(Re)Constructing Beirut:
Helem and "Local" Homosexualities

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to present the way in which male members of an emerging gay scene in Beirut, Lebanon conceive of their sexuality. The work is based on ethnographic research conducted between March 2005 and June 2007 that explores this gay scene and Helem, the first civil rights organization in the region publicly advocating gay rights. The ethnographic materials include interviews with the administrators of Helem, materials published by Helem (i.e. newsletters, magazines, press releases), secondary sources on the organization (i.e. media and news reports), twenty-five interviews with members of the Beirut gay scene, and two surveys with one hundred and sixty-four respondents.

The analysis begins by exploring some of the limitations and binary constructions that appear within the study of homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic world and pursues an ethnographic response to this scholarship. Case studies on Helem's activism and materials from informants in the gay scene are used to illustrate the construction and negotiation of "local" homosexualities. The reconstructed area of Downtown Beirut, where the fieldwork was conducted, is understood as a site of struggle where these sexual identities are negotiated. My central claim is that these understandings of (homo)sexuality disrupt a number of existing dichotomized frameworks that are currently embedded in the study of homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic world: global/local, identity/behavior, visible/invisible, and West/East.

ABSTRAIT

Cette thèse tente d'identifier les façons selon lesquelles les membres d'une scène homosexuelle émergeante à Beyrouth conçoivent leur sexualité dans. La présente thèse, avec du recherches menées durant la période de Mars 2005 à Juin 2007, examine la gay scène dans la capitale libanaise, Beyrouth, et Helem. Cette dernière est la première association visant à promouvoir publiquement les droits civils des hommes homosexuels. Le matériel ethnographique inclut des entrevues auprès des administrateurs de Helem, des publications de Helem (bulletins, magasines, communiqués de presse), des sources secondaires concernant l'organisme (rapports et/ou reportages des médias et des nouvelles), vingt-cinq entrevues passées par des membres faisant partie de la scène homosexuelle de Beyrouth, et deux sondages avec cent soixante-sept répondants.

L'analyse débute par l'exploration d'un certain nombre de limitations et de constructions binaires qui se sont manifestées à portée de l'étude de l'homosexualité dans le monde Arabe et Islamique. Cette analyse cherche à formuler une réponse ethnographique à son érudition. Afin d'illustrer un meilleur portrait de l'homosexualité 'locale', nous utiliserons, des études de cas visant l'activisme de Helem et des matériaux offerts par des informateurs de la scène homosexuelle. Downtown Beirut, une région nouvellement reconstruite et qui me servit de terrain de travail, est reconnu comme étant un site où les identités sexuelles sont négociées. Ma principale hypothèse est que la multitude d'interprétations ainsi que la compréhension (ou le manque de) vis-à-vis de l'(homo)sexualité perturbent un grand nombre de structures dichotomiques déjà existantes : globale/locale, identité/conduite, visible/invisible et Ouest/Est.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an attempt to present the way in which male members of an emerging gay scene in Beirut, Lebanon conceive of their sexuality. My central claim is that these understandings of (homo)sexuality disrupt a number of existing dichotomized frameworks: identity/behavior, local/global, visible/invisible, and West/East. The thesis explores the process of "subjectification" of same-sex practitioners in Beirut through ethnographic fieldwork, historical analysis, and the study of local gay rights activism.

Emerging "Gay" Groups in the Middle East

At the end of the twentieth century, the Middle East witnessed the emergence of a number of groups of men who identified as "*gay*." As early as 1990, Bruce W. Dunne noted "reports of gay rights demonstrations in Kuwait and the formation of underground gay organizations in large cities such as Cairo."[1] In 1998, a special edition of the journal *Middle East Report* entitled "Power and Sexuality in the Middle East" included articles on an AIDS hotline in Cairo and transsexuals in Istanbul,[2] as well as another article by Dunne in which he confirmed "the formation of small 'gay' subcultures in large cosmopolitan cities such as Cairo, Beirut and Istanbul and a degree of political activism."[3] Frédéric Lagrange would soon reaffirm that "homosexual desire is to be found throughout the anonymous metropolises like Cairo and Beirut."[4] Similarly, Joseph A. Massad would proceed to state a couple years later that "small groups of men in

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[1] Bruce W. Dunne, "Homosexuality in the Middle East: An Agenda for Historical Research" *Arab Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 3-4 (Summer-Fall 1990): 58.

[2] See Karim El-Gawhary, "Breaking a Social Taboo: AIDS Hotline in Cairo," *Middle East Report* 206 (Spring 1998): 18-19; Mary Robert and Deniz Kandiyoti, "Transsexuals and the Urban Landscape in Istanbul," *Middle East Report* 206 (Spring 1998): 20-25.

[3] Bruce W. Dunne, "Power and Sexuality in the Middle East," *Middle East Report* 206 (Spring 1998): 11.

