

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

IS THERE A GAY INTERNATIONAL?
AN ANALYSIS OF HOMOSEXUALITY ON LEBANESE
MUSALSALAT

by
HEATHER RADWAN JABER

A thesis
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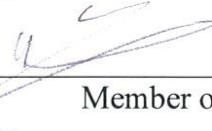
by
HEATHER RADWAN JABER

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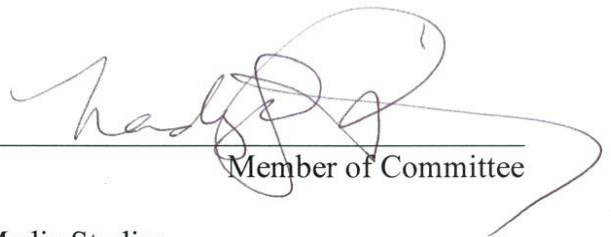
Dr. May Farah, Assistant Professor
Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Media Studies

Advisor



Dr. Hatim El-Hibri, Assistant Professor
Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Media Studies

Member of Committee



Dr. Nadya Sbaiti, Assistant Professor
Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies
Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Media Studies

Member of Committee

Date of thesis/dissertation defense: May 11, 2016

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Heather Radwan Jaber for Master of Arts
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This study examines three Lebanese *musalsalat*, *Min Kol Albi* (Al-Jadeed), *Ajyal* (MTV), and *Ichk Al Nisaa* (LBCI), and argues that homosexuality is represented as a national “other.” As media spectacles expose a discourse of the homosexual as a societal threat, there are new implications for emerging melodramatic portrayals dealing with homosexuality. Scholarship on sexuality in the Arab region recognizes a discourse questioning the authenticity or foreignness of such a sexuality at all. While one reading may suggest that new portrayals represent homosexuality as incompatible with the region, another offers that it is hypervisibilized as a destabilizing, foreign sexuality in the quest for national consolidation. In the same vein, media panics in the region centered around gender, sexuality, and authenticity offer insight into discourses of the nation and the “other,” drawing parallels to fictional portrayals of the homosexual. As melodrama affords a moral legibility and presents a portrayal of “how things should be,” homosexuality presents not only a contrast to hegemonic masculinities, but to hegemonic nationalisms as well.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

In locally-produced Arab media, where it is rare to find physical expressions of love or desire, the representation of sexuality remains an underdeveloped area of research. Portrayals of normative or non-normative desire are more often found in literature, with physical acts of intimacy reserved for foreign media (Mourad, 2013). Although the Lebanese media landscape is considered to be among the freest in the region (Freedom House, 2015), homosexuality is commonly presented as comic relief or social threats to heterosexual men, to broader society, and the nation.

Any discussion of sexuality cannot be isolated from the tropes of the nation and its historical identity (Aghacy, 2009), especially one that deals with its representation in the media. Contextualizing this to discussions of the Middle East—and more specifically Lebanon—recognizes a discourse about the region questioning the authenticity or foreignness of such a sexuality at all. With debates on the use of sexual terminology, the origins of sexual knowledge production, and broader construction of sexuality itself, the discussion of homosexuality in the region is tied up in dialectics of the East and the West, the domestic and the foreign, and often, the authentic and inauthentic. With moral panics in the region over sex and the body occurring in conversation with the nation, an analysis of the representation of non-normative desires

must take into account similar efforts to consolidate a national image through the use of such binaries. While there are scholars who argue that homosexuality as an identity is the product of Western imperialism¹, one must problematize the host of forces that shape the discussion of homosexuality and its representation. It is with these specificities in mind that the representation of non-normative sexuality must take place, especially in a country with a “fundamental identity dilemma” (Kraidy, 1999, p. 3).

Emerging portrayals of homosexuality offer new insight into the ambiguity and complexity involved in discourses of sexuality in the region. Three programs in particular introduce a new kind of character to the Lebanese media landscape—one that is grappling with an alternative or non-normative sexuality. MTV’s *Ajyal*, or “Generations,” offers the story of Amelia, a mysterious woman from Canada who exhibits an “unnatural” interest in another woman. Al-Jadeed’s *Min Kol Albi*’s, or “With All My Heart,” introduces viewers to Samih, a married man grappling with what he exhibits as a “shameful” and “disgusting” preference for men. LBCI’s *Ichk Al Nisaa*, or “Women’s Love,” presents Nadim, who lives in France but attempts to navigate his sexuality in Lebanon amongst his family. These programs, through their use of

¹ Most notable is Joseph Massad (2007) for his analysis of Arab literature. His work draws on Edward Said’s (1978) *Orientalism* and Foucault’s (1978) incitement to discourse. Later in this research I problematize Massad’s discussion of the sexual subjectivities and identities of Arabs as ultimately products of Western imperialism. Although Massad does not claim that his analysis constructs a dialectic of authentic and inauthentic, I argue that his discussion of the “West” and “East” as two disparate forms as well as his claim that Western epistemology and Arab elite reaction were the sole defining forces on sexuality in the region strips Arabs of agency and constructs an argument based on an authentic and inauthentic form of sexuality.

melodrama, offer insight into not only discourses of homosexuality, but of the nation itself, a trope through which sexuality is heavily intertwined.

The discussion of sexuality in the region merits attention for its “provocative and polarizing effects” on “cross cultural dialogue in the Arab world and its Western counterparts” (El-Khatib, 2011, p. 5). While most research has focused on literature (Amer, 2012; El-Rouayheb, 2005; Massad, 2007; Najmabadi, 2005; Smith, 2012), much of this work uses archival resources to offer a historical analysis of sexuality in the region. While insightful, these are limited in their ability to discuss the contemporary landscape of sexuality. “For instance,” writes Sara Mourad (2013) “to what extent can the idealization of man boy love in classical poetry inform our understanding of the social experiences of self-identified gay men today?” (p. 2535).

While depictions of physical intimacy are scarce on any form of Arab media (Mourad, 2013), research on media representations of sexuality in Lebanon is even scarcer. Studies on the queer community focus on personal narratives (Georgis, 2013), ethnographic research (Merabet, 2014; McCormick, 2011), and the shifting language used to discuss sexuality (Mourad, 2013). Particularly, the tension involved in using English terms like “gay” or “lesbian,” translations of “homosexual” in the form of its Arabic counterpart “*mithliyyah*” based on Freudian psychoanalysis, or Arabic designations from classical literature (Mourad, 2013). Often demarcations arise—such

as distinctions between acts and identities—when discussing sexuality in an academic or a practical sense. This research recognizes the scholarship on sexuality in the region and opts for a discussion of homosexuality² and homosexual expressions rather than naming the homosexual as a subject. When analyzing these programs, it is apparent that each introduces a character which is dealing with their sexuality, whether through a “preference” for members of the same sex or through a desire for acceptance of this sexuality by family and friends. The term “homosexuality” is then used to interrogate the associated tropes which construct it as an “other” to the nation. Drawing on Gayatri Gopinath (2005), “queer” may then be used in the discussion of fluid conceptions of “practices and desires” which may not be encapsulated within identity categories. Rather than reinforcing categorical claims, “queer” then works against convention, offering new modes of thinking about a particular context.

The last few years have witnessed greater visibility of discussions of homosexuality on the most popular medium for entertainment in the region—television. While physical intimacy is portrayed more commonly in foreign programming, trends also show that demand for locally-produced as opposed to regional or global media content among Lebanese audiences is growing (Arab Media Outlook, 2012). If locally-produced television can “construct a national audience and create a shared cultural-political space” more effectively than print media, then the implications of the

² Khaled El-Rouayheb provides a discussion of the recognition of a premodern homosexual behavior or feeling as different from modern-day conceptions of homosexuality.

construction of the homosexual on Lebanese television are significant for their commentary on the nation.

In Lebanon, homosexuality is most commonly portrayed on socially-concerned talk shows, comedy programs, or *musalsalat*. If these *musalsalat*, or serialized dramatic narratives, through their use of melodrama, offer a “moral legibility” (Williams, 2014, p. 36) for audiences, what are the implications for the discussion of homosexuality in Lebanon? If melodrama is “the very engine of mass culture,” (Williams, 2014, p. 81) contrasting the way things are with how they could or should be (p. 84), how does the discussion of homosexuality fare? These melodramatic portrayals are also useful in their capacity to indicate subjects worthy of empathy through the failures of justice. If melodrama is a “dramatic convention in which timely social problems and controversies are addressed,” (Williams, 2014, p. 114) how do storylines dealing with homosexuality portray these social problems? This analysis will also offer insight into the dialectics of authenticity and “othering” in the discussion of homosexuality, using melodramatic conventions to highlight the constructions of injustice and failure, especially as related to the nation.

If the mass media offers the conditions for a collective imagination which “creates new modes of belonging and cultivates new networks of affinity” (Mourad, 2013), what are the implications of emerging representations of homosexuality on Lebanese television? To this researcher’s knowledge, there has been no work done on fictional depictions of homosexuality on Lebanese television. With an increased visibility of discussions of homosexuality in the media, more work should be done to detect shifts in discourse and align them with trends in the nation and region. The implicit and explicit storylines on drama programs merits further examination.

The Media Landscape

When asked about my research topic by a host of colleagues, family members, and friends, the most overwhelmingly common question I encountered was a resounding, “What homosexuals³ on Lebanese TV?” The visibility of homosexuality or any type of sexual “deviance” is not widespread in “the visual or verbal landscape” of the region’s mass media (Mourad, 2013), indicating the implications for the few fictional portrayals which have emerged over the last half of a decade. In these same few years, Lebanon has been host to developments in LGBTQ rights and activism. At the same time, as discussions of persecution seem to be gaining exposure, they exist in parallel to stereotypical portrayals of hypersexualized homosexual men as comedic relief, as well as media spectacles involving the publicized violation and arrests of alleged homosexuals. It is within this context that new dramatic portrayals of homosexual characters have made their way to airwaves.

Perhaps the most prevalent representations or discussions of homosexuality on Lebanese television are present on talk shows and comedy sketches, as mentioned. The talk shows organize a televised discussion of the concept of homosexuality, mainly framing the subject as taboo or a fad. With titles like “Homosexuality: Fashion Trend or

³ This researcher recognizes the debate on the use of the term “homosexual,” which will be discussed in a later chapter.

Illness⁴” or “The Homosexual Crime,⁵” talk shows associate homosexuality with threats to social security or being a fad. A panel of “experts,” which often includes a religious figure, a social scientist, and a lawyer or activist discusses homosexuality while a guest who identifies as homosexual (usually with a blurred face) is interviewed. The discussion here is framed around “concern over wellbeing” (Mandour, 2013).

Alternatively, satirical comedy programs often include a portrayal of a homosexual man, one who is often portrayed as hypersexual, a threat to heterosexual men, and lacking in political inclinations or opinions. Largely, they are portrayed the same way, as comedic devices built on the stereotypical conception of the flamboyant, effeminate homosexual. They often use explicit language and make jokes about rape or homosexuality (Mandour, 2013). With these types of characters portrayed during primetime on the most watched television networks, their visibility and legibility presents a safe “other” for Lebanese audiences.

On these very same networks, fictional drama programs offer new narratives or storylines dealing with homosexuality. Rather than appearing as caricatures or blurred faces, characters attempt to navigate their sexuality in Lebanon. The *musalsal*, or Arab drama serial, is a popular format in Lebanon and the region, occupying primetime slots following the evening news. In its use of melodrama, the *musalsal* can be viewed as a

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmTsjrjZC7M>

⁵ <http://www.bekhsos.com/2010/10/what-did-you-think-of-the-ntv-and-ftv-shows-on-homosexuality-in-lebanon/>

tool of “social development, national consolidation, and ‘modernization’” (Abu-Lughod, 2008, p. 112), providing grounds for analysis of the complexities involved in defining the nation. These melodramatic storylines indicate a utopianism which affords a moral legibility predicated on suffering, and pits good against evil and justice against injustice (Williams, 2014). If the *musalsal* presents viewers with “how things are and how they could or should be” (Williams, 2014, p. 84), what does this mean for not only the portrayal of homosexuality on Lebanese television, but for the nation itself?

What sets Lebanon apart from the rest of the region is the heterogeneity of its population, and thus the lack of effective⁶ “protectionist measures against threats of Western cultural imperialism” which may be found in other Arab nations (Kraidy, 2000, p. 8). A “Western cultural identity” among a part of the population has led to the popularity of foreign programming, usually of a Western variety. Kraidy points out that while diversity in civic discourse can be progressive, it is not without its drawbacks:

It is a blessing because a multiplicity of discourses prevents authoritarianism and stimulates democratic political activity. It is a curse because changes in national, regional, or global politics can trigger upheavals ranging from economic instability to political tension to armed conflict. (Kraidy, 2000, p. 3)

Lebanon’s new era of openness to Western intervention and the promotion of a “unique ‘modern’ Lebanon” under late Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri witnessed the growth of new civic movements calling for personal and sexual freedoms (Mandour,

⁶ Al-Manar, the network affiliated with Hezbollah, offers an example of an effort to apply protectionist measures against Western imperialism. Still, the impact is limited when considering the existence of six other privately-owned television networks.

2013). This path to “openness” led to both greater tolerance for discussions about sexuality and heightened moral policing of sexual freedoms (Mandour, 2013). The opening of new gay bars existed—and still exists—in parallel to the sexual policing of a society which largely regards homosexuality as a disorder and threat, and believes that laws are necessary to limit the number of homosexuals in the population (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015). This tension between both a relative openness and conservatism toward homosexuality highlights the “amalgam of contrasts and contradictions” inherent in society and onscreen (Darwich, 2009, p. 76).

The Legal Landscape

Although Beirut’s status as a liberal retreat from the chaotic Middle East is widespread, many citizens debate that title (McCormick, 2011). The region now largely maintains the prohibition of homosexuality by law, with penalties ranging across countries from harassment to arrest to death. Lebanon’s legal stance on homosexuality is reflected in Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal code, which prohibits “unnatural sexual intercourse” (Makarem, 2011). Two recent rulings in 2009⁷ and 2014⁸ have called to attention the problematic nature of the term “unnatural” in Article 534. The 2014 ruling also showed that 2009 had not been an isolated case, but instead constituted

⁷ In 2009, Judge Mounir Sleiman found that consensual sex was not considered “unnatural.”

⁸ In 2014, a transgender woman was acquitted for having “unnatural” sex based on her own perception of her gender. This ruling was similar to the 2009 ruling, showing that it was not an isolated case.

a seminal ruling in the case of homosexuality in Lebanon⁹. While the recent ruling that dismissed article 534 was viewed as a triumph for the LGBT community in Lebanon (The Economist, 2014), suspected homosexuals are still subject to institutionalized homophobia (El-Shenawi, 2013). Men accused of being homosexual are also reportedly still being subjected to arrests and anal examinations despite the Lebanese Order of Physicians banning such practices, which they have labeled as torture¹⁰ (Rainey, 2014).

Laws have not officially changed, and arrests may still be made on the basis of appearance or mannerisms (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015). In fact, in between these rulings, two publicized incidents involved the harassment, arrest, and abuse of allegedly homosexual men and a transsexual woman. It is amongst these advancements and setbacks that emerging storylines dealing with homosexual characters have made their way to primetime Lebanese television.

A Shift in Discourse?

In 2012, the heavily mediated Cinema Plaza case marked a significant event in the discussion of homosexuality in Lebanese media, taking part in the cause of what may be viewed as “one of the worst cases of human rights violations in recent history” (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015). The case was noteworthy for the amount of televised debate and media backlash it sparked about the issue of institutional homophobia (Mandour, 2013),

⁹ <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/18900>

¹⁰ While men have been subject to this practice, this is not the case for women, as “unnatural sex” is used to refer to intercourse between men rather than between two women.

as well as MTV's alleged involvement in the arrests of the men.¹¹ The year after, a police raid of a gay night club in an eastern Beirut suburb under the orders of its mayor saw the arrests of allegedly homosexual men and a transsexual woman.¹² This case notably found MTV's Joe Maalouf this time defending human rights and expressing outrage over the arrests of the men, only to be fired from his post thereafter. These media spectacles highlight the shifts in discourse that might be brought about by such visible violations, but also the limitations of such discourse.

They also show how sexuality can become not only public concern, but national concern, prompting the mediated securitization of the body. These cases draw parallels to the 2001 Queen Boat raid¹³ in Cairo, which saw allegedly homosexual men detained, linked to globalization, and hypervisibilized "in a wave of moral panic" (Amar, 2013). In Egypt, where economic globalization occurs in the name of modernization yet a fear of a cultural assault from these subjects who represent "colonial penetration" to the nation, similarities can be drawn to Lebanon's context.

In the past decade, there has been an increase in activism for sexual and gender

¹¹ The story featured secret video footage of men engaging in sexual activities and watching pornography in an abandoned cinema, and was broadcast on MTV's tabloid show "*Enta Horr*" ("You Are Free"). The show's anchor, Joe Maalouf, called on religious clerics and police to put a stop to these activities, expressing disgust with the men's actions. Police subsequently raided the cinema, arrested the men for "having unnatural sex," and enforced the "anal test" to determine their guilt (Mandour, 2013).

¹² The detainees were forced to strip, were photographed, and forced to simulate intimate acts. Some of those detained were Syrian, making them more vulnerable to Lebanese national authorities and larger society. (Mandour, 2013).

¹³ The Queen Boat raid in Cairo involved the arrest of 52 Egyptian men from a gay tourism boat by Egyptian police. This case will be discussed in a later chapter.

rights in Lebanon, including positive media coverage and heightened visibility of landmark achievements (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015). During this time, Lebanon has been host to shifts in the language newspapers use when discussing homosexuality, removing terms like “deviance” and “perversion” from the conversation (Mandour, 2013). Still, this does not necessarily constitute a shift in the discourse of sexuality. The Cinema Plaza case and others like it beg the question of whether mediated discourse on homosexuality has truly witnessed a shift in the past few years. Controversial issues like homosexuality are often framed around the concept of “social readiness,” a problematic term, as it “flattens out historical and contextual specificities and contingencies,” (Mandour, 2013). Rather than a shift in attitudes, the Cinema Plaza case was significant for the amount of conversation generated, particularly around the concept of institutionalized homophobia (Moussawi, 2012; Farrell, 2012). Even more significant was its status as an issue of public and national concern (Hoballah, 2012), pitting the arrested subjects as threats to the public for their “indecent” acts (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015).

This research will analyze language and the semiotic aspects of the text which are used to construct the storylines. Apart from a semiotic textual analysis, it uses critical discourse analysis to connect these storylines to larger power structures. As melodramatic storylines are often concerned with how things should be, critical discourse analysis is useful for its recognition of power inequalities and imbalances. At this particular political, historical, and social moment, what do the emerging portrayals of homosexuality—which both inform and are informed by Lebanese society—say about existing power relations? With what appears to be an increased visibility of storylines dealing with homosexuality on *musalalat* existing alongside the policing of the body in reality, what are the power structures in our social system which render

these representations visible in their current form? May these stories be read as ultimately inauthentic or “Western” constructs, following the work of scholars like Massad (2007), or perhaps the product of something more “local”? If so, what are the implications for such linkages? This analysis will link the portrayals to moral panics in the country and region and attempt to examine how they become linked to a discussion of authenticity, failure, and the nation.

The following section will provide an overview of Lebanon’s media landscape, identifying key players and events involved in the discussion of homosexuality. The visibility of storylines, narratives, or discussions relating to homosexuality will be discussed, focusing on the Cinema Plaza media spectacle. This will be followed by an overview of scholarship on sexuality in the region. In particular, Massad’s view on homosexuality will be discussed, along with critics of the Gay International. An overview of moral panics in the region relating to sexuality will follow, highlighting discourses of authenticity and the nation. As many of these panics express anxieties over less rigid conceptions of gender or sexuality, the trope of masculinity will be discussed. I also introduce Raymon Williams’ concept structures of feeling, as it is useful for discussions which exist as transitory modes of thought, emerging but not constituting official shifts in discourse. Finally, a discussion of melodrama and the *musalsal* will follow, to theorize how they create a legibility of “how things are, and how they could and should be,” (Williams, 2014, p. 84) particularly relating to the representation of homosexuality.

Chapter II

LEBANON'S MEDIA LANDSCAPE

In the Lebanese television industry, a variety of entertainment formats dominate primetime, including talkshows, comedy programs, and *musalsalat*, or serialized narratives of Arab television (Sakr, 2007). All three of these networks feature discourses of homosexuality on social talk shows, comedy programs, and *musalsalat*. This research focuses on the dramatic portrayals of homosexuality, while recognizing that other genres contribute to dominant discourses. These drama programs are popular throughout the region, drawing the most advertising dollars of all pan-Arab television genres (Chahine, El Sharkawy, & Mahmoud, 2007 as cited in Kharroub & Weaver, 2014). *Musalalat* gained appeal through their association with the Muslim month of Ramadan (Sakr, 2007), although they now air on networks year-round. The programs were born with the television industry in the 1960s, but after the rise of satellite programming in the early 2000s, they became subject to the pressures of other popular formats on primetime television. As such, *musalsalat* became yet another popular format along with reality TV and gameshows dealing with the same economic pressures (Salamandra, 2005).

An analysis of Lebanese television programs requires careful consideration of its unique media landscape. Institutionalized sectarianism is evident in the ownership of the country's seven major privately-owned television networks. Coupled with moves towards liberalization, privatization, and "modernization" since the 1990s (Mandour, 2013), a complicated web of political, economic, and social constraints governs Lebanon's media content. Lebanon's highly fragmented civil society is reflected in its media scene, with each channel catering to a specific sect or political party. Content

diversity occurs across rather than within the media outlets themselves, though some stations are expanding their programming palettes “to reach beyond their traditional partisan audiences and thereby attract more advertising” (El-Richani, 2013). During the political vacuum that characterized Lebanon’s civil war, various political factions launched dozens of unlicensed private television networks (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009). In 1994, the post-war government headed by Rafiq Hariri enacted the Audiovisual Media Law 382, which authorized six new licenses for broadcasting. The law saw the enactment of the National Audio-Visual Council (NAVC), which was responsible for licensing and monitoring the networks but today “remains a toothless body with only consultative, rather than executive powers” (El-Richani, 2011). The Audiovisual Law is seen to have reinforced the confessional system, as it saw society’s sectarianism institutionalized in television ownership.

To date, there are seven privately owned television stations in Lebanon and one state-owned station (TeleLiban). The top three stations are LBCI, MTV, and Al-Jadeed (IPSOS, 2016; Northwestern University in Qatar, 2013; AUB, 2014)¹⁴. LBCI and MTV were among the initial four stations to receive licenses in 1996, while Al-Jadeed obtained its license in 2000. LBCI is Lebanon’s top major network and first broadcaster of satellite programming. Along with Al-Jadeed, it enjoys greater independence and a

¹⁴ While a lack of transparency regarding audience viewership exists to some extent throughout the region (Sakr, 2007), these three networks consistently cited as the top networks across various sources.

more diverse audience than other channels that are owned by political factions rather than businessmen (Mandour, 2013). MTV and Al-Jadeed are the other two leading networks in Lebanon (IPSOS, 2016). While LBCI remains the most popular television network, both MTV and Al-Jadeed have outranked it before (Mandour, 2013).

Both MTV and Al-Jadeed have, in the recent past, attempted to detach from their coalitions and have been left without a license (Al Jadeed) or shut down (MTV), pointing to the precarious nature of Lebanese television's political economy (El-Richani, 2013, p. 77). The channels became tied up in the complicated web of political and financial ties relating to Syria's military occupation in the country and financial support from Saudi Arabia (Sakr, 2007, p 42). This highlights how political strife undermined the Audiovisual Law of 1994 and negatively impacted two major networks, in opposition to the very protections the law was meant to ensure (p. 43).

MTV, or MurrTV, which caters to a mainly Greek Orthodox community and is owned by the Al-Murr family (El Richani, 2013), was shut down in 2002 for its critical stance against President Lahoud's pro-Syrian policy (Notzold, 2006). This was surprising to audiences from all sects, as MTV's entertainment programming was relatively popular. Ultimately, the shutdown was viewed as a violation of Lebanon's Audiovisual Law, which sought to bar such political manipulation (Sakr, 2007, p. 43). The channel re-opened in 2009, and is today perceived as the best channel in terms of entertainment for Lebanese viewers (AUB, 2014). Viewership of MTV is directly proportional to income, suggesting that those with a higher standard of living tend to tune into this network (AUB, 2014). The network was involved in a media spectacle which saw the arrest of alleged homosexuals in a theater in Lebanon after they prompted law enforcement to act. MTV was criticized for its involvement in one of the

most publicized violations of alleged homosexuals in Lebanon's recent past. The media spectacle and MTV's involvement will be discussed in a later section.

In 2010, the network began airing *Ajyal* ("Generations"), which featured the rare portrayal of a woman who falls in love with another woman. A second season aired two years later, although Carla Boutros was not part of the cast. In 2011, MTV introduced two stereotypical, effeminate characters, Majdi and Wajdi, to the comedy program *Mafi Metlo* ("There's None Like It"). The characters were not new, and had appeared on Future TV's *La Youmal* in the years prior. While these characters are portrayed through a relatively less political lens than other comedy shows in Lebanese media, they are hypersexualized and depicted as silly, but also threatening to heterosexual men.

Al-Jadeed, or New TV, has a reportedly Sunni Muslim affiliation and ownership by Hariri rivals (El-Richani, 2013), and, as such, was launched as the "station of the opposition," (Notzold, p. 228). New TV offers an example of the precarious nature of Lebanese political ownership. It was created prior to the Audiovisual Law but was denied a license under the leadership of the Hariri government. The channel, which was owned by businessman and critic of the Hariri government Tahsin Khayat, saw this decision reversed in 1999 under a government led by Selim al-Hoss, and reopened in 2001 (Sakr, 2007). It was one of the only channels to adhere to the audiovisual media law for local content, producing 40% of its own programs, including entertainment programming (p. 235). The channel is currently viewed as the best source for news by Lebanese viewers (AUB, 2014). Consumption of programs on Al-Jadeed is inversely related to income, meaning that those of a lower standard of living tend to watch shows on the network (AUB, 2014). As such, Al Jadeed

and MTV offer two polarities in Lebanese demographics and consumption of television. Al Jadeed, which has a traditional leftist and anti-imperial agenda, but has received criticism for reverting to sectarian, social, and professional conservatism (Mandour, 2013). Although the network airs coverage of topics like workers' rights and the Palestinian cause, it has approached matters like sexual and domestic abuse as trivial. Some attribute this to its "suburban conservative ethical background of its staff" (Mandour, 2013).

The comedy sketch, *Irbit Tinhel* ("The Solution is Near") is on this channel and it also features comedic commentary on the political climate of the country. The show features a sketch with Jiji, a flamboyant, hysterical character in the program who is often wearing pink clothing. In 2012, while Jiji was on air, the network aired the program *Min Kol Albi* ("With All My Heart"), which told the stories of Lebanese characters in a rural setting, including the character Samih whose homosexuality and infidelity is exposed after he is caught embracing the chauffeur.

LBCI, the leading station in Lebanon, is viewed as having a relatively "liberal-style" and is affiliated with the Maronite Christian community. The station was affiliated with the Lebanese Forces when it was created in 1985, catering to a mainly Christian audience. During the civil war, LBC attracted a more diverse audience as more Muslim viewers watched its programs (Notzold, 2009). This channel, along with MTV, has also been known for its new television show formats, particularly in its relatively recent adaptations of global reality television formats. Its entertainment programs are popular in the region, and it is known for its comparatively more risqué programming:

LBC's screen aesthetic reflects a socially liberal Lebanese ethos, characterized by ostensible mimicry of Western consumer lifestyles, slick production values,

informality in newscasts and talk-shows, language mixing between Arabic, French, and sometimes English, and, most importantly, the ubiquity of alluringly dressed women. (Kraidy, 2006)

As the Gulf is a lucrative and popular market in terms of advertising revenue (El-Richani, 2013), LBCI's corporate identity is seen to be in tension with the more traditional national identity of its target audience in Saudi Arabia (Kraidy, 2009), as it attempts to push the boundaries of acceptability in conservative Islamic society. Various content, like talk shows and entertainment programs, deal with controversial topics related to politics and culture (Notzold, 2009). While some talk shows on LBCI discuss taboo topics, they pander to a broad and mainly Gulf audience, broaching sensitive issues carefully so as to maintain wider appeal. Its introduction of reality TV to the Arab world marked a new wave of adapted global formats as well as local productions in the region.

In 2012, LBCI hired Khaled Saghie, brother of prominent Lebanese human rights lawyer Nizar Saghie, as head of the news department. Mandour (2013) suggests that with this move, LBCI took on a more progressive discourse in the way of sexuality and class, evidenced in part by its take on the Cinema Plaza case in 2012. In contrast to previous media discourse, their news bulletin targeted homophobia rather than homosexuality as a source of shame, although analysis does not suggest a shift in discourse was necessarily apparent. In 2013, LBC introduced the character Hader Nader to the comedy sketch *Bas Mat Watan* (a pun on "When The Nation Dies" and "The Nation's Smile"). Hader Nader, whose name translates to "always ready," is depicted as a stereotypically homosexual man who is effeminate, dresses in flamboyant outfits, and makes suggestive jokes about phallic objects. It is in this context that LBC's *Ichk Al Nisaa* was introduced to the airwaves in 2014, telling the story of a group of doctors and

friends navigating through infidelity, divorce, disease, and homosexuality.

In the following section, I will expand on the implications for the portrayals of homosexuality on *musalsalat*, first giving an overview on the nature of representation.

Chapter III

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following section will introduce the discourse which informs and is informed by representations of homosexuality in Lebanese *musalsalat*. Operational definition of sexual terminology will first be offered to highlight the tensions involved in naming desire. A discussion of representation and visibility will allow for an understanding of the factors which shape these storylines' introduction to the media. An overview of the work on sexuality in the region will follow, focusing on Joseph Massad's (2007) notion of the importation of homosexuality as an identity from the "West," as well as studies which complicate these potentially problematic claims. Tropes of masculinity and sexuality will be discussed, especially hegemonic ideals with inform mediated representations. While most research on homosexuality or homoeroticism in the region has focused on literature, several cases of media and moral panics relating to sexuality highlight the tensions which dictate the domestic and foreign, the authentic and inauthentic, and the "other," all which serve to consolidate a national image. These melodramatic programs occupy a significant place in Lebanese society, serving as indicators of what is legible and offering insight into dominant and alternative modes of thought. Melodrama's capacity to portray how things should and could be provides a means to discuss sexuality at a particular social, historical, and political moment.

Representation and the “Other”

An analysis of emerging storylines dealing with homosexuality lends itself to a discussion of how these subjects are represented. What symbols, codes, and values inform our understanding of homosexuality as represented in the media? Stuart Hall’s (1997) analysis of representation as “the production of meaning through language” (p. 2) is particularly useful in analyzing mass-mediated signs, as it recognizes this construction as active and meaningful rather than natural or accidental (p. 10). Hall argues that messages are encoded by senders and decoded by receivers, and that these moments are influenced by knowledge frameworks, relations of production, and the technical infrastructure, creating meaningful discourse (Hall, 1993, p. 94). This process requires analyzing mediated representations using material forms through which “symbolic meaning is circulated” (p. 9). At the denotative level of analysis, an event is portrayed, and at the connotative level, the meaning or message of that event is expressed (Hall, 1993). While the denotative level of analysis is usually more overt, the connotative level holds the ideological meaning. Connotation, or suggesting without saying, can then be viewed as the “representational and interpretive closet of mass culture queerness” (Doty, 1993, p. xv). He also explains how the televisual sign is complex in terms of comprising both visual and aural discourse (p. 95). This type of analysis acknowledges receivers of the message as active agents with their own interpretive abilities, therefore allowing for a certain degree of polysemy in texts rather than having one fixed meaning (Fiske, 1986).

Still, the presence of power “circulating through meanings and knowledge” means that the codes in texts are only significant “if they are to some degree shared” (Hall, 1997). Even though texts can have multiple layers of meaning, shared cultural

codes can be understood by analyzing dominant or preferred meanings in popular media. While various social situations may impact the message, taking a contextualized approach will allow for a more holistic analysis of homosexual representation. This approach allows for historical specificity, shedding light on “the way representational practices operate in concrete historical situations, in actual practice” (p. 6). In this way, representation lends itself to a discussion of the structures of feeling, or the ways in which meaning is “actively lived and felt” in a particular time and place (Williams, 1977, p. 132). This will be discussed further in a later section.

In discussing representations of homosexuality, I analyze the representation of the ‘other,’ which Hall contends is marked by their difference (p. 230). To effectively understand representations of the “other,” we must understand the systems of representation which create the subject as the other. Hall asks us to analyze the “discursive formations” or “repertoires or regimes of representation” in mediated representation of “difference” (p. 234). Representations of homosexuality can be read “against the grain,” and set against other texts through the process of “intertextuality,” which allows for a message to be “read in the context of other images” and texts (p. 232). In doing this, we can find the deeper meaning of representations, rather than taking them at face-value as singular events. Often, those represented as homosexual are constructed as the other, especially in Lebanese media, whether it is through a newscast or fictionalized representation. Deconstructing representations of the other is useful to this analysis, not only when we contextualize the various ways that homosexuality is represented in Lebanese media, but also how the “other” is constructed.

Visibility

If television is one of the most “gendered and sexualized repetition apparatuses of modern technoscience, the modern implantation of gendered and sexualized social time” (Villarejo, 2014, p. 7), then emerging representations of homosexuality on mainstream media can be thought of as part of this rhythmic process. If primetime television viewing indicates a joint domestication between family and the ritual of watching television, then family time is shaped by certain “processes of adoption” which include “[p]rocesses of recognition, expectation, remembrance, anticipation, repetition, [and] assimilation” (p. 80).

Although the following study seeks to contextualize emerging representations to Lebanon, a discussion of emerging portrayals on US media lends insight to the process of heightened visibility. Amy Villarejo (2014) suggests that Eve Sedgwick’s (1990) notion on the repetitive nature of coming out is reflected through this ritual of television. This reputation of calculation, decision, and utterance can be linked to the processes of adoption inherent in the temporalities of television itself. While dichotomies of “out/in” may not be the case for non-Western contexts (El-Ariss & Al-Samman, 2013), this attention to emerging visibility situates and complicates the “refashioning and reprocessing” depicted in the media and in reality.

These emerging portrayals may then constitute “shifts in representational protocols that expose the working through of significant cultural anxieties” (Davis & Needham, 2008, p. 9). Media discourses which accompany greater visibility of homosexuality often work to uncover anxieties about social changes. In his analysis of straight panic in the 1990s and 2000s, Ron Becker (2006) highlights the panic that ensued in US media when faced with the overturning of an anti-gay sodomy law. Some

media discourse juxtaposed sexual identity with marriage to highlight the alleged paradox of such a reconciliation, creating at once a blurred but also sharpened line between homosexuals and heterosexuals. This, for Becker, was partially the result of straight America confronting a shifting social landscape, in this case, of multiculturalism. While a Middle Eastern context presents different kinds of social anxieties, the nature of these kinds of panics in the face of social anxieties will be discussed in a later section.

Still, greater visibility does not necessarily bring about progress or negotiation in a linear progression. Alexander Doty (1993) also discusses “straight culture’s paradoxical rejection of queerness that is either too different or too similar” (p. 103). Of the Pee-Wee Herman theater scandal,¹⁵ Doty writes: “Applause for Reubens/Pee-wee was a way for people to show their hipness without committing themselves to doing much,” drawing parallels to mainstream Lebanese media discourse directly proceeding violations of alleged homosexual bodies. Becker suggests that rather than assuming greater visibility on network television is the direct result of debates on gay rights, one must take into account the scramble for demographics and the practice of narrowcasting. Greater visibility of homosexuals on network television “both reflected

¹⁵ Paul Reubens, who played comedic and childlike character Pee-wee Herman on US television in the 1980s, was charged with exposing himself in an adult movie theater in 1991.

and exacerbated” straight panic in reality and targeted “disproportionately affluent, loyal, and active consumers” (Doty, 1993, p. 81).

It may be more useful to discuss Latin American models for the representation of homosexuality as some scholars have discussed a “Mediterranean model”¹⁶ which argues for cultural specificity of sexualities in the Mediterranean and Latin American cultures, a view mirroring Massad’s controversial claim to Arab sexuality, to be discussed below. In Latin American countries in the 1970s, representations of homosexuality emerged amidst a sweeping discourse of libertarianism which encouraged social change at a faster rate than society could accept (Mira, 2000). What followed were representations which used homosexuality as a way to discuss other issues, like nationalism, or stereotypical comedic portrayals. Pairing these shallower representations with an emerging political movement premised on sexual freedom and resistance to categorization, yet a silence when the AIDs pandemic swept through the nations, it became clear that the Mediterranean model may be homophobic in its punishment of those who wished to assert gay identities. Furthermore, this mistrust of gay identities or claim of incompatibility “may just be another name for the closet” (Mira, 2000, p. 249).

¹⁶ The model suggests that homosexual identities, rather than practices, are inauthentic to Mediterranean cultures and serve as imports from the West.

Television: Institutionalized homophobia as taboo

In the same vein, the nature of the visibility of homosexuality is shifting on Lebanese television. The Cinema Plaza case of 2012 serves as a more recent “morality on television” affair, albeit one with a very different discourse. Rather than shaming homosexuality, media began shaming institutional homophobia (Mandour, 2013). The affair began after MTV’s “*Enta Horr*” (“You Are Free”), hosted by Joe Maalouf, aired episodes featuring footage of men watching pornography in abandoned cinemas in Beirut and Tripoli. The footage showed men engaging in sexual acts with one another or masturbating while watching pornography. Maalouf called out to Muslim and Christian clerics alike in the episode, and referred to the men as “perverts.” Almost a month after these episodes aired, 36 men were arrested at a pornographic cinema in Beirut and subsequently subjected to the “homosexuality tests” which involved rectal examinations. Some of the men were released a week later, with others charged under Article 534 of the Penal Code, which criminalizes “unnatural” sexual intercourse. Other news networks, such as Al-Jadeed and LBC, were quick to link these events to the MTV episodes, resulting in condemnations of MTV’s unethical reporting.

LBCI was vocal in its condemnation of the state, leading to various other outlets following suit. They criticized the state for policing sexuality when it could not provide the very basics for its citizens. MTV responded, blaming the attacks against them on conspiratorial forces at LBCI. A year later, when police forces raided a gay nightclub and arrested three homosexuals and a transsexual woman, MTV’s Joe Maalouf, in a drastic turn from previous discourse, condemned the abuse. His condemnation led to his removal from the show—allegedly, his criticism of the powerful mayor responsible for the arrests led to his firing. LBCI once again criticized

the police for their actions, further cementing what appeared to be a new discourse on the policing of sexuality by the state. The overall media coverage marked what appeared to be a shift in the discourse to one about the morality of homophobia to one about the morality of “taboo-ing homophobia” (Mandour, 2013, p. 8).

In her discussion of the increased visibility and potential shift in discourse of homosexuality in Lebanese media, Sahar Mandour (2013) suggests that while recent media spectacles and editorial decisions by mainstream media may indicate some sort of shift emerging, they do not constitute a shift in discourse. She refers to a neoliberal economy’s globalized discourse of human rights, an active civil society making advancements for the past decade, an increased use of social media platforms for activists and audiences to respond to media content, and newspaper journalists paving the way for discourse of sexual rights. For television networks especially, a main concern is to target a crowd which is active on social media. Of the more influential social media users, many are activists or adopt progressive rhetoric (Mandour, 2013).

Still, this coverage should not be read as a media revolution or complete change in discourse—while some newspapers ceased use of the words “deviance” or “perversion” and included the LGBT community in their coverage, many newspapers still continued the practice of “othering” (p. 13). Rather than shifting discourse completely, it may be viewed as a significant “event in a historical continuity” (p. 25). It can also be suggested that LBCI’s supposedly new, progressive approach to sexuality was due to the especially public and aggressive manner in which the aforementioned raids were handled rather than a real commitment to sexual rights.

This media spectacle provides a case-study for the way in which sexuality became conflated with the nation. Hoballah (2013) makes a case for the discourse

operating around Maalouf's framing of the issue and of the constraints through which the audience viewed the "homosexual" activity. The taken-for-granted nature of this media spectacle found that some assumptions were made around the issue—for one, the identities of those on camera were not articulated by the men themselves. The episode also spoke for the assumption that this was of national concern—the host framed these acts as state issues in need of being dealt with by authorities, and therefore, that sexuality was in need of policing by the state (Hoballah, 2012), pointing to a nationalist pulse in the concern over sexuality. Hoballah, drawing on Foucault, infers that "[s]exuality must be made into an issue of public concern" (p. 16). She asks whether the institutions—lawyers, religious clerics, government officials, and the police—involved and weighing in on the issue are forcing sexuality as an issue to be publicly addressed (p. 17). The relationship between sexuality and the nation will be interrogated through an analysis of drama programs, highlighting the way that these representations of homosexuality have little to do with sexuality (Halberstam, 2005), and perhaps more to do with the nation.

Sexuality, Authenticity, And The Nation

In Lebanon, discussion of homosexuality in the media is often regarded as broaching the taboo. Several cases of media panics in the region related to the body and sexuality reveal the complex links between the nation and discourses of authenticity. Much of the discourse in the region concerning this content pits authenticity against modernity, often with negative connotations of the latter. If modernity is "an elsewhere" (Appadurai, 1996), that elsewhere is often viewed as the West (Kraidy, 2013). If modernity is a dynamic trope, constituting "a situation of unending transit in which the

uncertainty of what it means to be modern is never eliminated” (Garcia-Canclini, 1994), authenticity is its antithesis, seeking an organization of emerging social anxieties. It is the way by which “the historical world is reduced to a particular order” (Al-Azmeh, 1993). As such, authenticity is also a trope which may vary depending on the context and motivation. Particularly in terms of television, the notion of authenticity often presents a stance towards that which is alien. According to Al-Hamad, it is usually the weaker party which “expresses its fear, anxiety, and weakness in terms like cultural invasion, similar to a military invasion, and it takes up the cause of authenticity,” (Kraidy, 2009).” The following discussions of sexuality and the body will shed light on how “policing the sexualized body becomes a celebrated procedure involving complicated social and religious components” in an effort to “maintain a constantly threatened national unity” (Mandour, 2013, p. 21).

Much of the discussion on homosexuality in the region is tied up in the notion of authenticity, as it is often studied in terms of an East-versus-West binary, falling prey to comparisons of a hegemonic West to a premodern East. Much of the literature on homosexuality in the Middle East is based on a postcolonial framework, arguing that Western imperialism attempted to spread or apply its own conceptions of sexuality on the region. It is also suggested that the region publicly resists this paradigm, seeking to preserve its own “sexual heritage” (El-Khatib, 2011, p. 9). Joseph Massad's (2007) analysis of Arab sexuality makes for perhaps the most controversial claim in this sphere of thought, as he suggests that homosexuality as an identity was a product of Western imperialism, both through Western influence and the reactionary approach of Arab intellectuals. Other schools of thought argue for more of an exchange between the East and West rather than a one-way flow of knowledge production. Discussions of the West

and East often pit them against one another as disparate wholes, structures which are assumed to be distinct from one another but which have both been shaped by cultural exchanges and dialogues (Al-Samman & El-Ariss, 2013, p. 205). An argument can be made that knowledge production should not be set up in terms of West and East at all, but exists entirely as localized subjectivities (Boellstroff, 2003). This constructivist approach recognizes some form of homosexual identity in Arab society's sexual history, as well as co-developing conceptions of sexuality, rather than one that moves almost exclusively from the West to the East.

The "Gay International"

In his analysis of Arab literature, Massad attempts to highlight the way that Orientalism has impacted sexual epistemology in the Arab region. While he traces the impact of discourses of modernity on Arab scholars' writings and knowledge production in the region, he stresses the need to reframe it within the larger imperial project. Massad argues that due to ahistorical Orientalist analyses of the Arab world, Arab intellectuals ultimately used Orientalist categories of sexuality to assess their own cultures. This was done, he says, as a defense mechanism against European scholarship which depicted desires in the region as deviant and perverse. In establishing this deviance as foreign contamination or distortion, Arab authors placed their culture and history under the lens of a European predilection toward modernity and progress. Massad posits that Western discourse on the universalization of sexuality inevitably created homosexuality as an identity in the region. This shift occurred in a repressive rather than liberatory manner, that Massad refers to as incitement to discourse, which stunted and repressed certain types of change and ensured "only one way for transformation is made possible" (p. 49-50).

Massad argues that the Gay International—Western gay rights activists with a “universalizing and missionary role” (Amer, 2010)—actually “produces homosexuals, as well as gays and lesbians, where they do not exist” and represses the desires of those who engage in same-sex relationships without wishing to conform to Western sexual epistemology (Massad, 2007, p. 162-3). The Gay International seeks to stabilize an “instability” in sexuality and apply gay/straight epistemology (p. 164). As such, it can be read as “Western hegemony’s discursive construction of Arab homosexuality,” (Hamdan, 2015). Sexuality was only one of the points of debate or contention—Western models of economics and politics are other examples of “progressive” or “modern” frameworks to adopt. Time is a major component of this modernization discourse—the Middle East is often pit against the West as “backwards” or “behind” suggesting that “the Arab world has yet to catch up with the liberatory Western model of gayness...” (Massad, 2007, p. 173)

For Massad, the tension lies in the identity. As a case study, he uses Cairo’s Queen Boat raid, which saw the arrest of 52 Egyptian men in May, 2001 on the Queen Boat—a floating nightclub known for its campy, male clientele. For Massad, this persecution occurred because of public identification with homosexuality rather than actual sexual acts (Mourad, 2013). While written accounts of the Arab world have described same-sex desires for years, he argues, declarations of homosexuality have not

historically been part of these societies (p. 188). In response to one Arab activist's comparison of the Queen Boat raid to Stonewall,¹⁷ Massad suggests that while those at Stonewall publicly identified as and maintained their rights as homosexuals, the Egyptian men in the Queen Boat raid denied being homosexual or gay and attempted to keep their faces out of the public eye (Massad 2007, p. 184). Massad suggests that cases like this stem from Gay International agendas and discourse and lead to more intervention and persecution (p. 185).

Critics

In response to Massad's analysis of the raid and its broader implications, Paul Amar (2013) takes this contextualized case of moral panic to discuss security regimes in Brazil and Egypt. His work dissects the nature of moral policing of sexuality and uses Cairo's Queen Boat raid as a case study. The contexts present two similarly, though inversely, contradictory approaches to sexualized publics and human-security apparatuses. In Rio, these publics held a positive connotation for "identities of cultural nationalism," but as negative for "economic renewal and urban globalization" (Amar, 2013, p. 70). In Egypt, on the other hand, these sexualized publics were seen as part and parcel of Egypt's modernization efforts through the tourism market and its economic

¹⁷ The Stonewall riots took place following a police raid of a popular gay bar in New York City in 1969, a time when homosexual sex was illegal in most states. The ensuing protests would come to be viewed as the spark of the US' gay rights movement.

globalization, but, on the flip side, as “agents of cultural impurity and colonial penetration” (Amar, p. 70). In turn, Amar posits that these “contradictory actions and discourses unleashed by these parastatal formations generated creative forms of queer resistance” (p. 71).

In Cairo, “police and press identified a particular set of queer subjects with globalism, hypervisibilizing them in a wave of moral panic” (Amar, 2013, p. 71). With increasing crackdowns by the Egyptian police on male and female prostitution and sex between men, the press (often monitored by the state and executive branch) generated “a sex panic where virtual (online) and real spaces of globalization became identified with perversion, or the queering of the nation” (Amar, 2013, p. 71). This invoked newspaper headlines such as “Become a Pervert to Please Uncle Sam!” (Schneider 2001 as cited in Amar 2013). While men had previously been arrested, charged with solicitation or debauchery, and released following a bribe, the advent of the male homosexual as criminal and socially distinct in Egypt’s security landscape soon emerged. These men were regarded as national threats, especially due to claims of “citizenship and rights” (Amar, 2013, p. 73). Amar posits that the presence of foreign men in the Queen Boat raid was used as evidence of the the perversion stemming from globalization. The discourse here assumes the men to be terrorists of a state where “homosexuality-as-minority-identity first became a nationally hypervisible, politically urgent, and state-securitized identity.” (Amar, 2013, p. 74).

Amar suggests that Massad assigns the Gay International more agency than it contains, much in the way that security state apparatuses in Egypt do, setting up the construct of “globally queer menacing masculinity” (2007, p. 75). In this way, Massad may ignore or downplay the impact of these security apparatuses in the region, “as well

as the parastatal control formations of the Global South” (Amar, 2013, p. 75). It was this governance regime, says Amar, rather than Western gay rights activists and their discourse which deployed moral-policing of sexuality to create targets. Amar suggests that this argument sets up a West-versus-East binary and a recognition of sexuality as a tool of modernity

...rather than examining how domination and autonomy are mutually imbricated, and examining how the analytical unit of ‘sexuality’ itself is the very mechanism by which domination and autonomy are simultaneously linked while appearing essentially distinct. This happens through the governance practices that generate fear and desire and that animate or degrade bodies and spaces. (11)

He suggests that Massad hypervisibilizes the Gay International in the same manner as the Egyptian police and press, enhancing their agency and framing them as “a form of globally menacing queer masculinity” (2013, p. 76). In doing so, he says, Massad ignores the agency of “transnational security cultures” and “the parastatal control formations of the Global South” (2013, p. 76). These, he says, had more impact on the creation and governance of space and subject, and ultimately of “‘globalizing sexuality’ subjects as their others” (Amar, 2013, p. 76). Rather, Amar likens the Queen Boat raid to the securitization of other social activities associated with globalization, such as campaigns against rock music, sexual contact, and policing of unmarried couples in cosmopolitan areas (2013, p. 76). While some activists and lawyers defended those arrested, most were quick to disassociate these acts with issues of human rights, drawing parallels to tensions involved in discussions of homosexuality in Lebanon.

Other scholars have also criticized what may be considered an unforgiving stance by Massad (Georgis, 2013; Tolino, 2014; McCormick 2011; Mourad 2013), arguing that it ignores complex local factors in Arab culture that influence identity. Stuart Hall’s (1997) “local/global” nexus is recalled here, suggesting that the source of

hegemonic forces of “a global west” are more local than they appear (Benavides, 2008). Latin American scholars have been some of the main critics of this “global west,” drawing parallels to discussions of the Middle East. In this sense, the problematic nature of defining an “authentic” identity is complicated, as it is also a construct, one that is just as dynamic as conceptions of the inauthentic or foreign (Georgis, 2013). While Dina Georgis (2013) recognizes the impact that imperialism has had on queer identities in the way of a universalized concept of human rights, she says that rather than merely “appropriating Western epistemology,” the queer community (women in this case) is “cultivating and negotiating their sexualities under a variety of local and geopolitical pressures,” drawing on the notion that these identities are hybrid and never really finished (p. 234). Part of the local pressure—specifically in terms of Lebanon—is rooted in the concept of shame that relates to strong familial bonds in the Arab world and the fear of being ostracized from society. Pressures arising from Lebanon’s colonial past, Western imperialism, globalization, and postwar Lebanon combine to create an emerging community (p. 234).

What unpredictable futures and new optics does shame hold for queer Arabs? Shamed locally (when socio-moral codes are publically violated) and globally (for being too gay or not gay enough), queer Arabs are proverbially damned if they do and dammed if they don’t. (p. 242)

These anxieties and feelings of shame, says Georgis, have less to do with the fear of behaving in an immoral or sinful way, and more to do with “the fear that it will lead to “*kalam al-nas*” (what people will say) and therefore public reckoning” (p. 243). Drawing on Heather Love’s attention to affects of shame, this fear of shame must not only be thought of as a repressive force, though, as it lends itself to the creation of community. Georgis reminds us that invention occurs through and not against shame (p.

234-235). She posits that through the process of living through “European colonial sexual shaming” and globalization, reinvented sexualities have emerged (p. 237).

She suggests that Massad’s harsh stance on the impact of postcolonial powers in the region has created a construct of what it means to be “traditional.” Tradition itself, she says, is subject to the same ebbs and flows of colonialism, rather than remaining a static and authentic concept to compare modern-day modes of behavior against (p. 236). This highlights the problematic nature of equating the traditional or domestic with authenticity, allowing alternative terminology to be rejected as inauthentic or foreign “threats to national sovereignty” (p. 236). Drawing on Benedict Anderson, Georgis highlights how this tradition is manifest in an imagined community and “instrumentalized in the fight against imperialism and globalization” (p. 236). Recognizing “gay epistemologies” and the tensions involved allows for a practical rather than purely historical approach to sexuality studies in the region (p. 236-237). Analysis of present-day texts may highlight a potential “generative force for the process of Arab queer becoming,” (Hamdan, 2015, p. 56), rather than applying a purely postcolonial framework well into the realities of the present day. As such, an analysis of contemporary portrayals of homosexuality will attempt to uncover shared cultural codes (Hall, 1997) presented through popular media.

Massad’s choice of texts—those written by intellectuals and elites—also impacts the arguments he makes. Without engaging with more “low-brow” cultural texts, what might his broad-reaching argument say about those living outside of such circles? As such, his stance on modern-day conceptions of sexuality may read as reductionist and ignore localized, hybrid subjectivities. Additionally, they may lose sight of the actual “lived-in reality” (Williams, 1977) of the people they purport to

discuss. While archival research may illuminate the origins and track the evolution of present-day practices, they are limited in their use and should not be mistaken for “modern-day configurations of sexuality”¹⁸ (Mourad, 2013). Massad’s dismissal of gay rights activists in a 2005 protest in Beirut as unrepresentative of the region and country does not mean that these categories do not exist. The mere fact that there are debates on the notion of homosexuality in the region may likely mean that there are at least some people who identify themselves or others as homosexual (Ze’evi, 2008).

A recognition of ambiguity is important to understanding the use of language to discuss sexuality, as it highlights “global cultural influences on local discourses of sex” (Mourad, 2013, p. 2534). It is rare to see physical intimacy between any two characters on Arab media, whether homosexual or heterosexual; when aired, these scenes are usually in foreign programming in other languages. As such, terminology for alternative sexualities has become a heavily debated topic. Mourad (2013) points out that while using terms like “gay” and “homosexual” may point to problematic power dynamics, there are issues with completely rejecting this “Western” epistemology and

¹⁸ Jared McCormick (2011) offers an example of a possibly negotiated identity in the region in the form of the “bear,” which may offer a form of resistance to the Gay International. While terms like “gay” or “bear” have certain connotations in a Western context, McCormick argues that they have been appropriated and transformed within a Lebanese context. While he does not define the “bear” as the exclusive localization of homosexuality and recognizes that in some ways, it may be an oppositional negotiation to being “gay,” he offers it as an example of a negotiated identity of the homosexual who is part of the non-heterosexual community but avoids the “full stigma associated with more outward pronouncements of one’s sexuality” (p. 87)

those who identify in these terms¹⁹ (Massad, 2007) as well as the call for the use of Arabic and therefore more “authentic” terms²⁰ (Amer, 2012).

While these debates over language offer insight into colonial/colonized power dynamics, calling Arabs “same-sex practitioners” to avoid the stigma of importing identitarian terminology or reverting to classical Arabic literature to authenticate such desire creates new stigmas in their own right. Mourad opts for a focus on the ambiguity of such terms and their use, changing questions of authenticity to questions of “how...these people live despite or through ambiguity”²¹ (Mourad, 2013, p. 2539). This incorporation of ambiguity, while less clear-cut as a mode of analysis, provides new modes of thinking for these emerging storylines.

Masculinity and Sexuality

In Lebanon, if “homosexuality is the negation of masculinity” (Merabet, 2014, p. 126), then a discussion of masculinity is a vital part of the analysis of sexuality. If the homosexual is pit against hegemonic, heterosexual masculinities in the analyzed

¹⁹ Massad discusses the appropriation of Western sexual epistemology by Arab intellectuals and opts to use the term “same-sex practitioner” rather than “gay” or “homosexual,” focusing on practices rather than identities.

²⁰ Sahar Amer (2013) adopts a similar criticism of the use of ‘foreign’ terminology, calling for Arabs to use “traditional” Arabic terms for non-normative desire, thereby marking them as “authentic” and words like “gay” or “lesbian” as “inauthentic.”

²¹ Mourad suggests that the invention of words for the queer community in Lebanon “is not about succumbing to imperialist agendas, but about imagining new ways of being” (p. 2539-2540).

programs, what are the implications for the notion of cultural inauthenticity in the way of the Gay International? Questioning essentialist portrayals of masculinity and same-sex love requires a look at the hegemonic ideals that permeate through society and are depicted on-screen. Sexuality's subtle but very real connection to all other "byproducts of human activity" (Al-Moussawi, 2008, p. 2) means that at different points in time, sex becomes more visible as a point of contestation, but is always political, tied to the ways in which we navigate through other institutionalized forms of human activity (Rubin, 1984). Understanding how deviations from the normative operate within society can then help us understand conceptions of desire are shaped. More importantly, a nuanced approach to queer theory is required to understand the context of the representation of non-normative desires. Dichotomies like "closet/coming out, shame/pride, and complicity/resistance" must be problematized in order to uncover emerging ways of thinking (Al-Samman & El-Ariss, 2013, 206).

A number of definitions and frameworks for queer theory exist, arguing for what is and what is not considered "queer." Queer theory draws on both feminist theory and Foucault's conceptions of sexuality and identity. Robert Brookey (1996) attributes to queer theory the aim of demonstrating how "sexuality is culturally essentialized to inscribe heterosexuality as normal and all other sexualities as deviant" (41). It discusses "how power operates with sexuality in contemporary society to define social and cultural norms" (Avila-Saavedra, 2009; 6). Looking at queerness as "an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices," we recognize that homosexuality's threat has little to do with sexuality (Halberstam, 2005, p. 1). According to Judith Butler, queerness is more than the gender or sexuality binary—it is a way of responding to something (as cited in Doty, 1993, p. xv). Rather

than existing as an identifier, its function is “to challenge and break apart conventional categories, not to become one itself,” (as cited in Doty, 1993, p. xv). As such, queer theory allows us to think about alternatives to existing hegemonic power structures (Halberstam, 2005, p. 89).

Often, these representations are offered with no explicit sexuality, and serve to make homosexuality or deviations from the normative sexuality palatable by “reinforcing traditional values like family, monogamy, and stability” (Avila-Saavedra, 2009, p. 8). An analysis of the representation of finds that it is often pit against tropes of tradition, patriotism, and stability. In comedy sketches, talk shows, and drama programs alike, the homosexual character is often used to juxtapose one of these tropes, reinforcing a hegemonic masculinity and nationalism. The assumption that greater visibility is equated with progress has long been contested by queer media critics—it is then rather important to analyze the conditions under which these representations are presented to the larger public. This attention to the dominant modes of being is a vital aspect of queer studies, allowing us to deconstruct that which we have unconsciously accepted as “normal” modes of being.

Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, which was further developed by Hall, is useful in the study of queer theory, as it refers to that which “achieves ascendancy through culture, institutions, and persuasion,” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It refers to the ideology which is dominant through an “ability to impose a definition of the situation, to set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed, to formulate ideals and define morality is an essential part of this process,” (Donaldson, 1993). This is useful for analyzing dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings of television programs with socially “taboo” content. Looking at gender and sexuality

from this perspective, hegemonic masculinity questions why “certain ways of being male predominate,” (Donaldson, 1993). Although masculine power may be the reality, masculinity studies juxtapose this with an unstable, threatened masculinity, suggesting that “threat” and “failure” are ideological tropes used to maintain a hegemonic masculinity (Conway, 2008). In Lebanese media, a failed masculinity in the form of the homosexual may then serve as a juxtaposition to more dominant forms of masculinity. In melodrama, this contrast is pronounced, indicating the characters and larger ideologies which merit the recognition of a “fundamental utopianism” (Williams, 2014, p. 84). Homosexuality then appears in conversation with hegemonic masculinities and nationalisms, offering insight into dominant modes of thinking.

In the past century, notions of masculinity have been complicated, and rather than prescribing to essentialist notions of masculinity as dominant and homogenous, these portrayals feature masculinity not only in places of dominance, but also in crisis. Masculine identity has been depicted in terms of “domineering types, to precarious, unsure, and less typical, nearly feminine styles of manhood, struggling in a hyper-aggressive world of tyranny and wars” (Aghacy, 2009, p 16). Masculinity exists in varying forms across historical and social contexts, but the volatility of Arab masculinity in particular lends itself to interesting analysis (Aghacy 2004, p. 2). In contemporary Arab literature, themes of masculinity have been presented through various tropes. In postwar Lebanon, Samira Aghacy (2009) traces the ways masculinity has been represented as not only reinforced, but also destabilized. This context led to the fear of the “feminization of culture,” and secured women as “bastions of traditional values,” largely placing their sexuality under the control of men (p. 2). The scarce representations and associated discourses of homosexuality in Lebanese media are most

often presented through a male figure, ultimately undermining the homosexual woman's body politics (Al-Samman, 2008). Such is the case in Lebanese drama, where distinctions between sexuality of men and women presents the latter as destabilizing.

Representations of hegemonic masculinity in the region often present as ways to define an "other." For example, in Aghacy's analysis of contemporary Arabic literature, she recalls various hegemonic representations, contextualizing each to highlight the volatility of masculinity across time and place. Aghacy discusses the "*fida'i*," a hegemonic or idealized masculinity which points to the gendered national identity (p. 57). She discusses the male-centered nature of nationalist discourse, highlighting "acts of heroism, revolutionary valor, and self-sacrifice for a higher purpose" as masculine attributes (p. 57). This figure also serves as a symbol of the past or tradition, revealing a yearning for control over identity which juxtaposes ambiguity and fluidity. An example of this is referred to in one novel as the "nationan," a symbol of martyrdom and nationalism. This figure juxtaposes that which is not "nationan," and is rejected from meaningful political life ostracized to the dark corners of society.

Discussions of masculinity also inform tropes of womanhood and femininity. Aghacy draws on themes of the nation in literature, suggesting that the nation becomes the motherland, giving way to motherhood as national service and women as mothers of the nation—she represents a form of power, but also fetishism and victimization when it comes to occupation (p. 57). This draws on Elizabeth Thompson's (2000) discussion of the representation of women and deviance in Syrian and Lebanese periodicals of the 1930s (p. 220). The Patriotic Mother and Good Wife juxtaposed the Backward Woman and the Deviant, although it was the latter which violated normative gender roles by willfully choosing not to produce patriotic children or marry. The Deviant women were

viewed as “highly sexed, aggressive women” who were a danger to the nation itself (p. 222). The women prescribing to the normative thus represent beacons of tradition for Lebanon, drawing parallels to tropes in Arab literature which favor stability over ambiguity (Aghacy, 2004, p. 2).

These tropes of masculinity, gender, and nation are then utilized in times of anxiety, whether due to changes in social structure during the French Revolution, industrialization, or the Lebanese civil war, to name a few. Tensions in Lebanon exist between attempts to maintain a stable and “authentic” form of masculinity and one that is more fluid under the influence of “modernity” (Aghacy, p. 2). While some perceive that modernization has led to a fear of a “Western cultural assault,” others may still embrace modernity, “leading to blurred lines and ambiguity,” (p. 2). On the other hand, for those who tout authenticity and traditional culture, “change is seen as a potential betrayal of one’s culture, values, and language,” leading to an essentialist masculinity for men and the view of women as “beacons of stability” (p. 2). In the same vein, a Western masculinity is viewed as both a threat and blessing in Lebanon, a testament to its volatile nature:

Nevertheless, opposing forces of modernity and counter-modernity stretch and strain the country’s social fabric, and cherished ideals of masculinity are being challenged and interrogated. At the same time, traditional masculinity continues to rattle its arms to ensure that the field is still under male control. (p. 3)

Authenticity: Moral and Media Panics

The volatile nature of masculinity lends itself to a discussion of moral and media panics in the region which complicate notions of masculinity and authenticity. Panics in the region surrounding sexuality and gender norms point to discourse of the nation, as well as an “othering” of that which does not subscribe to the national image.

While the following media and moral panics are not related directly to homosexuality, they relate to the body, gender norms, and sexuality, prompting discourse of the domestic and foreign, the authentic and inauthentic, and the traditional and modern. An analysis of such discourses uncovers a construction of a foreign, inauthentic threat similar to the construction of Massad's Gay International. Drawing on Hall's (1978) analysis of 1970s media coverage of black youths and subsequent over policing, moral panics are utilized to maintain control. This representation encourages the legitimization of viewing a certain group as "others." Although Hall's analysis focused on race, the fear narrative is also used on sexuality and gender norms to promote a sense of chaos and disorder while identifying a certain problem as a "mere process." Ultimately, this provides a way to defuse the disorder, legitimizing certain coercive measures such as the representation of homosexuals as criminals.

Media panics in the region centered on gender norms and the body highlight the anxieties and tensions circulating throughout the region. Moral panics and sex panics, according to Maya Mikdashi (2014) "do not (only) reflect a country's social or political realities, they articulate and help shape them," particularly relevant for postwar Lebanon and its "deep civil and political unrest." Media panics, in particular, are moral panics "in which the media is both instigator and purveyor of the discussion" (Drotner, 1999, p. 596 as cited in Salamandra, 2012), reflect this same unrest, "particularly among powerful groups who fear loss of control over a broadening public sphere" (Salamandra, 2012, p. 59).

In Lebanon, moral and sex panics can be viewed as part of the "production of a Lebanese nation," as they reflect how they define, represent, articulate, and market a national image through "gendered architectures of citizenship and noncitizenship"

(Mikdash, 2014). Maya Mikdash discusses three panics relating to sex and the nation: nude photos of a Lebanese Olympic athlete, domestic abuse and murder, and accusations of rape and the razing of Syrian refugee camp. Mikdash suggests that these instances point to the creation of “outsiders” to define the nation. While state-sponsored tourism ads tout the nude female body and sexual labor and abuse runs rampant but relatively undiscussed, it was Jackie Chamoun’s symbol as a national athlete and a “good girl” which were “damaging to the country’s image.” Mikdash points out that both types of women—the “good girl” and the “bad girl”—lack sovereignty and agency over their bodies as it is the masculinist state, in service of the nation, which views them as “legal appendages to male citizens.” Mikdash suggests that while women represent the nation, it is men who constitute it. In a case where Syrian refugees were arrested, questioned, and displaced for being wrongly accused of the rape of a mentally disabled Lebanese man, Mikdash points to the distinction between the Lebanese and the Syrian refugee as “other.” It was Syrian bodies, in this particular context, which were “tasked with articulating national difference,” and in this case, they became a double “other,” not only in their alleged sexuality but their status as Syrian. These instances point to the intersectionality of national difference, and the ways in which discrimination cuts across class, sex, race, ethnicity in the effort of creating a national “outsider” or “other.”

In another case of “othering” in regard to the nation, a moral panic surrounding reality television and Gulf audiences reflected broader social issues, drawing on the notion of authenticity in the discussion of gender. LBC’s Star Academy was a reality TV show which presented a cultural hybrid to Gulf audiences, having been produced in Lebanon as a European format. The program featured men and women from the Arab region living together under one roof as they competed in a singing competition. Saudi

Arabia's national identity is based on Wahhabi adherences to Islam which shun foreign influence (Al-Rasheed, 2002, 2007 as cited in Kraidy, 2009). This adherence creates a focus on gender issues in the regulation of media content due to the pious woman's place as "central to Saudi identity" and "the bearer of authentic Islam as imagined by proponents of Wahhabiya (Doumato, 1992 as cited in Kriady, 2009). As such, it violated Wahhabi gender norms, compelling Gulf critics to deny claims by LBC that it was truly "reality." It was criticized by critics from the Gulf for promoting "*muyu'a*," which translates to "unsteadiness," "effeminacy," or "softness," (p. 111). Religious fatwas were issued against the program, and discourses of corruption, evilness, terrorism, and inauthenticity ensued, with the program being referred to as "Satan Academy" on audio sermons (Kraidy, 2009). Other responses to the program were supportive, with discourse of democratic voting practices and alternatives for the Saudi youth.

Saudi Arabia's place in the satellite era of television has given citizens alternatives to religious programming in the way of production from Beirut and Cairo, out of the reach of Saudi censorship. LBC and Saudi Arabia's paradoxical relationship is reiterated in this analysis, contrasting LBC's hypervisibility of women with Saudi Arabia's invisibility of women in public space (Kraidy, 2009). Controversy over the alleged violation of gender norms—specifically gender segregation—highlights concerns over the fluidity of masculinity and femininity as well as dichotomies of the domestic and the foreign (Kraidy, 2010, p. 111). In a country where gender segregation is used to deflect political tension (Al-Rasheed, 2007; Doumato, 1992; Al-Bishr, 2007 as cited in Kraidy, 2009) inauthenticity was touted as a result of the ambiguity that arises when faced with shows that "muddle identity and authenticity and confound the

boundaries between the domestic and the foreign, between the Arab and the alien” (Kraidy, 2005).

Similarly, drama programs, such as *musalsalat*, in the Arab region have sparked moral or media panics centered around discourse of modernity, with discussion of degradation and ambiguity alike. In a case study of the melodramatic Arabic-dubbed Turkish program *Noor*, Christa Salamandra (2012) notes unease in the region with the portrayal of the male lead on the program. The pan-Arab program was controversial for its portrayal of “individualized freedom, and the specter of Western cultural imperialism and moral degradation shadowing it” (p. 61). The lead character’s “androgyny” stood in contrast with traditional notions of Arabness and Arab masculine ideals, an embodiment of inauthenticity (p. 55). Several aspects of the series—its structure, romance, and elite family politics—draw similarities to Latin American telenovelas shown in the region, although these are often dubbed in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) rather than colloquial Arabic. *Noor’s* appeal also stemmed from its less weighty approach to social issues, departing from the usual storylines about terrorism, Christian-Muslim relations, and colonialism (Salamandra, 2008, 2011). The program’s use of melodrama and its “twin loci of action and intrigue; of love and betrayal” (p. 47) created both a wide-reaching appeal and legibility and a discussion of the foreign and domestic.

As such, an appeal was made to cultural authenticity, drawing parallels to the suggestion of an inauthentic homosexuality. The discourse highlights tensions circulating around gender and sexuality in the region, where an inversion of the traditional male gaze to the female gaze uncovered the volatile nature of masculinity and sexual agency. Although the program was hailed as controversial or progressive by Western and Arab critics alike, its traditional Middle Eastern family values, lack of

class conflict, and portrayal of the West as a site of moral corruption point towards relatively conservative and less controversial storylines than reviews and ensuing media panic suggest. Themes associated with “modernization, westernization, and more recently, globalization” pointed to tensions between the modern and the traditional, of an “incomplete modernity” (p. 51) but also the fear of a “Western cultural assault” (Aghacy 2004, p. 2). This instance suggested a discomfort with the ambiguity afforded by the main character’s masculinity, one which was viewed as inauthentic and foreign.

Egyptian blogger Alia al-Mahdy faced similar criticism for posting nude photos of herself online, prompting media to label her tactics as “Western” and her brand of feminism as incompatible with Arab culture. Mourad (2014) highlights similarities between this and the Queen Boat raid, highlighting a discourse framing them as “uncalled-for violations of cultural and moral codes,” (p. 69). They were dismissed as foreign and trivial, although hypervisibilized in the process. Discourses of social readiness reiterated the notion that Arab women must wait their turn in the face of issues of national priority (Mourad, 2014, p. 69). Alia’s body became a “synecdoche for the imagined West in the Arab body politic,” a body used to express similarity or difference (p. 69). Mourad points out that the discourses of these panics surrounding the body are symptomatic of “national identity, political participation, and the place of sexuality” (p. 74). In the same vein, discourses of non-normative sexuality often pit the homosexual against the nation, whether as a comedic, hypersexualized caricature, a blurred face on a talk show, or a dramatic portrayal of incompatible citizenship.

Structures of Feeling

If Massad’s analysis of sexual subjectivities in the region ignores the “lived-in reality” (Williams 1977) of Arabs grappling with alternative sexualities, then it is

important to take into account that which exists between official discourses. If melodrama responds to “new conditions and ways of thinking about experience, family, gender, and race,” (Williams 2014, p. 112), it follows that these modes of thought are not fully formed, but are constantly adapting, shaping, and being shaped by their social context. Raymond Williams’ (1977) work on structures of feeling provides a way to detect emerging aspects of culture—those that are in flux. A common error analyzing the social, says Williams, is reducing it to fixed, finite thoughts and terms. Although we discuss ideologies and world-views as fixed and explicit substances, these categories “exist and are lived specifically and definitively in singular and developing forms” (p. 129).

Recognizing the “complexities, the experienced tensions, shifts, and uncertainties, the intricate forms of unevenness and confusion” (p. 129-130) present at any given moment is useful in the discussion of sexuality in Lebanon. These types of tensions are important for the study of queer subjectivities, especially when considering “the transformation and fluctuation of the discourses on sexuality in Middle Eastern cultural production” (Al-Samman & El-Ariss 2013, p. 205). A careful analysis requires “engagement with it as a complex site of meaning and transformation” (p. 205). These types of qualitative changes and transformations can be actively lived before they require categorization or official recognition. Structures of feeling, then, refer to “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt,” paying special attention to “characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone” (p. 132). This is particularly relevant to cultural forms, especially those which are in the process of emerging:

[As] a matter of cultural theory this is a way of defining forms and conventions in art and literature as inalienable elements of a social material process: not by derivation from other social forms and pre-forms, but as social formation of a specific kind which may in turn be seen as the articulation (often the only fully

available articulation) of structures of feeling which as living processes are much more widely experienced. (Williams 1977, 133-134)

The representational systems that inform films or television shows are inextricably linked to the “material culture” which both informs these texts and is informed by them (Benshoff, 1997, p. 136). In an analysis of telenovelas and narcodramas in Latin America, Hugo Benavides (2008) points to the pervasive nature of melodrama and its implications for informing and being informed by structures of feeling, drawing parallels between a Middle Eastern and Latin American context:

Contrary to most academic analysts, I would maintain that the greatest political decisions are being made, every minute of every day, with little input from official or educational discourse, even without much conscious awareness, but, rather, with a sincere desire to just survive another day. (p. 3)

These structures of feeling are then representations of ideologies that may be shifting, often providing insight into modes of thinking which are still forming. Attention to structures of feeling is especially important to queer studies because they analyze what are largely, “uncodified subjective experiences,” (Love, 2007; 12). In Lebanon, where official shifts in discourses of homosexuality are not apparent, structures of feeling may be a useful way to uncover that which is forming on an affective level. This may serve to complicate Massad’s construction of a Gay International, calling to attention localized subjectivities which may better inform understandings of sexuality. Incorporating experience with ideology is key in this way “because homophobia and heterosexism inflect everyday life in ways that can be difficult to name,” (p. 12).

It is possible to detect impulses that are not yet organized as movements; we can understand and respond to a historical moment that is not yet fully articulated in institutions as the dominant mode of existence. (Love, 2009; 2007)

A consideration of feelings of shame, of emotions and affects, is useful to

queer studies as these experiences are “supplement[s] to the study of history of formal laws, practices, and ideologies” (Love 2007, p. 12). She points out that this attention to affect is what helps understand “motivational system[s] and as the grounds for forging new collectives.” Shame, she says, is considered one of these “bad” feelings which have come to be regarded as “useless,” as an affect that is not necessarily conducive to large-scale political movements or resistance, but as a “disinterest in action.” Still, it is precisely in this blockage of action that lends itself to questions of “how and why it is blocked” (Love, 2007, p. 12).

Melodrama and the *Musalsal*

Attention to how emotions and affects are expressed at a particular moment in time in a particular context lends itself to a discussion of melodrama. While some critics of melodrama dismiss its exaggerated expressions as “low-brow” or even divorced from reality, melodrama informs and is informed by reality in the form of “mutually reliant” tropes (Williams, 2014, p. 84). In order to grasp the significance of these melodramatic portrayals on Lebanese *musalsalat* which are being interrogated, an understanding of genre is required. While some studies of television assume that genre is essentially a component of text rather than a category, these texts are grouped based on “the intertextual relations between multiple texts, resulting in a common category” (Mittel, 2001, p. 6). Genre cannot be inherently textual because of this reliance on intertextuality to be meaningful; it can be discerned by audience, narrative, setting, or actions, which largely depend on the cultural context. Now, more than ever, texts like television shows are inextricably tied to other “texts, industries, audiences, and historical contexts” (p. 7).

To contextualize these texts, Michel Foucault’s (1970) conception of discursive formations may be used to think of genre as a discursive practice. These formations are

“historically specific systems of thought, conceptual categories that work to define cultural experiences within larger systems of power (Mittel, 2001, p. 8). As such, the truths that appear to be natural and widely-held beliefs are the effect of discourse (Abrahamsen, 2002). Foucault dismissed Freudian and Marxist reductionism in their attempts to explain broader ideas and systems of power. He did not believe that power could effectively be explained by examining one thing, in this case genre, but rather that power itself is relational and must be studied in a microcosmic manner. If genres are discursive formations, then an attention to “the contextualized generic practices that circulate around and through these texts” will involve audience and industry perception of genre, terms and definitions linked to certain genres, and cultural concepts associated with those genres (Mittel, 2001, p. 8).

This avoids the trappings of defining genre and highlights its significance at a given moment (Mittel, 2001, p. 9). Looking at genre through Foucault’s microcosmic approach to the source of knowledge production offers insight into its creation which both informs and is informed by industries and audiences. If “genres can be both fluid over time yet fairly coherent at any given moment” (Mittel, 2001, p. 10), attention to context helps to identify historical and cultural factors which impact genre across time and place. *Telenovelas* in Latin America, soap operas in the United States, and *musalsalat* in the Middle East may all link in aspects of their discursive formation, but analyzing their intertextual differences gives insight into their cultural significance.

In the same vein, a consideration of melodrama requires thinking less in categorical terms, and more in terms of its linkages to the modern. Peter Brooks’ (1976) seminal work on melodrama describes its function in dealing with the contemporary era of the “post-sacred.” Melodrama rose to the forefront at the turn of the 19th century on

the French stage, offering more modern depictions of the dramatic and reflecting a shifting social order (Brooks, 1976 as cited in Williams 2014, p. 83). Its relationship with the modern persists in contemporary portrayals, offering channels to respond to emerging social change (Hayward 1996 as cited in Mosquera 2000, p. 66). Melodrama then focuses on contemporary notions of justice and the “fundamental utopianism” of the moment (Williams 2014, p. 84). There is still debate and confusion around the notion of melodrama as a genre (Abu-Lughod, 2005), highlighting its relational nature and reliance on the contemporary.

It is then difficult to offer an operational definition of melodrama—rather than referring to a static type of portrayal, melodrama is steeped in modernity and cannot be reduced to a particular category of thought. While televised melodrama may be written off by some as a mode of analysis for its use of sensationalist clichés, its status as “the very engine of mass culture” (p. 81) means that it can provide insight into a particular historical, political, and social moment. As cultural texts, these portrayals both inform and are informed by circulating values and beliefs in society, providing a landscape of possibility for that which is not wholly formed. In melodrama, the viewer is meant to be empathetic to the hero who faces injustice, contrasting “how things are and how they could or should be” (Williams, p. 84). To present things as moral or just, empathy or sympathy is invoked in the “manifest suffering of an oppressed innocence” (p. 114). Melodrama’s capacity to induce empathy is key in understanding its function of moral legibility. In *musalsalat*, Arab serial domestic genres, it has been found that audiences critically assess *musalsalat* “in the context of their everyday lives,” (Abu-Lughod, 2005, p.12), indicating that these programs offer sites of negotiation for audiences.

While much of the research on representations of same-sex desire in the region

focuses on literature, an analysis of televised melodrama affords elements of expression which cannot be translated through linguistic text form. It is important to note the implications of televised scenes with shock-value, musical markers, and emphasis on emotions which distinguish high art and popular culture (Benavides, p. 10). The significance of melodrama as a cultural form has been debated, with some critics dismissing its characteristic “modes of excess” as “bad or low cultural expressions” (p. 10). Although this dismissal is predicated on its exaggeratory expression, melodrama’s popularity and legibility importantly provide a contrast of “how things are, and how they could be, or should be” (Williams, p. 84).

Melodrama in the non-Western context

That legibility is inevitably impacted by its cultural context. To take into account cultural nuances surrounding these programs, Brooks’ framework of melodrama’s relationship to the modern must be problematized. According to Linda Williams, Brooks’ discussion of melodrama marked it as a significant cultural form; “an essential thread in the warp and weave of global modernity” (Buckley 2009 as cited in Williams, 2014, p. 112). Still, Meredith Slifkin (2014) points out an inability to “categorically translate” one context to another, particular in the case of Western to non-Western contexts. While Brooks discusses “break from the sacred” as an inherent part of melodrama, Slifkin notes that a portrayal of “cultural expression under colonialism” in Indian cinema presented something quite different. Taking a “melodrama as method” approach allows us to recognize that while melodrama may spawn global appeal and legibility, it is also rooted in historical and cultural contexts (Slifkin 2014).

In the Middle Eastern context, while melodrama might not be interchanged synonymously with *musalsalat*, key characteristics make a melodramatic lens useful for

analysis. The programs draw on interpretations of the modern, featuring everyday people rather than heroes of tragedies, and culminate in a legible ending—they resolve (Abu-Lughod, 2005, p. 113). According to Lila Abu-Lughod's (2005) analysis of Egyptian serial dramas, "television melodrama, projected by national television industries, are seen by state officials and middle-class professional producers as particularly effective instruments of social development, national consolidation, and 'modernization'" (Abu-Lughod, p. 112). As such, melodrama in this context is used to maintain and strengthen a national image or "community." Although Egyptian serial dramas are embroiled in morality, as Brooks asserts, it is a morality which speaks at a social or community level, but impacts the subject as an individual on an affective level. Abu-Lughod questions discourses of the modern involved in the production of these programs and highlights melodrama's ability to "engender individualist subjectivities" (2002, 2005 as cited in Salamandra p. 57). Through this individualization in a context where other identifying ties—like tribe or religion—still exist, melodrama may create national subjects and community (Lukacs, 1962).

Although many studies of the representation of homosexual characters are based on US media, it is important to take a nuanced approach to the portrayal of non-heteronormative sexual subjectivities. While American and British soap operas employ melodrama, more similarities exist between Latin American telenovelas and Middle Eastern dramatic serial programs (Abu-Lughod, 2008). In Latin America, these programs are seen as a "place of negotiation, reconfiguration, and mediation of popular culture and identity—a site of hegemonic struggle over meanings" (Joyce 2013, p. 50). They can provide critical insight into dominant meanings as well as emerging modes of thought. These programs share common characteristics of melodrama, such as of

“modes of excess” which are common in soap operas as well. They also offer “clear-cut stories with definite endings that permit narrative closure,” (Lopez, 1995, p. 258 as cited in Sakr, 2007, p. 124) differing from US soaps which may run for years with no narrative resolutions. Similar to Middle Eastern programs, family relations and social excess are tropes through which moral judgement is expressed (Martin-Barbero 1987 as cited by Benavides p. 11). In these cases, family is used to “understand and express the complexity and opacity that the new social relations embody” (Martin-Barbero 1987, 131 as cited in Benavides 2008), pointing to an emphasis on family values which is similar to Middle Eastern society.

Hugo Benavides (2008) suggests that Latin American telenovelas, in contrast to American or British soap operas, depict a postcolonial legacy, a colonial desire which

expresses a particular kind of longing, even a nostalgia, that is defined both by its characteristic failure (i.e. not being as good as something else in racial and/or cultural terms) and by the constant comparisons to the “other” (i.e. that which is not me/us and that I/we would want to be). (p. 7)

This relationship echoes Lebanon’s own context, particularly in terms of its colonial past. This tension is dynamic in nature and difficult to reduce to a binary West-vs.-East paradigm; rather, “the ambiguity of ‘lived-in’ reality” (Williams 1977 as cited in Benavides 2008, p. 7) must be taken into account to form a critical assessment of contemporary discourse. An analysis of Latin American *telenovelas* offers points of comparison between hegemonic views of masculinity and homosexuality in Arab and Latin American media. In the media, homosexuals on Latin American telenovelas largely support a dichotomous active/passive view of sexuality. These programs are often compared to soap operas of the US, although their melodramatic representations reach wider audiences due to their popularity and primetime slots (Tate, 2011), offering grounds for comparison to Lebanese drama serials. New portrayals of homosexual

characters on these telenovelas have been read as both progressive in terms of sheer visibility, but also problematic in terms of their stereotypical portrayal of homosexual men as effeminate, flamboyant, and comical. Often, the characters flirt with other men, but retreat if threatened. This may serve as a comparative function for heterosexual characters on the show, helping to strengthen their masculinity (Tate, 2011).

Other representations of Latin American programming identify representations which may be read as “progressive” or dominant to heteronormative conceptions of sexuality (Joyce, 2013). An analysis of Brazilian telenovelas found representations of homosexual characters adopting the passive role in the relationship, pitting them against a partner who is active, dominant, and thus heterosexual. Discourse dealing with the nature of homosexuality linked it to disease or something that requires exorcism. Still, other portrayals included a discussion of issues like gay-bashing and violence, calling attention to more progressive storylines. While the gay community is most often portrayed in crime, comedy, and religious programming in Latin American media—drawing parallels to Lebanon—these storylines present new types of visibility for the discussion of homosexuality.

Before analyzing the *musalsalat*, I briefly explain my method for interrogating the programs. The chosen approach, critical discourse analysis, will be introduced, as well as the reasoning for my selection of programs. I will also discuss my specific procedure for analyzing the programs. Finally, I will offer an overview on the limitations to critical discourse analysis along with the strengths of such a method.

Chapter IV

METHODOLOGY

Research Concerns

This study examines recent representations of homosexuality in *musalsalat* on LBCI, MTV, and Al-Jadeed to complicate Massad's notion of an ultimately inauthentic or imported sexuality in the region. The first question this research aims to answer is whether mainstream media reinforces Massad's notion of the Gay International and the imperial connotations of homosexuality in the region. Is this notion reflected in dramatic television programming, or are there other ways to read the texts? What might other readings of this text suggest? What are the implications of this type of discourse in the Lebanese context?

The emerging visibility of these storylines in dramatic programming is significant in providing potentially new ways of complicating notions of sexuality and power in the region. These openings allow for links to be made between larger power structures which, while recognizing Massad's contribution to scholarship on the imperial project, highlight the practical pitfalls of constructing and hypervisibilizing the Gay International and its agenda. As such, this research asks how new storylines are impacted by networks, as well as historical and social context, and how these contribute to discourses of homosexuality in Lebanese media.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Rather than analyzing whether the characters or programs are good, bad, or offer realistic depictions (Benavides 2008, p. 9), this research aims to complicate

notions of power circulating within and around these cultural forms. Discussing these representations in conversation with moral panics in the region as well as Massad's notion of the Gay International helps uncover "the spotlighting of certain identities and bodies as sources of radical insecurity and moral panic in ways that actually render invisible the real nature of power and social control" (Amar, 2013, p. 13). Foucault's approach to power recognizes the ways in which discourses are normalized in the pursuit of power maintenance. This is particularly relevant to the Lebanese context, where discourses surrounding homosexuality construct it as a social and national threat. The question is then centered around the ways in which these emerging portrayals of alternative sexualities "open avenues of critical discourse and challenge the traditional subjects and regimes of representation" (p. 9). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is best used to study "the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (Van Dijk, 2001 p. 352).

When an object of analysis, such as sexuality in Lebanese media, is inextricably tied to social and political issues, questions of power are central to the conversation. Because hegemonic discourses are predicated upon existing structures of power, it is vital to question how they are reproduced, challenged, legitimated, and negotiated (Van Dijk, 1983). The relationship between language and social systems is key here, helping to complicate notions of power, ideology, and identity (Fairclough, 2001). In this sense, CDA is conducted with the ambition of political or social change, offering an analysis of texts which can uncover exploitation within a social system.

This analysis draws on Norman Fairclough's (2001) approach to CDA, and aims to dissect the links between "discursive practices, events, and texts" and the wider

social structure while also paying attention to the power structures which operate amongst the discourse (1995, p. 132). In this manner, power relations operate discursively, drawing on Foucault's (1972) notion of language and its relationship with power. If language is the primary method to maintain and reproduce ideology, then a close reading of language is key to understanding how hegemonic ideals are reinforced and appear natural. Language, according to Foucault and Fairclough, constitutes its subjects, and often operates within the subtle inflections of "everyday" life (Lazar, 2005, p. 9). If individuals are social subjects constituted through discourse, the aim of this analysis is to critically analyze the homosexual's constitution as a social subject (Kuhar, 2003). Drawing on Roman Kuhar's analysis of the representation of homosexuals in Slovenian media, the point of entry is in recognizing that homosexuals, or those who identify with non-normative sexual identities, are discriminated against in Lebanese media. For this reason, CDA is an appropriate method, as it aims to uncover hegemonic structures which maintain this social order. At the same time, although heteronormativity is perhaps a dominant strand of discourse, CDA recognises that an interdiscursive approach is key, as there are multiple and often contradictory discourses operating within any given text. Caitlin Campisi (2013), drawing on Lazar's (2005) approach to the study of gender relations, offers that CDA helps to identify the dominance of one discourse over another while still recognizing that there are multiple discourses to acknowledge and complicate.

In the case of sexuality, an allowance for the critical analysis of multiple discourses is vital, as these identities or subjectivities are often the sites of complex negotiation processes. More specifically, in the case of queer studies, this component of the analysis is key in considering the hegemonic power structures which legitimate and

maintain the orders of discourse. As such, an interdiscursive approach allows for the recognition of multiple discourses of gender and sexuality. While discourses of gender and sexuality are often predicated in terms of binaries or dichotomies, critical discourse analysis allows for the breaking down of such rigidities (Browne, 2010 as cited in Campisi, 2013), instead speaking in terms of fluidity and flexibility. Critical discourse analysis is then the preferred method, as it offers space for ambiguity and complexity, departing from more quantitative approaches to representation (Campisi, 2013).

This approach involves an in-depth analysis of one of discourse's "semiotic modalities" —language (Fairclough, 2013). While there are other modalities, such as visual images and body language, this analysis focuses on language. Although these modalities are of interest and are touched upon, verbal language lends insight into the terminology used to discuss homosexuality and the associations which can be made through this language. As such, semiosis has a dialectical relationship to other aspects of social processes. It does not exist as separate, mutually exclusive components of the social order; rather these elements "internalize semiosis without being reducible to it." (Fairclough, 2013, p. 3). Drawing on Fairclough's (1992) approach, this analysis focuses on a linguistic and intertextual analysis, interrogating sentence structure, vocabulary, rhetorical devices, and dialogue. Links to other texts and discourses are also drawn, creating meaningful connections between the text and larger social processes. Semiosis then links dialectically to other aspects of a social process in three ways—as actions, representations, and identities, which respectively link to the semiotic levels of genre, discourse, and style (p. 4).

Procedure

Analyzing genre at the micro level involves textual analysis, which dissects

language and discourse within the text itself, in this case paying particular attention to dialogue and language use on the programs, taking special consideration of the semiotic. This practically involves an analysis of the words used to discuss the characters as well as homosexuality in general, the associated storylines which serve to denote value to certain characters or practices through juxtaposition, and the use of sound and imagery to denote particular feelings or meanings. An analysis of the use of vocabulary, dialogue, metaphor, and other rhetorical devices are also part of this level. At the macro level, texts are analyzed as discursive practice, linking them to larger power structures. Here, dominant power structures which stand to gain from this discourse are identified. In this case, hegemonic ideals of masculinity and heteronormativity are complicated, as well as power relations with security apparatuses which deploy such discourses. CDA serves as a bridge between the macro and micro levels, with texts analyzed as a social practice at the meso level. In this manner, the focus is on “the structures of text and talk” (Mogashoa, 2014, p. 105), paying special attention to power and processes of production which maintain and legitimize this power.

This analysis draws on Fairclough’s (2001) five-step approach to CDA. The first stage is to begin with a social issue which has a semiotic aspect. In this case, the social issue would be the representation of homosexuality in Lebanese media. The second stage of CDA identifies the obstacles to tackling this issue, navigating through the root and legitimization of the problem within a particular social order and providing context. It is in this step where the analysis of discourse itself takes place (p. 236). A structural approach to the order of the discourse itself helps to uncover tensions which both shape and are shaped by surrounding social processes (Fairclough, 2013). The

steps in this stage will be discussed in further detail below. The third stage of CDA asks whether the social order “needs” the problem or issue at hand (p. 238). This questions whether the social order benefits from the maintenance of “relations of domination between different groups in societies, through achieving a measure of hegemony” (p. 238). The fourth stage moves from a critical analysis of the problem itself to the identification of possible ways to surpass the obstacles. This is done dialectically, linking the semiosis to gaps and contradictions within the social problem’s network (p. 239). This stage discusses alternatives and their capacity for change, offering these at sites of contradiction within the network. The last stage involves a critical reflection with the researcher recognizing their own positioning within the order of discourse.

Analyzing the discourse itself (stage two) involves “addressing dialectical relations between semiosis and other social elements,” (Fairclough, 2012, p. 8). At this stage, the first step is to analyze the related discursive practices. This involves a linguistic and semiotic analysis of the text itself, paying attention to how it represents, relates, identifies, values (p. 241) and thus has social meaning. This links to the second step, or the interdiscursive analysis, which posits that social processes are reflected in the text itself. Here, the text links to interdiscursive elements of genre and discourse (p. 240). Lastly, the social analysis of the interaction takes place, contextualizing the discourse and completing the critical component of CDA. It is here that conceptions of

power and hegemony are complicated, in this particular case relating to dominant discourses of gender and sexuality in Lebanese media.

Analytical categories

This research opts for a discussion of homosexuality²² and homosexual expressions rather than homosexual subjects. If homosexuality in Lebanon is viewed as a lack of masculinity (Merabet, 2014), then representations of homosexuality will be discussed through this negation. Homosexuality will be used to describe a sexuality which is predicated upon a failed masculinity. This is not to say that effeminacy will determine homosexuality, but that a struggle with masculinity will be the focus of analysis. These characters will not be discussed as “homosexual” subjects, as they do not identify explicitly this way and this research does not attempt to construct identities as authentic or inauthentic. The distinction between acts and identities will be noted. Specifically, as Massad suggests that the issue of homosexuality lies in its category as an identity, this research seeks to read into the discussion of acts and identities. Phrases and words which relate to a “preference” or the act of loving will be coded as the naming of a sexual act. Words like “*shadh*,” or “deviant” will suggest the recognition of an identity. These terms will be read against Massad’s claims, suggesting that ambiguity is a more fruitful mode of analysis. The term “queer” will be used to discuss the

²² Khaled El-Rouayheb provides a discussion of the recognition of a premodern homosexual behavior or feeling as different from modern-day conceptions of homosexuality.

“practices and desires” which do not necessarily fit within the identity categories (Gopinath, 2005), such as “homosexual,” or “lesbian,” and their Arabic counterparts, such as “*mithliyyah*.” This will be used in a discussion of ambiguity and structures of feeling circulating around non-normative sexualities in Lebanon. This term will be reserved to refer to ethnographic accounts which suggest a self-identification as queer (Georgis, 2013).

Approach

One program was selected from each of the three most-watched television networks—LBCI, MTV, and Al-Jadeed (IPSOS, 2016). Each of these networks also features a stereotypical portrayal of a homosexual man in a comedic sketch program aired during primetime. While there may be other representations of homosexuals in Lebanese *musalsalat*, this researcher also attempted to find portrayals on networks that were most involved in the Cinema Plaza and Dekwahneh raid coverage. That these portrayals occurred relatively close to the timing of the Cinema Plaza and Dekwahneh raids provides for a broader approach to analyzing discourse. These programs also all garnered online media attention in the blogosphere due to their relatively new storylines. While this does not necessarily indicate the portrayals’ reception by a wide cross-section of the population, in conjunction with the aforementioned reasons, LBCI, MTV, and Al Jadeed were chosen as networks. Apart from their relative popularity, the programs also present three different approaches to representing these characters and storylines, providing a holistic analysis of circulating orders of discourse. This analysis aims to uncover different types of discourse, some that may appear contradictory in nature. These programs were selected on both the basis of their popularity and their

varied presentations of storylines dealing with non-normative sexualities.

Textual analysis was applied to the three Lebanese serial television dramas, drawing out discourses of sexuality, with a focus on notions of masculinity and authenticity. First, I watched the programs in their entirety, taking notes on the narratives which emerged. I noted dialogue between the characters, the visual aspect of the scenes (such as facial expressions, actions, and setting), and sound (including dramatic music and sound effects). Terminology is of special interest to the present study, especially considering the ambiguity involved in sexual studies in the Middle East on the basis of naming alone (Mourad, 2013). After identifying the episodes which were key to these narratives of homosexuality and the nation, I watched the episodes again, selecting specific scenes. These scenes were transcribed and coded, with certain terms and themes pointing to key themes. I identified key themes in relation to the nation, the gender divide, failed masculinity, and the notion of shame.

These discourses were analyzed particularly through their relation to binaries of foreign/domestic, national/local, and authentic/inauthentic, especially in conjunction with similar discourses surrounding moral panics in the region. Using these themes, Massad's notion of homosexuality as an imported identity was then complicated, drawing on dominant discourses which may support this view, but also using an interdiscursive approach to identify other discourses which support notions of resistance or at least ambiguity. This allowed for a reading which departed from Massad's theory of sexuality in the region, drawing on other related discourses on the networks and in the region. Linking these discourses to larger power structures—such as hegemonic ideals of masculinity and the nation—uncovered discourses which point to the hypervisibilization of the Gay International for national consolidation and the

maintenance of power.

Limitations

While CDA dissects the way that language and power inform and are informed by each other, it does not purport to offer a critical analysis of the effects of the production or reception of a text. Although recognizing these as vital components to the analysis and links the text to its larger context, CDA cannot delve into these categories in depth. While we cannot assume to know exactly how various audience members interpret a message, we can use Stuart Hall's (1997) concept of preferred or dominant readings of a text on the basis of its genre and context. Paying attention to how a text is encoded with respect to genre, language, and style can help guide an analysis which does not otherwise take an in-depth approach to reception.

In the same vein, CDA does not aim to draw out the reasons or intentions behind the production of a certain representation. Still, CDA does consider the factors behind a given representation, linking the text to broader forces and social conditions. Rather than aiming to speak on behalf of producers or audiences, CDA recognizes that messages are created within certain constraints and largely targeted at certain audiences. As such, it is constitutive of particular social processes and contexts, as it recognises that discourse both shapes and is shaped by social processes (Fairclough, 2013). CDA's aim is then to expand on the discursive link between the text and its broader context.

While critics have called for quantitative analysis to support methods like CDA, the goal of CDA is to conduct an in-depth analysis and connect the text to larger social processes and orders of discourse. CDA has been criticized for its openness to interpretation and lack of fixed meanings, a quality that can make its lack of standardized steps or guidelines a more involved method in that respect (Morgan,

2010). A quantitative approach to the present study would provide quantifiable results that would shed light on trends, but it would not delve into these discursive links and their implications at a particular moment in great depth.

Despite the aforementioned limitations of CDA, it is the method which will allow for the most in-depth analysis of representations of sexuality in a Lebanese context. These portrayals' connections to the political, historical, and social spheres make a contextual approach key, which CDA allows. This approach also uncovers questions and links that may have previously gone unacknowledged, pushing its critical component (Morgan, 2010).

Chapter V

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The following section will offer an analysis of each of the three programs, discussing themes of masculinity, sexuality, and the nation. The section will culminate in a discussion of the main themes which emerged from the analysis.

Ajyal (Generations): Amelia And Tamara (MTV)

Ajyal premiered on MTV in October of 2010 with a cast of well-known Lebanese actors, with a second season following in July of 2012. The first season was comprised of 34 episodes while the second ran for 31 episodes, both running the standard number of 30 episodes per Arab serial drama (Sakr, 2007). A year prior to the first episode, Lebanon witnessed a landmark ruling which stated that consensual sex could not be classified as “unnatural.” MTV’s involvement in the Cinema Plaza case occurred two years after the program aired its first season—which the bulk of this analysis is based on. Two years after Amelia’s storyline was introduced, the network found itself in the midst of a media spectacle it helped initiate, shamed by other institutions for violating journalistic ethics and contributing to institutionalized homophobia. The program was written by Claudia Marchelian, who previously wrote the storylines of other MTV series including: Dr. Hala, a woman who has been in an abusive relationship with a man; Sara, a divorced woman navigating through a society which views divorce as taboo; and Madame Carmen, portraying the lives of prostitutes. The producer, Phillippe Asmar, has worked on series on LBCI and MTV, including Ichk Al Nisaa. Ajyal is rife with relatively taboo storylines, such as divorce, extramarital affairs, physical abuse, murder, satanic-worship, AIDs, and non-normative sexuality. The program follows the lives of residents of a compound in Lebanon, with the characters regularly meeting in its shared spaces. Amelia comes from Canada as the newest arrival and maintains an air of mystery amongst the other residents who regularly question her actions and general backstory. She becomes interested in Tamara, a rebellious, outspoken resident who seems to have an affinity for the foreign. Other characters of interest include Farah, the widow raising

three children after her husband died in the war and the show's moral compass, and her love interest, Theo, the patriotic wealthy investor.

The story of Amelia and Tamara is told amidst a multiplicity of other storylines dealing with infidelity, jealousy, domestic violence, AIDs, devil-worshipping, divorce, and murder, all navigating within a Lebanese context and trying to keep these transgressions on the private side of the public/private divide. Various characters embark on a downward spiral after committing some sort of moral infraction, with the melodramatic portrayals drawing on themes of madness and corruption in the state. Most of the storylines deal with the subsequent madness of women who come to live in a compound full of “devils.” Rather than affirming cultural inauthenticity propagated by Western imperialism, the portrayal points to the more on-the-ground impact of moral panics and securitization of activities associated with globalization (Amar, 2013). The story may then be read as a parable of the fragmentation within the nation in the face of a cultural assault.

A foreign arrival

The viewer meets Amelia after she has arrived from Canada to spend the summer in Lebanon. Upon entering her apartment, she is confronted with a couple in the middle of a secret tryst on her couch. Amelia tells the couple, “The best love occurs hidden and in the dark,” and refers to herself as the three monkeys—she does not see, hear, or speak. Amelia’s character is thus shrouded in mystery from the start. She has an interest in the taboo, asking personal questions to her new neighbors, yet remaining ostracized, often drinking coffee on her balcony and watching the goings-on of the compound. Tamara, one of the more central characters of the show and the object of Amelia’s affection, is portrayed as troubled. The other residents of the compound refer

to her as “*majnouneh*,” or crazy, due to her bold and matter-of-fact nature.

The first time Tamara sees Amelia, she remarks that she appears to not be from “here,” presumably meaning Lebanon. Mira, commenting on her interest in Amelia, remarks that for Tamara, things have to be “from outside” for her to like them. When the characters first interact, they use English intermittently, more-so than they do with others. This highlights an interest in the foreign, in this case, the West, drawing on similar themes of the Arab’s destructive infatuation with the West in Arabic literature (Al-Samman, 2008), as well as discourse presented amid moral panics (Mourad, 2014). In these readings, while the colonized is drawn to the colonizer, it ultimately constitutes a dangerous disruption. In one scene that further cements Amelia’s status as an outsider, she sits down with her neighbours, who appear to be apprehensive of the invasive Amelia. She asks them personal questions before calling them “cute” for their disregard of their respective religions. In a nation like Lebanon where sect reigns supreme, this baffles her. “How do they say there is sectarianism in the country?” she asks, which constructs her as an outsider who doesn’t understand Lebanon’s political context. She is thus pit against nation, marked as an “other” from the start. Rather than reading Amelia as a product of Western imperialism propagating an inauthentic sexuality, she reads as an example of “the uneven distribution of national identity and honor across [the] gendered divide” (Mikdashi, 2014). If “the intensity of queering is directly proportional to its sexualized coloniality, not to its homosexuality” (Amar, 2011, p. 306), then the moral panic which surrounds Amelia has less to do with sexuality than it does her status as a national threat. This is presented through an improper relation between gender and sexuality.

The colonial citizen and the deviant

If melodrama pits characters against one another in an effort to achieve “moral legibility” (Williams, 2014), then Amelia’s status as mysterious, foreign, and later, “unnatural,” form a stark contrast between her and the traditional model of womanhood in Arab society. Farah, a widow whose husband died serving his country and left her with three children to raise, is a central character and the show’s moral backbone as she continuously sacrifices her own happiness for her children. The series follows her relationship with Theo, a patriotic central male lead with whom she has an on-again-off-again relationship. While they wish to be together, her son Ahmad does not want to accept a new father figure in his life, and Farah sacrifices her own happiness to be an adequate mother. She maintains high moral standing for her late husband’s status and spends the entirety of the show pushing away romantic love for the sake of motherhood. If Farah is the direct contrast to Amelia, Theo is the male strand of this nationalist pulse. Theo speaks of his love for his country and says that he is investing in Lebanon because of that commitment. The viewer also learns that Farah’s son, Ahmad, wishes to grow up to be just like his father, a “*shahid*,” or martyr, and watches videos of his father during military practice, transfixed. He is eager to become the man of the house and protect his family. The symbol of the martyr is an important symbol in the patriarchal traditional realm (El Kachab, 2013), making Farah more respected in her community. Her suffering is also readable as empathetic for the viewer. Various scenes find her crying after her young, angry son lashes out at her, or exhibiting restraint to avoid becoming physically intimate with Theo. Her sacrifice is often accompanied by slow, melancholic music which juxtaposes Amelia’s rejection.

Amelia’s actions are largely read as “*mish tabiaa*” or “unnatural,” “*zaydi aan*

al zoum” or “excessive.” The juxtaposition between Farah, the moral compass, and Amelia draws parallels to 1930’s media discourse of the woman as deviant in Lebanese and Syrian periodicals. While Amelia represents the Deviant, Farah represents the Patriotic Mother and Good Wife (Thompson, 2000, p. 220), beacons of tradition and stability for Lebanon (Aghacy, 2004, p. 2). Portrayed as physically invasive and uncomfortably forward, Amelia represents the “highly sexed, aggressive women” who were dangerous to the nation (p. 220). If melodrama presents ethical or moral dialectics, then the juxtaposition of Amelia and Farah places the latter in a favorable light and creates a feeling of discomfort with Amelia’s status as an outsider. If Farah and her late husband have suffered for their commitment to their country, then melodrama affords their characters a moral legitimacy which Amelia lacks (Williams, 2014).

Amelia’s extra attention to Tamara soon becomes a topic of discussion amongst the residents. When Amelia’s apparent interest in Tamara becomes evident to a doctor on the program, the love interest of Tamara’s sister, Mira, the issue is finally brought to the forefront. Prior to this moment, subtle remarks were made about Amelia’s apparent “unnatural” interest in Tamara. Now, Dr. Roger sits with Mira and tells her that Amelia’s care for Tamara is “*zaydi aan al zoum*,” or “more than is needed.” He goes on to say that Amelia is “*mish tabiaa*” or “unnatural.” It is not insignificant that a doctor and a character who is providing knowledge to the residents throughout the series is the one to impart this impression. Drawing on Foucault (1973), medical knowledge becomes a form of discipline, carrying power in the doctor’s “gaze.” At the point when Amelia’s “unnatural” nature becomes evident, the doctor’s gaze moves from observer to the gaze “of a doctor supported and justified by an institution, that of a doctor endowed with the power of decision and intervention” (p.

89). Dr. Roger's status as a medical professional asserts his diagnosis as truth—
Amelia's behavior is unnatural, and therefore unhealthy. If medicine as a profession is a
tool for societal regulation, then this diagnosis ignites the flame which sparks Amelia's
downward spiral.

Danger, deviance, and the devil

Although Mira seems confused with Dr. Roger's initial warning about Amelia,
after hearing his diagnosis that she is "unnatural," the seeds are planted. Mira confronts
Amelia, telling her that she is giving her sister too much attention. An illuminating
conversation ensues afterwards with Mira and her cousin, Roula, discussing Amelia's
"unnatural" interest in Tamara:

Mira: I'm speaking the truth. I'm speaking what I feel.

Roula: What do you mean?

Mira: Roula, we are not young children, we have to be aware that Amelia's
attention towards Tamara is not normal attention. It's unbelievable. Even Roger
noticed.

Roula: Roger was able to notice something like that? He has bad intentions.

Mira: That's not right. Anyway the situation is exposed (*mafdouh*).

Roula: You mean Amelia is in love with Tamara?

Mira: Amelia is a crazy woman and she could do anything.

Roula: She doesn't have to be crazy to love a woman.

Mira: Really?

Roula: Of course. Look Mira, you and I are very similar. I am an orphan and my
brother is weak, and I always feel responsible for him. Your parents are far away
and rarely ask about you and your sister is crazy, and you feel responsible for
her. But be wary of acting like her mother and father in an attempt to take care
of her, be wary.

Mira: But I can't leave her if I feel she is in danger.

Roula: Amelia is not dangerous.

Mira: Yes she is. Amelia could be dangerous if it turns out she loves women and
she's in love with Tamara.

Roula: Of course it's not dangerous. That is a choice in life. Tamara is above
eighteen and she is the one who decides. In the end, if what you are saying is
correct, Amelia will tell the truth to Tamara, and Tamara is the one who will
decide what she wants, you don't stand in front of the woman and decide for her.

Mira: But maybe Amelia will be able to convince (*ti'naa*) Tamara.

Roula: That would be Tamara's choice and she's the one that will carry the
consequences.

Mira: What are you saying Roula? Do you know what this means? Do you know what it means if my sister loves women?

Roula: And my brother loves the devil Mira! And I know. I swear to you I know. But these are personal choices that we cannot interfere with, do you understand? And don't let the doctor start interfering with all of the details in your life from now, even if he is a doctor and even if he is older than you. Your sister's sex life (*hayat al jinsiyah*) is none of his concern.

Mira: (Talking to herself) The family is crazy, it's really crazy!

Dr. Roger's diagnosis has established a truth which Mira propagates—she is adamant that she cannot leave her sister in the face of “danger” or “*khattar*.” Roula distinguishes between “danger” and “choice,” or “*khayar*,” explaining that it is a personal choice for Tamara to make. Still, they do not disagree that it is possible for Amelia to influence Tamara. Mira worries that Amelia will “convince,” or “*ti'naa*,” Tamara to love women, highlighting her belief that this is a preference that a person is persuaded to have or may catch, like a disease. The use of the term “*mafduh*” is significant, as it highlights a fear of “*kalam el nas*,” or “what people will say,” in Arab society (Georgis, 2013). According to Georgis, this “threatens the social fabric” (p. 243). One must consider the function of moral panic in regards to building a Lebanese national identity (Mikdashi, 2014). If Farah is the symbol of the nation and a “[beacon] of stability” (Aghacy, 2004, p. 2), then Amelia is the dangerous “other,” threatening to disrupt the national balance.

Further adding to the construction of this moral panic, Amelia's sexuality is likened to Shahid's satanic-worship, a result of his character weakness. Satanic-worship is linked to non-normative sexuality, presenting both as “unnatural.” Mira and Roula then represent protector figures who are looking out for their siblings' best interest, while the weaker siblings must ultimately make their own, and hopefully “natural” choices. In true melodramatic fashion, Shahid develops AIDS after it is passed to him from his devil-worshipping girlfriend. This storyline recalls media discourse in the

region since the 1980s surrounding “Western sexual deviance” and subsequently, the AIDs pandemic (Massad, 2007, p. 177). It also recalls other moral panics in the region: sexual contact and rock music in Egypt (Baghat, 2004), women’s agency in Saudi Arabia (Salamandra, 2013; Kraidy, 2009), and female nudity (Mikdash, 2014) metal music, and satanic worship in Lebanon (Daily Star, 2003; NOW, 2011). For each of these panics, it is not cultural inauthenticity which presents itself as a threat to the nation, but it is constructed as such by hegemonic forces in a construction of the nation. Tamara must not be “convinced,” setting up Amelia as a threat to the nation and its inhabitants. It is not an issue of Amelia’s sexuality, it is rather a matter of articulating the nation, stressing “how the Lebanese state and nation define and represent themselves across gendered architectures of citizenship and noncitizenship (Mikdash, 2014, p. 3). If “[w]hat holds this gendered architecture together as nation are constitutive ‘outsiders’ (p. 3),” Amelia presents a way to construct national identity.

Mad women

The above conversation also suggests that Amelia is “*majnouneh*,” a word which refers to a crazy or mad woman, as well as a mental disorder or expression of homosexuality (El-Ariss, 2013, p. 298).²³ The words had also been attributed to Tamara from the beginning of the program for her rebellious ways. In a climactic point of the

²³ Tarek El-Ariss, in his reading of queer characters as mad in Arabic literature, suggests that this word has been used to denote both “a mental disorder” as well as “the expression of a flamboyant homosexual desire recognizable in dress and actions” (p. 298).

show, Tamara begins to unravel as she deals with the death of a nephew she has come to think of as the younger brother she tragically lost to militia men in Africa as a child. The child, born to her cousin's drug-addict girlfriend, is dying and Tamara remains in denial, with Amelia at her side offering support all the while. They briefly spend time together doing chores, napping, and watching the baby, much like a couple taking care of a child. This coupling ultimately proves incompatible when the child dies, setting Tamara on a downward spiral which has her answering that she is not quite yet crazy—"Not yet, but soon." The death of the child under Amelia's watch can be read as a symbol of infertility; if women are viewed as "bastions of traditional values," (Aghacy, 2004, p. 2) linked to being a wife or mother, then Amelia is presented as their antithesis. Amelia's encroachment into Tamara's life can thus be read as a dangerous force—she is a threat linked to infertility and an ultimate danger to the nation. Her madness seems to be influencing Tamara, echoing fears that she would "convince" Tamara.

The viewer learns that Amelia's love for women came after the betrayal—of a man. While she previously thought that love between two women was "not possible" or "*mish maa'oul*," she met a woman who changed her mind. "I started loving women when I started hating all men," says Amelia, suggesting that her preference for women was the result of a man's actions. Again, Amelia's sexuality is portrayed as destabilizing, seeking stability through its male proxy. This echoes the lack of sovereignty Lebanese women have under the law, where they are "instead legal appendages to male citizens" (Mikdashi, 2014). According to Mikdashi, it is rather "the (masculinist) state and the economy, both of which are said to be in service of 'the nation' that decides the form and content of that representation." While women's sexuality is touted in tourism videos sponsored by the state, this sexuality is depicted as

dangerous and a threat to national image when it occurs “outside the confines of consumerism or state driven tourism” (Mikdash, 2014).

Amelia is not the only woman who is portrayed as dangerous or mad through the lens of sexuality. The series features several storylines with manipulative women, those who are often taking advantage of men, or more broadly, the nation. Ra'if, the landlord of the compound, is cheated on by his wife, and the series ends with his new bride-to-be colluding with her secret lover, dooming Ra'if to another cheating partner who will also deprive him of having children. Two male lead characters, Theo and Serge, are seduced by women while they are drunk. An illuminating example dealing with non-normative sexuality finds one of these women, Sabbah, in jail after she is found guilty of starting a fire. While in her cell, Sabbah sits on the ground as another woman comes close to her. She sits next to Sabbah, looking her body up and down, running her hand on her arm before Sabbah snaps and yells at her. Ultimately, Sabbah is moved to a mental asylum, having begun her downward spiral at the touch of the lesbian in jail. This further reinforces the idea that same-sex desire is dangerous, ultimately invasive, and linked to madness.

Further constructing this “other” as a threat to the nation, it is suggested that the compound, and more broadly Lebanon, is a site of different types of moral corruption. In one episode, Melissa, a young woman who has come to visit her aunt and uncle for the summer and has been accused of seducing a drunk man, has a conversation about her deviousness with her aunt Rita. Her aunt asks, “Yesterday I left you an innocent girl, when did you turn into a devil?” to which Melissa responds, “Since I became aware of all the devils around me.” As such, the moral corruption taking place—devil-worship, AIDs, rape, extramarital affairs, domestic abuse, and an

“unnatural” sexuality—is a product of the moral corruption threatening Lebanon itself. Salamandra (2012) suggests that this representation of moral corruption on drama programs point to tensions arising from an “incomplete modernity” (p. 51). In Lebanon, this is especially significant due to its “fundamental identity dilemma” (Kraidy, 1999, p. 3) in its relationship as relatively Western or relatively Arab. An economic openness to Western products and consumerism conflicts with a fear of a “Western cultural assault” (Aghacy, 2004, p. 2). As such, the characters in the program espouse an interest in the West, use nicknames of Hollywood stars like Sylvester Stallone and Rambo, and listen to English music in nightclubs, which ultimately links to moral and national corruption.

If moral corruption presents through the outsider, one of the nation’s answers presents as an appeal to religion. The program’s network affiliation has implications for its portrayal of non-normative sexuality and women’s sexuality in general. MTV’s status as a Christian channel with a majority Christian audience is apparent in this series as various characters find their way to church pews in times of need. Symbols of religion, particularly Christianity, make more frequent appearances in this program than the other analyzed *musalsalat*. After Amelia has professed her love to Tamara, the viewer finds Tamara appealing to a holy power in church. The scene depicts Tamara praying and searching for an answer to her problems. The change in sound—from the usual pitch of dialogue to a monologue which echoes and features calm background music—marks this scene as more serious and serene than usual. For Massad, religious discourse in the face of Amelia’s “unnatural” advances draws on reactionary Islamist discourse of the deviant or homosexual, the result of Gay International discourse. Alternatively, rather than a reaction to the Gay International, this discourse seems to stem from the constructed threat of globalization. In Lebanon, this has come in the form

of rock music and its alleged link to devil-worshipping.

Tamara's appeal to religion contrasts an earlier scene where devil-worshippers are preparing to sacrifice a baby, drawing on panics that have occurred in Lebanon concerning metal music and satanic cults (NOW, 2011). In an episode which finds Tamara, Amelia, and Shahid attempting to save the baby, a menacing cult leader with a pentagram drawn on his shaved head and a nose piercing threatens the group with a switchblade. His name, Foxy, is not an Arab one, further adding to his construction as an "other." In the next episode, scenes of the sacrifice flash quickly. In a dark, red-tinted room, the viewer is bombarded with flashes of cult members with eyeliner, the number 666, tattoos of scorpions, the image of a skull, and fire, along with the sounds of a woman in pain accompanying somber music. This juxtaposes Tamara's church scene, which features glowing light around her head and peaceful, soft music behind her echoing prayers. The viewer finds a demarcation between good and evil, reflecting a discourse of religion used in the wake of moral panics relating to metal music in Lebanon and alleged ties to devil-worshipping (NOW, 2011).

A foreign tongue

In a climactic point in the series, Amelia tells Tamara she is in love with her. Her declaration of love occurs in French: "Je sais tres bien que je t'aime," or, "You know very well that I love you." There is a sense of "otherness" occurring when Amelia professes her feelings—she quite literally switches languages to express desire. Amelia would then represent the French colonial power and Western construct of sexuality, while Tamara represents the Arab or the colonized. For Massad, this signifies an inauthenticity with the Arab tongue due to a categorical Westernness. This theme is further reinforced through the character of Inas, a mother from Iraq who regularly

watches news of the Iraq War and its aftermath on television. She is often hysterical, crying for her home country and her parents who are still in Iraq. This links Amelia's non-normative sexuality with Western imperialism, highlighting the repressive effects of what Massad would call its "liberatory agenda" (p. 47). According to Massad, it expresses the concern that Western intervention has historically assumed universalist categories of sexuality, and ultimately propagate violence on the basis of a liberating, human rights agenda.

While it is important to recognize the harmful effects of universalist claims to feminism or sexuality which "work[s] to shame and degrade Arabs" (Georgis, 2013, p. 236), this reading attributes too much agency to the Gay International while stripping it from those with non-normative sexualities. Conflating homosexuality with imperialism in the form of military intervention suggests that sexual identities are forced violently upon subjects and that those who identify as gay are products of "orientalist fantasies, of colonial imposition, and of the universalizing claims of Western gay rights groups" (Amer, 2010 as cited in Georgis, 2013, p. 237). Jasbir Puar's (2005) discussion of "pinkwashing" strategies in Israel is useful here, as it highlights the representation of Israel as a defender of human rights by pitting its own support of LGBTQ rights against more repressive Arab countries, even while denying Palestinians basic human rights. As such, this highlights the way that non-normative sexual identities or subjectivities can be appropriated for the use of anti-imperial rhetoric. Although Massad attempts to highlight universalizing agendas as repressive rather than liberatory, his argument can similarly be used by hegemonic state actors who position alleged homosexuals or those who identify as homosexuals as products of imperialist agendas and national threats.

The end of Amelia's storyline restores business as usual for Tamara,

introducing a new male romantic interest who she ultimately chooses at the end of the series. At the beginning of the second season, the viewer finds that Amelia has returned to Canada at the request of Tamara. Thus, the viewer is left to imagine Amelia living happily in Canada with her girlfriend, where she belongs. Amelia's return to Canada serves as a stabilizing force, marking the beginning of Tamara's less rebellious and emotional storyline in season two. In a later episode (S2E12), Maher, a compound resident, asks Tamara what really went on between her and Amelia. Tamara tells him that Amelia was "a different story" from all the other characters in her life. Every "story/word with her was new and heavy," and she wasn't herself—she was a new person with her. Tamara's demarcation between her self and the person she was with Amelia is significant. With Amelia, she experienced "a beautiful connection, a strange connection." For Massad, this could symbolize an inauthentic sexuality—perhaps Tamara, an Arab, was not able to carry out a relationship with Amelia, the foreigner. Alternatively, an inversion of this suggests an ambiguity in the relationship between Amelia and Tamara which departs from a case of inauthenticity. Perhaps Tamara's true self was the one she experienced with Amelia. While Tamara ultimately tells Amelia that she cannot return her love in quite the same way, her reflective pauses when discussing Amelia, her curiosity about her backstory, and her admission that she was "someone different" for her, show a sense of curiosity that points to the ambiguity in her feelings. It is no coincidence that the last scene in the series finale has Tamara leaving questions about Amelia quite literally unanswered. When her male love interest, Louay, asks about Amelia's storyline in the *musalsal* she is writing, Tamara avoids answering and speaks of other characters.

Still, the program suggests that such an "unnatural" desire is best avoided. In a

funeral scene following the murder-suicide by a character named Raghid, a young boy asks fellow residents why the deceased killed himself and his wife. Raghid, who had learned that his wife and daughter were leaving him, is enraged and emasculated—he cannot face the idea that his wife does not need him anymore. His apparent failure drives him to end both of their lives. A neighbour responds to Ahmad that Raghid was “unnatural,” or “*mish tabii*,” drawing parallels between Amelia and the crazed, emasculated man. Ahmad asks fellow residents how he can discern between who is “natural” and who is not. The pool guard’s response of “It is better not to know,” seems to encapsulate a mode of thinking about various characters who are unnatural—it is best to avoid them. This was the idea that was propagated when Egyptian security forces treated alleged homosexuals as quasi-terrorists after arresting them from the Queen Boat (Amar, 2013).²⁴

Through Amelia, *Ajyal* provides commentary on moral corruption and threats to the nation. The diagnosis of her sexuality as inauthentic and dangerous echo Massad’s notion that homosexuality as a category was repressively imported. While the Arab region has historically experienced the harmful effects of interference and representation of the “oppressed,” this view is problematic in its essentialism; it produces authenticity as ahistoric, ignoring complex interactions between an

²⁴ The Queen Boat raid in Egypt saw the detention of 52 Egyptian men from a gay tourism boat. The men went to prison in the midst of emergency counterterrorism decrees and framing by national police that they were quasi-terrorists.

“authentic” Arab sexuality and colonial power or difference (Georgis, p. 236). It serves as a trope through which a national identity can be constructed. *Ajyal's* approach to a Amelia's storyline also points to MTV's future involvement in the Cinema Plaza raid. Portraying homosexuality as a threatening force which corrupts the nation foreshadows their condemnation of the allegedly homosexual men for acts of “public indecency.”

Min Kol Albi (With All My Heart): Samih (Al Jadeed)

Min Kol Albi aired on Al Jadeed on February 12, 2012, running for a 20-episode season. It aired every Sunday and Monday after the evening news at 8:30 pm. The series was produced by Joe Fadel and written by Tarek Soueid, who also plays the character of Shadi in the program. The program aired a few months prior to the Cinema Plaza case, and one year prior to the Dekwaneh raid, which it condemned in media reports. The show follows a family of two daughters, Youmna and Lara, their widowed mother, and Wissam, the man they hire to tend to their estate. Lara has a wedding planning business and is involved with a married man, while her sister Youmna, tries to exit a bad relationship with overbearing, needy Shadi. The girls' mother spends most of her time trying to learn about the hardships her daughters face, becoming invasive at times. Wissam comes from a humble background, and has been desperately searching for work to support he and his father. He finds a job taking care of the estate of the wealthy Lebanese family of women, taking care of their olive trees and doing other odd jobs. Eventually, Wissam and Youmna fall in love, but class serves as an obstacle to their happiness. Wissam's ex-girlfriend Lina broke up with him for the wealthy son of the village mayor, Samih, only to find out after they marry that he "prefers men." She uses this secret as leverage to maintain her marriage publicly and attempts to seduce Wissam privately. Ultimately, Wissam transcends class barriers, working towards an education and a future with Youmna, while Samih is forced to leave Lebanon after his secret is uncovered.

In the program *Min Kol Albi*, non-normative sexuality is presented through the character of Samih, who struggles with feelings of shame in regards to his desire. Unlike Amelia, Samih does not willingly express his same-sex desire, rather, he is caught and forced to admit to his sexuality. Also unlike Amelia, Samih's exile from Lebanon is central to his story, evoking empathy in a portrayal of a man's rejection from his home. Ultimately, Samih's sexuality and the lifestyle that he would live ultimately proves to be incompatible with Lebanon; his dinner table and land comes to signify his nation, and his inability to easily function in these settings predicate his self-

enforced exile. His juxtaposition with hegemonic ideals of masculinity on the program result in an ultimate failure of masculinity on his part. He is pit against characters who represent the nation, such as his father, the beloved village mayor, and Wissam, the hardworking gardener, drawing contrasts between his “otherness” and their national identities. He can be compared to Shadi, a character whose own inability to live up hegemonic ideals of masculinity results in his suicide. Still, Samih’s downward spiral evokes empathy in a way that Shadi’s cowardly exit does not—he is torn from his country, leaving to avoid more pain and shame.

The melodramatic exposes notions of loyalty and faith in various romantic relationships on the program, depicting infidelity and cross-class love. Youmna sacrifices happiness time and time again to stay loyal to her longtime boyfriend Shadi in his time of need. Lara is caught between being with a married man and leaving him. It is in the context of these central relationships that the viewer learns of Lina and Samih’s sham marriage. Lina has married Samih to escape her humble background, leaving Wissam because of his lack of prospects. The point driven by multiple characters in the show is that Lina and Samih married each other with an ulterior motive—Lina for Samih’s money, and Samih to cover up the fact that he prefers men over women.

Coming out or being outed?

The scene which exposes Samih’s secret preference for men is marked with elements characteristic of melodrama’s “modes of excess,” communicating to the audience through music and bodily gestures rather than dialogue (Brooks, 2005). It is here that the audience is meant to feel shock, just as Lina does as she watches her husband presumably kiss another man. In the pool house, the chauffeur holds out his hand and pulls Samih into a dark area of the room which is out of frame. Although their

apparently intimate moment is obstructed from camera view, Samih's hand on the chauffeur's shoulder and physical proximity allude to a kiss. When Samih realizes he has been seen, the chauffeur seems to disappear into the background, and quite literally into the dark.

Samih: Lina, it's not what you think.

Lina: It's not what I think? Disgusting! Animal! With a man! You and Nabil? Why did you marry me? For what, for what?

Samih: Lower your voice.

Lina: My husband is a—[Samih covers her mouth]

Samih: I'll tell you whatever you want, just don't unveil/uncover me in front of everyone.

Here, the danger lies in the the publicness of Samih's actions. Lina may do whatever she wants, so long as she does not let this become public knowledge. This discussion draws parallels to the notion that the publicness or naming of sexuality as the issue rather than the act itself (Massad, 2007; Ewing, 2011). Although Lina is about to name Samih, he covers her mouth, silencing her from naming his desire or identity.

Their conversation continues as Samih explains himself:

Samih: I wanted to be a dad and to have a nice family.

Lina: What family? Family of what? You want to make a family? You married me to hide yourself...I turned out to be stupid, I thought you loved me. It turned out you didn't love me at all. I'm a cover for your filth?

Samih: Why did you love me? You loved my money. You don't think I knew you were using me? You don't think I knew you still loved Wissam? We both used each other. If you want a divorce, we'll divorce. You'll go back to poverty, and I'll go back to my old life.

Lina: Can I understand why you wanted to have kids when you're a—?

Samih: Because I'm not happy with myself. Why did I turn out like this? Do you think I chose to be like this? I beg you/kiss your feet. Please, don't unveil/uncover me in front of everyone and my family. I'll do whatever you want, whatever you order. Tell me what you want, tell me what you want...[crying and kissing her hand]

In the dialogue with his wife, Samih stops her twice from articulating a name for his sexuality or desire. While the viewer does not learn what Lina would call Samih, it is clear that it would be a term which focuses on an identity rather than an act, based

on her use of the word “*wahad*—” here used to mean “one who is—.” For Massad, the use of an identarian term rather than one which describes the act of loving or desiring would point to an appropriation of Western epistemology in the region. It would serve as a product of the Western imperial project and the Gay International Agenda. The avoidance of using a term, though, may point to the ambiguity involved in using language to express sexual desire in the Arab world (Mourad, 2013). It also points to the notion that Arabs grappling with non-normative sexualities are faulted in either direction; using terms like “gay,” “homosexual” or “LGBT” may be criticized for an inauthenticity while terms like “*mithli*” and “*shadh*” may also carry certain stigmas in their use (p. 2537). The literal silencing of Lina points to the ambiguity in this relationship and represents the tension involved in naming desire.

Lina’s confusion about Samih’s desire to make a family and her later affirmation that he will never have children with her may signal a form of castration or infertility, drawing on metaphors of globalization from contemporary Arab literature (Al-Samman, 2008). For Massad, Samih’s emotional plea with his wife would draw parallels to the recognition of a “Westernized medical condition” (p. 413). This condition, according to Massad, represents a twist on the notions of personal freedom of choice into personal freedom for that which is not chosen. Samih’s “Why did I turn out like this?” echoes a character in Samir Sayf’s *Dayl al-Samakah* (2003): “I did not choose to be like this” (Massad, 2007, p. 413). For Massad, this points to a shamed passivity, a justification, an explanation for such desire. But does this portrayal denote shame simply in its “inversion of stereotypical representations of same-sex encounters” in Ottoman or Greek historical archives (p. 413) or its reaction to Gay International discourse? Can the origins of this shame not be rooted in something distinctly Lebanese

or Arab (Georgis, 2013; Mourad; 2013; Boellstorff, 2003)? Samih's fear of "*kalam el nas*," or "what people will say," translates to a fear of public reckoning (Georgis, 2013), and at the same time a sense of shame and disgust with himself. His desire to have a family is also stressed immediately, pointing to the significance of familial bonds in the melodrama. The theme of shame will be further discussed below in the context of Samih's departure from the program and country.

After Samih is outed to Lina, she begins to take advantage of his secret, making snide remarks about his preference for the chauffeur. The viewer later finds him sitting in his room alone with a gun in his hand. He looks distraught, and seems to be considering the possibility of killing himself or another person. Lina's ulterior motives in marrying him pale in comparison to the possibility of unveiling his secret preference for men. The viewer sees Lina in a position of control, taunting Samih in private and in front of his family. Later, at the dinner table, Samih's father asks him how he allowed Lina to visit a man on her own—after all, it was not entirely proper in the eyes of the community. Lina answers on behalf of Samih, quite literally silencing the man, pinching his cheek, and saying "When his wife talks, he's quiet and listens. That's how a man should be."

The masculine ideal

If for Lina, this is how a man should be, then Samih is unable to live up to this standard. *Min Kol Albi*'s portrayal of "how a man should be" is presented through the character of Wissam. Wissam, unlike other male characters on the analyzed programs, comes from a poor background and works manual labor. Still, he presents as the masculine ideal, sacrificing his education to help his father and work manual labor. This departure from the other programs' portrayal of masculine ideals may relate to the

viewership of Al-Jadeed—their lower standard of living indicates that they may view a less wealthy, hard-working character as an ideal.

As hegemonic masculinities are not timeless, bounded concepts (Aghacy, 2004), Wissam represents the idealized version in the world of *Min Kol Albi*. Wissam, who was hired to take care of the family's olive trees, is regularly featured picking olives from the family's land or simply spending his nights sitting among the olive trees, actions and settings which symbolize tropes of nationalism and endurance in Arab literature (Namdari et al, 2016). Specifically within resistance poetry, the olive has been used as a symbol for "Palestine, encouragement for fight, and rich Arab culture" (p. 880), also drawing parallels to the martyr or holiness. Wissam's sacrifice, the suffering he endures because of a cross-class romantic love, and his moral compass which has him rejecting the advances of an ex-flame—"You're a married woman, a married woman! How can you do this?"—creates a melodramatic alignment between his moral compass and alternative actions in the program. His sacrifice is pit against the comparatively—and perhaps undeservedly—wealthy Samih's secret and Camille's infidelity, creating a clearer sense of who deserves ultimate happiness. It is indeed Wissam who ultimately achieves his happy ending, in stark contrast to Samih. Wissam serves not only as the hegemonic ideal of masculinity in the program, but for the nation as well. He works day after day, juxtaposing the rich Samih who is often found driving his sports car. Ultimately, he is rewarded for this sacrifice by Samih's father, transcending class barriers and entering a relationship with the woman he loves.

In the same vein, the program depicts how a man should not be through the character of Shadi, played by the writer of the program, Tarek Soueid. Shadi sets off on a downward spiral following a car accident that results in severe burns on his body and

face. He fears losing Youmna due to his appearance and pushes his family and friends away, preferring to be alone. In one episode, Shadi attempts suicide by overdosing on medication. As he takes the medicine, he stares at his scarred reflection in the mirror and cries, marking an inability to reconcile with his marred appearance. Although he survives this attempt, a deranged Shadi corners Youmna in the finale, ultimately attempting to murder her and take his own life, succeeding in his suicide. His suicide is juxtaposed with Samih's consideration of suicide, drawing parallels between the characters' ultimate inability to cope with their conditions. Shadi's is a tale of failed masculinity, similar to other portrayals of the anxieties that emerge from social change. Samih's ultimate failure, however, is decidedly less cowardly and more empathetic approach to dealing with these anxieties.

Shame and exile

Samih, unlike Wissam, is not destined to transcend societal barriers in pursuit of a happy ending, although he does not choose death, like Shadi, either. Ultimately, the power dynamic in his relationship with his wife proves to be unbearable for Samih, and he departs from the house, the country, and the program. His departure after being taunted by his wife in front of his family serves as the marker of his ultimate failure as a husband and son. His failed masculinity is juxtaposed with his own father, the beloved village mayor, as well as Wissam, both characters who offer a nationalist pulse in the program. Drawing on contemporary Arab literature, this recalls the "nationan," a symbol of martyrdom and fighting for one's homeland, and its antithesis, or that which is not "nationan" (Aghacy, 2009, p. 120). The latter, failing to live up to the "nationan's" masculine ideals, is fated to the "nooks and corners of the village," rejected from meaningful political life (p. 120). This symbol is an example of the

hegemonic male ideal of “*fida’i*,” which appeals to sacrifice, tradition, and stability rather than ambiguity or fluidity. As such, Samih is similarly constructed by hegemonic ideals of the masculine and as an “other” to the nation.

Although the viewer does not learn where exactly Samih is travelling, it is known that he is leaving his home country of Lebanon. Samih’s sexuality, it seems, is incompatible with Lebanon. Following Massad, this would serve as a mark of cultural inauthenticity, forcing the homosexual subject out. A closer reading of this scene uncovers the empathy evoked by his departure and signals a complication of the “global/local” nexus (Hall, 1997; Benavides, 2008; Mourad, 2013). As Samih packs his things in the middle of the night, the viewer notices a Lebanese flag on his suitcase. As he prepares to leave, he looks around the room and lets his fingers linger on parts of the house, clearly having a difficult time leaving. As he sits in the dark backseat of a moving car, he cries, and a voiceover reads a letter he has written to his father:

I wanted to keep your head up and keep you seeing yourself in me. But I’m not able to anymore. When you find out you might hate me, but believe me, it’s not in my hands. I did the unthinkable and I wasn’t able to change. I’m not able to tell you what I could have done differently. Lina knows everything. I will of course not be able to tell you everything except for one small detail. Lina and I never loved each other. We used each other, each for their own reason. Be careful of her. There’s nothing else. Try not to see me differently and change your opinion of me. I will keep loving you all. Take care of mama and tell her that I love her a lot, and don’t let anyone bother her. After you find out from Lina what made me move away, try as much as you can not to hate me. And remember that I love you with all my heart and I will keep loving you until the last day of my life.

From the letter and the dialogue with Lina, it is apparent that Samih is ashamed of his desire and has tried to “change.” This echoes discourse around non-normative sexuality in *Ajyal* surrounding Amelia’s potential threat to Tamara. Unlike *Ajyal*, sexuality does not appear to be something that one chooses or can be “convinced” to have. For both, though, sexuality is linked to a failure of masculinity. While Amelia’s

sexuality was the result of a man's failure, Samih's sexuality is also portrayed as a failure. Unlike Amelia, though, Samih's failure is the source of empathy for the audience. Samih's loss of land and family is the ultimate suffering through which atonement can occur.

Samih's appeal to his father and his appeal to pride has great implications for a Lebanese or Arab audience. Melodramatic Arab drama serials, similar to Latin American telenovelas, draw on familial bonds and relationships to guide plot development (Martin-Barbero, 1987). In this monologue, the viewer is presented with Samih's ultimate inability to live up to what he believes are the standards of his father and, by extension, his nation. The shame/pride dichotomy is also recalled here, with Samih explaining his wishes to keep his parents proud. This echoes Georgis' reading of *Bareed Mista3jil*; Samih's anticipation of shame drives him to leave on his own terms rather than being publicly shamed within his family or community. Departing from Western gay rights activism, which was predicated on defiance and pride within a community, this highlights the significance of the familial bond in Arab society and the negotiation that takes place "not in defiance to family and group ties (religious, societal, cultural) but in reparative responses (p. 247). While Massad suggests the Gay International creates homosexual subjects where they previously did not exist, this ignores the agency of Arabs navigating within their own social contexts. While these contexts involve the impact of imperialism and a colonial legacy, this does not suggest that their subjectivities are any less "authentic" than Arabs living prior to the nineteenth century.

While Shadi's exit through suicide and attempted murder largely read as pitiful and cowardly, the circumstances surrounding Samih's consideration of suicide and

ultimate exile evoke feelings of empathy in Lebanese viewers. It shows that, ultimately, Samih is unable to reconcile his sexuality with his life in Lebanon. Pitting him against Wissam and his father then “others” Samih, suggesting that his sexuality is ultimately incompatible with the nation. Again, the problematic notion of authenticity is recalled, ignoring the ways in which those with queer sexual identities in Lebanon navigate through a variety of “local” and “global” pressures.

When Samih’s father finds out from Lina that his son “loves men,” he physically collapses, unable to handle the shock. Almost right away, though, he begins to come up with a cover story for Samih’s whereabouts, pointing to the pervasive theme of “*kalam el nas*” in Arab society (Georgis, 2013). The choice of wording—“loves men”—points to the naming of sexuality as an act rather than identity, echoing Massad’s discussion of acts rather than identities due to their discursive nature (p. ix). Still, if it is the naming of desire as an identity which is problematic, the rejection of those who wish to “identify with a broader public” (Mourad, 2013, p. 2537) is equally problematic, complicating what it means to be authentic or inauthentic, traditional or modern. Melodrama affords insight into this portrayal, contextualizing that which is often discussed in essentialist terms, as a product of the West received by the East. The themes surrounding Samih’s departure are heavily linked to the family and community, whether through his desire to have a family, his fear of shaming his family, or his fear of public retribution. As such, this portrayal complicates the notions of cultural inauthenticity and shame.

Ichk Al Nisaa (Women's Love): Nadim (LBCI)

Ichk Al Nisaa premiered on LBC in September 2014 and ended its 56-episode run in December of that year. It was aired on primetime every night from Sunday to Thursday after the evening news. The program was also broadcast on its sister networks like LDC and LBCEurope, giving it a regional and more global audience. The program aired two years after the Cinema Plaza raid and one year after the Dekwaneh raid, on the network which was the most vocal critic of the state's treatment of the alleged homosexuals. It has been suggested that LBCI's civil rights agenda became more visible at this time, prompting other networks to follow suit. The program features an inflection of French and English and the "mimicry of Western consumer lifestyles" (Kraidy, 2006). It was directed by Phillipe Asmar and written by Mona Tayeh. The series, apparently inspired by a true story, follows the lives of several characters working in a Beirut hospital, highlighting "the different hardships our society faces such as violence against women, drug addiction in schools, organ donation and more" (LBCGroup 2016). This series features perhaps the least amount of physical intimacy out of all of the analyzed programs—kissing takes place on the forehead or cheek, and never on the mouth, and sexual intercourse is suggested before and after the fact. This is possibly the result of the paradox of LBCI's nature—while it characterizes Lebanon's "socially liberal ethos" (Kraidy, 2006), it also caters to a relatively conservative Gulf audience. Ghada, the main character, plays the widowed head of a Lebanese hospital and mother of four. Nadim is her only son and lives in France where he is completing medical school. Adel is Ghada's love interest and represents the hegemonic figure of masculinity, working as a Lebanese politician. While the representations of Amelia and Samih offer discussion of invasive or shameful desires, Nadim stands in contrast. His character is perhaps the more developed of the three, as the series devotes more time and dialogue to his storyline. Nadim presents as a character who admits to his sexuality for the sake of expressing who he is rather than for romantic love or being caught in the act.

While *Ajyal's* Amelia and *Min Kol Albi's* Samih are "outed" willingly in the pursuit of a romantic interest or found out against their will, *Ichk Al Nisaa* offers the

story of a character who seeks familial acceptance of his sexuality. Like Samih, however, the failure of masculinity is recalled, as Nadim's similarly faces an inability to live up to hegemonic ideals of masculinity, which, in the series and nation, are ultimately predicated upon heteronormativity. Following Massad's critique of Arab sexual subjectivities, Nadim's life between France and Lebanon would read as a link between his sexuality and the imperialist project. Rather, he presents as a portrayal of a perversion of globalization, and a threatening "queering of the nation" (Amar, 2013, p. 71). Nadim is afforded a moral legibility and empathy through his suffering and atonement through an attempted suicide. The discourse surrounding non-normative sexuality in *Ichk Al Nisaa* largely draws on societal constructs of what is considered "tabiaa" or "natural," familial bonds which are often central to discussion of queer sexuality in Lebanon, and the notion of shame.

In the program, Nadim is constantly traveling between Paris, where he is completing his medical degree, and Lebanon, where he will return to work once he has finished. At the beginning of Nadim's storyline, he and his longtime girlfriend, Ahlam, have plans to marry in the future. On a trip back to Lebanon, he urges her to marry him and live with him sooner rather than later. Ahlam is surprised at his sense of urgency, and wishes to focus on her career for the time being. Later, the viewer finds that he has been grappling with his sexuality in France, reframing this conversation as an attempt to live a publicly "normal" life for the sake of society, and especially his family. A dramatic scene and cliffhanger suggests that Nadim has a lover in France, as a telephone call between the two finds Nadim telling her, in English: "I miss you too. Babe, don't forget that I love you," followed by dramatic music and lingering shots of the actors closing the episode. The drawn-out shot of the men combined with the music, create a

sense of shock and emphasis on the news.

The entirety of the conversation, as well as Nadim's admission of love, is spoken in English, much like Amelia's, which was in French. This draws on LBCI's relatively "Western" ethos, as characters in the program often speak Arabic with inflections of French and English. For Massad, the notion of Western imperialism and its impact on constructs of Arab sexuality is recalled, suggesting that his same-sex desire is inauthentic in the Arab world—he speaks from France in English to an American. This portrayal, however, may point to the moral panic associated with "spaces of globalization" which have been associated with a "queering of the nation" (Amar, 2013, p. 71). Rather than pointing to an inauthenticity of a sexual identity (problematic in its own presupposition of inauthenticity as a static concept), this points to the fear of the perversion of globalization and the construction of homosexual men as national threats as a result (Amar, 2013).

The masculinist nation

While the series focuses more dramatic emphasis on Ghada's reaction to Nadim's secret, it is Adel's ultimate acceptance of Nadim that speaks to notions of nationalism and masculinity to make his sexuality palatable. Adel, a Lebanese politician, signifies an idealized form of masculinity on the program. He is rarely portrayed as perturbed or out of control—he maintains an air of confidence, and is rarely filmed without a suit and his hair slicked back. He is regularly featured making calls from his office (where a Lebanese flag sits on his desk, and an even larger one in the corner of the room), trying to combat injustice and corruption in the country. An assassination attempt has Adel clinging to life, but ultimately, surviving, almost becoming a popular and idealized figure in the patriarchal traditional realm—a martyr

(El Kachab, 2013). Adel and Ghada's relationship generally presents itself as a guide of morality on the program. Although they have always been in love, they have never consummated that love until late in the series when both of their significant others have died. The restraint they exhibit is the backbone of many of the tensest scenes in the show, setting up a moral paradigm characteristic of the melodramatic.

It is in this context that Nadim tells Adel of his sexuality first. Adel's status as the idealised form of masculinity on the program makes his ultimate acceptance of Nadim's sexuality palatable and acceptable to the rest. An enraged Ghada confronts Nadim after learning about his secret from Adel:

Ghada: I hate you! I'm disgusted with you! You're not my son! I don't know you nor do I want to know you!

Nadim: Mama, please listen to me/understand me.

Ghada: What should I understand? I'm not able to understand!

Nadim: But why?

Ghada: What do you mean why? Because this is against what is natural (*el tabiaa*)!

Nadim: But this is my natural! And I'm a human. And if it's in me then it's in what is natural.

Ghada: This is deviance (*shawedh*)! Or god would not have created man and woman!

Nadim: Then I'm a deviant (*shez*). But this is me. Accept me as I am.

Ghada: How can I accept you? I'm looking at you and seeing a stranger. You're not the son I raised, my intelligent son, the cautious one, the well behaved one, the respectable one.

Nadim: But I am still respectable. I'm still intelligent and well-behaved.

Ghada: You're a deviant (*shadh*)!

Nadim: But I am happy. It doesn't matter to you that I be happy?

Ghada: Why would you be happy living in deviance (*shawedh*)?

Nadim: I don't know. Does there have to be a reason? Either accept me as I am or forget I am your son.

While Ghada insists that Nadim's desire is not "natural," Nadim's logic is that if he feels this way, then it must be natural. Historically, European and North American views of sexuality linked it to "nature," or what was necessary for reproduction.

"Unnatural" sex largely became that which was "non-heterosexual, non-penetrative sex,

and non-reproductive sex” (Gender Dictionary, 2016, p. 95). Ghada’s claims, as a doctor, also have implications for her diagnosis of Nadim as “unnatural” and “*shadh.*” Drawing on Foucault’s notion of the medical gaze, Ghada’s words become truth for Nadim—“Then I am a deviant.” After this conversation, Nadim seeks out psychological counselling at the request of his mother, attempting to deal with his “deviance.” Here, in contrast to the portrayal of Amelia and more similarly to Samih, Nadim’s “deviance” does not arise from some sort of trauma from his past. Although he tells his mother he is happy this way, he, like Samih, first attempts to live within the heteronormative.

This encounter between Nadim and Ghada highlights the delicate familial bonds in Lebanon which largely rely on heteronormativity, especially in public (Georgis, 2013, p. 243). In one story of *Bareed Mista3jil*, Georgia explains an author’s experience when her mother learned of her homosexuality: “In reaction to the storyteller’s ‘immorality,’ her mother in full theatrical drama communicated the cost of social disobedience by threatening loss of family love,” (p. 245). In Lebanon, a society which makes up for its weak public sector by investing in its familial, religious, and sectarian relationships, the taboo made public is a threat to this security (p. 244). It is rather this threat to public and national security which fuels discourse on the deviant or “agents of cultural impurity and colonial penetration” (p. 70) rather than any real incompatibility of homosexuality with the nation. Here, Ghada threatens Nadim with the breaking of their familial bond, telling him that he is “not her son,” that he is a “stranger.” The dialogue with her son also echoes the mother’s reaction in *Bareed Mista3jil*, marking both disgust and an “intense terror” at the same time (p. 245).

For Massad, discourse of human rights on the program as well as suggestions

that pit West as comparatively progressive fall in line with Gay International and Orientalist discourse surrounding the region. LBCI's status as a pan-Arab network with an "ostensible mimicry of Western consumer lifestyles," (Kraidy, 2006). In episode 36 Adel tells Nadim, "It took a lot of time for even foreigners (Western) to accept." Adel's statement about the status of gay rights in Lebanon pits the West against the East as a more open and progressive place. This conception of the West as perhaps more advanced in their acceptance of homosexual identities places Lebanon in a position to catch up, reminiscent of discourse on the Middle East lagging behind Western countries (Massad, 2007). In its problematic assumption of the West as forward and Lebanon as comparatively backward, it echoes Orientalist accounts of Arab society as well as reactionary discourse by Arabs. This association suggests that these sexual identities or subjectivities flow from West-to-East, although "East-West was merely one of several axes along which the terms of the modern subject was reiterated" (Jacob, 2007).

Atonement

Nadim ultimately tries to make his mother happy by seeing a psychologist and deciding to marry Ahlam. After all, he does not want to stay living outside of Lebanon his whole life, and she does not want him to "live outside of society." This points out a stark contrast between Western versions of the melodramatic and a stress on individualism; here, "a Middle Eastern version of 'family values'" (Salamandra 2012, p. 65-66) is placed above the individual and serve as a barrier to Nadim living the way he wants to. Adel tries to stop him, urging him to think about the implications this would have on Nadim and Ahlam's futures—will he tell her about his situation *or* "*wadaa?*" It's better she doesn't know, replies Nadim. Their bliss is short-lived though, as a later episode (E44) finds the couple in bed, with Nadim apologizing to her for being tired and

telling her that he doesn't know what happened, alluding to the fact that he is not able to have sexual intercourse with her. A later scene finds Nadim sitting at the end of the bed after an apparent second attempt. "I can't," he says, shaking his head, "I'm not able to." Drawing on readings of Arab literature (Al-Samman, 2008; Massad, 2007), this impotence draws parallels to themes of castration and sodomy that served as metaphors for globalization (Massad, p. 385). While previous themes drew parallels between rape and colonialism, globalization serves to strip men of their very manhood. Reading this text through its relationship to existing social structures and systems of power, Amar's analysis of Egyptian security apparatuses and the construction of the perversion of globalism is recalled. Rather than providing the Gay International with such agency, a construction of a "globally menacing queer masculinity" may stem from the very local rather than global pressures of which generate the nation's "other" (p. 76).

In a scene highlighting the navigation of non-normative desire within the nation, Nadim reaches an ultimate inability to live up to societal ideals of heteronormativity. In the next episode (E45), the viewer finds Nadim distraught in his Paris apartment, rocking back and forth in the dark. He goes to a cupboard under the sink as audio flashbacks of his mother saying "I hate you" and "*shadh*" are replayed. Crying, Nadim takes out two bottles of unknown substances, choosing one and turning it so that the label is clear—mouse poison. While many representations of the "gender or sexual deviant" ultimately lead to their death, "if they manage to survive, it is on such compromised terms that it makes death seem attractive" (Love 2007, p. 1). While Nadim has tried to compromise his wishes to appease his mother, that lifestyle proves to be incompatible with his happiness. A life adhering to local "social-moral codes" in Lebanon and a life in the "global" realm without familial bonds both prove to be equally

debilitating for Nadim. Georgis' (2013) diagnosis of those with queer sexual identities is recalled in this instance—they are “proverbially damned if they do and damned if they don't” (p. 242). Nadim's suffering allows for an empathy to emerge on his behalf—his ostracization from his family and nation present viewers with the pain and isolation that befalls those who are essentially labeled inauthentic, national threats.

Failed masculinity and suicide

Later in the series, another suicide attempt has implications for conceptions of idealized or hegemonic masculinity. The series follows the relationship between Amal and her husband, Bob, both of whom are doctors at the same hospital. After years of Bob insisting that they should prioritize work instead of having children, Amal attempts to get pregnant, but is repeatedly unsuccessful. Eventually, Bob meets a woman who becomes his mistress and then fiancé after he and Amal divorce. After this betrayal, Amal begins to unravel, obsessed with the idea of winning Bob back. In an attempt to gain Bob's dependence on her, Amal cuts Bob's fingers off with a medical tool, simultaneously destroying his future as a doctor as well as his future with his mistress. In the ensuing episodes, Amal takes care of Bob as he sinks into depression, refusing to leave his bedroom. Slowly, the viewer witnesses a role reversal as Bob becomes increasingly paranoid that Amal is going to leave him, begging her to stay home with him, and wondering why she doesn't call and check in on him enough. Amal becomes the breadwinner, working late and brushing off his insecurities, which alternate as expressions of anger and anguish. In one scene, Amal taunts him, asking how the doctor is, “the strong one,” further driving the point that Bob is now weak. This draws parallels to Lina's remarks about Samih's manliness in *Min Kol Albi*, both serving as mockery to the men they now control. Bob, like Samih, has assumed the passive position of his

wife. Bob, like Shadi in *Min Kol Albi*, stares at his reflection, focusing on his marred hand which signifies all that he has lost. Eventually, unable to cope, he attempts suicide by overdosing on alcohol and painkillers in their bathtub. Bob is ultimately saved from the brink of death by his wife, but his attempt to end his life signifies an inability to cope with the role reversal and his loss of manhood.

If tropes of masculinity are utilized in times of anxiety, this loss of manhood reflects such anxieties. Just as the French Revolution, urbanization due to industrialization, and the Lebanese civil war have resulted in discourses of modernity and tradition, of stability and fluidity, and of authenticity and inauthenticity. Bob's reaction to this role reversal encapsulates anxieties expressed by Gulf critics in the wake of the blurred gender roles touted by Star Academy. Tensions emerged between a national identity based on the trope of tradition and stability and alternative modes of being which came to be seen as effeminate or soft. Drawing on Aghacy's (2002) discussion of the volatility of masculinity, this encapsulates anxieties when faced with "blurred lines and ambiguity" (Aghacy, 2004, p. 2)

Familial acceptance

After Nadim's suicide attempt, Ghada travels to Paris to visit him. The scene finds Nadim sitting on the couch looking distraught. After a knock at the door, Nadim's lover answers the door to find Ghada. To her "bonsoir" he replies "hello," both of them communicating in a foreign tongue. As Ghada walks into the room past Jason, she asks, "Are you an American?" Although the viewer assumes she is asking Jason, she is facing the room beyond Jason, where Nadim sits on the couch. Her question is answered by Jason, but seems as if it could have been posed to her son just as easily. Is Nadim an American, or is he still Lebanese? For Massad, hers can be thought of as a question of

authenticity, echoing Massad's notion of homosexuality as a Western imported identity. The nature of cultural inauthenticity is recalled as a trope through which an imperialist threat is constructed, pointing to the problematic nature of this reading. Rather than framing this as a case of inauthenticity, this recalls media discourse framing moral panics in the Arab region, often constructing threats through the sexualized body. This draws on "the ways that both Lebanese citizenship and national imaginaries are gendered and the ways that sexual difference operates and is operationalized politically" (Mikdashi, 2014). Ghada, as the heterosexual Arab woman, constructs Nadim and Jason as foreign in the same way that Egyptian media constructed the queer community as perverts pleasing "Uncle Sam" (Schneider 2001 as cited in Amar 2013).

Ultimately, Ghada accepts Nadim and tells him he is in good hands with Jason. Only after receiving his mother's approval does his demeanor ease. This highlights the importance of the family above the individual in Middle Eastern society. Although Nadim wishes to live his life on his own terms, it is important to note that it is not until he gains his mother's acceptance does he consider truly doing so. This recalls Georgis' (2013) reading of texts by the queer community of Lebanon, for whom "the loss of group belonging is not a sacrifice they want to make for the right to be 'out'" (p. 238). A conversation between Adel and Nadim on a visit to Lebanon highlights this relationship with the public and private divide:

Adel: You'll be fine when you return and live here. Come back to the work that you love. I think that you want to come back.

Nadim: You're right. But I'm not ready now.

Adel: You'll never be ready if that's what you're waiting for. You have to come back quickly and throw this story behind you. What do you want with people? Come back and live here, in your country. You know very well there are a lot of people like you in this country. At all levels and careers. Some are unveiled/out (*makhshouf*) and some are hidden (*mkhhabba*). And it doesn't make a difference to them.

Nadim: And which kind should I be?

Adel: I want you to be you. I want you to be yourself.

Nadim: I understand from you that you are telling me, in another way, to hide.

Adel: Not at all. Not at all Nadim. I'm asking you not to reveal information that has nothing to do with others. We're all surviving and we all have secrets.

Nadim: Tell me honestly, do you want me to come back for me or for my mother?

Adel: For your mother of course. But you know what? You belong together.

Adel urges Nadim to come back and live in his own country, Lebanon. After all, "there are a lot of people like you," he says. "Some of them are out/unveiled (*makshouf*) and some of them are hidden. And it doesn't make a difference to anyone else." When Nadim asks which he is to be, hidden or what essentially translates to out/unveiled, or "*makshouf*," Adel avoids answering and invokes home and country to appeal to Nadim, urging him to put his country above the visibility of his sexuality. Adel, presented as the hegemonic masculine ideal and the symbol of the nation, then allows for Nadim to reenter his country, so long as he does not publicly assert his non-normative sexuality. Following Massad's critique of public sexuality in the Arab world, this would be read as the publicity of homosexuality being the issue in the Arab world, rather than the "acts" themselves.

Massad essentially contends that the Arab world had its own sexual traditional or authentic subjectivities prior to the spread of Western epistemology to colonized countries. This problematically sets up sexual authenticity as a trope, suggesting that it is a traditional or "original" form of sexuality that has been tainted by external forces, in this case, Western imperialism. Boellstorff (2003) disturbs this notion of cultural authenticity by drawing on translations of dubbed Indonesian media, which also draws parallels to dubbing programs in Arab contexts. While some may criticize dubbed language on television as inauthentic, he argues that new authenticities are being forged which do not depend on the trope of tradition. As such, social contexts impact not only

this new dub, but also the original “traditions” which “are the product of social contexts with their own assumptions and inequalities” (p. 237). As such, suggesting that one form of sexuality is an original suggests that it is not too the product of all kinds of social events and power imbalances. While Massad’s view does recognize the harmful effects of universalizing claims to sexuality, his suggestion of an authentic/inauthentic private/public divide effectively denies Arabs the power to navigate through their own social contexts and limits their choice in the matter. This distinction is key, for it again highlights the problematic “damned if they do and damned if they don’t” (Georgis, 2013, p. 242) nature of gay visibility for Arabs.

The series ends with a New Year’s party that has all of the family and friends coming together for a party on the rooftop. Most of the characters are there with their loved ones, but Nadim remains absent. Although Nadim decides to eventually return to Lebanon, he will remain in Paris until then. It is also in Paris where Adel’s emergency surgery and recovery after his assassination take place, due to its more advanced medical resources. While the relationship between *Ichk Al Nisaa*’s characters and Paris serves as a metaphor for both a more “progressive” place, it also serves as a place of escape, with Ghada and Adel traveling there for secret trysts and Nadim living openly without having to fully disclose his sexuality to his friends and family. Paris can then be seen as a site of “moral corruption,” drawing parallels to other representations of the West in Middle Eastern dramas (Salamandra 2012, p. 66).

Ultimately, although Ghada and Adel accept Nadim’s sexuality in theory, there has been little attempt to navigate his sexuality in the Lebanese context. While his sexuality is made more palatable through the acceptance of hegemonic heterosexual Arab characters, he is ultimately removed from the nation in the finale, living in a place

which is regarded as morally corrupt. As such, although *Ichk Al Nisaa* presents a different discourse on homosexuality from the other analyzed *musalsalat* in the way of a human rights discourse, the character grappling with his sexuality is regarded as an “other” to the nation. His association with “Western” elements constructs him as foreign—“Are you an American?”—mirroring Massad’s Gay International. Still, this “othering” and the pain and shame that emerge through Nadim’s attempts to navigate his sexuality encourages a moral legibility predicated on his suffering. As the affect of shame may be viewed as a productive rather than reductive force, this reading of Nadim highlights the nature of navigating sexuality in Lebanon. Rather than constituting a progressive or different discourse of the homosexual, there appears to be an affective force which, when read with other portrayals, could constitute an emerging structure of feeling.

Discussion: Visibility, the Gay International, sexuality, and the nation

The status of these portrayals as melodramatic point to the genre's function to counter anxieties emerging from social change (Hayward, 1966). This is particularly important in the case of homosexuality in Lebanon in light of potential shifts in attitudes (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015; Mandour, 2013), however embryonic. While differing in use of terminology, language, and parallel storylines, the analyzed programs largely construct an "other" to not only the heterosexual, but to the nation. This echoes discourse surrounding moral panics in the nation and region, whether relating to women's sexual agency, the female body, or "unnatural" sexuality. Rather than reading these characters as culturally inauthentic, they can be viewed as "others" through which the nation consolidates its identity. If sex and the body are significant tropes through which the national citizen is constructed, these portrayals cast the homosexual characters out of the country, rejecting their citizenship.

While Massad's view of sexuality in the Arab region is useful as a theoretical approach to the impact of a universalizing sexual rights paradigm in any context, the emergence of such storylines serves to complicate a uni-directional force of influence and knowledge production. The heightened visibility of homosexual characters paired with discourse of moral panics surrounding body in the nation and region indicate more local forces shaping the discussion and construction of sexuality. One could argue that attributing such power to the Gay International constructs a menacing imperial threat through which the mediated criminalization and policing of the body becomes legitimized. Such was the case for the alleged homosexuals on the Queen Boat in Egypt and more recently in Lebanon's Cinema Plaza. These representations, through their creation of a national "other," serve to reinforce discourse framing homosexuality in

Lebanese media.

In the same vein, their sheer visibility on primetime television may indicate a discussion taking place where there was a vacuum previously. While homosexuals on these drama programs are also often portrayed as a passive partner in the relationship, pitting them against a heterosexual whose masculinity is reinforced through their lack (Joyce, 2013), they constitute new platforms for discussion. Similar to the visibility of homosexuality in Latin American *telenovelas*, they may constitute structural openings, such as the targeting of audiences who have expressed interest in progressive discourse on sexual rights (Mandour, 2013), as well as a departure from the limited depiction of homosexuals in comedy programs or talk shows. Most potentially productive in these representations are the notions of pain, shame, and loss. The empathy afforded to the characters may serve as an opening to emerging structures of feeling rather than official shifts in discourse.

Visibility and reinforcement of network discourse

Although the programs were aired on different networks, which account for some of the creative differences, their place on primetime television suggests a general legibility of their discourse by the Lebanese public. From the dangerous, invasive Amelia, to the shamed, exiled Samih, to the son, Nadim, who tries to atone for his non-normative desire and is ultimately rewarded for his suffering, these portrayals present slightly varied discourses of the homosexual. Still, pairing these portrayals with the networks' use of stereotypical homosexual characters on comedy programs uncovers a similar representation of the homosexual to a foreign element, one that is at odds with the nation. While discussion of a potential shift in discourse followed the Cinema Plaza case, the repeated construction (prior to and following this media spectacle) of the

homosexual as national “others” is present in all types of genres on these networks.

MTV’s construction of Amelia as invasive and capable of “convincing” others to adopt her “unnatural” sexuality is reflected in Joe Maalouf’s initial call for officials to turn their attention to the men in the Bourj Hamoud theater. It also reflects the network’s majority Christian ownership, as symbols of Christianity serve as a juxtaposition to storylines dealing with homosexuality, AIDs, and devil-worshipping. The words “dangerous,” “crazy,” and “excessive” are also used to describe Amelia, suggesting that she is threatening. This discourse reflects its later involvement in the condemnation of homosexuality as a societal threat; their appeal to religious authorities and the police further cemented that threat as national. MTV’s portrayals of Majdi and Wajdi on their comedy sketch *Mafi Metlo* (“There’s None Like It”) as hypersexual, threatening figures reinforces this discourse of a national threat.

Al-Jadeed, with its traditional anti-imperial leftist agenda and lack of real attention to civil rights (Mandour, 2013), portrays the homosexual as someone who is disgusted with himself, could potentially bring shame to his family— “Please, don’t unveil/uncover me in front of everyone”—and ultimately, as an outsider. While the fear of public reckoning is the reality for many Arabs, the character ultimately reads as two-dimensional, especially considering the treatment of his lover who quite literally disappears into the darkness when Samih is exposed as a homosexual to his wife. While a full discussion of the intersection of class and sexuality is beyond the scope of this analysis, this treatment suggests an invisibility of homosexuals who are not upper class. The portrayal of Samih ultimately mirrors criticism of the channel for its sectarian, social, and professional conservatism paired with its coverage on issues like sexual abuse in the news as trivial (Mandour, 2013).

LBCI, which was a vocal critic of MTV as well as the state after both raids, provides the only portrayal of a homosexual attempting to navigate his sexuality within Lebanon. Discourses of human rights and freedom of choice figure into this negotiation, portraying discussions between family members who debate the concept of homosexuality and whether Nadim will ultimately be accepted. In this regard, LBCI does introduce a relatively new storyline than those that have come before, and this is likely in part due to the program's reach to other parts of the world, namely the Arab region and Europe, and the channel's "socially liberal Lebanese ethos" and mimicry of Western consumerism (Kraidy, 2009). Sara's appeal to her mother about her brother reflects this sentiment, "Oh mom, haven't you heard of human rights? You don't understand freedom of choice?" Still, the homosexual is forced to try and atone for his non-normative sexuality before it is accepted. He is then still regarded as an outsider, ultimately living off-screen. As suggested by Mandour (2013) and supported by this analysis, previous discourse surrounding the Cinema Plaza case and Dekwaneh raid may have taken place due to the particularly publicized nature and scale of the violations rather than a real commitment to discussing homosexuality progressively.

Despite network variation in the way of ownership, target audience, and discussions of homosexuality in other genres or programs, all analyzed *musalsalat* point to a common construct of an outsider. Despite the empathy afforded for some of the homosexual characters on these programs (i.e. the men), the fact that each of these networks also portrays a stereotypical flamboyant, threatening, hypersexualized representation of a homosexual character on their comedy sketch programs, which also air on primetime, suggests a reinforcement of the homosexual as an "other" to the nation. While it can be argued that the discussion of homosexuality in a new format

presents progress, it can also be argued that reinforcing discourse of the homosexual as an “other” reaffirms their criminalization by the media and the state. This “othering” is further legitimized by discourse of a globally menacing Gay International. When pairing this visibility with other portrayals on the network, we can complicate this notion of the Gay International or the “Mediterranean model” in much the same way as the Latin American context.

The limits of the “Gay International”

Just as greater visibility of representations of homosexuality in Latin American media have found the “Mediterranean model” problematic (Mira, 2000), these portrayals complicate the notion of the Gay International on a practical level. While attention to the repressive effects of a “liberatory” imperialist agenda is vital, echoing the works of scholars like Massad (2007) and Spivak (1994), representations of the homosexuality should not merely be read as products of a colonial legacy. The analyzed programs largely pit homosexuality in a relationship with the nation, ultimately suggesting that incompatibility with this desire and Lebanon. They run parallel to characters which represent the nation, whether it is the village mayor, the rich investor, the martyr, or the powerful politician. Melodramatic portrayals often present ethical values in the form of characters, in this case providing a juxtaposition between the non-normative sexual desire and the nation. While characters differ in their willingness to name their sexuality and their acceptance of it, they are all ultimately exiled by the show’s end. Discourse of the West as a more “progressive” place for their acceptance of gay rights and links between the characters and Canada and France suggest that homosexuality is linked to the West. For Massad, this is the result of the Gay International’s agenda to universalize homosexuality through an “incitement to

discourse,” but there are other ways to read this.

For Arab sexuality, language can become embroiled in political and historical debates about the origins or authenticity of certain terminology. Many of the programs employ strategic scene jumps or interruptions to avoid using any terminology for sexuality altogether. When named, they tend to focus on an act rather than an identity, such as “loves women,” or “prefers men.” For Massad and other critics, this would suggest that an “authentic” Arab sexuality does not use identitarian terminology to constitute that sexuality. Various scholars cite classical Arabic terms for homosexual acts rather than identities to indicate that Arabs or Muslims are opposed to the naming of the act rather than the actual act itself (Pratt-Ewing, 2011 as cited in Mourad, 2013).

According to Mourad, though, this diagnosis ignores attempts to identify with the broader public—or “distant but familiar Others” (Boellstorff, 2003, p. 226)—and even attributes it to a desire to emulate the West. The discomfort displayed on the programs does not necessarily serve as an expression of Massad’s notion that gay Arabs are “derivative of globalization, the advent of mass media, and cultural imperialism” (Georgis, 2013, p. 237) but instead offers something more ambiguous in nature. Instead, this use of language may reflect the tensions involved in the discussion and expression of sexuality in Lebanon. These representations point to the paradoxical situation for queer Arabs—they are perpetually viewed under the lens of the local and the global, shamed within their home for violating what society deems normal, and shamed globally for failing to fit within universalized conceptions of sexuality (Georgis, 2013). The problem with the “global/local” nexus, or in Massad’s case, the Gay International versus localized, “authentic” forms of desire, is that it ignores the lived-in complexities and negotiations that arise when one thinks outside of these binaries.

Rather than affording the Gay International such power over discourse in the region, these programs highlight the way inauthenticity is used as a trope to define the nation. The storylines reflect the problematic nature of Massad's Gay International and the damaging effects of affording it such power in the Arab world. Providing Western gay rights groups with more agency and power than any local or other "global" force on Arab sexualities helps construct a menacing figure of globalization by which state security systems and other national actors—such as the media—can deploy as their "other." In their disassociation with the nation, their status as outsiders, and their links to the West, these storylines highlight the danger in hypervisibilizing gay rights movements and the Gay International agenda (Amar, 2013, p. 75). It allows for a categorical delegitimization of these identities and subjectivities which leads to an undermining of bodily rights and politics. The implications for this type of construction in reality is reflected in the Cinema Plaza and Queen Boat raids which depicted the homosexual as criminal and terrorist, respectively. While Massad rightly recognizes that universalist paradigms may be repressive to the contexts they seek to "save" or "liberate," his argument presents a legitimization of the persecution of those who not only identify as homosexual, but who have been identified as homosexual by the state.

Similarly, the Egyptian blogger Alia's body became a site for some to reject a Western feminism as inauthentic to Egypt, describing it as an imitation which was incompatible (Mourad, 2014). Through this discourse, it is apparent that her body was "constructed as a synecdoche for the imagined West in the Arab body politic" (Mourad, 2014, p. 70). If similar discourses of inauthenticity were adopted to discuss *Noor's* provocation of an inversion of the female gaze, Star Academy's violation of Wahhabi gender norms, and Alia's brand of feminism, is it really homosexuality which is at odds

with the nation? Rather, these instances point to discomfort with ambiguity and a construction of authenticity which is just as relational a trope as an encroaching modernity. These portrayals highlight how sexuality is tied to the nation, and the delegitimization that can occur through the construction of an all-powerful, often Western, “globalizing sexuality” like the Gay International (Amar, 2013).

Hall’s (1978) notion of the moral panic and the legitimization of coercive measures is recalled, especially in the case of MTV’s *Amelia*, as she came to represent moral corruption and an invasive Western imperialism. Nadim’s American lover and his life in Paris, a site of moral corruption in the way of infidelity and non-normative sexuality, further cements him as a corrupting influence touting “Western” ideals. All programs’ excessive use of English and French music rather than Arabic in the backgrounds of nightclubs suggests an origin to what is presented sometimes as moral corruption but always as incompatibility. Pairing these portrayals with their comedic primetime counterparts creates a Western or foreign construct which legitimizes persecution in the media and reality.

Failed masculinity and the nation

While comedy sketches paint homosexuals as effeminate, flamboyant men, presenting the notion that in Lebanon, “homosexuality is the negation of masculinity,” (Merabet, 2014, p. 126) then these programs appear to exhibit a less exaggerated portrayal of this belief. Although they are toned-down portrayals, this does not mean that they suggest a shift in thinking about the homosexual and masculinity. These characters are all tied to a failed man or masculinity, whether through the betrayal of a man, or through the comparison to his hegemonic ideals, which are closely tied to the nation. Each homosexual character’s story is told in parallel to a masculine character

whose devotion to his country, whether through investment, the fight against corruption, the care-taking of land, or the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom. They also parallel other characters who attempt to take their lives due to an inability to cope with their looks, love, or fortune.

In one sense, this draws on similarities in Latin American *telenovelas*, where the homosexual often reinforces the masculinity of the heterosexual male counterpart (Joyce, 2013). As masculinity is not a static concept, these ideals vary from program to program, presenting as a just politician, a patriotic businessman, a fallen martyr, a beloved village mayor, and a humble estate worker. These characters do not necessarily exhibit a forceful, dominating form of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), but may also achieve this complicity through their relationship with the nation. Their function in comparison then hypervisibilizes the patriotic male lead, serving as a way to forge hegemonic nationalisms. A hegemonic masculinity's ties to the nation also means that, by comparison, their status as outsiders is constructed and reaffirmed, resulting in their ultimate departure. If it is men who constitute the state (Mikdashi, 2014), then the homosexual characters have failed to live up to its ideals, leaving as a result. The hegemonic ideals of masculinity that these characters fail to live up to are then forged with "the pressures of morally virtuous and shaming nationalisms" (Georgis, p. 248). That a volatile Arab masculinity is responding to emerging social anxieties draws parallels to moral and media panics over fluid conceptions of gender (Kraidy, 2009) and discomfort with the ambiguity of a "foreign," or Western, masculinity (Salamandra, 2012).

Samih cannot bear being emasculated by his wife—when she says, "That's how a man should be," it serves as the final straw for him to pack up and leave. Nadim

sits on the edge of his bed, telling his girlfriend, “I can’t. I’m not able to;” his failure to perform sexually directly precedes his suicide attempt. Even Amelia, at her lowest point of unrequited love, says “I started loving women when I started hating all men,” illustrating that she too is in this position of rejection due to a man’s failure. Presenting a “failed” masculinity may then serve as a way to assert a hegemonic form of masculinity (Conway, 2008). An inability to perform sexually, a role reversal between the husband and wife, the loss of dependence by a wife and daughter—the anxieties exhibited as failure place the homosexual in the shadow of masculine ideals.

These masculine ideals juxtapose this failure through their relationships to the nation. “Come back and live in your country,” says Adel to Nadim, urging him to come home but essentially keep his sexuality a secret. “I love him as he is,” says Samih’s father, the mayor, although he rewards Wissam with upper-class mobility while his son must live in exile. While these characters appear to be accepted on the surface, the viewer is offered no view of what this negotiation may look like on Lebanese soil.

Suffering men and destabilizing women

The homosexual characters navigate in a world where their fellow friends and family members are, for the most part, rewarded for their sacrifices—widows shirk romantic love for the sake of work or children and find patriotic men to marry; a widower finds love after a political assassination attempt; an estate worker, rewarded by the village mayor, even transcends class to marry the woman he loves. The characters grappling with their non-normative sexuality, however tragic their suffering, ultimately can and should not live in Lebanon. Melodrama affords a moral legibility in those who suffer and as such, allows for viewers to feel a sense of empathy. The suffering of Samih and Nadim evokes empathy in audiences and, ultimately, a moral legibility

(Williams, 2014, p. 114). Melodrama affords this judgement, contextualizing the sufferers of injustice within a Lebanese landscape, navigating and negotiating their sexuality through language, family, and society. This sympathy is not afforded to all, and the current analysis finds a distinct difference in the representation of non-normative sexuality on the basis of gender. While a sense of melancholy is expressed through Samih's forced exile and Nadim's attempted suicide, Amelia's rejection is glossed over. Echoes of his mother's angry remarks play while Nadim swallows mouse poison and Samih's voice reads a letter while he sits in the backseat of a car leaving his home. No such insight into Amelia's thoughts are expressed, as she remains an invasive character in a world of other dangerous women.

Women's sexuality then becomes "a political site to articulate similarity or difference and resistance to the homogenizing forces of Western modernity" (Mourad, 2014, p. 71). This uncovers the "the uneven distribution of national identity and honor across this gendered divide" (Mikdashi, 2014). In the program, Amelia's dangerous and invasive nature draws parallels to a Western imperialism that represses rather than liberates (Massad, 2007). As such, her sympathy is not afforded, while the men's narratives of a failed masculinity appeal to viewers' sensitivities through their loss of home and family. Her diagnosis as "unnatural" is linked to other storylines dealing with AIDs and devil-worship, and juxtaposes characters who appeal to religion in times of crisis. She comes to represent a Western modernity which encroaches and introduces homoerotic practices as "unnatural" (Najmabadi 2005; Massad 2007); a feared "Western cultural assault" (Aghacy, 2004, p. 2). What is problematic in this portrayal of non-normative sexualities as inauthentic are the implications of authenticity itself. If "women's rights and sexual freedoms are imagined as Western imports and threats to

national sovereignty,” then this reading points to the shortcomings of the assertion of an authentically and traditionally Arab sexuality which is used in order to fight imperialism or globalization (Georgis, 2013, p. 236). This recalls moral panics in Lebanon surrounding the naked female body: although used for state-sponsored tourism and consumerism, it is a danger to the nation when left uncontrolled by a masculinist state (Mikdashi, 2014).

The type of reading has significant implications for its impact on body politics in the Arab world. Although these portrayals differ in their use of terminology, language, and parallel storylines, they largely present same-sex love as a second choice, and never first. These portrayals suggest that non-normative sexuality is either resorted to after trauma or betrayal, or after one tries and ultimately fails to live a heteronormative lifestyle. Nadim tries to date a woman again and seeks psychological counselling at the request of his mother, Samih enters a loveless marriage with a woman to maintain a “normal” image in public, and Amelia has turned to loving women as a result of a man’s betrayal. This echoes themes in contemporary literature which depict homosexuality as temporary or related to traumatic events in one’s childhood. This is problematic for women in particular, as it “undermines the legitimacy” of body politics (Al-Samman, 2008, p. 278).

The portrayal of this “other” through a woman exhibiting non-normative sexual desire is significant in its implications for women’s sexuality. It then becomes a tale of destabilizing female sexuality, that which has historically been viewed as a threat to the social order (Mernissi, 1987). In a region which largely views women as “bastions of traditional values” and primarily as mothers and wives, female sexuality is largely controlled by men (Aghacy, p. 2). In these programs, the conditions which create this

alternative sexuality stem from male action. Amelia and Tamara present as two female characters with troubled pasts—for Amelia, a betrayal by her husband and subsequent hatred of men, for Tamara, the death of her brother as a child. As such, women’s sexuality is sometimes a result of a childhood trauma, but always predicated by a man. This parallels other representations in the region where “lesbianism exists only as a prelude to, or as a temporary replacement of ‘normative’ heterosexuality” (Al-Samman, 2008, p. 270). While the modern Arab male subject negotiates through the anxieties of an encroaching modernity, the female subject is reduced to passivity—while women serve as symbols for the nation, it is comprised of men (Mikdashi, 2014). Thus, all portrayals are tied to a masculinity, whether through the failure of the male subject himself or the woman’s reactionary sexuality predicated by the failure of a man.

Shame, loss, and structures of feeling

While melodramatic Western programming may stress individualism (Williams, 2014), portrayals in the region may have a tendency to “affirm Middle Eastern ‘family values’” (Salamandra, 2012). The association of these characters’ stories is thus inextricably tied to family in these melodramatic portrayals. They use the lens of family to make sense of “new social relations” (Martin-Barbero 1987; 131 as cited in Bienavides), or of the individual within a society which is facing change. These portrayals then focus on the family or members of the community to tell their stories—the hard-working mother who worries that her son will be ostracized for deviating from social norms, the father who physically collapses under the weight of his son’s revelation, or the solidarity of family members who present an alternative to the lone foreigner. Without his mother’s acceptance, Nadim will quite literally kill himself; Samih’s father almost faints upon hearing of his son’s secret and cries upon his

departure; Tamara's sister becomes defensive over her sister's safety in the face of the dangerous Amelia. As such, the notion of shame is expressed through the lens of the family.

While the portrayals are problematic in their construction of the homosexual subject as a national threat, there are potentially productive implications for the emerging visibility of shame and loss. It is important to consider why, in this place and time, there is a heightened visibility of these storylines potentially forging a "negative freedom" through loss (Halberstam, 2014). As melodrama enables "affective currents" (Slifkin, 2014, p. 4), these portrayals are significant in their indication of structures of feeling, rather than official changes in discourse, surrounding the discussion of non-normative sexuality in Lebanon. What these representations do afford, is a visibility of the sites of shame and pain which serve as "a metaphor for becoming out of shame and difficult affect, between two epistemologies, articulating what is yet to have a name or a theory but has an emotional shape," (Georgis, 2013, p. 248). The representations reflect this interplay, revealing a discomfort with articulating desire and with navigating through a social context they do not wish to reject.

Just as the condemnation of institutionalized homophobia following the Cinema Plaza case should not be read as a shift in discourse (Mandour, 2013), nor can these representations. The outcry over the violation of the bodies of alleged homosexuals draws parallels to the shame and pain experienced by the characters in this program, which may produce possibilities on an affective level. They may constitute a structure of feeling which is in transit, not quite constituting a dominant discourse but providing openings to discussing homosexuality. If new "aesthetic forms and conventions" are signs of emerging modes of thought, then Williams' structures of

feeling presents a way to think about “implicit tension with those pre-emergent presences that were embodied and given expression during the transition” (Mosquera 2000, p. 67). That these characters are relatively new representations interacting with the established hegemonic heteronormative, expressing loss, failure, and rejection means that they form, however embryonic, alternative modes of thought or emerging structures of feeling.

Heather Love’s call for “a politics forged in the image of exile, of refusal, even of failure” (2007, p. 71) reframes loss as potentially productive rather than the antithesis of progress. While Western gay rights discourse has often espoused narratives of pride, focusing on more traditionally “positive” affects, there is an argument to be made for the reading of queer love through the lens of shame and loss (Love, 2009). In studies of Arab sexuality in the media, as well as this analysis, the concept of shame is a common theme which emerges. By reading these instances of exile and threatened familial bonds as “how people are living with shame and defining and transforming who they are,” (Georgis, p. 238), these stories depict the conditions which are very real for members of the queer community in Lebanon. This echoes academic calls to leave room for ambiguities in sexuality and media research in the region, particularly in the case of Lebanon (Mourad 2013; Georgis 2013). Themes in the programs point to the tensions involved in negotiating “legacies of colonial humiliation, exposure to imperial gay epistemologies, and the pressures of morally virtuous and shaming nationalisms” (Georgis, 2013 p. 248), drawing on other work in the region. If shame is “a resource for imagining change” (Georgis, 2013, p. 233), then these portrayals may provide new openings forged through a negative freedom.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to read portrayals of homosexuals against the grain, and uncover prevailing beliefs which are legible for readers and producers, and therefore, Lebanese society at large. Lebanese media's discourse on homosexuality has recently vacillated between shaming homosexuality to shaming institutionalized homophobia. The timing of these storylines suggest that their visibility is in some part linked to the recent advances in LGBT rights over the last decade. In the same vein, while advancements have been made, the Cinema Plaza media spectacle—which occurred in the middle of the airing of these three programs—indicates that visibility is not always progressive. When paired with stereotypical comedic representations of hypersexualized, threatening homosexual men on these very same networks during the week, it becomes evident that the dominant discourse of homosexuals presents them as “others,” not only to heterosexuals, but to the nation. What these specific portrayals do offer, though, is a way to complicate the notion that homosexuality has been adopted exclusively as a Western import.

Television provides insight into shared beliefs and attitudes which may not be detected through literature, the object of most media studies of sexuality in the region. Its function in the consolidation and maintenance of national sovereignty indicates these sites of negotiation and contestation. Structures of feeling rather than shifts in official discourse may be detected, lending insight into a period of time which will later be afforded hindsight. More specifically, melodrama's ability to convey the disparities between what is and what should be while serving as one of the more popular forms of

entertainment in the region means that it is both a fruitful and underdeveloped area of study in the Arab world. While some may scoff at its supposed lightness or determine that it is not a respected area of study, its popularity and commentary on modernity prove just the opposite. In a nation which struggles with an alleged identity dilemma, the study of locally-produced melodrama can provide commentary on a particular transitory period of time.

As one of the most polarizing and provocative issues in the region (El-Khatib, 2011), the discussion of sexuality generally splits thinkers into postcolonial or constructivist camps. Although academia recognizes the agency of Arab subjects as well as a more complex take on the flow of knowledge production, this view of sexuality is not presented in the mass media. What the viewer finds instead is a forever “other.” An emerging visibility then culminates in a return to invisibility by the program’s end, drawing on claims of a lack of “social readiness” to fully engage with any sort of integration in society. The “Arab waiting room” for women exists for homosexuals who must also wait their turn to seek rights due to more pressing priorities for the nation (Lynn, 2010 as cited in Mourad, 2014).

At first glance, the introduction of these storylines seems to indicate some sort of shift in discourse through a heightened visibility. Despite the heightened exposure, it is important to consider the nature of this visibility. The problematic associations of some of these characters with parallel storylines dealing with AIDs and devil-worshipping, for example, frames non-normative sexuality with danger and threat. The initial attempt of all characters to live a heteronormative lifestyle also suggests that homosexuality is never a person’s first choice. Perhaps it may be accepted ultimately after a painful failure to live a heteronormative life. Still, the timing of these stories and

their status as some of the first portrayals of homosexual Arabs on primetime drama indicates openings for the discussion of homosexuality. To be sure, the introduction of new storylines dealing with controversial issues in society signals an emerging structure of feeling which itself will continue to be shaped and transformed. That Arab audiences have viewed these programs following the evening bulletins, at the most popular viewing times, on the most popular television networks, may indicate the beginning of shifts in dialogue, however embryonic.

While it is important to recognize the repressive aspects of cultural imperialism, it is important to take into account the host of local forces which shape the subject and the agency they are afforded, but also that which they resist. Looking at these representations from the lens of the nation, it becomes clear that these constructions, rather than reaffirming any sense of inauthenticity, reflect the anxieties of a potentially shifting social order and a constructed imperial threat to blame for constituting a cultural invasion or the dangers of globalization. After all, moral crackdowns and panics reflect more about those in power than they do of the subjects they identify as threats. The pairing of these fictional representations—comedic relief and dramatic portrayals alike—with very real media coverage of crackdowns of bathhouses, cinemas, and tourism boats reflects not only an incompatibility, but something which does not belong to the nation.

Moral panics across the region have uncovered similar discourses of tradition and modernity, the foreign and domestic, and the authentic and inauthentic. Rather than reading these portrayals solely as the damaging impact of a “Western cultural invasion,” they indicate an “othering” not due to any inherent inauthenticity, but in an effort to define the self. Similar discourses in the region in the wake of less rigid gender roles

and women's sexual agency point to tensions surrounding the consolidation of a national identity. Similar discourses are taken up to indicate that which is "Western" or "them," and that which is "Arab," or "us." The body becomes a way to compare and contrast, to express difference. In this case, citizenship is rejected for the homosexual Arab, indicating the link that sexuality has with political life and citizenship. These readings may be framed within larger discourses of the nation which reject a supposed cultural inauthenticity or invasion. The rejection is political rather than cultural, and it speaks for the influence, but not sole influence, of a colonial legacy (Mourad, 2014). It is in the wake of other discussions of the body and its securitization in the region that political ends become clear.

Situating these portrayals among other fictional and nonfictional discussions of homosexuality highlights the current debate on sexuality in the region. Attitude surveys indicate a lack of public awareness on the violations the queer community has experienced, as well as societal beliefs of homosexuality as a threat and as dangerous, supporting laws which seek to "limit" the number of homosexuals in the population (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015). What these, along with the securitization of the body across the region, indicate is the very real and problematic impact of the treatment of homosexuals as quasi-terrorists. This type of labelling appears all the more natural when polarities of West and East are deployed—they serve to categorically delegitimize those who express non-normative desire. As such, analyzing any type of fictional portrayal of homosexuality must take into account the deployment of "authenticity" as a trope through which to define the nation.

The characters on these programs are also not representatives of the very real subjects being harassed, detained, and tortured in the region and nation. To portray a

non-Lebanese, lower-class homosexual in a society where many non-Lebanese, lower-class men have been the regular public victims of harassment by law enforcement would likely not constitute such a palatable and morally legible storyline. Importantly, this discourse reflects the class and gender lines that overlap with sexual identities or subjectivities. That the discussion is centered around upperclass, affluent Lebanese characters reflects the class line that intersect with sexuality. While in reality, the more recent target of police raids are often lower-class Syrian refugees experiencing a double “othering” through and intersection of sexuality, class, and nationality, these portrayals are made more palatable for audiences.

These portrayals and moral panics in the region also present the gender line which intersects with sexuality. In a country where women are quite literally second-class citizens, unable to pass on citizenship and discriminated against in penal code and personal status law, it comes as no surprise that their sexuality is also treated as second-class. A woman’s dependence on a man in the legal sphere is reflected in her sexuality, which also depends on a male figure. Representations of homosexuality for women are perceived as threats to the nation, the antithesis of the Good Wife or Patriotic Mother, while the hardships of homosexuality for men is afforded a sort of sympathy. Onscreen it is his non-normative sexuality which is less threatening, less destabilizing, and more easily discussed. The woman, on the other hand, is linked to an invasion of the nation, regarded as invasive and unnatural. Her non-normative sexuality, and even her heteronormative sexuality, serve to destabilize the nation, reducing it to a site of moral corruption. The initial interest in her “foreignness” then serves as a warning tale for those who are similarly interested in that which is “different” or “foreign” to them.

But what are the implications for the few, albeit male, moments of suffering? What can we take away from these pockets of empathy these characters are afforded? That these characters attempt to live a heteronormative lifestyle and the viewer witnesses the debilitating results provides a commentary on the reality for many Arabs in the region. Rather than reading this as a representation of the repressive effects of Western imperialism on Arab subjects, as Massad suggests, this can be read through a different lens. Suggesting that queer Arabs are products of Western imperialism and gay rights activism undermines their body politics. These portrayals are the very real result of a discourse of an ultimately inauthentic sexuality. If homosexual Arabs have been reduced to the victims of “orientalist fantasies, of colonial imposition, and of the universalizing claims of Western gay rights groups” (Amer, 2010 as cited in Georgis, 2013, p. 237), then these portrayals are the product of that problematic reduction. The suffering they endure through their exile can be read as the effect of this securitization of their body and use as a national threat.

Ambiguity then becomes a useful lens through which to discuss these representations of homosexuality in Lebanon. These programs offer portrayals of loss which have not similarly reached mainstream Lebanese audiences thus far. Although a real change in discourse does not seem to be apparent through these texts, which suggest in some form or another that homosexuality is incompatible to Lebanon, on an affective level, there seems to be an emerging discourse on pain and shame which may serve to be productive. The structures of feeling which are afforded by these portrayals point to the very real rejection and pain that these Arabs face in their nation. These storylines and their progression over the years, paired with publicized cases of homophobia and violations of the human body as well as higher levels of activism, also

suggest that these structures of feeling will continue to be shaped by the surrounding forces, events, and discourses taking place.

These programs reflect the real-life contradictions queer Arabs are embroiled in, especially those who are Lebanese. The ambiguity involved in using language to describe identities or subjectivities alludes to a position between “local” and “global” contexts. Which words should be used, in which language, in which context? When the use of traditional Arabic terminology seems far removed from current day practices and subjectivities and the use of English terminology suggests an “inauthentic” sexual identity, then how must we speak about the queer community, and how will they speak about themselves?

While a more historicized approach to an analysis of these representations would be useful in tracking changes or differences in media discourses and mapping these shifts to regional or national events, this research has focused on the articulations of the portrayals themselves. In an effort to complicate and contextualize these representations within larger discourses of authenticity and “othering,” I have identified similar discourses of sexuality and authenticity in the region, as well as previous network involvement in discussions of homosexuality. Future research which seeks to historicize these portrayals further should track national and regional developments which inform discourses of masculinity, sexuality, and the nation.

Although this is beyond the scope of this research, future scholarship on the creative control or consultation of the queer community in the production of media representations should be investigated, as well as the representation of queer characters by those who identify as queer. After all, while greater representation of marginalized groups indicates that a discussion is taking place, that these subjects are not speaking on

their own behalf has clear implications for the type of representation taking place, as this study highlights. Further research into fictional storylines dealing with homosexuality in the mass media will highlight potential trends in discourses of the body and the nation. Comparing these fictional portrayals to other attitude surveys (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015) may offer insight into how dialogue may be shifting. It will be interesting to see whether discourses change as advancements are made by LGBTQ rights groups or as other violations of the body are mediated. Discourse does not follow a linear path from one pole to the other, and it will be interesting to note how it oscillates and shifts according to other media spectacles or legal changes alike.

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