbian identity becomes a ‘categorical imperative,’ to building a public, collective gay identity, and diverges greatly from the idea of sexuality as simply an activity” (Katyay 109). This assumption that increased visibility is a successful formula for combating homophobia is flawed and may position gay people as accessible targets for violence and discrimination. Some states, such as Israel, have employed this visibility and the vulnerable position Arab LGBTQ individuals are placed in after coming out as a strategy to promote an image of progressiveness and tolerance. This “Pinkwashing” is a deliberate strategy to deflect condemnations of the violations of the rights of Palestinian and Arab people and conceal the continuing condemnations behind an image of modernity signified by the states’ tolerance and acceptance of its gay community.

Israel has strived in recent years to brand itself as a haven for LGBTQ individuals in the Middle East and a progressive democratic state that is tolerant of LGBTQ rights. It has adopted liberal queer discourses as it shames Arab states for their violent and oppressive behaviors toward their LGBTQ communities. But while branding Arabs as barbaric and backward and positioning its claims within international human rights discourse, Israel offers no protection or support to Arab LGBTQ people (Georgis, “Thinking Past Pride,” 2013). They would in actuality face the same discrimination faced by any Arab in Israel. Instead, in a queer activism organized around visibility and coming out of the closet, queer Israelis depend on the queer narratives of the U.S., Canada and Europe, to “[marginalize] and cast as ‘premodern’ or ‘unliberated’ queer Palestinians, and explain their supposed inability to come into (Western/Israeli) gayness as a result of the irredeemable pathology of Palestinian (or ‘Arab’) culture” (Ritchie 560). Jasbir Puar uses the term “homonationalism” to refer to such positioning where a heteronormative nation utilizes global gay rights to shape the democracies of the U.S. and Europe against Muslim-

majority nations (2007). One of the main critiques of Puar's homonationalism is the lack of consideration or support for the concept of solidarity across borders for LGBTQ people and feminists of color, which scholars and activists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, advocate (1987). Puar later advanced in response to similar criticisms and other (mis)employments of her theory in various fields, a paper titled "Rethinking Homonationalism" (2013) in which she states that homonationalism is not simply a synonym for gay racism, "or another way to mark how gay and lesbian identities became available to conservative political imaginaries; it is not another identity politics, not another way of distinguishing good queers from bad queers, not an accusation, and not a position. It is rather a facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality" (Puar 2013, 337). Homonationalism has thus subtly encouraged the U.S., Canada, and European states to pursue wars in order to protect and save Middle Eastern women and LGBTQs from their repressive cultures and violent states without really providing them with sanctuary. The 2003 U.S. war on Afghanistan is an example of the "moral crusade[s] to rescue oppressed Muslim women from their cultures and their religion [that have] swept the public sphere" (Loghud 2013). "Liberating" women and gay people in the Arab world has thus grown to be key in the discourse of neocolonialism (Georgis, *The Better Story*, 235), which results in highly damaging consequences for Arab queer communities. In the Palestinian context, for instance, LGBTQ people are jeopardized on both fronts, from within their own culture, and from the Israeli occupation. As on the personal level, the Pride narrative imposes coming out on Arab LGBTQ people who are not accustomed to living with LGBTQ identities (Georgis, "Thinking Past Pride," 2013).

The spread of global LGBTQ rights has received critique from scholars internationally (see Butler 2008; Massad 2007; Katyal 2002). Joseph Massad condemns the idea of an openly gay identity in the Arab world, particularly a propos the promotion of LGBTQ rights while distinguishing and advocating the rights of people for whom homosexual practices are part of their lives – an activity as opposed to an identity. He establishes that the advancement of global gay rights in the Middle East is but a “missionary project [by] Western imperialist nations” through which Arabs are forced to subscribe to a heterosexual/homosexual binary (12). The *Gay International*, thus, “heterosexualizes” the Arab man, for, when faced with this binary, as he is forced to choose being exclusively heterosexual since homosexuality entails a deviation from the cultural norm (Massad 13). Due to the European colonialism of the Arab world Arabs have internalized Victorian attitudes toward sexuality that privilege heterosexuality and devalue all non-normative sexual expression or desire (Amer 649). Thus, while falling on a corpus of Orientalist representations of Arab masculinity and sexuality, the queer ideologies of the U.S. and European countries becomes used to “liberate Arab and Muslim ‘gays and lesbians’ from the oppression under which they allegedly live by transforming them from practitioners of same-sex contact into subjects who identify as homosexual and gay” (Massad 162).

Many scholars and activists have warned against the severe repercussions of the globalization of a model of queer identity that comes from the U.S. and Europe (see Butler 2008; Massad 2007; Katyal 2002). Judith Butler, in her speech at Brooklyn College in 2013, emphasized the vulnerability of gay politics and its current employment by countries such as the U.S., Canada, and Germany, to serve homophobic ethno-nationalist and homonationalist racist agendas. The closet becomes a more subtle, postmodern power technique, and the struggle to come out of it as citizens in a respectable queer society protects the state from liability and

frames it as neutral authority to be called on to amend laws and protect citizens, “rather than [. . . itself] invested with the power to injure” (Brown 27). In the case of Israel, for example, coming out of the closet represents a dream for many queer Israelis to acquire full citizenship and motivates their activism to achieve national belonging. On the other hand, for many queer Palestinians, the violent reality of checkpoints and the barriers to of their equal citizenship, along with other countless reminders of the impossibility of belonging, shape the nature and discourse of the Israeli state. The logic of coming out of the closet as a mechanism, thus not only “allows for [a normalized] homosexuality to be included in the national discourse . . . [and] reproduces and perpetuates oppressive heteronormative practices” (Ritchie 562), it also simulates and sustains oppressive racist practices that are indispensable to the nation’s anatomy. Queer Pride is limited to the right to come out of the closet into dominant society as respectable queer citizens who are otherwise members of the dominant group in that society. Meanwhile, the potential of queer pride as a radical tactic of opposition to repressive discourses and practices has been substituted by the vocabulary of visibility, which has become a key term in gender and sexual identity politics. It is not shocking, therefore, that many queer Arabs reject queer pride ideologies and coming out practices of gay activism of mainstream societies in the U.S., Canada, and Europe, and are seeking to articulate a politics of social change that disrupts the normalization of the queer visibility project (Ritchie, 2010).

III. Ali Baba and Visibility: Marriage of Convenience and Community Building for LGBT Arabs in Diaspora.

Amin Maalouf maintains that we identify with certain aspects of our identity when they are under threat of erasure (2001). For many in Middle Eastern communities, homosexuality is a

threat to their traditional values and national and religious identities (Mourad 2013). Children in the Arab world do not generally leave their parents' home until marriage; and once married, they are expected to care for their elderly parents who eventually reside with one of their children (Georgis, "Thinking Past Pride", 243). In order to maintain this structure, familial bonds that rely on heteronormativity must remain intact. Any violation of conventional values, such as divorce, bearing a child out of wedlock, or violations that are public in nature, are considered threats to the social fabric of these communities. In the absence of a reliable public service sector, family ties grow more crucial for individuals' general welfare and security, "for the attachment to familial cultural practices is not playing out a romance with tradition, but often enacting an investment in material and emotional survival" (Georgis, "Thinking Past Pride", 243).

For the Arab communities in diaspora, this threat posed by the violation of conventional values is more imminent. Arabs in diaspora form a minority within a dominant culture with differing values that are constantly changing and influencing their native culture, which seems on the verge of submersion within its dominant host culture (Abudi 2011). The children of Arab parents feel the pressure to assimilate and find it easier to set aside their Arabic language and Middle Eastern traditions (Turjoman 2013). It becomes more crucial for Arab parents to minimize the influence of the host culture on their families, and therefore they may grow more conservative and religious as a result (Foner 1997). They expect a level of obedience and respect from their children that second-generation immigrants would typically consider authoritarian and domineering. Parents' concerns about the corrupting influence of the mainstream cultures of the 'West' are also related to sexual relations as a second source of conflict. They worry about their children's sexuality and dating choices, but that concern is more particularly acute with daughters than with sons (Foner 1997). This leads minority Middle Eastern communities, such as

the Lebanese community in Australia as shown in the web series discussed in this section, to isolation, which can be devastating for queer Lebanese-Australians.

Arab families in diaspora, especially mothers, create strong emotional ties that bind members together (Abudi 2011). Children in immigrant families therefore have a sense of pride in their country of origin and appreciate their parents' sacrifices and struggles to make a better life for themselves and their children (D'Alisera 2009). And despite the young members of the community resenting their parents' constraints and obligations, they also feel a strong sense of loyalty, affection, and duty to their parents (Suarez-Orozco et al. 2008). They recognize the importance of family and the need to provide, financially or otherwise, to their family members and maintain the strong traditional familial ties (D'Alisera 2009). Gay marriages of convenience have, thus, become the reality for many in the LGBTQ community as they hail from traditional ethnic and religious environments. Capitulating to the expectations of their Lebanese heritage, children of immigrant Arab parents enter a heterosexual marriage, at least as far as their families are concerned. It is not that same-sex acts cannot occur, it is that everyone must keep up appearances that conform to the important principles and values of Arab society; "so long as everyone can pretend that [homosexuality] doesn't happen, there is no need to do anything [to] stop it" (Whitaker 85). This manner of keeping up appearances increasingly leads to a widening gap between the demands of society and the daily life the individual leads, and between upholding tradition and appearances for the sake of culture and history and the things individuals do in private away from the scrutiny of society (Whitaker 86). This "double life" almost always involves marriage, because, as already noted, family and progeny are of the utmost importance in Arab societies.

I Luv U But (2013) is an independent web series, written and directed by Fadia Abboud and produced by Abboud, Amin Palangi, and Mouna Zaylah. The series premiered on its official website, Iluvubut.tv, and since it relies on donations and public funding, the website provides free access to the web series. The first season found a following not just in Australia, but in Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. It was nominated for Most Engaging YouTube Channel in Lebanon's Social Media Awards in 2013. Set in the heart of the vibrant and multicultural community of Sydney, Australia, *I Luv U But* depicts the lives of queer Lebanese-Australian husband and wife, Mouna and Sam, who married for convenience. The series consists of two seasons and a total of 19 short episodes with an average of 10 minutes each. Both characters are gay and not "out" to their parents and extended conservative families. This miniseries aims to expose gay marriages of convenience within Lebanese communities in diaspora in a non-judgmental way, to show that coming out is not the only option for LGBTQ people, and "to say that it's ok, and that there is no right or wrong choice of LGBTQ lifestyle" (Cawley 2015). The series opens with Mouna, the lesbian wife, in a wedding dress and Sam, the gay husband, in a tuxedo. They address the viewer in an effort to explain their having to resort to deceiving their families. The series progresses and unfolds as we see Sam in episode three, scrambling to get his date out of his house as his mother in law pays him an unexpected visit. The series portrays the old conservative and patriarchal traditions these Lebanese-Australian families uphold when, for instance, in episode three, Mouna's mother tells her to "give [her] husband a taste [of the food] before [she] take[s] a bite of it" (S. 1, 00:01:54), or when in episode six, Sam's mother asks him: "Why did you marry such an old wife? She's 35!" (S. 1, 00:02:15). We experience how this couple maneuver their daily lives while being married yet maintaining separate personal lives, Mouna with her partner, Sash who pressures throughout the series her to

come out, and Sam with his many sexual exploits. We see the two friends grow closer and more supportive of one another through the difficulties they face maintaining such a lifestyle. We experience the difficulties Sash experiences being in a relationship with a closeted lesbian, especially considering that she herself is a Lebanese-Australian and has chosen to come out to her family, which was not an easy experience for her, seeing how it led to her parents ostracizing her, but she continues to believe that that was a price she “had to pay to be free” (S. 1, 00:01:30). The friends also find support and alliance in one another in episode 16, when Sam suspects having contracted HIV. The married friends spend the remainder of the episode in the clinic waiting room nervously awaiting the test results. For these young second-generation Lebanese-Australians and for Lebanese people in diaspora, maintaining relationships with other Lebanese people with similar backgrounds provides these individuals with support that they would not have otherwise been able to receive from their immediate families who uphold a romanticized version of traditional values and customs, despite these values and traditions having gone through substantial change since they left their home country (Foner 1997).

The fifteen-year-long Lebanese civil war (1975-90) displaced an estimated 900,000 people (Migration Policy Institute). Today, it is estimated that six million Lebanese people live in diaspora, most of whom maintain an active relationship with their native country (Labaki UN). Director Fadia Abboud shows the strong ties between diasporic communities and their Lebanese identities as the dialogue in her miniseries alternates between English and the Lebanese dialect. The majority of the dialogue in episode three in season one, for instance, is in Lebanese. I have estimated that 35 seconds out of the 3 minute-long episode is in English. *I Luv U But* (2013) focuses on the experiences of Lebanese-Australian LGBTQ individuals as they attempt to meet the demands and expectations of both their families and the liberal LGBTQ community. This

Web series maintains that visibility and the Pride narrative are not applicable to everyone and do not represent a solution for integration and social cohesion for Arab LGBTQ people in diaspora. While other writers and directors focus on the coming out narrative as adopted and altered in Lebanese and Arab LGBTQ communities (see Alissar Gazal's *Lesbanese* below), Abboud relocates the discussion within the failures of the pride narrative to incorporate Arab culture in its discourse and ideology. In the final episode of season 9, Sash tells Mouna that even in a gay club "still end up hiding who [they] are" (E. 9, 00:03:10) signaling that visibility for these homosexual Arabs entails relinquishing aspects of their Arab identity and culture. Abboud challenges through her miniseries the notion of coming out and homosexuality as identity as a necessary and desirable rite of passage for gay men and lesbians, for not all people would choose to "just give up family for the individual pursuit of happiness" (Abboud interview, qtd. in Taylor, 2014). In *I Luv U But*, LGBTQ identity is transformed within the terms of Arab, religious, social, and cultural contexts. When Mouna rushes to meet her mother at their annual visit to her father's graveside, she is reminded of the cultural and religious aspects of her Lebanese identity that makes it impossible for her to come out. As she sits with her mother by her father's grave eating his favorite cookies, her mother speaks of the sacrifices her father had to make working at a factory in poor conditions to provide his family with a good life in Australia. "Poor thing, how hard he worked" Mouna's mother told her, "and that damn place killed him!" (S.2, E.5, 00:03:29). After her husband's death, Mouna's mother had to raise her daughter by herself, striving to provide her with the life her father had hoped she would have. For the Lebanese, religion is an inseparable part of their national identity, especially for the generation of the civil war (Hajjar 2002). At the conclusion of this episode, we find that Mouna's father is named after a Lebanese man who went missing in Lebanon in 1983 (000:04:54), one of 17,000 Lebanese

people lost during the civil war and whose families continue to demand, generations later, for the reclaiming of their bodies (Jaquemet 2009). For many Lebanese people, to deny one's religion as an integral part of their identity, is to deny the history of struggle one's ancestors went through to protect their religious identity (Hajjar 2002). All these facets of Mouna's identity combine to alter and complicate her identity as a Lesbian.

The couple find themselves forced to reconcile many aspects of their identities, the cultural, the religious and the sexual. For them, as it is for many Arab queer individuals in the U.S., Canada, and Europe, the loss of family belonging is not a sacrifice they want to make for the right to be "out." This is articulated in episode 4, when Mouna feels pressured by her partner to come out. Mona says to her, "There's no way I can do what you did to your parents" (S. 1, 00:01:16). Her Lebanese-Australian partner goes on to talk about how coming out was not an easy experience for her, how it led to her parents ostracizing her, but how she continues to believe that that was a price she had to pay to be free. To which Mouna responds, "You're out but you're not free" (00:02:04). This web series evinces a pronounced hope for a future when the price for social freedom and integration within LGBTQ communities in the 'West' is not family ties or religion.

In *I Luv U But*, gendered behavior commonly associated with femininity and masculinity, as well as the intersection of patriarchy, traditional conservative gender dynamics, and homosexuality, also affect the homosexual characters' integration within the LGBTQ community in Australia, and their cohesion within the larger, heteronormative, mainstream Australia community. An important factor in the definition of masculinity is the question of activity and passivity as has been established by many scholars of literature and cinema (see al-Samman 2008; Dialmy 2009; Georgis 2013). For, the topic of homosexuality in modern literature and

cinema seems to be dominantly framed within the context of the colonial other, which in turn recreates the traditional power dichotomy of the active colonizer and the passive Arab partner (al-Samman 288). The male, by default, is assigned the active role in Arab society in contrast to the female that is reduced to passivity. Male activity is often accompanied by the insatiable desire to dominate, which carries a patriarchal operation that emphasizes the male as active (Ncube 59). And to be an active agent in a postmodern Arab society, or patriarchal Arab mentality, is to simply mechanically reproduce heteropatriarchal norms that define masculinity as domination. In *I Luv U But*, Sam inadvertently reproduces these norms as he differentiates between passive and active masculinities in his personal relationship, by asking his lover, “Are you a bottom? / Yeah / Good, because I’m a top” (S.1, E. 5, 0:43). This could also be attributed to the continued notion of homosexuality in the Middle East as the failure of the Arab man to resist the interference of the countries that once colonized his (Massad 2007). Sam’s behavior changes, however, when addressing the female characters in the miniseries, as the lesbian women take on more dominant roles.

I Luv U But questions the dominant belief that gendered behaviors are innate, depicting the ways an individual’s performance of an acquired gendered and sexualized behavior is imposed on them by normative heterosexuality. Judith Butler questions this distinction by establishing that “gender acts” influence individuals in physical and corporeal ways so that people’s recognition of corporeal sexual difference is impacted and altered by social conventions (1993). Sex, then, stops being “a bodily given on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed, but [...] a cultural norm which governs the materialization of bodies (Butler 3). Butler adopts the postmodern technique of viewing reality as determined by language, which ultimately renders it impossible to envision or articulate sex without imposing linguistic norms: “there is no

reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body” (10). Thus, many Arabs who engage in same-sex practices and do not identify as “gay”, “lesbian”, “queer”, or “bisexual” formulate their sense of self through various culturally-specific encounters and remain unconnected to the word “gay”. Even amongst those who may feel at home in gay identity, the notion of publicly coming out rings hollow in a culture where who you share your bed with is a private matter.

On the other hand, the lead female character’s refusal to come out is directly connected to her mother. In most literature written by Arab women that tackle the period of postcolonial wars, mothers and motherhoods have acquired centrality (Cooke 1994). The nurturing persona, who in the literature of the colonial period seems bent on molding her daughter into her own image -a symbol of resistance to the colonizer, to war, and to patriotism- has multiplied so as to be able to play numerous roles. These mothers are both aggressive and pacific, patriotic and nationalist, desiring and destructive, martyr and prisoner. They may be all of these at once or at different times. Motherhood, or the act of mothering, becomes a multi-faceted tactic of resistance, and the literature to which it belongs becomes an act of resistance in and of itself (Cooke 1994). As such, Arab motherhood is constantly reconstructed to suit its challenges, for “no boundary is so resilient that it cannot bend” (Cooke 25). In *I Luv U But*, mothers embody the motherland. Sam’s mother represents a more modern Lebanon: “I’ve left your father” she tells her son and speaks to him of wanting to seek independence and live life to the fullest (S.2, E. 3, 00:03:43), and of reconnecting to her womanhood and embracing her sexuality (season 1, episode 6). Mouna’s mother, on the other hand, is constantly bringing her daughter and son-in-law Lebanese dishes, as if to preserve her own as well as her homeland’s memories in an inward culinary landscape, providing the framework of reference needed by her daughter. The maternal culinary heritage

represents “the cultural agency of resistance and endurance, as the mother teaches her daughter the importance of certain foods that inscribe an entire ethos of harmonious living as her best defense against cultural erasure (Maleh 213). Coming out, therefore, would represent for Mouna and her mother another threat of cultural erasure. Immigrant families are crucial to the development of childrens’ personal identities and ideologies, as they provide them with ideas of the heritage nation – making the father and mother figure central in most Arab immigrant literature (Maleh 193). The absence of fathers in *I Luv U But*, however, is an indicator not of the lack of importance of fathers in the Lebanese familiar structures, but of the more masculine roles Lebanese mothers took on in the family following the Lebanese civil war, when mothers had to replace the physical and emotional absence of the fathers and sons who left to fight or died in the war (Cooke, 1994). “Your father is dead and I’m here all alone” (S.1, E.8, 00:02:45), Mouna’s mother tells her daughter when she asks her for a grandchild. Mouna’s mother represents that Lebanese mother who had to raise her child alone. She raised her daughter alone and invested her time and efforts into seeing her happily married and with children. Middle Eastern and Arab queer cinema is growing in relevance and importance under current economic and political conditions as it redefines the link between the public field of radical politics and the private realm of sexuality and desire. These works demonstrate how both female and queer sexualities often serve as figures of sacrifice and marginalization and repression by nationalist struggle and the subsequent formation of national states (Aaron, 2004) and further explains the complications of visibility as belonging for LGBTQ Arabs immigrants. The place of Arab queer sexuality in light of the predicament of postcolonial nationalism, is thus a social and political position.

I Luv U But is filling an important gap in gay Arab representation, as it positions racial minorities within global queer life and discourse. It also addresses the difficulties queer Arabs

face integrating in mainstream societies in diaspora. The characters frequently address difficulties in integration as Arabs within the mainstream LGBTQ community. In one instance, Sam tells his cousin to shave because “Western men don’t find body hair attractive” (S.1, E.7). In other instances, humor is employed to address obstacles of cohesion for Arab immigrants within societies in the ‘West’. Sam, for instance, employs the Orientalist image of Arabs as terrorists to scare his bed mates into leaving: “My mother just got back from a military camp with Hezbollah and she’s outside right now, get out!” (S. 2, E.1, 00:02:42). The Australian men readily believe this and run out of the house naked. The presence of stereotypical orientalist imageries in Arab cultural productions are essential to address considering how undeniably close the international LGBTQ movements of Europe and the U.S. have aligned themselves with capitalism and the military, and with growing anti-Arab and Islamophobic sentiments in the past few years. For, as I have discussed in detail in the first section of this chapter, the only acceptable visible queer Arab in today’s dominant global queer ideology is the victim who exchanges his Arabness and native culture for the more tolerant nations of “the West.” Abboud’s web series ends with an episode titled “I Luv U”, in which Mouna and Sam attend a pool party given by Ali Baba, where Mouna reminisces on the good times she had with her ex-girlfriend, Sash. Ali Baba reconciles Mouna with her ex-girlfriend by enlightening Sash to the complexities of the queer Arab identity. What she says encapsulates the message of this series: “Being gay is complicated. Being Arab and gay is even worse. Coming out isn’t the be all and all kind of thing. It’s actually OK not to be out. What really matters is what’s here [pointing at her heart], everything else is pure decoration” (3:04).

IV. Hijabs, Heels, and War: Belonging as Women and Lesbians.

The Israel-Hezbollah war of 2006 was a 34-day conflict that led to the destruction of Lebanese civilian infrastructure, including roads, bridges, electrical facilities, and the Hariri International Airport in Beirut. And although Hezbollah considered the UN-brokered cease fire a victory, the conflict resulted in the death of thousands of Lebanese civilians and the displacement of approximately one million people (Emerson, Human Rights Watch). *Lesbanese* (2008), a documentary directed and produced by Alissar Gazal, shows how the lesbian community in Lebanon maneuvers the politics of their daily lives, their survival, and their reactions to the Israel-Hezbollah war. This documentary was filmed in Beirut nine months after the war as the conflict's effects settled on the country and its people. It first premiered at the Queer Arab Film Festival in Sydney, and it opens with a rough filming of an Al-Jazeera news report: "If you live in the West," Gazal begins, "the image you are left with of Lebanon is that of chaos and war, political assassinations, civil strife, and endless death. That is not the Lebanon that I know" (0:10). She transitions with upbeat music to the streets of Beirut, referring to the famous resilience of the Lebanese people and how, as the streets reflect, they live their days despite the daily chaos and instability of their country.

Gazal's documentary is, at its core, an engaged and oppositional political film. Its rough filming and collage-technique of production reflects a philosophy inspired by anti-colonial thought and independent cinema that is anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist in nature. Its director and writer, Alissar Gazal, hails from a generation of filmmakers whose memories of Lebanon's bloody civil war (1975-1990) remain omnipresent. She incorporates the economic situation and the political aspirations of the Lebanese people she documents, and puts forward the transitional stage from post-traumatic crisis to post-revolutionary catharsis. Lebanese cinema has a long and

unstable history rife with unmet potentials and colonialist hindrances. It reached its peak in the 1960s and 1970s with mainstream flicks and folk musicals (Rahbani brothers) but its progress was quickly halted by the Lebanese civil war and Lebanese filmmakers became reliant today on foreign funding and grew accustomed to the restrictive conditions that came with it (Fahim 2016). Apart from few Lebanese film producers who managed to receive funding from private investors or institutions, most producers continue to be reliant on the funds of foreign states and independent donations. Modern Lebanese cinema seems to also explore various topics within the concept of the civil war. Even the films that offer a social and economic critique, including films and documentaries on the Lebanese LGBTQ community, such as Daboul's *Out Loud* (2011) and Labaki's *Caramel* (2007), seem to revolve around religion and war. This documentary is no different, for Gazal portrays the intersectionality of nationality, patriarchy, religion, and war as inseparable within the discussion of sexual orientation in Lebanon.

Lebanon is on track to decriminalizing homosexuality. In January 2017, Rabih Maalouf became the fourth Lebanese judge to declare homosexuality “a personal choice, and not a punishable offence” in a ruling that challenges Article 534 of the Lebanese penal code, which states that homosexuality “contradicts the laws of nature” and is punishable by up to 1 year in prison (Reid, Human Rights Watch). The progress being made for the rights of LGBTQ individuals in Lebanon is largely due to activists and human rights organizations, such as HELEM, featured in *Lesbanese*, that organize workshops, seminars, and have recently recruited famous figures to advocate LGBTQ rights in an effort to normalize homosexuality among the public (Chamas 2015). Lesbian voices tend to be marginalized or underrepresented in discourses of queer representations in the Middle East, mainly due to the assumption that their homoerotic behavior is more tolerated in Arab societies (Habib 2007). Lesbians in Lebanon,

however, have organized under MEEM and Helem to take part in shaping the discourse of gender and sexual rights in their country. The lesbians interviewed in this documentary, or “the Helem Girls” as Gazal refers to them in her credits, comprise eight women: Faten, Jacky, Luby, Mia, Mira, Nadz, Stephanie, and Zeina. The most revealing footage that gives a hopeful outlook on the future of LGBTQ communities in religious and conservative societies is the interview with Luby, the 17-year-old Muslim lesbian. Her mother spoke of her and her husband’s acceptance of their daughter’s sexuality, making it clear that it is indeed mainstream society that would not be as tolerant:

I can accept, but our country can’t accept. I can’t go to my parents and tell them: this is Luby’s girlfriend or fiancé (6:50) [...] We believe in Allah, that is what God willed, it’s not how she chose to be. Nobody wants to be different. It’s not her choice, that is what Allah willed. What can I do about that? (7:40)

In a world that regards homosexuality and Islam as incompatible, this documentary shows Muslim parents accepting their lesbian daughter’s sexuality, and providing her with space to express her complex identity freely. That, in turn, provides space for the veil to play a role in this lesbian’s personal expression of her gender and sexuality and to maneuver her identity within Lebanese society, placing an importance on fashion as a signifier of cultural behavior for this sub culture: “When I’m on the street, I feel really happy wearing my veil, because [...] I believe it’s a protection for me. And I like to feel mysterious. That no one knows the real me unless they get to know me more [...] I’m not going to take it off no matter what” (20:05). However, while Luby emphasizes the importance of her hijab to her as a woman and as a lesbian in Lebanon, she dissociates her choice to wear the hijab from her identity as a Muslim. And while she maintains it in public, her hijab is taken off in all her interviews and video recordings in this documentary. Taking off her headscarf, which represents the most visible symbol of Islam and the “East”, could be an attempt by Luby to “liberate” herself from what is often regarded as

a sign of her repressive religion (El-Tayeb 91) and an effort to be seen as liberated by the English-speaking audience whom this documentary is intended for. Fatima el-Tayeb suggests that a particular appearance is associated with a particular national identity, Arabness, which also has grown to suggest a particular religion, Islam (91). Luby, who is a Shiite Muslim, comes from a conservative religious family and has worn the hijab most of her life and so has her mother. And while she has disclosed her sexual orientation to her mother and father, she insists that coming out to her married brother would be very dangerous for her. Indeed, as shown in Gazal's documentary, Islam's stances on homosexuality and women's rights are often debated in Muslim communities and within the same Muslim families, "often invisible to a dominant society still not ready to enter an open dialogue- and to a gay and lesbian community not ready to include Muslim queers" (El-Tayeb 119). For, as Samar Habib argues in *Islam and Homosexuality* (2009), as does Fatima el-Tayeb in *European Others* (2011), homophobia continues to be defined in Muslim communities as inevitably produced by their culture and religion. Islam itself symbolizes the threat that, sequentially, is present in every Muslim (Habib 2009; El-Tayeb 2011).

Similar to the use of international human rights and pinkwashing, scholars have shown the way in which countries, such as the U.S. and European countries, employ the "treatment of women" and women rights as "the primary litmus test to determine whether foreigners -and especially Arabs possessed the capacity to function effectively within a Western liberal-democratic society" (Chin 143; See Yegenoglu 1998; Ahmed 1992). El-Tayeb argues, along with other scholars, that there exist many differences between Muslim communities around the world, but these differences are ignored due to the homogenization of dominant discourse: "[A] diverse group of Eastern and Southern European, Middle Eastern, South Asian, North and West African

background, with different religious practices and different degrees of religiosity” (104) are homogenized under the category of Muslims, yet this “outwardly coherent, homogenous community is discovered to be fundamentally divided along gender lines: Muslim identity is shaped exclusively by men, according to their own interests, which are directly opposed to the interests of Muslim women” (93). For Muslim women, like Luby, a complex image arises: A woman who embodies the two dominant discourses surrounding the topic of hijab in feminism: The “headscarf as liberation” and the “headscarf as repression” or “a tool of male oppression” (Yorukoglu 124). It could be that, same as she hides her lesbianism from her brother out of fear of a violent reaction, Luby wears her hijab in public out of fear of what her brother might do if she sees her without it. The daughter’s hijab could also be an attempt at belonging to her family and community, seeing how her mother as well as most probably other females in her family wear the hijab as well. What is more relevant to this chapter, however, is how Luby redefines herself when she takes off her hijab. It could be that she feels a sense of belonging to the Australian or English-speaking community to whom she is speaking through the camera lens, and taking off her hijab, the most visible sign of her religion and culture, makes her stand out less as the other (El-Tayeb 2011) and more as someone the English-speaking audience could easily relate to. The veiled Muslim woman, after all, is seen as capable of engaging in dialogue as long as she sheds her cultural baggage, that is her veil, in order to become “not too different” (El-Tayeb 99).

The struggle that these Lebanese lesbian women who hail from various religious backgrounds share with other women in Lebanon regardless of their sexual orientation goes beyond integration, however. The women speak of gender discrimination in the work force and the restrictive fashion imposed by certain companies, they speak of their struggle to meet

impossible gender standards and performing strict gender behaviors. “Everything is politicized,” (20:53) Mia explains, even hairdos and footwear. And not making the right statements with your physical appearance and behavior renders life for these women difficult: “Enough stepping on women! They’ve stepped on women enough. We have a lot of pressure from abroad and life here is difficult, but our generation, the young, want things different now. We want freedom without having people go against us” (24:30). However, freedom to these women does not necessarily incorporate coming out, as it is not considered a right or a priority they seek to attain as women and as homosexuals, at least not at current time. For, while Fadia Abboud shows how the coming out narrative fails homosexuals in Arab communities in diaspora, the women in *Lesbanese* make no secret the incompatibility of their end goals as activists in the Lebanese queer community with those of queer activists in countries outside the Middle East and North Africa region. Highschool student, Luby, for instance, makes it clear that the Pride narrative and “getting married to someone means absolutely nothing to me” (10:30). In fact, marriage equality is not a priority for this Arab queer community, unlike for their counterparts in queer communities in the U.S., Canada, and Europe who strived for years to achieve this right. Reproductive rights, on the other hand, takes the form of a more crucial demand for this family-oriented community. Teary eyed, Luby explains that attending her cousin’s marriage revealed to her a desire for children: “For some reason, I looked at my cousin and her husband, [...] now I know that my cousin is looking forward to [...] raise her kids and to see them grow up, and, you know, be a mother and stuff. I got really bothered, and left that dinner. I couldn’t stay there” (11:30). While Luby identifies herself as lesbian to her conservative Muslim parents, her sexual identification is complicated by its loss of cultural specificity. As an Arab lesbian, Luby sees more urgency in advancing reproductive and adoption rights for the LGBTQ community than achieving marriage

equality. Her goals and the goals of her LGBTQ community are not compatible with the goals of the dominant international LGBTQ communities. To her, identifying as a lesbian does not carry the similar implications as it would for an American woman, for instance, to identify as a lesbian.

The dilemma of sexual identifications and queerness for Arab communities will remain complex and dissociating as long as they continue to be regarded as inauthentic, but “there is nothing easy about inhabiting new identities in what is inevitably and irreversibly a postcolonial, globalized modernity” (Mourad 2543). It is clear the self-conscious awareness of the U.S. and European influence on the women in this documentary, as they comfortably shift from Lebanese dialect to English when discussing their sexual orientation and experiences as lesbians. Luby came out to her father by saying, “I am not like my brothers and sisters, I am not *straight*, I am *gay*. Exactly these words” (07:55) [emphasis added]. These women could have easily chosen to identify as “mithliyah” (lesbian in Arabic, a more preferred term among the Arabic-speaking LGBTQ communities), but, even while speaking with their parents, they chose to rely on the English “gay” and “lesbian”. This “Arabish” language, which began as an informal transliteration system used by Arabic-speaking people in online chatting to write Arabic in Latin letters, developed to incorporate English words and words with English roots within the Arabic dialect. “Panicked” becomes “Pannaket”, for instance. Other words, such as “gay” and “lesbian” were incorporated fully. This language has acquired, or began to acquire, “an imported system valuation and foreign signification brought upon by the colonial experience, and exasperated by the aborted national projects of most postcolonial nations” (Al Samman 271) causing it to lose its cultural specificity. Whether the incorporation of a postcolonial homoerotic lexicon could also be determined by education in foreign languages, exposure to U.S. and European media (the U.S.

continues to be the largest exporter of culture), or attributed to Lebanon's socioeconomic background; the fact of the matter remains that the adoption of English with or to replace Arabic words means that terminologies of sex, along with other modern terminologies, are much more accessible in English than in Arabic. The majority of available equivalent terms in Lebanese dialect are also too derogatory, thus the adoption of English homoerotic terminology is an attempt to move away from the stigma that terms such as *shadh*, *mkhannath*, and *louti* carry (Mourad 2541). This is not simply a matter of incorporation or translation, it is the process of expanding the mother tongue to include positive and affirmative terminology of gay and lesbian sexualities. Developing an LGBTQ-friendly language, then, is among the main challenges of Arab queer activists today and it remains key to establishing unity, relatability, and stability in these communities. The embedding of English terminologies and the invention of new words is not a surrender to imperialist agendas, but about creating new methods of being as competing demands of queer representations are gradually leading to the shaping of hybrid queer identities.

While many books and films report coming out stories in the LGBTQ communities in the Middle East (Bareed Mista3jil, etc.), Gazal's documentary fills a gap in these representations as it focuses on Arab lesbian interests, which have yet to be as consistently thematized as Arab male homosexual interests have been (Habib 2007). It also offers an alternative to the representations of nationalist Arab lesbians in the Middle East. The women in this documentary comfortably appropriate and bend queer ideologies, such as coming out, and epistemologies thereby creating the Arabish language, but they do not dwell on the technicalities, instead they speak of their personal experiences and their attempts to negotiate their sexualities under a variety of local and geopolitical pressures. They are not preoccupied with the theoretical; they instead share their techniques and advice of navigating gender and sexual identities between the

private and the public, the difficult and the possible. They help the viewer grasp queer Arab identity as postcolonial, hybrid, and unfinished. Sexuality is not expressed as defiance or pride; instead, these women address their sexual orientations using the vulnerabilities and survival techniques associated with gender shaming. These interviews validate these lesbian Arab women's presence in the global queer community as political resistance to the current political and religious systems in place in the Middle East, as well as to the legacy of colonialism and Orientalism that dominates their countries, and to the U.S. and European homonationalism. For, as lesbian Arabs, they face a dual struggle as they battle oppressive forces within their own communities and resist the global narrative that tries to use their 'oppression' for broader military or political goals.

Concluding Thoughts on Visibility and Pride

Like Ahmad Danny Ramadan in chapter I, Ayse Toprak employs her documentary *Mr. Gay Syria* as an attempt at cohesion within the international gay rights movements that advocate the Pride narrative but have proven problematic and dangerous to the LGBTQ populations in the Middle East. On the other hand, Fadia Abboud's *I Luv U But* and Gazal's *Lesbanese* both make attempts at presenting the challenges of visibility and the Pride narrative for the Arab immigrant community in the West and the Arab world. They attempt to shed light on the alternative voices and movements in place in the Arab LGBTQ community, be it in diaspora or in the Arab-speaking world, that seek to attain a reality for the Arab LGBTQ individual where their sexuality and their national and religious identities do not present them with obstacles in their familial and daily lives. The current heterosexual/homosexual binary that the Arab homosexual and lesbian individuals are presented with only alienates those who don't subscribe to sexual identities.

Ramy in Namir's *God in Pink* is a perfect example of an Arab individual faced with the heterosexual/homosexual binary, which led him to isolation and alienation, and finally to choose heterosexuality and end up married with child (see chapter I, section IV).

Arab LGBTQ communities are working towards a future that guarantees them full citizenship rights, political representation, and visibility. Their strategies are similar to their counterparts in LGBTQ communities in Europe, the U.S. and Canada, in that they are rendering themselves visible. Yet they are dissimilar in that they do so not by coming out to their societies, but by coming out to friends and reaching out to LGBTQ communities around the world, by blogging their experiences and taking part in global feminist movements, as I have shown in my selections for this chapter. Such is the case of the Lebanese LGBTQ community that collaborates with feminist organizations, like KAFA, in their efforts to obtain further rights and recognition. However, for the time being, Arab LGBTQ people and individuals engaging in same-sex sexual acts take part in what Hassan El Menyawi calls "activism from the closet" (2006), by which advocates can push for the strengthening of privacy rights while also attempting to broaden the discussion about sexual identities in the Arab world to include models that are more relevant to the region. The "activism from the closet" approach does not involve explicitly advocating for LGBTQ rights, but rather advocating for issues that, while they are not categorically "gay rights" issues, will greatly benefit LGBTQ people and those who participate in same-sex sexual acts. Thus, this alternative model is a subtler approach to gay rights advocacy because it attempts to persuade people on important issues that indirectly advances LGBTQ agendas. Arab LGBTQ rights suffer from the lack of political rights for all citizens in these regimes, in which imperialist geopolitics is implicated. This model most notably focuses on heightened privacy protections, as it does not directly articulate concepts of gay rights and LGBTQ identities, which would have

received opposition from mainstream Arab societies and states. This method of activism presents LGBTQ people with a safe space as it does not involve being “out”. Thus, rather than becoming a target for the government or other non-state actors, “[t]he closet, fluid, protean and hidden, becomes a safe locus for collective strategizing – a place from which LGBTQ groups can engage in activism” (El Menyawi 7).

Another alternative discourse to the coming out narrative involves an activism that aims to create a community based on a “common identification with a radical democratic interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality” (Mouffe 70) rather than to organize around a common identification as ‘gays’ and ‘lesbians.’ Such a collective strives to uphold the liberal state to its democratic ideals, instead of demanding that it accept and protect its queer citizens (Georgis, *The Better Story*, 571). The closet as space, and to be out of the closet, demands entry into a dominant social space, which some Arabs reject as solution. The goal of such an activism would not be to unite international LGBTQ communities under an out of the closet narrative that places them into a space recognized and protected by the state, but to create a space outside of the reach of the state and its regulations where bodies could inhabit, regardless of their subscribed identities and sexual desires.

For the time being, Arab LGBTQ communities are attempting to broaden the discussion of sexual identities and LGBTQ discourses to include models, such as the examples I have mentioned in the previous two paragraphs, that are more relevant to their regions. For, must the struggle of homophobia in the Middle East “be compromised by the racism of Western liberalism? Can we not instead contextualize present-day homophobia in a history of colonialism that once shamed the Arab world for being ‘too free’ in its sexual promiscuities and now shames it for not being free enough?” (Georgis, “Thinking Past Pride,” 238). Gloria Anzaldúa calls for

the reclaiming of the borders that have been set up to divide as transitional spaces where unity can take place (1987). The border, which Anzaldúa describes as an “open wound where the Third World grates against the First and bleeds. And before a scab forms, it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country a border culture” (3), transforms into a space where transnational feminist and queer coalitions could meet and collaborate. As a lesbian, she unites herself with the struggle of all women and LGBTQ people internationally: “We come from all colors, all classes, all races, all time periods” (84). She highlights the importance of contributions made by minorities in the homosexual community: “Colored homosexuals”, she writes, “have always been at the forefront [...] of all liberation struggles [...]; have suffered more injustices and have survived them despite all odds” (85). If we work, as Anzaldúa calls, to document sexualities and the experiences of LGBTQ people across borders living with shame and their efforts to understand and define themselves within the global queer discourse, then the discourses produced for collaborating with and supporting the LGBTQ communities in the Middle East will most likely be beneficial and productive for LGBTQ communities internationally.

CONCLUSION

My dissertation project, *Queer Arab Writing Across Borders*, provides a framework for my research agenda and reflects my sustained interest in the role of gender and sexuality in Arabic literature and cultural production, particularly as it pertains to Arab voices in diaspora. I examine and compare the writings and films of queer Arabs, including recent queer Syrian immigrants in Europe, the U.S. and Canada. I shed light on the non-normativity manifested in Arab American communities, how desire is written and felt, how queer authors in diaspora write queer Arab characters and how they attempt to reconcile queerness and Arabness in writing and film. I employ recent productions of queer Arab literature to debate dominant views in the discourses of social cohesion and integration for Arabs in the “West.” Democracy demands relations of inclusion and exclusion owing to the formation of a specific group of citizens. This leads to a political other who is automatically excluded from “the borders of the sovereign unity of ‘us’” (Yorukoglu 58), and leads to a cultural uniformity that enables individuals “like us” to be included within our society. This informs Arab individuals’ relationships and experiences as immigrants and refugees. I interrogate concepts of international human rights and gay rights in modern politics and social justice, and the international models of sexual identity and sexual citizenship as they pertain to queer Arab immigrants and refugees. I study ways of belonging as LGBTQ Arabs situate their identities in wide, vague and conflicting contexts. The literature included in my dissertation attend to the movement of Arab peoples, ideas, and stories across international boundaries. Therefore, Arab identity must be considered mobile in order to understand Arab culture and the movements and literatures produced within the disparate locations they relay.

My research employs theories of gender and sexuality, transnational queer studies and the rhetoric of immigration and refugee politics to approach a range of Arabic cultural texts. In my dissertation, I explore the modern writing practices of Arab immigrants and refugees to better understand the ways their sexuality and gender affects their political existence in diaspora. In an interdisciplinary project that pulls from political science, identity politics, and theories of sexuality, masculinity, and feminism, I focus on seven cultural productions that demonstrate a keen awareness of the elements of Arab immigrant and refugee writing. I argue that queer Arabs have developed different ways of achieving belonging in various international communities, which enables them to bring their sexuality to the forefront of their lived experiences and resolve the social challenges facing Arabs and especially Muslim Arabs today.

In each chapter, I focus on one of three ways of belonging that Arab refugees and immigrants produce within the dominant societies they reside in: social cohesion and assimilation, distancing oneself, and cultural acts of belonging. My three chapters work together to show the different ways Arab LGBTQ individuals in diaspora are working toward belonging and citizenship in the countries they are residing.

In my first chapter, “Inclusion and Exclusion: Immigrants and Acts of Belonging in Europe”, I highlight main changes in social sciences and political discourses as they relate to the concept of cohesion, which ultimately resulted in the shifting of the primary focus from the maintenance of group relations to values shared by group members at the expense of relations with those who might not share these values and meanings. I pinpoint main problems with the mainstream understanding of social cohesion today, while establishing that, in the case of Arab LGBTQ immigrants and refugees, cohesion is not necessarily required to establish a sense of belonging. I also discuss sexual citizenship and the price of cohesion for Syrian refugees in

Europe and Canada today, which includes the exclusion of the histories of imperialism, colonialism, and racism from queer refugees' narratives of sexual identity formation and migration. I also discuss cohesion for Muslim Arabs in the U.S. and how trust in institutions plays a key part in establishing cohesion for Muslim Arabs and explore the relationship between trust and belonging.

In chapter II, "Dissociation and Ambiguity as Acts of Belonging", I focus on Arab immigrants' and refugees' feelings of belonging as they situate their identities within a wide and vague context. I discuss the changes in identifications for Muslim Arabs in the U.S. and Muslim Arabs in Middle East countries, I debate the dominant views in the social cohesion discourse concerning political activism and integration of Arab immigrants to establish political activity as a means of communication to establish social cohesion. I discuss the body and disease as tools of establishing cohesion among a certain group that, while excluded from the dominant society and from international hegemonic communities, remain a tightly knit group with a strong sense of identification and belonging. And finally, I address feelings of invisibility, ambiguity, and disassociation dominant in the two novels analyzed in this chapter.

In my third and final chapter, "Cultural Productions: Reflections on Belonging for LGBTQ Arabs in Diaspora", I discuss Arab cultural productions that make attempts at cohesion within the international gay rights movements gaining momentum in countries around the world. These movements advocate the Pride narrative but have proven problematic and dangerous to the LGBTQ populations in the Middle East. I then pinpoint main problems with the Pride narrative that is dominant in LGBTQ communities and mainstream societies in the US, Europe, and Canada, and discuss several Middle Eastern LGBTQ organizations' efforts at belonging within

the Lebanese society while attempting to reconcile their Lebanese culture and religions with their sexual orientations.

In order to better contribute to the discussion of Arab LGBTQ immigrant and refugee integration and belonging, I wanted my study to bridge the gap between the literature in queer studies, migration and citizenship studies, and social psychology. So, I needed to look simultaneously at three factors in Arab queer writing across borders: psychosocial and emotional factors, sexuality, and integration.

I. Psychosocial and emotional factors of the characters discussed in this dissertation – emotions of loneliness, desperation, hope, happiness, love – represent a lasting, impacting and productive force. A positive psychological and emotional state could aid the immigrant and refugee in achieving a sense of belonging and stability in a new country, while a negative state could lead to further negative emotions of isolation, rejection or invisibility, which in turn would impede the immigrant and refugee's belonging within a new society (Chodorow 72). Recent theories, of which I have discussed few in Chapter I, are interested in the socio-psychological questions such as belonging (see Friedkin 2004; Jansen et al. 2006; and Giddens 2006), but they fail to move the psychosocial matter beyond identity politics of “who belongs where” (Yorukoglu 158). I address belonging and cohesion in my study from the perspective that all identifications, be they religion, Arabness, masculinity and so on, move beyond the politically and culturally contested and become redefined and reshaped by the emotional self (Chodorow 1999; and Yorukoglu 2014). When discussing citizenship and cohesion in contemporary politics, one must thus situate citizenship and cohesion within the wider context of politics of belonging, citizenship, identities, and the psychological and emotional factors. Citizenship and cohesion, regardless of their different legal and political interpretations (see chapter II, p.50) distinguish

individuals who belong to the entity in question from those who are not permitted to belong. The rules and measurements for granting citizenship to those who were born outside a state's border, might be questioned and challenged, and their language might be rendered more "inclusive" and "human rights oriented", but the general concepts and ideas behind naturalization remain unaltered, and that is to make certain groups and peoples outsiders (Yorukoglu 64). In addition, the lack of consideration of the socio-psychological elements and the intersection of the axes of gender, race, and sexuality, lead and enable the dominant political discourse around migration to induce the strong "fear of the other" in society (Ropeik 2017). Therefore, sexuality must be enclosed within the psychological and emotional when looking at the sense of belonging within citizenship and social cohesion.

II. As for the sexuality factor, many cities in the Europe, the U.S. and Canada have been investing in consumers of diverse sexual orientations and marketing themselves as some of the most "tolerant" cities in the world (Jordan 10). From providing gay tourism, establishing gay bars and pubs, and displaying the rainbow flag throughout the cities, to providing legal rights and protections for LGBTQ individuals and same-sex marriage and civil union. However, as I establish in chapter III, this tolerance discourse towards LGBTQ is put in nationalist terms that validate discrimination against people conceived as outside that national identity, namely postcolonial people or people from "Third World" countries (see Butler 2008; Puar 2007; Ritchie 2010). We saw in Chapter II that tolerance, conceived as an American and European value, is established around sexuality and sexual dissidents, which enables homosexuality to be both a way to show the modernity and progress of a nation and also as a means to distinguish those who have managed to embody American and European values from those who have not. Calls and claims of homosexual liberation have been relocated from the sidelines of the countercultural to

the center of many countries' national discourse, and have become a principal constituent in the fashioning of these nations as progressive and human-right oriented. Homosexual and women's rights rhetoric have played significant roles in discourses and policies redefining modernity in sexual terms. In terms of multiculturalism as it relates to my dissertation, the familial and social positions of Arab women in the host community, for instance, is often employed as a tool to assess the integration of the community into the host society (see Yorukoglu 2014; and Hearly 2015), and as I show in Chapter I (part II, p. 32), this is reinforced with public and social policies to promote integration and strengthen social cohesion. Such policies view gender-related measures as a key issue in the integration process, and so gender-related details, such as protecting Arab women from domestic violence, become important factors in the integration policies. This, as I have shown through various discourses used by politicians in addressing integration and immigration, places the state in the role of a protector of its people, especially its minorities, and their rights and beliefs. Within this discourse, women and LGBTQ minorities in immigrant Arab communities need protection from their ethnic and religious communities, and this protection has been applied internationally and used as a justification for military advancements and furthering political goals.

III. Going back to integration as the final factor addressed in my chapters, the integration of immigrants is a highly debated topic in politics today. Sexual identity has risen as a main constituent in the discourse of equality where the integration of Arab and Muslim immigrants is employed in opposition to gay rights. For instance, Geert Wilders, the Dutch leader of the Party for Freedom made a statement in June 2017 that “the freedom that gay people should have – to kiss each other, to marry, to have children – is exactly what Islam is fighting against” (Solomon, *The New Yorker*). Such statements have been repeated by several politicians in the U.S. and

across Europe, as for instance U.S. President Donald Trump during his campaign when he spoke out against “immigration policies that bring Islamic extremists to our country who suppress women, gays and anyone who doesn’t share their views” (Diamond, CNN). France is also another European country among many that has seen a rise in calls to “defend Jews and gays against Arab immigrants” (Cohen, The New York Times). Such statements imply that Arab and Muslim immigrants are incapable of accepting sexual minorities or protecting them against discrimination. Such cultural differences reinforce the stereotypical assumptions that ultimately lead to the reasoning and exacerbation of the outlawing and surveillance of certain populations. For, as Judith Butler warns, queer communities are being used as tools to advance political goals (2013). The European Union and the U.S. and Canada, as I have discussed in Chapter III, are emphasizing tolerance towards homosexuality in their hegemonic discourses as a national value, and “right wing liberal policies give anti-homophobic struggles a nationalist and racist standpoint by pointing at certain cultures as intolerant and homophobic and thus disarticulating possible alliances between sexuality, class, and migration activists” (Haritaworn et al. 71). Such policies have thus made it increasingly difficult for Arab and Muslim immigrants and refugees “who are forced into the frontline of the artificially constructed gay v. Muslim divide, to contest sexual oppression in Muslim communities” (Haritaworn et al. 95).

Another example to such policies is the citizenship test, which I have discussed in Chapter I. The presence of specific questions, such as questions about one’s ability to accept LGBT individuals in society, indicates that tolerance of homosexuality is now part of a state and a people’s national identity and that excluding or civilizing the homophobic immigrant is a necessity for the protection of a state’s cultural values and tradition of LGBTQ friendliness. The homonormativity employed here “anesthetizes queer communities into passively accepting

alternative forms of inequality in return for domestic privacy and the freedom to consume” (Manalansan 142). Islamophobic rhetoric is employed to attain credibility and normalize “gay and lesbian human rights, which produce [...] gay-friendly and not-gay-friendly nations” (Puar 2007: xiv). This does not indicate a progress in gender and sexuality politics but a regression in racial politics (Haritaworn et. al. 79). Gay rights are increasingly being used in nationalist, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric which provides challenges for the queer solidarity advertised and called for by these nations (see Haritaworn 2008; Jivraj 2011; and Kuntsman 2013). In the case of Arab immigrants and refugees, not only political policies and events such as the citizenship test, but also academic and media productions about gay Muslims are “controlled by white people who determine which Muslims participate, what kind of questions they get to answer, and how their contributions are edited. Ironically, Muslim gays are invited to speak only when they give their voices up to white people, who can then appear to generously give it back to them” (Kuntsman and Esperanza 76). Arab and Muslim gay immigrants and refugees are given a voice as long as they mute or repudiate their Arabness and adopt the American or European values (Ritchie 2010). As Chandra Talpade Mohanty observed, European and American nations become interested in Orientalized sexual regimes only when it serves the development of their own culture (1984).

Arab Refugees and Sexual Citizenship

Sexual citizenship as a term has been developed by Evans (1993), Weeks (1998), Bell and Binnie (2000), and Richardson (2000) in criticism of dominant theories of citizenship that often did not recognize citizenship as gendered and sexualized. Discourses on sexual citizenship, however, often continue to fail in addressing the daily structural inequalities faced by queer

people of color, risking sustaining “the exclusionary potential within the very notion of citizenship which it takes for granted” (Cossman 244). As such, citizenship continues to be seen as positive and desirable, a notion deeply rooted in liberal democracy despite knowing well that access to structural power is unevenly distributed. I aimed to provide in my dissertation a reading and analysis of citizenship for the Arab immigrant and refugee that does not simply comprises sexuality, but that also takes into account that not all queer bodies are affected similarly by citizenship policies and the process of integration. The queer Arab body can be a site of liberation as well as repression, and clothing, especially for Muslim women, carries multiple meanings and significances (chapter III). And ultimately the dominant community assigns identities to the Arab and Muslim body (el-Tayeb 171), which in turn are associated with the community forming it into “a coherent community only by the discourse about them” (El-Tayeb 84).

The four novels and three films and web productions I have analyzed in this dissertation all portray varying experiences of discrimination and trauma experienced by queer Arab immigrants and refugees in Europe, the U.S. and Canada, as their national identities continue to be regarded as obstacles preventing them from fully integrating into the dominant liberal queer community. Queer Arab immigrants and refugees, and queer Muslims, are gradually coming to the realization that the intersectionality of their sexual orientations with their Arab identities are problematic for them in the West as they encounter prejudice and lack of acceptance from the mainstream LGBTQ population (Gray et al. 2015). In addition to navigating these various social spheres, refugees must grapple with potential conflicting pressures to acculturate and assimilate to American culture, while still maintaining their cultural or ethnic heritage (Gray et al. 2015). LGBT Arab refugees are also encountering difficulties interacting with different social groups

and communities, for they are often not welcomed or accepted in many ethnic communities. They may be discouraged, then, from accessing the support that might typically be provided to immigrants and refugees in Arab communities, such as family members, or in the LGBT communities, such as organizations and non-profit services, whether on account of hostility and violence they might have encountered or due the perception of being unwelcome (Gray et al. 2015).

LGBTQ Arab refugees also face daunting challenges negotiating a system that questions the authenticity of their sexual identity. These questions of legitimacy are constructed by consistently evaluating bodily appearances, conduct, and narratives to determine their suitability in Western homonationalist sexual categories (Puar, 2007). These modes of evaluation and investigation of the queer refugee's body across spaces and times create significant challenges for the refugees placed within the determination process (Murray 29). Queer Arab refugee claimants, then, become classified by the legislators and foreign governments as either unworthy claimants or as poor victims begging to be saved from the tyranny of their own cultures, communities, and nations. Sexual-orientation persecution, like gender persecution, as deployed in refugee discourse, can function as a deeply racialized, culturally essentialist concept in that it requires Arab LGBTQ people to separate their experiences of sexual violence from their experiences as colonized people (Murray 24). Their application for asylum often entails generating a racialist and colonialist discourse that critiques their native state "while participating in an adjudication process that often depends on constructs of an immutable identity refracted through reified colonialist models of culture shorn of all material relations" (Luibheid 179). To add, as mainstream LGBTQ groups and human rights organizations seek to support queer refugees, they may inadvertently utilize the refugees' statements and claims in ways that sustain

homonationalist discourses that preserve “a narrow concept of diversity defined in terms of freedom and choice ... that not incidentally chime with a neoliberal free market ideology whose inherent exclusions are harder to name” (Murray 29). Nevertheless, as refugees encounter homophobia and racism in their daily lives, the homonationalist discourse will expose the selective dynamics of asylum procedures and interpretations, as well as the role they play in supporting the privileges of neoliberal states (Goldberg 2008). But what is more important is the exclusion of the histories of imperialism, colonialism, and racism from queer refugees’ narratives of sexual identity formation and migration that “we are not able to see how these systems of domination produce and maintain violence against racialized sexual minorities both within and beyond national borders” (Goldberg 2008, qtd. Murray 24).

Social Cohesion and Democracy

I have addressed in Chapter I three dominant perspectives on social cohesion: the “Durkheimian” approach, the social capital emphasis, and the multicultural and cosmopolitan models. The Durkheim approach thus suggests individualism as a defining feature of modernity (Yorukoglu 40), while social capital states that for a society to be successfully cohesive, the members of that society must cooperate, which in turn presumes a general consensus, or agreement, among its members over basic values, while at the same time equally emphasizing “the phenomenon of multi-membership” (Giddens 109). The main characteristic of multiculturalism or cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, is that they positively valorize difference. These perspectives, however, either presume minorities as people belonging to entities separate from the majority or the dominant community, or take for granted the liberal interpretation of democracy and citizenship by states such as the U.S., Canada, and some

European countries.

Chantal Mouffe proposes a more practical democracy that aims to make a rational consensus on immigration and social cohesion possible (2005). The city in which immigrants reside and its inhabitants, along with the state all affect immigrants and individuals who come from migrant families. Immigrants and those with migrant backgrounds in turn reshape and redefine the space and the city in which they live and the different levels of belonging to that space. I have established in chapter one and reiterated in the following chapter the already-established argument that the definition of the self and other will always remain codependent and mutually constitutive (Mandel 101). For that reason, other understandings and interpretations of social cohesion must be adopted in public discourse, for there should not exist only two concepts of cohesion associated with democracy: the romantic and abstract idea of humanity and the more national idea of the traditional and separated nation states. It is in fact possible to have alternative readings of democracy and citizenship (Mouffe 2005).

Richard Sennett writes that “Western civilization” continues to refuse accepting and naturalizing pain and suffering as inevitable experiences: “Wholeness, oneness, coherence: these are key words in the vocabulary of power” (25). The denial of conflict, ambiguity, antagonism and anxiety in favor of idealized characteristics such as social cohesion “has affected not only our sense of being with others but also the sense of our being among others” (Yorukoglu 96). And as Mouffe argues, the real threat to democracy is the rejection of antagonism in character and the adoption of a universal rational consensus (22). By abandoning social cohesion and coherence as a concept or a goal to attain, only then, Yorukoglu and Mouffe argue, can “we can reclaim our sense of being ordinary, thereby expressing our solidarity with those whose experiences are in conflict with ours” (96).

The future of queer Arabs internationally

The postcolonial is inhabiting global queer space and time. In the countries that were once colonized and oppressed by the same people who are now working to liberate them from the restraints of their cultures and traditions, people are discerning within the global queer discourse the same orientalist representations of Arab sexuality and myopic chauvinism about the superiority of European and American configurations of sexuality. The globalization of notions of gay and lesbian identities has thus been met with resistance by post-colonial nations. Queer ideology is seen as a mean to “successfully subordinate Arabs to foreign Western sexual categories and identities” (Ritchie 362). The international pressure to follow such human rights principles does not seem to work, particularly when many in the Arab world see such principles as an imposition. The human rights discourse has also proven to be epistemically injurious to Arabs and utilized politically in Israeli and American democracies to serve ethno-nationalist agendas. However, the very emphasis on the lands that were once colonized imposes the binary of Us/Others, where history continues to define the past and future and the bodies that once inhabited that space. The continuity of a normative timeline becomes thus interrupted by the increasing weight of the past, “and the diminishing future which creates a new emphasis on the present” (Romanow 144).

Competing demands of queer representations are gradually leading to the shaping of hybrid queer identities. But queer Arabs remain in limbo as they are “shamed locally (when socio-moral codes are publically violated) and globally (for being too gay or not gay enough). [They] are proverbially damned if they do and dammed if they don’t” (Mourad 254). There is an urgent need for the queer Arab immigrant and refugee to take part in the altering of the pride discourse to accommodate them and the emergence of queer Muslim identities in societies amid

vitriolic political debates on the presence of Islam in the American and European world. Thus, queer Arabs and queer Muslims struggle for due recognition from mainstream societies and the overwhelmingly secular queer communities in diaspora. This reveals the limits of liberal multiculturalism, where, in the case of queer Arabs, religion, sexuality, and culture conflict in multicultural late capitalist societies. In order for LGBTQ Arab immigrants and refugees, especially Muslim Arabs, to be fully integrated in foreign societies, it is necessary for queer Arabs and queer Muslims to be integrated into the normative lives of Muslim and queer communities. Providing the necessary interaction, no matter how miniscule, of Muslims with other subcultures and communities, will lead to the “redefining” of those communities (Hunt 2015). However, queer Arab immigrants and refugees, Muslim or otherwise, will continue to face challenges as long as the Arab culture and Islam are not integrated into the lives of mainstream countries.

LGBTQ communities residing in the Middle East, who continue to mistrust LGBTQ ideologies as mere agendas, regard lesbian and gay Arab refugees as fallen victims to westernization and foreign influence. The gay identity becomes even more synonymous with westernization, and gay rights become a symbol of recolonization. The gay refugee is shown as serving foreign liberal ideals and a supporter of capitalist values, as they are shown on international media outlets marching in gay pride parades and getting married to partners of the same sex, thereby living the American and European dream of being ‘out’ and ‘proud’. International actors within this discourse promote the model of the globalized queer identity while failing to ask whether a sexual orientation internationally comprises a central aspect of personhood. This is a particularly important question where people from varying cultures view the intersections between sexual desire, behavior, and identity differently. From the queer

discourse that prompts international gay rights as part of international human rights came the assumption that increased visibility is a successful formula for combating homophobia, heterosexism, and misconceptions about LGBTQ people, but such visibility can prove dangerous. Current queer politics present coming out as a requirement for queer belonging and frame the discussion of LGBTQ human rights in the international context that deems a visible coming out expression of sexual identity essential for the progress of international LGBTQ rights. That method has proven to be unsuccessful in many postcolonial cultures, for, as a replacement for the relationship between identity, conduct, and expression, queer pride becomes a political instrument in building a community, rather than a personal choice. This present model of gay civil rights is problematic not only because it relies on an overly constrictive form of identity, but also because it alienates the very people such rights are supposed to protect. Many activists and scholars internationally are working to expose the logic of dominant queer ideologies as mechanisms that have enabled the reproduction and perpetuation of oppressive and racist ideologies as well as oppressive patriarchal and heteronormative practices. But for the time being, Arab queer immigrants seem bound to a constant struggle for identity in the face of the various postcolonial borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1999). Gabriel Garcia Marquez said it best in his Nobel prize acceptance speech:

It is only natural that they insist on measuring us with the yardstick that they use for themselves, forgetting that the ravages of time are not the same for all, and that the quest of our own identity is just as arduous and bloody as it was for them. The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own serves to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary.

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