[4] Frédéric Lagrange, "Male Homosexuality in Modern Arabic Literature," in *Imagined Masculinities: Changing Patterns of Identity for Middle Eastern Men*, ed. by Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb (London: Saqi, 2000), 175.

metropolitan areas such as Cairo and Beirut" were exhibiting a "gay group identity."[5]

Unfortunately, beginning in early 2001, the Egyptian government began to arrest,

prosecute, and convict a growing number of men in Cairo for sexual relations with other

men—most notably in the widely publicized trial of the 'Queen Boat 52'.[6] Although these

arrests arguably suppressed the emerging group of gay men in Cairo,[7] groups in other

metropolitan areas, and particularly Beirut, continued to grow.[8]

In fact, the Beirut gay scene has become significantly more visible since the

beginning of the century. A growing number of local nightclubs, restaurants, and bars

opened and catered to a gay clientele—perhaps responding to an increase in gay tourism.[9]

Media and journalistic reports proliferated about gay rights activism by a group called

Helem.[10] Simultaneously, numerous discussions on Beirut and its emerging gay scene

were published by British-based publishing house Saqi Books.[11]

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[5] Massad, however, disagreed with the idea that there was an emerging gay rights agenda in the region: "there is no evidence of gay movements anywhere in the Arab world." Joseph A. Massad, "Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World," *Public Culture* 14, no. 2 (2002): 373.

[6] On the 11th of May 2001, police officers raided a discotheque and arrested men in what would later be known as the 'Queen Boat case'. As a result of the raid and other arrests made elsewhere in Cairo before the Queen Boat, fifty-two men were detained and charged with the "habitual practice of debauchery" (*fujur*) and "contempt for religion." Ultimately, over half of the men would be convicted and sentenced to prison.

[7] "Before the headlines [of the Queen Boat case], Cairo had the tentative beginnings of a community of men who desired other men—people who perceived a commonality among one another, and sometimes (though not always) described themselves as 'gay'. … The scandal and scare tactics around the trial, the paranoia the press evoked, shut that inchoate community down." Scott Long, "In a Time of Torture: The Assault on Justice in Egypt's Crackdown on Homosexual Conduct," (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2004), 2.

[8] In addition to Beirut and the other metropolitan cities mentioned, John Bradley has noted similar developments in the cities of Saudi Arabia. "The young population of the cities [of Saudi Arabia] is mushrooming, and now includes many young Saudis who returned after September 11 from a lifetime abroad. These 'returnees' combine the traditional Saudi tolerance… with a more subversive attitude that homosexuality is part of an identity and, as such, has political components. As a result, a small, confused 'gay community' is establishing a space for itself." John R. Bradley, *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 155.

[9] For a discussion of gay tourism in Beirut, see "Tourism: Lebanon as a Gay Holiday Destination," *Barra* 0 (April 2005), 7; and Lee Smith, "Beirut Unexpected," *OutTraveler*, 2006, 62-71.

[10] Helem is the Arabic word for "dream." For more information on Helem, see Appendix A: Helem, infra.

[11] See, for example, the photo essay by Nabil Kaakoush, "Hey Handsome," in *Transit Beirut: New Writing and Images*, ed. Malu Halasa and Roseanne S. Khalaf, trans. Sarah al-Hamad (London: Saqi, 2003): 166-

These discussions grow out of a field of research that can be conceptualized as 'homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic world'. Much of this Western scholarly literature has been plagued by a foundational dichotomy, East/West; an indigenous homosexuality is, if not defined against, then compared and contrasted to its Western counterpart. These comparative treatments of Western versus Arab-Islamic homosexuality primarily concerned themselves with the social acceptance or tolerance of homosexuality and—perhaps consequently—the endeavor of locating an indigenous Arab-Islamic homosexual identity. Accordingly, an identity/behavior dichotomy is privileged as evidence and experience are analyzed. What gets lost in this process of reification, however, is a more personal understanding of homosexual practice and experience, which suggests a far more complex interweaving of the two. In the chapters that follow I attempt to reinsert this component of personal experience—through an analysis of ethnographic material collected in the gay identifying scene of Beirut—as a means of questioning certain assumptions that are often uncritically held about the opposition of homosexual behavior and identity in this region.

At the outset, however, I would like to offer a note on terminology. A recurrent criticism that has—and continues to—hamper research in the field is whether references to "homosexuality" can, and should, be made when discussing same-sex practices in the Middle East. Using the term homosexuality implicitly associates these practices with Western homosexuality, while concomitantly refusing the term denies this association.

73; Sofian Merabet, "Disavowed Homosexualities in Beirut," *Middle East Report* 230 (Spring 2004): 30-33; Sofian Merabet, "Creating Queer Space in Beirut," in *Sexuality in the Arab World*, ed. Samir Khalaf and John Gagnon (London: Saqi, 2006), 199-242; Jared McCormick, "Transition Beirut: Gay Identities, Lived Realities," in *Sexuality in the Arab World*, ed. Samir Khalaf and John Gagnon (London: Saqi, 2006), 243-260; and, for a more journalistic account, see Brian Whitaker, *Unspeakable Love: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East* (London: Saqi, 2006), 41-48.

As the discussion below will demonstrate, the term homosexuality is accompanied by a number of essentialist and constructivist claims related to issues of tolerance and identity. I employ the term homosexuality in an effort to situate this thesis within these themes. Nonetheless, I will often revert to the term "gay" during the discussion of same-sex practices in Beirut to reflect the more widely used term in the Lebanese vernacular of the gay scene.

Although there continues to be no general consensus, the majority of authors who systematically consider representations of homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic world broadly agree on certain basic points of reference which I also consciously adopt here. For many scholars working in the Middle East, the 'Arab-Islamic world' is understood to be a heterogeneous and evolving entity that challenges static geographic, religious, ancestral, or linguistic delineations. For the purpose of this thesis, I employ the term 'Arab-Islamic' to refer to societies that share a common Arab linguistic heritage and/or have experienced various historical Islamic influences.

<u>Tolerant/Repressive: Western Binaries and Arab-Islamic Homosexuality</u>

The discussion of "Oriental sexuality" oscillates between terms of licentious depravity and repression. Edward Said explains, in "Orientalism Reconsidered," how Orientalists described the Orient "as feminine, its riches as fertile, its main symbols the sensual woman, the harem and the despotic—but curiously attractive—ruler."[12] In *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, historian of sexuality John Boswell contrasts the increasingly intolerant social atmosphere in medieval Europe with the Arab-Islamic world, concluding that "most Muslim societies have treated homosexuality with

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[12] Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Cultural Critique* 1 (Fall 1985): 103.

indifference, if not admiration."[13] Vern L. Bullough, in his comparative study *Sexual Variance in Society and History*, argues that homosexuality was tolerated in medieval Muslim societies and that, in contrast to Christianity, Islam is a "sex-positive" religion.[14] Authors are eager to contextualize their Eastern observations through comparison and contrast to Western societies. We see how the foundational binary opposition in these works—East/West—is extended to encompass the related binary of tolerance and repression.

Distinct representations of homosexuality have been deployed in order to sustain a tolerant/repressive dichotomy. For some authors, including Boswell, Arab-Islamic tolerance of homosexuality is evidenced by the homoerotic love for boys in Medieval *belle-lettres*. Others, however, argued that the prescribed punishments for homosexuality in Islamic laws and scriptures represent an intolerant, or repressive, social atmosphere.[15] Appropriated within a dichotomized framework of tolerant/repressive, these two representations of homosexuality have been presented as opposing and contradictory

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[13] John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 194.

[14] See Vern L. Bullough, *Sexual Variance in Society and History* (New York: Wiley, 1976).

[15] The Qur'an makes seven references to the story of Lot, or the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the *suras* and the destruction of the people of Lot (*ahl Lut*) is thought to be explicitly associated with their sexual practices (*liwat*). Notwithstanding, the Qur'an does not prescribe any specific punishment for *liwat* (anal intercourse between men). In a hadith, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Whenever a male mounts another male the throne of God trembles, the angels look down in loathing and say, Lord, why do you not command the earth to punish them and the heaves to rain stones upon them?" With the noted distinction of stoning, this hadith bears striking similarity to—and embodies the evolution of—a sura referring to the people of Lot: "Of all creatures do you come unto the males and leave the wives the Lord has created for you? ... dreadful is the rain on those who have been warned." On Qur'anic proscriptions on homosexuality see Jim Wafer, "Muhammad and Male Homosexuality," in *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*, edited by S. O. Murray and W. Roscoe (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 88; cf. David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 173. On the evolution the sura, see James A. Bellamy, "Sex and Society in Islamic Popular Literature," in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam*, edited by A. L. Sayyid-Marsot (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1979), 37.

evidence. In *The Venture of Islam*, Marshall Hodgson notes that during the ʿAbbasid

period:

> Despite strong Sharʿi [i.e. Islamic legal] disapproval, the sexual relations of a mature man with a subordinate youth were so readily accepted in upper-class circles that there was often little or no effort to conceal their existence…. The fashion entered poetry, especially the Persian.[16]

In *Music of a Distant Drum*, Bernard Lewis makes a similar observation:

> Homosexuality is condemned and forbidden by the holy law of Islam, but there are times an places in Islamic history when the ban on homosexual love seems no stronger than the ban on adultery in, say, Renaissance Italy or seventeenth-century France. Some [classical Arabic, Persian, and Turkish] poems are openly homosexual; some poets, in their collected poems, even have separated sections for love poems addressed to males and females.[17]

However, historian of Arab-Islamic homosexuality Khaled El-Rouayheb argues that the

evidence used in such literature refers to distinct representations of homosexuality. El-

Rouayheb clarifies that "what Islamic law prohibits is sexual intercourse between men,

especially anal intercourse."[18] And there is a "distinction between committing sodomy

and expressing passionate love for a youth" in *belle-lettres* or *ghazal* poetry.[19] In other

words, authors have selectively used these contradictory representations of

homosexuality and presented them through an organizing principle of tolerance versus

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[16] Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 146.

[17] Bernard Lewis, *Music of a Distant Drum: Classical Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Hebrew Poems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 26.

[18] Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 3. While Islamic writings explicitly deal with the question of liwat, these writings also contain other representations of homosexuality, including that of male-male attraction, without any prescribed punishments. There are abundant allusions to the beauty of beardless male youths, specifically with reference to Paradise and Allah, in the Qurʾan in hadith. Furthermore, the attraction towards other males was sometimes described as stronger than that towards women: "Do not gaze at beardless youth, for they have eyes more tempting than the *huris* (beautiful maiden's of paradise)." See Wafer, "Male Homosexuality," 90.

[19] El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 3. The Qurʾan makes stipulations on one of the representations of homosexuality: that of the proscribed liwat. *Liwat*, as it was depicted and condemned in religious writings, was a distinct representation of homosexuality in that it occurred in the public sphere; it was a public, and visible, transgression that had to be seen. *Liwat* could not be condemned nor punished unless it was witnessed by four other Muslims. See *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. 5. S.v. "Liwat." New ed. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986: 776-779.

repression to bolster the particular claims they are trying to advance. This practice and foundational binary continue to inform the recent scholarship on Beirut. Both articles by Sofian Merabet present arguments framed in terms of repression, if not fear, of homosexuality. Specifically an internalized "homophobia" is presented as a central component of homosexuality in Beirut. In *Unspeakable Love*, Brian Whitaker highlights the suffering and repression of homosexuality in contemporary Arab-Islamic societies, with a particular emphasis on Beirut, in order to intervene in a growing debate concerning reform in the region.[20]

<center>Identity versus Behavior: Assessing a Dichotomy</center>

The assumption made in discussing tolerated and/or repressed homosexuality is that there is single, self-evident homosexuality "to which a particular culture reacts with a certain degree of tolerance or repression."[21] Some authors argue that the expansion of the fields of gender studies and gay and lesbian studies into Islamic studies, led to a preoccupation with the construction of a homosexual identity and attempts at locating an indigenous Arab-Islamic homosexual identity.[22] In an attempt to counter this overtly essentialized conception of homosexuality, recent scholarship thus sought to locate a specifically Arab-Islamic homosexual tradition.[23]

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[20] *Unspeakable Love* was launched at a number of events around the world, including one organized by Helem in Beirut. The event included a question and answer session during which attendees brought to the author's attention, and inquired about, the lack of "positive" stories in his discussion of Arab-Islamic homosexuality. Whitaker claimed not to be aware of any such experiences, and reiterated the purpose of the book as a tool for liberal reformists in the region.

[21] El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 5.

[22] See in particular Lagrange, "Male Homosexuality," 193n2. On the relationship between Western gay scholarship and representations of Arab-Islamic homosexuality see Massad, "Re-Orienting Desire," 365.

[23] See Arno Schmitt, "Different Approaches to Male/Male Sexuality/Eroticism from Morocco to Uzbekistan," in *Sexuality and Eroticism among Males in Moslem Societies*, ed. Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer (New York: Haworth Press, 1991), 1-24; Everett Rowson, "The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Arabic Vice Lists," in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991); and Everett Rowson, "Two Homoerotic Narratives from Maluk Literature: alsafadi's lawʻat al-shaki and ibn daniyal's al-mutayyam" in

The separation of homosexual identity and homosexual behavior was first theorized by Jeffrey Weeks. Weeks' argument, which emphasizes the need to separate behavior and identity, draws on Foucault's assessment that the construction of the homosexual as a "species," with an essential nature or identity, is a recent product of Western history. This argument was most forcefully presented in Foucault's oft-cited, and historically disputed, section of *History of Sexuality: Volume One:*

> As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject to them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood… The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.[24]

According to Foucault, a conceptual break occurred between "sodomy" and the "homosexual." "Sodomy" was a sinful act that anyone could commit, whereas "homosexuality" and "inversion" referred to the psychological state of a distinct type of person. One of the benefits of this critique is the emphasis upon the "constructed," or historically conditioned, nature of our modern sexual categories. For the study of Arab-Islamic homosexuality, this has meant an increased emphasis on the specific contexts and meanings of various representations of homosexuality and a proliferation of homosexualities.[25]

Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature, ed. J. W. Wright, Jr. and Everett Rowson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[24] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 43.

[25] Tapinc states that "there exists homosexualities rather than one single category of homosexuality in Turkish society, and these are stratified within themselves" in Huseyin Tapinc, "Masculinity, Femininity, and Turkish Male Homosexuality," in *Modern Homosexualities: Fragments of Lesbian and Gay Experiences*, ed. Kenneth Plummer (London: Routledge, 1992), 47. Also, despite criticisms that it is written by nonspecialists relying primarily on secondary studies, see Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1997). Stephen O. Murray developed a typology of homosexualities based on the anthropological work of Barry D. Adam and elucidated in a series of comparative studies in Stephen O. Murray, *Homosexualities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). These typological classifications (i.e. status-differentiated homosexuality, gender-defined, age-stratified) continue to reappear in the general anthropology of homosexuality and, specifically, of Arab-Islamic homosexuality. See Will Roscoe, "Precursors of Islamic

However, as the literature has sought to disprove the existence of an indigenous homosexual identity, the conceptual break between behavior and identity has become privileged. Sexual historian Arno Schmitt claims "there are only acts, not roles, nor even inclinations" of homosexuality.[26] Later Schmitt argues "[t]here are no homosexuals, there is no word meaning homosexual."[27] Although Schmitt's linguistic claim is part of a contentious linguistic debate within discussions of Arab sexuality, Schmitt argues that since the terms "refer either to an action or a preference, not a character trait," there are no homosexuals and no homosexual identity.[28] Frédéric Lagrange makes the same point more explicitly: "The classical language… does not consider homosexuality as an identity. It categorizes different types of homosexual acts."[29] Nonetheless, while agreeing with the claim that the Arabic language lacked the corresponding terminology, Lebanese cultural historian As'ad AbuKhalil, who lives and teaches in the United States, argues that "there is – and has been – such a thing as a pure homosexual identity [in Arab cultures]…. The idea that there were no self-declared lesbians or gay men is false."[30] Most recently, Massad argues that the "sodomite" subject position, or homosexual identity, as opposed to various homosexual behaviors or practices, is a new phenomenon that appeared in response to the global gay rights rhetoric.

<u>The Gay International and Local Sexual Practices</u>

Massad tackles this subject in his critical essay "Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World," edited and republished in his new book *Desiring*

Homosexualities," in *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*, ed. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Bruce Dunne, "Power and Sexuality."

[26] Arno Schmitt, "Different Approaches," 3.

[27] Ibid., 5.

[28] Ibid., 11.

[29] Lagrange, "Male Homosexuality," 170-1.

[30] As'ad AbuKhalil, "A Note on the Study of Homosexuality in the Arab/Islamic Civilization," *Arab Studies Journal* 1, no. 2 (1993): 33.

Arabs, where he insists on the incompatibility of supposed "universal" gay rights and the local realities. He argues that human rights organizations' efforts to address issues of gay rights, which he terms the "Gay International," are in fact "transforming [Arab and Muslim "gays and lesbians"] from practitioners of same-sex contact into subjects who identify as homosexual and gay:"[31]

> I argue that it is the discourse of the Gay International that both produces homosexuals, as well as gays and lesbians, where they do not exist, and represses same-sex desires and practices that refuse to be assimilated into its sexual epistemology.[32]

What Massad is claiming here is that the specific representation of homosexuality found in gay rights rhetoric, as an embodied identity politics, is destroying 'indigenous' homosexual practices and behaviors.[33] The identity/behavior binary is once again noted as Massad points out that "it is an ontological and logical error… to collapse subjects with practices or to conflate sexual desires with identities."[34] While I agree with this claim, and with the academic worth of many of the sources cited above, I would argue that the identity/behavior dichotomy is limiting the analysis. Accordingly, the complexities of sexualities that exist in between a fixed, public, and visible identity and the fluid, private, often hidden practices are left out of the discussion. To what extent are subjects borne out of practices? And how do sexual desires configure identities?

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[31] Massad, "Re-Orienting Desire," 362.

[32] Ibid., 363.

[33] Massad is ultimately concerned with the treatment of Arab desires in modern Arab intellectual history and, thus, undertakes a similar project in discussing the colonialist moment and its effect on Nahda Arab thought and the neocolonialist Gay International and Islamism's response to its "crusading" mission: "A puritanical Islamism… borrowing most of its Puritanism from Western Christianity and Western conservatism built up an unwitting alliance with the crusading Gay International in identifying people who practice certain forms of sex. The Gay International and Islamists agreed that such practitioners must be identified. Where they disagreed was on whether they should be identified and endowed with rights and accorded the protection of the state, as the Gay International demands, or identified, repressed, and subjected to the punishment of the state, as the Islamists and other conservatives demand." See Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 265.

[34] Ibid., 233.

The analysis Massad provides concerning "produced homosexuals" and repressed desires is, unfortunately, not thoroughly substantiated:

> The advent of colonialism and Western capital to the Arab world has transformed most aspects of daily living; however, it has failed to impose a European heterosexual regime on all Arab men, although its efforts were successful in the upper classes and among the increasingly Westernized middle classes. It is among members of these richer segments of society that the Gay International found native informants. Although members of these classes who engage in same-sex relations have more recently adopted a Western identity (as part of the package of the adoption of everything Western by the classes to which they belong) they remain a minuscule minority among those men who engage in same-sex relations and who do not identify as gay nor express a need for gay politics.[35]

Indeed, Massad critiques authors like Schmitt for their "Orientalist" abstractions, but does not draw on any ethnographic data to support the claims he seeks to advance in his own work. The reader is therefore left wondering how these various representations of homosexuality, as embodied identity or polymorphous practices, are perceived by gay men in cities like Beirut, whether one appears more "foreign" to local subjects than another? Do these representations even represent distinct conceptual frameworks for local members of the gay scene?

<div align="center">Ethnographic Intervention</div>

Indeed, one answer to these questions might be found through ethnographic research. Lila Abu-Lughod argues for refusing "to be dragged into the binary opposition between East and West in which so many [arguments] are mired," by "fearlessly examining the processes of entanglement" of these constructed poles.[36] In the chapters that follow I explore the multiple intersections of a "Western," or "global," gay rights discourse and "local" understandings of homosexuality and present the many

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[35] Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 172-3.
[36] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Introduction: Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, edited by Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 16.

entanglements. In an attempt to intervene in the existing debate on Arab-Islamic homosexuality, this thesis undertakes an ethnographic study of homosexuals in Beirut, Lebanon where I conducted field research between 2005 and 2007. In seeking to privilege an ethnographic analysis, I hope to explore to what extent a global gay identity is being disseminated through a transnational gay rights rhetoric as claimed by Massad and how homosexuality, as subjectively experienced in the daily lives of homosexuals living in Beirut, negotiates this rhetoric.[37]

The Beirut gay scene is a useful case study to consider when responding to Massad's particular claim against Westernized Arabs and the Arab diaspora influenced by a Gay International. Firstly, Helem, the multinational NGO hailed as the first gay rights organization in the Arab-Islamic world, was established in 2001 in Beirut. Secondly, the emerging gay scene and Helem are composed of a socio-economically limited population. They are urban, educated, cosmopolitan, elite members of Lebanon— a "miniscule minority." Helem's activism was primarily focused on this privileged population with the financial resources to participate in a gay scene found in the newly reconstructed city-center focused on capital consumption, global integration, and intercommunal interaction. In advocating on their behalf, Helem employed strategies of visibility explicitly appropriated from the wider gay rights movement and actively sought to engage the wider Arab diaspora. Nonetheless, as discussed in Chapter 2, Helem was far more circumspect in its global appropriation and engagement as it navigated overlapping global and local concerns and responded to its criticisms of gay men in Beirut. Members of the gay scene, for their part, similarly engaged with Western

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[37] Accordingly, I see my own work as overlapping significantly with that of Jared McCormick, "Transition Beirut: Gay Identities, Lived Realities," in *Sexuality in the Arab World*, ed. Samir Khalaf and John Gagnon (London: Saqi, 2006), 243-260.

resources and terminology as they navigated their (homo)sexuality, yet contestations were recurrent themes as these global concepts were negotiated to reflect local understandings—the theme of Chapter 3.

Building on the assumption that an identity/behavior dichotomy may not be a distinction that is sustained in the minds of my informants, I will examine how the various contemporary representations and discourses of homosexuality are subjectively understood and negotiated. The chapters that follow constitute an ethnography of a gay scene in Beirut, and the discourses, practices, and understandings that underpin daily entanglements with being gay. The thematic and discursive permutations explored in this chapter continue to reappear in the ethnographic analysis. Particularly, those discourses and practices relating to homosexuality, that were implicated in modern Arab intellectual thought (i.e. homosexuality as dismissed or taboo, foreign, Western and disease), develop as central conceptual frameworks.

<u>Methodology</u>

This thesis, as is the case for the majority of existing literature on homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic world, is focused on male homosexuality. I did not originally intend to focus primarily on the lives of men and limit my focus to male homosexuality. However, two factors influenced the shifting focus. Firstly, the dearth of academic literature on female homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic world made analysis of the topic difficult. Secondly, on a practical level, I had much more access to men's lives than

women's—even in Beirut's relatively less sex-segregated environment compared to some

of Gulf states in the region.[38]

The ethnography presented in this thesis is primarily based on fieldwork begun in

February 2005, with the majority of the interviews conducted in 2007. Two surveys, with

over one hundred and sixty respondents, provided statistical information on the gay

scene.[39] The surveys were administered throughout the various locales of the gay scene

noted in the subsequent chapters as well as at Helem's office. Using the survey results, I

approached a number of informants. I conducted a series of twenty-five interviews with a

self-selecting group of these informants as well as with the administrators of Helem

Beirut.[40] The fieldwork produced a level of "insider research,"[41] as a result of my own

background as a Lebanese and my decision to be openly gay throughout the fieldwork,

resulting in a "more facile entrée, a higher degree of trust, easier access to the nuances of

local interaction."[42] Although some advocate the benefits of insider fieldwork,[43] it should

be noted that my identification as Lebanese may have generated distinct relational

problems and tensions that accentuated my simultaneous "outsider" position as a member

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[38] According to the surveys conducted, less than 4 percent of those frequenting the gay scene identified as female. See "Table 2: Sex," Appendix C: Survey Results, infra. For further discussion on the invisibility of women in this thesis refer to the Conclusion.

[39] One survey was conducted orally in Modern Standard Arabic, Lebanese dialect, French, or English, while the second was conducted entirely in written Modern Standard Arabic. For more information, including detailed listing of locations administered, see Appendix C: Survey Results.

[40] Speakers used Modern Standard Arabic, Lebanese dialect, English, and French. All translations are my own. See Appendix B: Interview Questions, infra.

[41] Johnson emphasized the critical if often unnoted relevance of the "the observer's sexual status, racial status, socioeconomic background, appearance, abilities, goals" in shaping the way those studied define, evaluate, and react to the researcher. John M. Johnson, *Doing Field Research* (New York: Free Press, 1975), 91. For a discussion exploring ethnographic fieldwork in various cultural frameworks, see James Clifford, and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

[42] Robert M. Emerson, ed., *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 2001), 122.

[43] Maxine Baca Zinn, "Insider Field Research in Minority Communities," in *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 2001).

of the Lebanese diaspora educated, and living, abroad. I was aware of occupying both

positions throughout my fieldwork and, indeed, fieldworkers increasingly recognize that

they "are almost always simultaneously insiders and outsiders."[44] I met many of my

interlocutors over the Internet, as well as in many of the physical spaces discussed

throughout the thesis; in some instances I was introduced to individuals through other

researchers working in Beirut. Although subjects expressed a range of views about

whether or not they wished to be associated with the information they provided, in the

interest of protecting friends and informants, I have chosen to use pseudonyms in this

thesis except for those occupying official leadership positions of Helem Beirut. Finally,

while the fieldwork focused on downtown Beirut, it did extend to the suburbs of the city

since many of those interviewed lived outside of the mainly commercial Downtown

Beirut area. My familiarity with Beirut, the physical locations discussed, and the idioms

and linguistic characteristics of the locale are based on continuous exposure to the city of

Beirut during the past twenty-two years and being a raised as a member of Lebanese

family.

Additionally, frequent interviews with the administrators of Helem were

conducted.[45] Publications by the organization (i.e. newsletters, magazines, press releases,

internet website),[46] and secondary sources (i.e. media and news reports) were monitored,

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[44] Louise Lamphere, Helena Ragoné, and Patricia Zavella, eds., *Situated Lives: Gender and Culture in Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 1997): 141.

[45] See Appendix B: Interview Questions.

[46] These include, in addition to the works cited in the rest of the thesis, *Barra Magazine* 1 (Summer 2005); *Barra Magazine* 2 (Spring 2006); *Helem Pride Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (January 2006); *Helem Pride Newsletter* 1, no. 3 (September 2006); and Helem, *Rihab al-mithliyyat* [Homophobia], (Beirut: La CD-Thèque, 2006)

collected, and analyzed.[47] Finally, the ethnographic material and interview questions were informed by an in-group perspective of the subjective understanding of homosexuality within the "scene." This was the result of hours of participant observation, note taking, and my own involvement within the gay "scene," as an intern with Helem Beirut, and as a member of the Board of Directors of Helem Montreal.

A consequence of undertaking urban fieldwork is that the research population, the gay scene in this case, is often unbound and can only be defined in imprecise ways. In fact, the question of whether or not the research population can be viewed as a "community" or as bound at all will be a recurring point of discussion. I begin, in Chapter 2, by attempting to delineate the contours of the gay scene and the interaction of Helem in the various spaces through a politics of visibility. Chapter 3 explores not only local understandings of being "gay," but also how these understandings are employed and deployed in various contexts and to what effects, and how these uses relate to local, regional, global, and transnational discourses about homosexuality.

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[47] These include, in addition to the works cited in the rest of the thesis, "Lebanon's Homosexual Community Speak Out: Reports of Police Abuse and Societal Intolerance are among the Complaints of the Country's Gay Population," *Daily Star*, September 7, 2005.

2. BEIRUT:
HELEM AND THE GAY SCENE

The developing gay scene in Beirut, Lebanon is characterized by a number of commercial spaces (i.e. nightclubs, bars, restaurants, and cafés). In 2005, the inaugural issue of *Barra* (Out) magazine by Helem-Beirut described a public and popular gay scene that is unique in the region: "Lebanon… is somewhat of an exception in the area. Here, every night of the week, gays meet, more or less in public. We have a publicly known, and very popular, gay nightclub, several bars, restaurants and coffee shops in which gays hang out."[1] The "very popular" nightclub, Acid, considered the first gay nightclub in the Arab-Islamic world, caters to an almost exclusively gay clientele and remained for many years the only such location in Beirut; X-OM is gay-owned and operated; BO-18, Basement and Vogue serve a mixed clientele. The variety of other more visible restaurants, bars, and cafes are highly concentrated in Downtown area of Beirut—a space that was reconstructed by a company called Solidere. There are at least three cafes located in Downtown—which, together, created a new cruising area in between them during the last few years[2]—and a number of other cafés in the areas of Achrafieh and Hamra, located on the periphery of the Downtown area. This gay commercial world within a spatially restricted area of Beirut, occasionally extending with forays in greater Beirut, was the birthplace of Helem. It is within this public gay scene that Helem found its membership and undertook its most successful activism. This chapter explores the efforts and struggles surrounding its activism particularly as they apply to a strategy of increasing visibility.

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[1] Helem, "Tourism: Lebanon as a Gay Holiday Destination?" *Barra* 0, April 2005.
[2] The three cafés each feature outside patio seating for approximately thirty customers during the summer.

Negotiated Identities in Beirut

The protracted violence (1975-1990) of the Lebanese civil war left the city of

Beirut "severely fragmented and partially demolished, its historic center and the areas

extending out from it transformed into a no man's land between the warring factions."[3]

However, in the years following the cessation of hostilities the center of Beirut,

Downtown as it is locally referred to today, was rebuilt.[4] Beginning in 1991, a series of

proposals, put forth by the administration of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, sought the

"transformation of [Beirut's central district] into a modern financial and commercial

center… symbolizing the rebirth of the country and the determination for the Lebanese to

rebuild their capital."[5] The physical reconstruction of the Beirut Central District (BCD)

played both an economic and more symbolic role. Accordingly, Solidere, a public-private

partnership founded to undertake this project,[6] attempted to rebuild Beirut as a global city

with an "authentic" Lebanese identity.

The center of Beirut, partially demolished during Lebanese civil war, was to be a

blank canvas upon which Solidere would work. Those still living in the area at the end of

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[3] Maha Yahya, "Let the Dead be Dead: Communal Imaginaries and National Narratives in the Post-Civil War Reconstruction of Beirut," in *Urban Imaginaries: Locating the Modern City*, ed. Alev Cinar and Thomas Bender (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 107.

[4] For discussions on the history, urban planning, and postwar reconstruction of Beirut, see, in addition to the works cited in the rest of this chapter, Angus Gavin, *Beirut Reborn: The Restoration and Development of the Central District* (London: Academy Editions, 1996); Ossama Kabbani, *The Reconstruction of Beirut* (Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1992); Samir Khalaf, *Beirut Reclaimed: Reflections on Urban Design and the Restoration of Civility* (Beirut: Dar An-Nahar, 1993), Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon: A History of the Internationalization of Communal Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Samir Khalaf and Philip S. Khoury, eds, *Recovering Beirut: Urban Design and Post-War Reconstruction* (New York: Leiden, 1993); John Kifner, *Beirut Reclaimed: Reflections on Urban Design and the Restoration of Civility* (Beirut: Dar-an-Nahar, 1993); and Peter Rowe and Hashim Sarkis, eds, *Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the Construction and Reconstruction of a Modern City* (Munich: Prestel, 1998).

[5] Rafic Hariri, quoted in Yahya, "Communal Imaginaries," 110-1.

[6] Solidere or the Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of the Beirut Central District was one of two large urban development projects launched at this time. The other, Elyssar, was responsible for organization of the southern and southwestern suburbs of Beirut.

the war were given monetary compensation and displaced, while the previous functions

of the city center, "especially those that catered to the lower- and lower-middle-class

sectors, such as Souk el Bale (second hand clothing) or Souk el Fashka (wholesale cloth),

of the Lebanese population were eradicated."[7] Instead, Beirut was rebuilt to reflect its

role prior to the war and the fifteen years of violence would be forgotten in both the

physical reconstruction of the city and the constructed national identity.[8] By the time civil

violence began in 1975, Beirut had emerged as a cosmopolitan city renown for its relative

openness and tolerance.[9] The city was an "undisputed center of the financial network

linking the industrial world with the oil-producing nations of the Gulf,"[10] and "sported

more nightclubs, luxury cars, grand swimming pools, and flashy apartments per square

mile than almost any other place in the world."[11] Post-war economic development,

therefore, concentrated on "tourism, agriculture, niche industries, higher education, [and]

Lebanon's geographic and cultural position as the 'bridge' between Europe and

Arabia."[12] