AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

SHIFTING LIMINALITY: THE PRACTICES OF QUEER SAFETY IN BEIRUT

by
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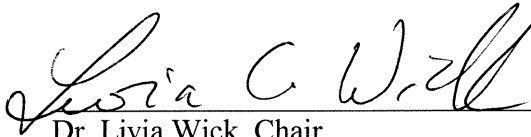At the American University of Beirut

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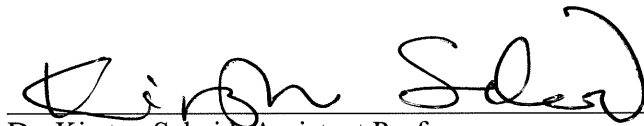QUEER SAFETY IN BEIRUT
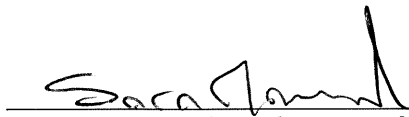

by
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

<u>Natalie Lilian Eric Wilkinson</u>   for   <u>Master of Arts</u>
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Title: <u>Shifting Liminality: The Practice of Queer Safety In Beirut</u>

This thesis explores how safety in Anthropology is often focused around issues of institutional safety, such as the practices of aviation safety, agricultural safety or workplace safety culture. The anthropology of safety is explored with focus on specific communities which are engaging in creations of safety which can be more nuanced and productive when the concept of safety itself is the focus. This thesis asks what is safety and how is it created? Who determines its boundaries and its conditions, and how is it felt? This thesis explores the ways in which queer communities think of and construct issues of safety, visibility and policing. This 'making' has many dimensions. The methodology focused research on issues of safety, visibility and policing, engaged in by both queer communities and those in opposition to them.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I will begin with a note: I use "queer" here as a standard form of nomenclature for a widely diverse group of people, some both self-identified as queer and others I have assigned it to as a hold-all. I know that generalization is the enemy of progressive research, but I think I can argue that for the purposes of what I am looking at, *queer spaces*, it would be nearly impossible to be more specific about identity regarding any patrons or visitors within them. Some primarily lesbian bars I visited had many cis gay male patrons. Many drag queen events were also spaces open to lesbians, the eternally invisible bisexuals of modern queer life and also to trans people. Without relying on acronyms, queer is how I have chosen to frame the sites I worked in.

"Any time a single space is subject to multiple interpretations by diverse groups, the potential arises for extreme conflict." Writing in 1999, Tangherlini identifies the potential of interpretation of space as a site for conflict, specifically among queer groups in opposition to heteronormative claims on urban spaces. "The gay men and women in LA write narrative interpretations of a place onto the landscape and in doing so construct for themselves a "queer Los Angeles." (Tangherlini, 2009) This narrativization of space is very much present in Beirut, but from the position of a city very much held in different lights by different groups of people. Despite being marketed as a desirable tourism destination for queer travelers, specifically gay men, Beirut's queer communities of queer populations still face a situation in which it is neither obvious nor simple what is and is not safe.

Safety in Anthropology is often focused around issues of institutional safety, such as the practices of aviation safety, agricultural safety or workplace safety culture. The anthropology of safety is an area in which I believe focus on specific communities engaging in creations of safety can be more nuanced and productive when the concept of safety itself is the focus. What is safety and how is it created? Who determines its boundaries and its conditions, and how is it felt? An important part of the 'making' of queer Beirut are about the ways in which queer communities think of and construct issues of safety, visibility and policing. This 'making' has many dimensions. I aimed to focus my research on issues of safety, visibility and policing, engaged in by both queer communities and those in opposition to them.

The multiplicity of identities that make up 'queer' and the flattening of the potential un-normalisable into an acceptable shape leaves people feeling uneasy in the body, both the physical body and the community body. I do not mean to imply that queerness is a state of discomfort. However, it is important to note that while scholars such as Massad have explored queerness as under the umbrella of sexuality itself as a concept imposed by Western hegemony, the fact of Beirut as it is right now renders in a sense that argument less useful than looking at the *practices* of the queer community.

In this project, I focused on the ways people create, enact and maintain their safety which leads to discussions of what it means to be safe, what it means to be visible, and who controls and directs the narrative of "queer Beirut." There are many bodies of work that address some of the issues brought up by the making of queer Beirut

and the concepts of safety, visibility and policing. The literature on queer geographies and the ways in which sexual identities travel (as detailed by Joseph Massad) explores the concept of how the label "sexuality" has historically been a western colonial intervention. However, scholars in these fields have not yet adequately addressed the basic question of the meanings of a ubiquitous concept of safety and sexuality in a context such as Beirut. My research was to focus on how queer communities understand and construct the concept of queer safety, visibility and self-policing. I remain interested in the experiential dimension, the ways in which people create a sensation of safety, or work within an unsafe environment to create spaces of safety.

"The threat of being ostracized remains the single biggest fear facing the queer community in Lebanon." states the introduction of Bareed Mista3jil, the book of stories collected by Meem in 2009 to illustrate the commonalities and individual struggles of queer women in Lebanon. Since its publication, Meem has been disbanded, leaving its progenitor organization, Helem, the most visible queer activist group in Lebanon.

Through my conversations with my friends, my colleagues and my extended contacts in Beirut, I have come to believe that the experience of fear in the queer community of Beirut, specifically, is not limited to ostracism. Queer people of all genders face discrimination, but also embody the fear of violence that is part of the collective history of being queer in Lebanon. As recently as 2013, suspected queer spaces were still being raided and the people occupying them frequently violated. A young man, speaking to the BBC after one such raid, said: "*Obviously it was really demeaning. It made me feel like I had no body rights, like the government had access to*

my body," he said. "*I wasn't stable psychologically. I was really depressed for a really long time. I was feeling so resentful, and was just staying by myself all the time.*"

I wished to introduce here an idea of shifting liminality which I believe can be seen in Beirut in the spaces, categories, and symbolic elements that contribute to the safety of queer people who have access to the spaces I will be working in. These spaces are visible spaces, but only if looked at from a place of foreknowledge given by word of mouth, and are not marked explicitly as queer. They are legally liminal given the ambiguity of enforcement of laws governing sexuality. Likewise, more visible and advertised events such as Beirut Pride, held in 2017 for the first time, at a series of venues were subject to more publicized possibilities of danger. The concept of liminality does not provide an explanation for the experience of all queer people in all queer spaces in Beirut, but if we begin to look at the future-oriented actions (both political and personal) of the queer community such as holding a pride event, liminality can also be seen as a space of possibility from which the outcome is uncertain. (Thomassen 2009)

The question of safety is one I have brought up with friends. As a foreigner, as a queer woman, my lived experience leads me to the knowledge that to be safe while living abroad it is vital to seek out the experience and advice of local people. Once, while walking me home, my friend H remarked, as we were passing the police station near my flat in Hamra, that I had chosen a bad location for myself with a visible shiver. She explained to me the memory people had of violations committed against queer people in the station, and asked if I'd ever heard people screaming. In the five years

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since violent physical examinations have been discouraged, the memory of violation remains among even the younger queer people of my acquaintance. H is not the only one to express disgust and anger at the police station. My questions have become not only those of safety, but of the affect of safety. A secondary question has also arisen from seeking out the voices of Beirut's queer people: how does this manifest in affect, in the body, in how people relate to each other before acknowledging the kind of shared space having a marginal sexuality can create. With certain visible public figures coming out of the closet, primarily artists and musicians, the conversation turns often to "conduct" in a way that suggests coming out to be a very different narrative of empowerment in Lebanon than in places where the rights of queer people are written into law. I asked H about one, a singer she loves: "Does being visible offer any protection?"

"Not really." She paused, reflective, and told me she would never come out to her parents, or risk in any way displaying herself as lesbian outside of a set of known places of safety. Even those spaces, such as well-known clubs and cafes, were still not assured havens. The fear of social and physical retribution forms in large part a pattern of self-censorship at odds with Lebanon's image as a destination for gay tourists and a safe place for queer travelers. What is the consequence of this in terms of the vigilance queer people must perform and embody in order to create both physical and emotional safe spaces for themselves?

While people are now more able to live more open lives, as evidenced by the proliferation of queer friendly social spaces, access to these is also predicated on class

and income, as well as, often, ability to travel to Beirut. Queer people face a dilemma in political mobilization: according to Helem, campaigning visibly for rights and for equal treatment under the law puts many participants in danger by virtue of the visibility campaigning demands. At the Knowledge is Power (KIP) conference in April 2017 held at AUB one of Helem's founding members said that the collaborative efforts of Helem and several feminist groups, including Dammeh, to show solidarity with political causes not directly related to queer issues also resulted in a de-legitimization of those causes by association with queer visibility.

Since the balance of visibility, legality and safety is so fragile, queer safety is subjective and dependent on highly individual circumstances: visibility, class, race privilege, yet it has a particular affective dimension when viewed from the outside. Jared McCormick, writing in 2009 identified reactions to an article in the New York Times calling Beirut " The Provincetown of the Middle East," which created a spectrum of reactions from Beirut's local queer populations, as it seemed to characterize Beirut's queer life as predicated on the highly Westernized subjectivities of liberation and being "out." (McCormick, 2009)

In my conversations with my interlocutors, the ability to be 'out,' and the idea of outing oneself as a measure of queer authenticity is far more complex than might superficially appear. While "out" implies a binary, this can no longer be presumed to be the case even in westerns conceptions of queerness, but even more so in spaces such as Beirut, in which care must be taken not to conflate the experience of being "visibly queer" with what that means in places which offer a rudimentary degree of institutional

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safety. The two narratives of being "out" between Beirut and other cities are incommensurable. To demand or expect the same thing as a metric of safety and inclusion is disingenuous to the reality of a space like Beirut. Being "out" is complex, both in what it demands from the person for whom it is irreversible and also what visibility endangers. My friend H confided in me about her family: "*I wish I could tell them. I feel like half— half of myself. It's so hard. I think about moving away, but I can't leave them […] If I lose them because of this it's my fault because I couldn't keep quiet*." The onus is individual, and H's silence is a kind of maintenance of her safe space. While many do not believe themselves or perceive themselves to be in physical danger, there are other dangers at stake such as ostracism and a loss of emotional, financial and familial support systems. There are also other spaces in which people make themselves safe. Some of these are the nightclubs Beirut is famous for, but many of them are also an in-between space, where people go in groups, create a space in which that performance of visibility has power it doesn't have in other situations. I also ask if the sensation of safety can be one of collective intent; In a sense, what justifies the cost of this delicate balance of actions which creates a sensation of safety?

In this project, I aimed to study the ways in which queer people constructed and produced new forms of safety in Beirut. These included social spaces, personal networks and navigations of visibility in opposition to normativity. I aimed to explore how specific kinds of spaces create a condition of safety. Is this question of safety one of physical safety? How does it relate to questions of recognition of queer persons and queer lives within a legal framework which does not acknowledge the legal protections of queer populations? These conditions of safety spring from multiple factors and

actions; the social construction of certain businesses as "friendly" to queer clientele, and social practices which can be as simple as silences or visibility. I believe that these can also be emotional practices, which leads me to question how safety is experienced outside of the physical.

While exploring the possibilities of this research I explored various public spaces considered to be 'queer friendly' in Beirut. Mostly spaces which were available to enter for anyone who could pay, like the nightclub Projekt, and the known queer spaces such as Bardo and Madam Om. There is a thriving "scene" available to people who can afford it, be they local or from abroad. While there are undoubtedly queer people and people who engage in non-heterosexual experiences to whom access to these spaces is not available, either through economic or social prohibitions, the visibility and the relatively recent relaxation of law enforcement regarding queer spaces and queer bodies has contributed to a continuum of communal spaces that have become known as queer-oriented. Who creates and maintains spaces like Projekt, or any of the other public gathering places known to be meeting points? If people of the financial means to emigrate to countries with more legal recognition of queer lives and queer identities choose to stay in Beirut and create spaces for other queer people, what element of future-building does this hint at?

This project, by exploring the production and construction of safety among young queer people in Beirut, expands upon the work already done in ethnographic and theoretical spheres around the perception of the queer body and its occupation of spaces. (Ahmed 2014) Sarah Ahmed's work particularly engages in what are known as

"regulative norms" (Ahmed 2014) and the strains these place on not only the queer body as a homologous entity but also the individual queer body and its ability to restrict or allow certain actions. I seek to read closely the anthropological (and otherwise) literature which exists regarding queer geographies and queer geopolitics (Haritaworn 2014) Gayatri Gopinath (2005) highlights how women of color in Asia create and experience different forms of spatial ownership and how the experience of queerness and pleasure is regulated by access to public space. Ahmed concludes also that comfort is a vital component to the experience of queer space. I would like to expand this to encompass how issues of safety can contribute to a relative ownership of ostensibly 'queer-friendly' spaces. I believe a concept of liminality can be applied in this context in the creation of queer spaces; while liminality according to Turner is an "unsafe" space, it is also a space of power. (Turner 1969) I would like to examine this in concert with Mary Douglas' more broad-ranging concepts of structural positions in contrast with each other. (Douglas 1966) In this context I believe the experience of "comfort" in a safe space can be a radical experience.

By focusing on queer safeties and the creation of safety (or lack of ability to do so) on an individual basis, I intend to gain a better understanding of the multiple perspectives and priorities which contribute to narratives surrounding safe spaces and recognition (Haritaworn 2015). By focusing on the real ways in which people live their lives in Beirut, specifically, I hope to avoid, on an ethnographic level, homogeneity of what is by nature a very diverse group of people. In Queer Lovers and Hateful Others: Regenerating Violent Times and Places, Haritaworn says of Berlin "*queer life is visible here: a gay cafe joins the next lesbian-managed bar, most of the city's queer population*

lives in the neighborhood. […] economically this bears great potential, but where homosexuality is lived openly, there are conflicts too. Violent attacks are not infrequent."

While this uses a lens of benefit juxtaposed with violence, the image of queer life is one in which there is a concentrated 'gaybourhood' and in which said area of the city has a market value, which is not the case in Beirut. They also assert that "a queer rendition of the neoliberal city, it seems, is insulated from critique." This does not apply to the specific physical and affective geography of Beirut. Haritaworn also goes on to point out that treating queer people as 'geographic subjects" (McKittrick 2006) can "challenge a colonial account of queer space and safety, and propose alternative methods of placemaking that do not rely on territorialization, secularization, displacement and dispossession," (2015) which can be productive from the standpoint of queer theory and activism, but I would also like to explore this in a more grounded style, exploring what affects are produced by queer activism in Beirut. In this vein, I believed it would be possible to observe differences specific to Beirut regarding the challenges to why and how queer life is visible, and who makes it that way, with conscious intent. For instance, in creating the event "Beirut Pride 2017" and its follow up in 2018, the organizers and conveners, as well as the hosts of the venues, engaged in a process of visibility which could also be seen as a process of narrativization. One of the events involved storytelling, in which participants told their own personal stories. In the vein of safety, this event could be seen as changing the conditions of safety in Beirut. In order to address my research questions, I had first aimed to engage with the concept of safety as well as group and collective actions in creating safety.

Research consisted primarily of participant observation and ethnographic interviews. By necessity, I also had to focus my research in Beirut among interlocutors with whom I could communicate effectively, as my Arabic is in progress and not fluent. This narrowed my field of research to those spaces in which conversation was at least partly in English, and includes the designated safe spaces created by, as well as among other interstitial spaces such as cafes, bars and clubs.

The research took place over the period of January-March 2018 as the project did not involve long periods of residence outside Beirut. I intended to identify between eight to ten key interlocutors. Two key concepts would be explored, the first of which is physical safety: I intended to spend time in physical spaces considered safe, and attempted to contact the activists and maintainers of those spaces and ask them what they do and have done to maintain those spaces, such as those of Helem which are, by necessity, kept to a word-of-mouth access basis. Had they received recent threats? What events are they hosting, and who is attending them? Secondly, personal safety: what are my interlocutors taking precautions against, and what are they not? How do they perceive the current movements in Beirut centered around activism and visibility? Are their opinions negative or positive regarding visibility and solidarity? What are their personal priorities? Under this line of enquiry, the very personal would be prioritized, as Beirut's diversity of queer people cannot be disregarded, most notably as it comes to the behavior and priorities of sometimes oppositional queer groups. Additionally, what was the role of NGOs in the daily life of queer interlocutors?

I did not succeed on all of these fronts, for reasons that I hope will become clear. I was not able to speak to business owners, nor to any official organizers of NGOs, and I believe it was partly based on how difficult this research turned out to be that made it impossible. I ended up focusing on three very different aspects of safety: Physical safety, affective safety, and refuge.

I have also changed the names of everyone who agreed to speak to me, as leaving the identities of people I know and love in Beirut obvious within my thesis for anyone to read is too personal. I have replaced their names with random letters in the interest of privacy, both theirs and mine.

THE GREAT UNSEEN

An interlocutor who wished to remain nameless if I used her communication in my writing asked to read my proposal after we met and spoke in a bookshop reaching for the same book. In response I received the following email:

Dear Natalie,

Thank you for sending your proposal. I was happy to read it; it made me curious about how you became interested in living and studying in Lebanon. When we met I wondered if you might be part Lebanese?

Anyway, in addition to curiosity, I had two main reactions or responses to your proposal. They are both personal and may not be relevant or useful at all!

Before I continue I want to let you know that I am American (by birth, citizenship and upbringing) and Lebanese (by citizenship through my parents) and my partner is a Lebanese woman. We are raising a child together. You met her at the protest downtown.

My first reaction is about queer as an identifier that, for me, brings up a notion of visibility. Queer is a word that I used to apply to myself during the 15 years that I lived in the San Francisco Bay Area which you probably know is a very queer/queer friendly place. Since moving here 5 1/2 years ago, I stopped using queer to describe

myself. I can't yet quite articulate why I stopped, but I sense within myself that it has something to do with my need for safety. So, for me, "queer" and "safe" do not coexist in (my) Beirut (life). Also, I think a part of this idea comes from another idea that I have had since my childhood: that in Lebanese culture, you can get away with doing many taboo things, as long as you don't say you are doing them, meaning, as long as you don't make it visible to others. Somehow, the risk and the shame arise when the taboo is named more than when it is enacted. To me, a degree a visibility is embedded in the term queer. But I am not a scholar, so maybe I've got it wrong and this idea has already been worked out in an academic way.

My second reaction may be (even!) less clear. I feel safest when I am at home. By now I am independent of my original family, so home is where my partner and daughter and I live. I know you are looking at public spaces, and I know there's a lot written about safety in public spaces, but I kind of don't get that. How could we feel entirely safe in public spaces? Who feels safe in public spaces? Are there classes of people who feel entitled to that kind of safety? Who are they? Are any of them queer, or gay, or Lebanese? I think a sense of safety shifts dramatically throughout life. I wonder if you might be thinking of a particular age group when you refer to queer people in Beirut?

I feel this is a very messy email! I hope reading it has not been confusing or a waste of your time. It was fun for me to think about what you proposed.

See you around!

L

I have thought extensively about this email since I received it in the very first

days of my research, before I fully began to conceptualize what I needed to ask people

if I was going to attempt to articulate any kind of experiential reality for the sensation of

safety for queer people in Beirut. I believe L articulates her concerns and evolution of

her self-conception better than I possibly could, but I do think it is worth noting that this

sentiment is not at all unusual, the crux of "*How could we feel entirely safe in public*

spaces? Who feels safe in public spaces? Are there classes of people who feel entitled to

that kind of safety? Who are they? Are any of them queer, or gay, or Lebanese?" Who

does feel safe in public spaces? I refer back to my previous chapter while hoping to

examine not the explicit context of L's email but its implicit context, which I think can

be summed up with: *how* does anyone feel safe. Not what creates a space of safety or

refuge, but what precipitates the feeling of safety and who it is available to. I will turn to

Miranda Fricker in this instance, to explain her conception of "hermeneutic injustice" as

follows:

"*Hermeneutic injustice occurs [...] when a gap in collective interpretive*

resources put someone at an unfair disadvantage in making sense of their social

experiences. An example of the first might be that a jury does not believe someone

because of the color of her skin; an example of the second might be that someone

cannot make sense of his homosexual desire because he lives at a historical-cultural

moment when the only available understandings of homosexuality are distorted and

negative. We can see then how the two sorts of injustice might be compounded, as when someone might try to explain an experience of harassment at a time when that idea is not properly understood." (Fricker, 2008, 80-81)

What I would like to dig into here is the aspect of disadvantage that Fricker extracts, the idea that being able to make sense of our social experiences is also a form of privilege and advantage which is exceptionally situational. L is a person who has a reasonable amount of financial stability and a happy home, yet her social experience of Beirut as a queer woman has fundamentally been affected by the injustice Fricker describes. Take again this fragment of her email:

I know there's a lot written about safety in public spaces, but I kind of don't get that. How could we feel entirely safe in public spaces?

There is an increasing amount written about safety in public spaces through a specifically queer lens in Beirut. Sara Mourad writes "Grassroots initiatives and collectives as well as civil society organizations have played a pivotal role in turning incidents into media events, directing the public's attention towards that which had long been unseen and unnamed." (Mourad, date unlisted) Her article focuses on the elements of public discourse which have created a public discomfort about visibility and activism, and the ways in which these forms of activism have achieved legal and societal victories, but the oppositional discourses which Mourad describes are perhaps part of the problem L has in "getting" how "we" can feel safe in public spaces. The lack of literature does indicate a gap in collective interpretive resources, as Fricker points

out, but L's email takes it further towards a truth in this situation, that the negativity of public perception of homosexuality in Beirut and Lebanon more broadly has led to a dissociation even of the words "queer" and "safe" from each other, such is the power of this interpretive injustice. While on some level L has chosen to live and raise a family here, she also points out the ways in which hermeneutic injustice has shaped behavior but also her affect, in articulating the ways in which she feels safest out of sight, and points out what I believe is an important commentary on the power of silence; behavior itself is not socially policed as forcibly as speaking that behavior into public interpretation.

She says: "*in Lebanese culture, you can get away with doing many taboo things, as long as you don't say you are doing them, meaning, as long as you don't make it visible to others. Somehow, the risk and the shame arise when the taboo is named more than when it is enacted.*"

I have never raised the topic of shame with her or any of my interlocutors and friends. For me it was not the focus of my research nor something I particularly wanted to dwell on. Shame has been extensively discussed in literature and in the activism embedded in much of my childhood and early adolescence and I found the idea of rehashing it tiresome. L brought it up without an explicit question on my part, but here I do think it is worth discussing again through Fricker's lens of hermeneutical injustice, which I would like to stretch to a simpler definition of *emotional* injustice.

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When I speak about safety, and by extension its emergence, what I would like to incorporate in this first chapter is also the idea of referents, the intangible things which can have an effect on the *affect* of safety, the feeling of it, the emotional core of what it can mean.

As I have mentioned before, several people I spoke to while living in Beirut expressed surprise to me that there even *was* a queer community in Beirut. This was attitude was present across many socioeconomic strata. The people who expressed shock to me at the topic of my research were equally male and female, young and old, privileged and not. One of them, M, spectacularly failed even to connect my interest in the topic to my own (I thought) known queerness, but as the interaction below illustrates, this was not the case:

> M: *"Is there a gay community in Lebanon?"*
> Me: *"Yes."*
> M: *"Like, out in the open?"*
> Me: *"That depends what you mean by open, I guess."*

I am speaking to M, a straight man of my acquaintance. We met through the symphony orchestra, which he plays with. We have met by accident at Dar, a cafe in Clemenceau which is popular for breakfast and lunch, completely by accident; I've been eavesdropping on his conversation with another man, trying to figure out if it's really M based on the shape of the back of his head.

It is. I say hello, and he draws me into conversation with his acquaintance, a Lebanese man who has been living in the US for twenty years. They ask about my research. M and I have never spoken about it. Our previous encounters have been unrelated. I have not previously considered whether it might be worth talking to people who identify as straight about issues of safety within the queer community in Beirut. It hasn't occurred to me that they might not know a community exists.

It is very easy when one is queer to assume that straight people are aware of our existence, as their awareness is so often adversarial. If one is talking about safety, that does include safety-from, or safety-within, but in Beirut, a city I am used to thinking of as small, it surprises me that these two can be oblivious to it.

The parliamentary elections are still two months away, but some candidates have expressed tentative support for LGBT causes. From my position, there is an amount of visibility for queer activism that makes this tunnel vision unlikely.

"Why do you think there isn't?" I ask them.

They glance at each other; M's acquaintance is older, about fifty years of age and dressed well. He has been out of the country for a very long time, and says so. M has studied abroad but he is only thirty-two, and has lived most of his life in Beirut. He is not religious, he has told me before, and considers himself a feminist. "It's illegal," M's acquaintance volunteers. "I thought that might make gathering difficult, sa?"

"How do you know there's a gay community?" M asks me.

"I'm part of it," I tell him. He looks surprised. "I'm sorry," I say," I thought it was obvious."

We change the subject, but the conversation never goes back to its initial ease, in which we were glad to see each other after falling out of touch, two people with a mutual interest in classical music.

It leads me to think about what obvious can mean, in the way we code ourselves; I am cisgender and female. I have a kind of neutral appearance not available to some of my friends on an individual level, but on a greater level I wonder whether gatherings and gathering places for queer people in groups hide in plain sight here as the accepted "codes" of how someone can "appear queer" are perhaps less widely known.

M politely says goodbye as they pay their bill and leave, and halfheartedly says he hopes we run into each other soon. I know immediately we will never go out to talk again, as the possibility of friendship between us is now off the table.

It costs me nothing to be unseen. I can go home. It is no injustice to me to "pass" to M as straight, but this lack of simple acknowledgement I do believe is part of the injustice done to L, who no longer identifies herself as a queer woman, and feels safest at home. Can we understand queer safety if we have no referents for it?

I'll use another example here of a Lebanese person going abroad and wrestling with the in-out/public-private dilemmas of queer life in many places, but particularly in how many in Beirut *refer* to queerness. Rajah Farah's blog OhMyHappiness is a personal blog by a gay Lebanese man who has also published satirical articles in other outlets, and he wrote an interesting post detailing his experience of working in a kitchen in France while at culinary school, entitled "Back In The Closet":

"Over the next 2 months at work, I created an entire story about my heterosexual life. I couldn't control it. From the moment I told my boss I had a girlfriend, I felt the need to create a new image, one that would fit their expectations […] I just couldn't stop. I needed to understand this, so I looked for clues all around me. Why did I have an easier time being completely out in Beirut than in Paris?" *(Farah, 2014)*

Farah raises an interesting personal narrative, one in which the space to be queer in Beirut is in fact one with less rigid boundaries than in France:

"France has recently passed a law to allow gay marriage and gay adoption. […] On the other hand, Lebanon still criminalizes "acts against nature". Beirut has a thriving gay scene, but it is only accessible to the middle class, and it is, mostly, secret. […] But here's the thing: In France, they have organized their hate towards gay people. […] They support each other in their hate. They feel completely safe in their hate. They define themselves and their friendships through their hate. In Beirut, people might gossip about gays, they might judge gay people, they might even physically hurt them,

but they won't create websites calling for the death of all gay people. They won't consider their hate part of a movement, […] and people don't make careers out of being homophobes in the way that people in other places do (I'm looking at you conservative America!). This does not mean that I don't think the rights of sexual minorities should not be discussed more openly in Lebanon. It just means that they aren't. In France and in the US, homophobia is a well-oiled, well-organized machine. In Lebanon, it's scattered individuals here and there. […] In dealing with homophobia in Lebanon, I am not faced with an organized hate machine. I have to deal with individuals, and that makes it much easier. In France, when I find myself face to face with dozens of people who have come together solely because they hate me, I lose my confidence, my strength, and my sense of safety."

There is a lot of irony in how Farah speaks about a sense for safety, not least because Beirut offers such a piecemeal and access-based landscape of safety. Farah's own blog is blocked by the American University of Beirut's internal internet filters, censoring queer content in what is ostensibly a queer-accepting institution. He is correct that access to "scene" spaces is governed by means. However, he raises an interesting and nuanced point about the sensations of safety, and what creates them.

The idiom "safety in numbers" could easily be examined along this axis, as the statement is not qualified regarding who can achieve safety in numbers. Farah points out that organized hatred has more access to the safety of numbers, in fact, and hatred can also lead people to bond together in response to the legally enshrined rights recently (as of 2014) extended to queer families. What I'm driving at with these examples is how

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difficult it is to simply say that Beirut is "safe" or "unsafe" for queer people. It is both, it is neither. Even the spaces created within the city for queer people are not unilaterally accessible, so how does safety emerge?

I would argue that using Fricker's lens people like L are more unsafe because they *feel* unsafe, and the anxiety in her email has always struck me as a very physical manifestation of a lack of safety as well as an emotional one. She goes out, of course, but she might carry a weight of fear. She is not protected in Beirut by the law the way she was in the US, though of course that protection becomes more and more questionable with every new presidential tweet. I would like to move on from Fricker now and take another lens, that of Jasbir Puar, writing about the legality of American LGBT rights:

"The foundational analogizing argument of gay and lesbian civil rights discourses proceeds as follows: gays and lesbians are the last recipients of civil rights that have been bestowed on racial minorities. This lackadaisical approach does not only naively propagate "an optimistic reading of the history of civil rights in the twentieth-century United States" perpetuating a belief that the issues addressed by civil rights legislation for people of color have really been resolved (as evidenced by multiculturalism). It also relieves mainstream gays, lesbians and queers from any accountability to anti-racist agendas, produces whiteness as a queer norm (and straightness as a racial norm), and fosters anti-intersectional analyses that posit sexual identity as "like" or "parallel" to race." (Puar, 2009: 118)

This is heavily centered on the American narrative, as is obvious from the assumption that civil rights *have* been bestowed upon ethnic minorities, but Puar raises an interesting point about the role of legality in creating legal protections for queer people. While I'm certain Puar isn't arguing for rights for queer people to not be codified into general societal practices, what she raises is also a question of referents: what are rights analogous to, referentially, in Beirut? The right to be seen or the right to choose not to be?

The lack of ability foreigners have to accurately compile referents for the fabric of queer Beirut is brilliantly skewered again by Rajah Farah in an article originally written for his blog, Oh Happiness, and republished by the Huffington Post, entitled "Every Article Ever Written About Being Gay In Beirut:"

"*[…] Beirut is the Provincetown of the Middle East. In the clumsy offices of Helem, Samir looks up from behind his desk, surrounded by rainbow flags. The flags, powerful symbols of gayness in the West, have now been adapted by this NGO, the first gay one of its kind in the Middle East. It's a sign that Helem is a safe space. You almost feel like it is a safe space in the United States. What does Helem do exactly? I did not care to find out. The mere fact that they exist was enough of a statement, because, after all, it's so hard to be gay in Beirut, the Mykonos of the Arab world.*"

Farah illustrates a demonstrable pattern in how "gay life" in Beirut is observed from the outside. In it, Farah skewers the comparisons of Beirut to gay-friendly havens around the world: Provincetown and Mykonos as above, but also London, San

Francisco and New York, showing that the comparative lens is both reductive and inadequate, as well as offering a humorous jab at writers who choose not to take Beirut on its own terms. In his blog however, Farah deftly touches on many elements of writing about Beirut from a primarily white, male and expatriate/touristic perspective, including the point that little is written about queer perspectives outside of Beirut (as that would require "real investigative journalism") and that lesbians are rarely mentioned or acknowledged at all ("there are no lesbians in Beirut.") He highlights the focal points of public discourse and interest in Beirut from an exterior view: the focus on legality, and the existence (but not the function) of Helem as a flagship NGO creating a "safe space."

Article 534, duly mentioned, is again not explored, though within the context of a satirical blog post used to demonstrate and laugh at how little concrete reportage is done that is hardly surprising. What becomes interesting is the accuracy of the satire when compared to how I have felt attempting to uncover "what Helem does exactly" and also the cursory assumption that because Beirut is comparatively *more* safe than other regions in the Middle East and North Africa, it is a unilateral feeling.

I attended a lecture during Beirut Pride about the development of drag in Beirut in recent years given by several prominent drag queens and attended by a visiting performer who was planning to perform at the drag ball later that week. It was held at a space which was not explicitly aimed at the queer community but was described as an art space and cafe. As the discussion was about drag rather than a performance of drag, nobody appeared in costume or persona. The event was filmed, however, which raised

questions to me after the fact about who it was filmed for and where it would be broadcast, as one of the subjects of discussion was the easygoing recklessness of younger drag performers showing up at venues in costume.

"Be safe, babies," one of the panelists implored, tongue in cheek but nonetheless with a hint of seriousness. *"They're watching us."*

"Of course they stake out bars," my friend T told me later. *"At least, I think they do."*

"I worry it's a little like Berlin in 1939," another friend chimed in. *"The police watch us just in case they decide they want to get rid of us, you know?"*

I have heard the same sentiment expressed many times in many forms, that the degree of surveillance is neither invisible nor easy to parse. There is an uneasy middle ground between outright persecution via every available avenue and the uncertainty of surveillance. Only once during my time in Beirut did I see an outright police presence at an explicitly queer event. Beirut Pride activities were suspended due to a supposedly unauthorized performance of a play at a small theatre held shortly after the large and extremely well attended drag ball. One of the organizers of Pride was detained along with several members of the audience. The audience members were released very quickly, but the organizer was held at a police station until he agreed to sign a declaration stating the events of Beirut Pride would not continue.

Shortly thereafter, a day-long conference tangentially related to Beirut Pride dealing with sexual health and wellness including that of queer people was held at Station, a public art space. An officer showed up and several conference leaders went outside to speak to him. "Happens every year," an attendee told me wearily. "We're still gonna do it."

I am unsure of what this signifies. Nominally, Beirut is a more inclusive space for queer people than other cities in the MENA region. However, I have found this stance to be reductive, as "more inclusive" requires a baseline I am uncertain of applying. Much as a moderate political position is dictated by the extremes it sits between, "more inclusive," much like "safe" occupies a mental space on a spectrum; for instance, homosexuality is not legally punishable by death, however what proportion of people suffer extrajudicial violence? Arguably, a visible police presence is "more violent" than an invisible yet implicit one, but both of these produce a similar response in the sense of knowing one is being watched and observed, and of wondering what the watcher will do, while simultaneously being invisible to the naked (straight) eye, something Beirut Pride is attempting to counteract with its existence, bringing full circle L's email: it *is* safer to be invisible, unqueer, and at home, but that is not emotional, affectual safety either.

THE QUEER BODY

K and I are meeting at Bardo, a small bar and restaurant that often hosts events like drag nights, film screenings and dance parties in Clemenceau, tucked into a backstreet off the end of the road that eventually become Hamra. Today at five in the evening it's almost empty and K has just finished lunch and her third coffee of the day. We met on Tinder, the one and only time I've used it in Lebanon. We met again in a class she was auditing, where we both stared at each other for a solid hour before deciding to say hello in person. We went out. K is intimidating and wonderful, and I don't want to be here. We've started the way we always do: she asks me if I've eaten, and berate me gently if I haven't. I ask her how work is going and she tells me. We're skirting around why we're meeting; she's read my thesis proposal.

K: "It's fine, but you're not really looking at the history of safe spaces." She says it bluntly.

Me: "I don't really know the history of safe spaces here. I was hoping someone could tell me."

K: "Your proposal is inconsistent. You don't know what you mean by queer, you don't know what you mean by safe space. I've left you some feedback."

Me: "Thank you. I know, it's terrible. As long as it's not also white, I just need to defend the thing. I wish this wasn't my project."

K: "You shouldn't talk yourself down, but—"

Me: "I know." We laugh. It's a shit proposal.

K: "You need to figure out what is a safe space anyway?" She continues. "Nobody is safe. What does that even mean? Safe from what? You're kind of—"

Me: "Being stupid?"

K: *"I just don't think you know what you're looking for. It's okay to be more specific."*

I thank her. We part ways. Later, I read her email, in which she says: "I feel here that we are missing on something in your introduction, which is how do you perceive a safe space. What is a safe space? It is important to define that if you can, or talk a bit about why you can't define it in case you don't want to define it. After that it would be easier for you to identify danger or safety in the rest of the text."

Doing a "queer" project felt disingenuous as almost all my friends were and have remained members of a nebulous queer community and digging into their private lives felt intrusive in a way that never ceased to be uncomfortable. Another stopping point was that all the questions I had formed almost always came to the same answer: people either were reluctant to discuss their own sensations of safety or conversely danger, or they just laughed at me and said (in almost infinite variety) "of course it's not safe." A sobering answer to a question which was at best only barely going to press a thumbprint into my life, but which was a far more real pressure for many of the people I became close to. An anthropology of safety is—as stated in the introduction to this paper— almost an unreal, a lacuna not just in the literature but in many people's lives. What data I lack is not wholly from people's unwillingness to be forthcoming (often it was the opposite) but from my lack of ability to treat my data as worth gathering, or my

own unwillingness to pretend at comprehension in the way a lived experience is a form of comprehension. I am queer but queer life in Beirut is not in my body the way it must be in people for whom this is home. My affect is not their affect and my lifeworld is not their lifeworld. In short, we occupy different ontologies, and I am not willing to pretend otherwise.

In attempting to construct a narrative from the data I gathered over my time in Beirut (an overwhelming "lol no" on the topic of safety among queer people, spaces and communities, for the record) I have explored the idea that treating Beirut as a monolith is to fundamentally misunderstand the space itself; I exist in a different Beirut than so many others do as a white visitor with a great deal of wealth behind me, and also someone well-connected in areas which perhaps produce a little more "wasta" than many other foreigners might expect to have. So far, so obvious. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that it is impossible to lump all queer communities together even though for the sake of discussing safety I may have to, but just as much it is nearly impossible to quantify safety without discussing what produces or reduces it, and that creates a much larger question about the characteristics of Beirut around that concept. Medical anthropologist Tulasi Srinivas states in a conversation in CulAnth:

How do we teach the anthropology of a country, such as India (or China, Russia, Brazil, or the United States for that matter) without reducing it to a mosaic of academic curiosities? How do we balance the analytically established giants of caste, family, kinship, race, or gender with theoretically fringe, but popular phenomena like

instant noodles, cricket, online dating, or stand-up comedy? What else might we be

missing? (Srninivas, 2019)

What this passage illustrates I believe is the thing I have been grappling with in trying to write about safety in Beirut. Nobody is safe without parameters, except perhaps someone completely outside the various traps and dangers inherent in citizenship or lack thereof, or someone with enough "fuck-you money" to escape repercussions, both legal and social, or perceived deviance from the norm. Even then, what does safety mean? What does it mean to be safe from harm if we can't define harm? Are you safe from harm if nobody can hurt you physically? Is anyone ever safe from psychological harm? Is safety in the mind or the body or both, rather than the city? How do I speak about Beirut's communities without speaking about all the interconnected elements which make Beirut the city it is; the pollution, the construction, the vast, vast disparities of wealth and care? The food, the coffee, the nightlife, the underlying history of everyone you see?

When I arrived in Beirut in 2016 the thing which struck me immediately was how different it was from when I had last been in 2009, in many ways a new place than the city I had known seven years prior, just as it was a horse of a different color in the 60s and 70s when my father was growing up here. The legacy of connections I inherited proved as well to be people for whom the lifeworld I inhabited was alien, one of whom asked me —sitting back on their high balcony looking over Baabda— when I told them what my thesis would be about whether there even *was a queer community* in Beirut.

"How can you not see us?" I thought, wondering at how something I perceived everywhere could be so invisible to them.

Confused and distressed I called my father to ask him about growing up in Hamra when he lived there, what people our age did, who he spent time with. Whether he was aware there was a thriving network of queer spaces. "I didn't know what a gay person was until I moved to London," he told me. "It didn't exist in Beirut." He was speaking of when he left Beirut in 1978, but it has surprised me how often I have heard this sentiment repeated.

In this chapter I will aim to explore the ways in which inhabiting a queer body can be alienated from the heteronormative space which is considered the default in Beirut and in turn illustrate the necessity of "queer space" as an alternative.

Firstly, though it is obvious, I feel I must state that there is no such thing as a universal queer body. the experience of a transgender person will not be the same as a person who identifies as nonbinary, or one who is a masculine-presenting woman or feminine presenting man. There are a multitude of queer bodies, some more visible to the heteronormative eye than others. For the sake of clarity without an endless devolving spiral of minutiae I shall use the false equivalence of "queer" as a broad descriptor in the full knowledge that it is not, as a way of corralling the wide spectrum of queer embodiments within certain theoretical boundaries created by the normative world. After all, there is one default (man) to which all others exist in opposition to, right?

In Donna Haraway "Situated Knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective" (1988) she refers to the people she focuses on, for the purposes of her article, as "*lifelong inmates of female and colonized bodies.*" (576) While the description is intended to be visceral and not literal, it does provoke a question: if the Other body is a prison, then who is the prisoner? What is the relationship between the self and the body in this statement? Lastly, is there a way out of the prison? M questioned my conception of what a safe space is, and to answer that I feel as though first I must attempt to extrapolate some of my thoughts about queerness in a general sense, rather than tackle the idea of a space for queerness right away.

Let us follow the thread for a moment and pick apart the twists which allow Donna Haraway to use this particular metaphor in her work. Firstly, for the body to be a prison, the prison must be occupied. The self, the anima — the pilot light which turns a body from component parts to an entity, a living being — must be separate from the body. So, following that, if the anima is the self or a component of it, what relationship does it have to the physical? For lack of better vocabulary, how does the self exist in the prison-body, and how is the body-as-prison contextualized and understood by the self? I set these questions out in order to illustrate the role played in this context by the exterior forces Haraway construes as the "objective."

I would like to work towards a wider thought experiment on the limits of the body as experienced by people whose experience of the strictures of structural violence are different from the hetero-norm, whose partial perspectives have evolved since

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Haraway's original work in 1988. Nancy C. M. Harstock quotes Gail Mason in her work "Experience, Embodiment, and Epistemologies" (2006): "*The body is not just a passive biological object, overlaid with social meaning.*" (181) While this is a tacit refutation of something Haraway may not have intended with her phrasing, it nevertheless deserves deconstruction, because if the body is not, as Mason says, a passive object overlaid with social meaning, yet is still a prison, then it follows that it might perhaps be allowed to be imbued with social meaning, or in other words to embody it.

It is evident that we must shift the parameters of not only that which is considered the 'normal' body, but in order for no single body to remain a prison, the understanding we have of how structural violence occupies the body, colonizes it, in Haraway's words, must be updated. In this case, what becomes the Other body? Female for one, those in opposition to Haraway's deconstructed false neutral — the power structure of those seen as default and treated as such — but rather than just examining white men between eighteen and sixty and everyone else — I'd suggest that the prison-body exists in layers not necessarily present in Haraway's work. What makes a body queer and how does it feel? How do we feel, to seek safety and community with others of the same kind? Arguably, this is the element of liminality I first intended to explore when proposing this project, though seating it in a physical dimension has developed through my fieldwork. The layers I've brought up out of Haraway's initial conception of the body can also create a sensation of liminal being, one of nonbinary gender, unquantifiable sexuality (as in L who no longer identifies herself as "queer") and a sensation of invisibility.

For a moment I'd like to refer to Judith Butler and her conception of gender as a social construct. In "The Lesbian Phallus" (1992) she states: "*to offer a definition of the phallus — indeed, to attempt to fix its meaning— is to posture as if one has the phallus and license to presume and enact precisely what remains to be explained*." I take this to mean that a body is not a bounded object in itself, but something subject to social meaning and formed by its interactions with it. Take for instance this anecdote from S. Lochlainn Jain's "Cancer Butch" (2007): "*When diagnosed with breast cancer, literary theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's first thought was, "Shit, now I guess I really must be a woman." (Sedgwick 1992:202-203) Crucially, Sedgwick's recalled reaction to diagnosis was that the cancer, not the breast (which she already had), offered the defining trauma that constituted her as a woman.*" (505)

Both of these statements I feel support an epistemological possibility in which non-normative bodies and structural violence are not divorced from each other as separate entities but are entwined experiences which sit within the body rather than exclusively acting on it or being enacted by it. Arguably by this model the same could also be said of a theoretical "queer body."

In the case of many of the people I spoke to in the course of my research, certain themes emerged in the context of a kind of queer embodiment; best illustrated by a friend I brought it up with who agreed to extrapolate with me:

R is talking a mile-a-minute again, thoughts jumping at a speed I can barely keep up with, faint Canadian accent making me homesick. We are in her living room on the fourth floor of a building with a wonderful view of the sea, a breeze wafting in through the open windows. We used to be neighbors and now we're still neighbors; we live on the same street instead of in the same building and frequently run into each other, once or twice literally. We've been talking about weed. Now we're talking about jobs. We were talking about hair. We were talking about food poisoning. We were talking about anxiety.

R: "People told me I'd never get a job. I was working in Toronto and then I was like, man, I'm sick of this, I'm moving back to Beirut, y'know, and people— friends! Were telling me like, c'mon, you gotta grow your hair, you need to— you won't get a job. You just won't. That's what it's like here. But you know what?"

Me: "What?"

R: "I'm me, right? This is me, it's always been me. I got lots of jobs in Toronto. I'll get a job here and I did."

R considers herself gender-neutral or two-spirit, a First Nations concept of third-gender or gender nonconforming people sometimes adopted by those who are not Native American or Canadian. I use "her" as a pronoun as R has expressed to me that it's fine as a placeholder. She doesn't want people to "make a big deal out of it." She is tall and confident, with grey hair she wears very high above her head. It gives her ten centimeters of extra height. I don't bring up with her whether her own gender terms are appropriative as someone Lebanese, and not first nations Canadian. The conversation

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moves too quickly, and we cycle quickly back through topics: tea, caffeine, mental health medication, Toronto, whether or not I "look Arab" (Verdict: I don't) before I manage to ask about gender presentation again, when she says "I guess I just like straight girls, right?" With a laugh.

Me: *"What makes a straight girl, if they date people that aren't men?"*

R: *"Oh, how they look, I guess."*

Me: *"Sometimes girls that look straight aren't straight. Maybe it's just to stay safe." I pause, trying to make a joke. "Or to get a job?"*

R: *"Man, a few years ago even, I got attacked. Some guy, he— you know, we were coming out of a place I go all the time, I know the owner, and in the parking lot, right— some guys, they saw us— they're driving past like "hey, what are you? What is that?" And they're just being loudmouths! And so then they get out, they come in the parking lot and they grab me and slam my head against a car. I was so mad."*

Me: *"Shit, were you okay?"*

R: *"Yeah, I mean— yeah, I mostly just laugh it off, they're idiots, but this time I was hurt, I told the owner, and then they were looking for these guys, but they never came back."*

Me: *Have you been back since?"*

R: *"Oh, yeah. It's fine. Nobody cares now. I went back to Canada and then I came back and now it's fine, people care less."*

Me: *"Do you do anything differently?"*

R: *"Nah, I mean, I laugh it off. But it's like— it was always harder for people who don't look like one or the other. I just don't know why they care so much."*

Me: "When did this happen?"

R: "A few years ago. Anyway—"

The conversation moves on, R driving it forward. She doesn't seem emotionally affected, but it's hard to tell. Her straightforwardness can also be a kind of obfuscation, her tone more or less the same talking about geese as it is talking about being attacked in the early hours of the morning outside a club she went to often.

What I believe this conversation with R illustrates in this context is that R herself is not interested in adhering to a gender role but also has little interest in discussing it, even brushing over the violence she faced as a result of people's reactions to her unidentifiable (to them) body: "*What is that*?"

"*So much for those of us who would still like to talk about reality...*" Donna Haraway continues. The reality of existing in a physical body that is differently othered than that of the white woman calls into consideration the context of otherness that Haraway's work lacks, so where is the queer body, suspended in the matrix of culture? Is every queer person similarly imprisoned? Or does the line of "queer" become blurrier with increasing grades of magnification under the microscope? R considers herself to be safe in Beirut, though physically she hasn't been. What can this tell us about where safety is felt? Arguably, R's sense of safety in Beirut stems from a different source than her physical space, as she has been harmed here, like many others I spoke to.

Two things must happen for Haraway's vision of the body to retain its epistemological clarity: the parameters of who is in the prison must be established, and then the prison itself, the body, must be situated within what makes it a prison. Here is where I believe there is a place for the definitions of structural violence; if the body imprisons the self, then the qualities of the body are subject to violence, as the prison is a violent metaphor. If a person othered by their body is the prisoner, the inmate, then they have been left at the mercy of structural violence, prevented from free expression, from basic needs, and subjected to the constant aggression of othering, then it might be possible to think of how the body reacts rather than just the self within in. Take for instance the structural violence of "white feminism." In an article from "Bustle" magazine, writer Claire Warner sources the manifestations of racial microaggressions from diverse voices, using the terms written into being by Haraway and Butler to illustrate the nuances of how white feminism erases black and minority ethnic (BAME) bodies: "*Much like how the patriarchy assumes that masculinity is the norm, White Feminists believe that their experiences as white, usually cis and heterosexual women are the default. This assumes that the way white women experience misogyny is the way all women experience misogyny, and that's just not true. To see the extent to which whiteness is idealized in our culture, just walk down the dreaded Pink Aisle in a toy store. Dolls are almost always primarily white, with perhaps one or two token "friends" of color, driving home the idea that "white" equals beautiful leading lady, while "nonwhite" equals sidekick only.*" (Warner, 2015) I would argue that a similar classification of bodies is at play with the straight body setting the queer body as "other" but where one is safe the other isn't.

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In a recent comic strip on Instagram, the artist going by "Beirut By Dyke" draws attention to the specific experiences of lesbian women and gender non-binary female-sexed patients at the gynecologist's office. In the strip, a woman who is drawn with short hair and trousers is sitting in the waiting room along with a woman wearing hijab and another dressed more "femininely." She is called into the doctor's office and is asked whether she is sexually active. When she responds that she is, the doctor (also drawn as female) expresses concern that she is not on birth control. "But you said you were sexually active." The main character reminds her that she is sexually active with women and therefore unlikely to get pregnant. "But not sex-sex," the doctor exclaims. This is an interaction I myself have had with doctors in Beirut, usually accompanied by the moment of self-interrogation before I tell them that my sexual activity is with women and I have never been on birth control. While neither of us (as per the details revealed in the comic strip) are "ill" necessarily, there is a certain experience of bodily disconnection to be felt when one is "designated other" whether by badly-understood or stigmatized sexual activity or gender presentation.

In the comic, the character's positionality is not of her own making, nor is her gender given the option of being philosophically questioned. Farmer writes: "*The degree to which people can fight back against such infernal machinery—or its symbolic props—has been the subject of much discussion in anthropology. […] many texts have celebrated various forms of "resistance" to the dominant social order and its supports, symbolic and material. Romanticism aside, the impact of extreme poverty and social marginalization is profound in many of the settings in which anthropologists work. These settings include not only the growing slums and shrinking villages of the Third*

World (or whatever it is called these days) but also, often, the cities of the United States. In some of these places, there really are social spaces of spirited resistance." I would argue that creating a sense of safety in any space for non-normative queer bodies is an affectual process of resistance rather than explicitly the result of the space itself.

I turn here slightly off-track to Yael Navaro-Yashin's work in North Cyprus (2001), and her concept of the embodiment of melancholia, which she describes as "'*maraz' refer[ing] to a state of mental depression, deep and unrecoverable sadness, and dis-ease, which I explore, in English, through the concept of melancholia.*" She identifies melancholia as an affect and an affective condition, something both within and without the body, arising not only from the self but from the environment of North Cyprus, described as "rusty and derelict, kept visibly unmaintained since the war," and also from the acts engaged in by her informants, who claimed the discarded items left behind by Greek Cypriots when they had evacuated North Cyprus and felt themselves to be dirty with it. She writes: "*The reference to 'dirt' by my informant who garbed herself in clothes left behind by the Greek-Cypriots is, I would suggest, a self-reflexive and conscientious moral commentary on the status of the person who uses things which belong to others. The 'dirt', therefore, in the self-reflection, is a critical reference to the self who is to be donned with the objects of another.*" Linking this back to violence, I wonder if the experience of being "imprisoned" in a body which is considered to be other can contribute to a collective affectual melancholia. If physical violence and its concussive detritus can produce melancholia, why can't other kinds of violence engender the same sensations and affects?

In searching for a way for those whose experience is colored not just by one factor of boundedness or otherness (women of color, women in poverty, trans people and single mothers and gender non-binary people) to express their view, the ability to articulate that pain may be a way towards Haraway's objective of a truly multitudinous anthropology.

Paul Farmer (2004) tells us that "*exploring the anthropology of structural violence is a dour business. Our job is to document, as meticulously and as honestly as we can, the complex workings of a vast machinery rooted in a political economy that only a romantic would term fragile. What is fragile is rather our enterprise of creating a more truthful accounting and fighting amnesia*." I would argue that fragility here is also a contributor to the affect of safety, and now, finally, I think I can begin to mention some spaces as well as who goes to them and why in my next chapter.

REFUGE

More than a year ago I began to think about the concept of refuge, in part because I was gearing up to take Sylvain Perdigon's class entitled "The Space of Refuge" but also in truth because of anxiety; my own, the anxiety of those around me, the general sensation of panic which seemed to pervade a lot of my social and online spaces about any number of topics: social inequality, the environment, reproductive rights, and many, many more. In the time since I have removed myself from social media and have chosen to moderate my intake of news to manage that anxiety. The anxiety I refer to I think has its roots in toxicity, and I mean this in a broad sense.

I have encountered what I consider *toxic spaces* many times. Often online, a kind of policing-based emotional toxicity which has more and more been colliding with sites like Grindr which add in the combined toxicities of racism and appearance-based judgements. I have, however, often encountered them in the real world as well, and the toxicity which produces anxiety can come from many sources. In bare terms, I have been in spaces with significant environmental toxins, and those with a toxic energy. They are not functionally different in feeling to me, though the latter is more important for the purposes of this paper. A toxic space might be harmful to physical health, but a toxic space can also be harmful to emotional health. I bring up the concept of toxicity to give a sense of affective texture to my writing on safety, because as I have pointed out, trying to pin down what safety is has proved to be a much more difficult task than anticipated. I will first go into what constitutes a refuge, if indeed that can be defined, and then weave it into a story about toxicity, environmental and social. I find it

interesting from a holistic perspective to pull back from a close-focus on a small, infinitesimal fragment of humanity and look for patterns of refuge elsewhere.

What do we consider a refuge when the habitable space has become divided; those who (inadvertently) provide refuge and those taking it, seeking protection or separation from further human interference. This reinforces a divide which has come to be essential to the understanding of nature as it is now, in a state of unprecedented flux, because humans are positioned outside of it, yet are constantly remaking it, so are recursively an integral part. Refuge from human-made alterations to the world does not exist, but as Tsing argues in, relationships with non-human species (such as her example, the Matsutake mushroom) must be considered in examining the possibility of life both during and after devastation. In her words, she uses the language of entanglements, intertwining ecosystems of survival relating "assemblages" rather than discrete biological species. However, in these assemblages is also the knowledge that "*all creatures can come back to life*" once man is gone. Tsing asks us to pay attention to destruction.

Beirut itself is a toxic space in a physical sense. The air quality is abysmal and the water not much better, yet it has become a space of refuge for many, many people. My thinking about refuge and toxicity becomes relevant to my research when I think of queer spaces as assemblages of need which are not quite refuges and for the purposes of this chapter I will focus on only a few of these spaces in Beirut: Projekt, a big nightclub, Bardo and Madam Om, small bars, and the Helem space, a small NGO which is a hangout for any queer people who wish to go there. I won't waste much time describing

them as physical spaces. That's not the point. The point is the assemblages they create, the character of their various forms of refuge, and the character of what they exclude as well as what they welcome in.

First, Madam Om:

Helem hosted a King Ball at Madam Om, a club off the Main Street in Gemmayze, a converted old house facing the highway done in shades of blue and red. It's a smoking space, a permanent haze wreathing the many low, narrow tables and leather booths lined along the walls. It's a space of many rooms, lacking an obvious stage. I initially found a seat in a corner then realized I wouldn't be able to see the performances. I moved several times before finding a spot, and ended up on the same table as the judges, some of whom were friends and acquaintances of mine, completely by accident. Generally, in these public situations I try to stay on the peripheries, not feeling wholly as though I belong. I needn't have worried; the space became so packed that we all ended up standing on chairs, the wicker seat I had chosen developing a bigger hole more quickly than I was expecting. Wobbling to keep my balance, I still managed to watch the show start. Introduced by representatives from Helem and a young performer, they explained over the blaring speakers that while there was a growing platform for drag in Beirut there was less space to celebrate drag kings, so the night had been started in response.

Immediately, the differences were obvious: Madam Om, like Bardo, is a bar and restaurant, open most of the day and coming alive at night, but where Bardo is a small,

polished space, Madam Om has a different feel, a more private, segmented atmosphere with less expensive drinks and more diverse patrons.

The performances had no projected backdrop, and hardly any space was left for a runway, but the crowd was just as enthusiastic. It is worth noting, however, that the last drag even I attended at Bardo required a cover charge to enter and reservations for seating, whereas at Madam Om people stood lining the walls and lingering in alcoves, even out of direct sight of the performances. As with all events run by Helem the language of performance was predominantly Arabic, and whether as a result or simply by coincidence, a fair number of attendees were faces I recognized from other Helem events who didn't always come to the more expensive, English-dominated events. While not specifically a Pride event, Helem decided to offer a platform for Kings, as they were underrepresented at more queen-based events.

In and around Beirut Pride, I attended a queer and Trans storytelling event, also at Madam Om in Gemmayze. The language of storytelling was Arabic, as some storytellers had to be gently reminded. Therefore, my understanding of the stories themselves was limited, but the atmosphere was warm and the friend I came with translated some for me. After the stories were over we stayed to have a drink, and ended up sitting with a table of people from Syria and Jordan, one of whom, a trans woman, had told a story which had everybody laughing and then sung very beautifully. A invited me over and introduced himself in English, translating for his friends. He was a computer programmer and was in Lebanon as a refugee with his boyfriend, who was Jordanian. They were both waiting for resettlement in Sweden. Their friend

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complimented my glasses as we settled in, and after a while A and I began to speak

about the event. I asked him if he'd enjoyed it.

A: "I love that this happens in Beirut. It's difficult but I think Beirut is much

better for us. We have both lost our families because they don't want us, and I have left

my country because it's too dangerous to be gay. I feel better in Beirut, and I think in

Sweden too."

I asked why he had requested Sweden for resettlement and he translated for his

boyfriend, who told him Sweden seemed like a better place to live than Canada, which

was so much further away. "Which do you think is better?" He asked me.

Me: "They're different, so it depends what you want."

A: "I want to be able to work and live my life."

He laughed about it. His boyfriend went out onto the balcony overlooking the

highway for a private smoke, tired of being in a conversation in English. I asked why

they had come tonight. "We came to support our friend, and because it's free."

Me: "Did you enjoy it?"

A: "Yes. I like the Helem events."

Me: "Do you visit their space?"

A: "Yes. You could come with us if you want."

I cannot begin to recount how many times I was told "*I can't go to Bardo, it's too expensive.*" A, in this anecdote, expressed similar sentiments when I asked if he had ever been. I have been many times, because it is in my neighborhood and in my budget, and I have exclusively encountered well-off people there and those treating themselves. The cheapest drink is eye-wateringly expensive and the food is good quality but similarly priced. In short, it prices people out, potentially on purpose, though I was not able to speak to either of the owners of it to ask. This was in part due to circumstance, but no owners or management of any of these spaces agreed to speak to me, so all I can offer is experiential conjecture. As such, Bardo is a more homogenous space, socioeconomically, (and well known enough to be referenced by Rajah Farah in his article "Every Article Ever Written About Being Gay In Beirut") and for the purposes of this section I use it only as a contrast: its assemblage of safe-unsafe is explicitly exclusionary. It is not for people who don't have money. However, Madam Om did not have a cover charge any time I attended an event there, and the organizers of the events had a significant difference: Helem choosing Madam Om for its king night is significant in that king drag is less well-known and less profitable than queen drag, and also Helem made a point of saying it was for the purposes of inclusion: *we noticed there wasn't a night for kings, so we put one on*. This is in keeping with Helem's mission ("to improve the legal and social positions of LGBTQI people in Lebanon") but also not designed to turn a profit. Although there are many spaces in Beirut which are explicitly queer-welcoming or queer-friendly (Helem's own space, location by word of mouth only, Dammeh collective which is by invitation only, AUB) for the purposes of this specific analytical interpretation, I argue that without looking at the contrapposto elements of commerce, lack of consistent external policing and the affective accessibility of public

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and semi-public queer spaces, we cannot articulate or understand the assemblages of safety within them, of which exclusion is also a very large part. It creates a question not just of belonging and welcome but also of precarity and un-belonging, opposing yet mutually dependent forces.

Next, I will focus on Projekt, a deep, wide warehouse space out by the highway, near to the sea but not in view of it:

Like every club on the strip it is set back from the road with a sign to mark its presence. Inside the walls are black and the lights are dim already. Everyone in the queue hands over their phones to have a sticker placed over the camera. It's in the shape of a yellow smiley face, conspicuous and easy to see if it has been removed. In a fit of sentimentality, I pay for my ticket and take a "BEIRUT PRIDE 2018" bracelet from the bucket on the cash desk, tying it on with one hand and my teeth. I'm here to attend the drag ball, a much bigger event than last year's equivalent. This year it is a spectacle, the venue much bigger and the stage already raised in the middle of the dance floor, just as black as the walls.

The judges are Sandra, the owner of Projekt, Evita and Anya, local performers who are widely credited with reviving and pioneering the drag scene in Beirut, though they themselves are cautious not to take credit from predecessors. The visiting judge is Miss Vivacious, a long-time drag performer from New York, who is the latest in a long line of famous drag queens who have come to Beirut over the last year and half.

I spot Evita in the crowd and say hello. In costume she's taller than usual, and is distracted by her to-do list. I keep her only briefly before I find two other friends in the crush. It's not as busy as it will be in an hour by the time the show starts, but it's still crowded, filled with faces I do and don't recognize. Tickets include one drink, prompting a near-stampede at the bar where one single solitary bartender is losing her temper. I find myself losing my temper in solidarity, though I don't intend to drink much.

It's a heightened atmosphere to begin with; Pride is just beginning and I see dozens of performers on the mezzanine watching the crowd. As the crowd fills in, I spot more friends, eventually finding a place to watch near the stage with them. There are official photographers, and nobody else is allowed to take pictures. I'm unsure where the pictures will go; I resolve to ask and never quite manage to remember. The yellow sticker keeps peeling off my camera and I keep sticking it back on, wanting to respect the control of the space over photography.

The lights go down and the crowd surges up and then the performances are starting.

Evita goes first, dancing and lip syncing to a song I don't recognize. She doesn't wear heels and doesn't shave her beard, but her act and outfit are very clearly drag. It is the first time I have seen her perform and I'm awed by her set. I have never been a regular attendee at drag shows, as I've always felt vaguely misplaced at them. Evita performs her numbers and then Anya takes the stage. Her act is fantastic, the crowd

going just as wild. However, when Miss Vivacious takes the stage the enthusiasm takes

a notable downturn. I'm not certain why, at first. Vivacious is famous on the drag

circuit, an alumnus of Ru Paul's Drag Race and has a unique act in which she wears an

additional mannequin head above her own, but then I begin to suspect it's because her

act is traditional in a way neither Evita's nor Anya's was. Her music is disco-based, not

an irreverent combination of rap and Arabic pop, and her moves are more catwalk than

club kid. This is a modern drag scene, one that reflects the youth of its participants, and

I realize then that the relative age of the crowd is also young. I might even be in the

older age bracket for attendees.

My friend leans over. "She's a little more traditional!" He yells, trying to be

heard over the music.

Her act looks anything but traditional to me, but the frenetic energy which

preceded her does make her seem staid in comparison. It amazes me that drag has been

codified into what is and is not traditional for its own genre, but then the judges have

retired to the bench and are announcing the categories in which competitors will be

performing. There are so many I lose track, but what I do see are the phones, the girl in

front of me blatantly holding up a screen to film, people flipping their phones to take

selfies with the performers in the background, and just like that I wonder whose photo I

might be in, where it might go, and who might see it.

This may seem like an unnecessarily negative reading of what might have been

an innocuous occurrence, merely an iteration of the pervasive nature of social media,

but in the context of the space of Projekt and whether it is "safe" (and what makes it so) and why I had a negative experience as well as a positive one while noticing the cameras, I am reminded of Desjarlais' work on the social world of homeless shelters in which he explains: "*The problem with taking experience as a uniquely authentic domain of life — as the first and last court of appeal — is that we risk losing the opportunity to question both the social production of that domain and the practices that define its use.*" (Desjarlais, 1997) It is the production and simultaneous reduction of safe practices in Projekt which alert me to its hybrid nature. It is an assemblage of safe-unsafe, a space which is heavily policed internally yet also indelibly visible. It is safe-for-some, yet practices a half-measure of privacy (just us) which is not enforced. The burgeoning drag scene (Aagaard, 2018) in Beirut also leads me back, finally, to the question of toxicity, this time of attitude as well as access. Many famous drag queens of the last few years have begun to visit and perform in Beirut, and with them have come people I have had transient conversations with who have come to experience the similar "risk" of coming to a country which criminalizes homosexuality for a gay event. Sexual tourism is nothing new and is an often-mentioned component of discourse around Beirut's queer community. I have met many young cisgendered men coming to Projekt for events and to drink, and have met equally as many women and nonbinary people who find it unwelcoming. Projekt is both a refuge (for fun, for drag, for partiers) and an alienating space.

Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, in their exchange of essays entitled "Intimacy" explore the notion of what makes a "gay community" through the lens of gay men who engage in barebacking, sex without protection, focusing on the violence and exclusion

which is a byproduct of identity-based inclusion. In their introduction, they write: "*Psychoanalysis tells us, in short, that our lives depend on our recognition that other people — those vital others that we love and desire — are separate from us […] despite the fact that this very acknowledgement is itself productive of so much violence.*" (Bersani & Phillips, 2008) In their quest to re-examine intimacy between themselves with psychoanalytical analysis. This brings up questions regarding what forms of intimacy permeate a diverse group of people and whether this particular analytical lens is suitable or indeed relevant to a city like Beirut at all.

This finally brings me to the "space" of the internet. At the time of Bersani and Philips' writing (2008) the use of hookup apps such as Grindr was not yet widespread, and they had not become an essential component of the gay male community they described. It is difficult to find someone who identifies as a gay man under thirty who hasn't at least downloaded the app to see what it's like. A friend of mine brought it up with me:

F and I have done two sessions of language exchange; he is teaching me some Arabic (days of the week, where are you from) and I have offered some less useful French in return. Mostly, we end up talking about anything else. Inevitably, on the first of these meetings, we talk about Grindr.

F: *"I love Grindr, but people are shallow,"* he tells me. *"People have preferences, and I don't like to post too many pictures of myself so it makes it hard to use."*

Me: "Is it not safe here? Like in Egypt?" (The police in Egypt have recently started planting accounts on Grindr to entrap users, (Flanagan, 2016)

F: "Not like that. But I guess I do some dumb things. I mean, we all do, right?"

Me: "Sure. Like what?"

F: "Oh, you know."

I don't know. I've done plenty of "dumb stuff" around sex and sexuality, but we don't know each other well enough yet for me to volunteer it. Instead I stick to the theme: "Lesbian Grindr doesn't really exist. I guess there's Tinder but it's different. Did you hear about the guy in Scotland who used Grindr to poll people about the Scottish referendum?"

F: *"That's funny."*

Me: *I show him the pictures of the exchange the Scottish Grindr user posted online. "He got some real answers, look."*

F: *"I wonder if he hooked up with any of them."*

F is far from the only friend of mine to mention the kind of limitation Grindr offers as well as its possible connective function. Can all Grindr users in Beirut be considered members, however briefly, of Beirut's gay male community? Is Grindr, and services like it, including, with this question in mind, Tinder, which I myself have used, an extension or a limitation of community? Are passerby and passers-through briefly intimate with Beirut's queer spaces?

Another friend of mine and I discussed it, as foreigners coming to Beirut for different reasons. He expressed that he found Grindr alienating, and we discussed it as a barrier to intimacy and community because of the nature of the app, (focused around sex, letting people list exclusionary preferences) which in some ways makes people more available to each other, though it's communication based doesn't seem to foster a sense of solidarity so much as a sense of creating a boundary of what's attractive and who can have access to intimacy.

I spoke to F again a few weeks later, after we had spoken about Grindr initially:

When I get there he is on Grindr, checking messages. After we've greeted each other he shows them to me, explaining as he goes: "I've started sending memes and jokes to see what people say."

Me: "How's it going?"
F: "Mixed. I want to get people to respond to something that's not a picture."

What both of these conversations illustrate, in contrast to Bersani and Phillips' identifications of the binding aspects of sexual encounters such as the dangerous exchanges of bodily fluids and the intimacy of that danger, is that community and community space are not necessarily the same thing. I would like to take this opportunity to muse about what it might signify that online apps have become such a ubiquitous way of making connections with other queer people outside of a physical space. In the context of Lebanon, my understanding is that the online "space" is less

policed than it might be in social and political contexts and regimes which have a more robust online surveillance infrastructure. In the UK for instance it is not unusual for my friends and I to assume every keystroke and every app is being collected (whether or not it is being examined is a different question, as illustrated by Slavoj Zizek's very entertaining diatribe on the subject in a video entitled "I don't care about surveillance") but the case seems to be different in Beirut. Unlike in Egypt, where there are known cases of men being entrapped through Grindr by the police state, my friends and colleagues here have primarily warned me about the "neighborhood informants" I have never seen and the physical danger of the security forces in physical terms.

What I am trying to push for here is the conclusion I have come to not just about safety but about space itself, which is that the layers of affect embedded within any given city are malleable and not possible to assign to any one particular ontological reality. There is no unilaterally "safe" queer space in Beirut, nor anywhere else. The exclusion of queer from the norm is the precursor for the lack of safety, but not the only reason. What refuges exclude, and what distinct assemblages constitute any given "safe" space? Beirut isn't "safe" by many, many metrics, but sometimes just "safer" matters deeply, as I believe the following interaction illustrates, a piecemeal assemblage, both inclusive and deeply exclusionary:

I arranged a coffee meeting with A, who I met at the queer and trans storytelling event at Madam Om. "Hello nice girl!" He writes when I get back in touch. "Yes."

His English is excellent but he apologized for it for the duration of our visit,

though before we met he asked if he could bring a friend, D. I agreed immediately,

happy for him to bring anyone he wanted. Over text however, the morning before our

meeting, he asked me not to talk about the LGBT community in front of her. Interested, I

agreed. That night, we met in Sassine Square and walked to a cafe a short distance

away, and he introduced D to me as his sister, visiting from Syria on a 24-hour visa.

They looked only slightly alike and I wasn't sure if he was being metaphorical,

though it made sense for him to ask me not to speak about the LGBT community in

Beirut and elide how we had met if she were, as well as offer some insight on why she

would have taken the risk of travelling to see him. We settled in at a table outside at

about eight-thirty, the night still hot but with a mercifully cool breeze. The silence only

stayed awkward for a moment as I left to get coffee, and when I came back they seemed

calmer.

We began a very strange conversation, both of us talking around how we met

and not mentioning acquaintances in common, but A also described D as "open-

minded."

D: "I am visiting from Latakia, it's very conservative."

Nonetheless, we spoke about music, about sports (she was a swimmer) and then

briefly about Syria. We settled into another kind of awkwardness, broken only when A

asked me about a mutual acquaintance by their drag pseudonym. I had wanted to see A

but hadn't been certain what we would be able to speak about. I finally asked about his friend I had met at the same time, a trans woman also from Syria who had told a wonderful story at the storytelling night and sung for the audience. She had been the one to bring me to their table. At the same time, I wondered how much to say with D listening. She spoke excellent English and my Arabic is limited, and A was explaining this too, that we had people in common and we had met at a party.

I suspected that D knew A was gay, but it never came up explicitly. The subject of Syria, instead, was inescapable. As I'm from a country that for all intents and purposes does not accept refugees, we joked about how waiting for Sweden to make up its mind was still better than hoping England would take anyone at all, but D changed the subject. She was away from Syria for twenty-four hours, she said, and didn't want to keep talking about it.

We spoke about a mix of topics; how YouTube has tutorials for everything, how bad the American coffee we were drinking was, how she wished she could visit more often, since A couldn't return. The conversation went quiet. "I'm glad he's here," she said, "it's safer."

CONCLUSION

People didn't want to talk to me about this. I didn't want to talk to people about this. Every question I asked made me feel as though I was intruding on something that was not my business, and which I was rude to even be considering. For the most part, this is the basic premise of all ethnographic work, a discomforting process of intrusion into a lifeworld which interests you but requires justification to study. I cannot decide whether the sensation is more or less amplified when it is work conducted among your friend group, your romantic life, your temporary social world or your permanent space. I can only speak for myself, and I can only refer to what others have told me.

So much of being in the world is sewing together different shreds of self, and to this I would like to add some clarity. The most important and illuminating thing I learned while living in Beirut and conducting research in Beirut is that it is impossible, simply impossible, to feel comfortable framing any queer experience without a gasping, sucking anxiety behind it about having excluded someone, reduced someone, failed to take someone into account.

Though I had every intention of speaking to as broad a range of people as I could convince to share their experiences with me, my work fell short of my initial conception of its scope. I did not manage to speak to any business owners, primarily because they didn't wish to talk to me. I had in mind the idea that it might be possible to explore how networks of safety are created within capitalist structures or even to explore Helem's mission statement in more detail. It turned out to be that case that in

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both these situations potential interlocutors were either suspicious of a western researcher or overtly hostile, and for my part I was not interested in pushing anyone's boundaries on that front. Partly for myself and partly because it would have undermined what I was in fact interested in: the nebulous safety of the queer space in question. Dammeh, in particular, as a safe space for MENA women (including LBTQI+) was one I considered asking people to speak to me about, but I was and remain wary of intruding on the space.

Ultimately, this project highlighted what I am going to call outsider guilt more than anything else, a knowledge that my intrusion wasn't welcome, my opinion wasn't needed, and my own response to that knowledge: deep reluctance and outright guilt over my presence in the space to begin with.

Is there such a thing as *any* safe space? In truth, I don't think there is. Much like sexual health campaigners are constantly battling to explain to people why they should call it "safer sex" because "safe sex" is dangerously misleading, I would argue that "safe" as I have attempted to frame it is worse than worthless as a metric for how a space is used, occupied and experienced.

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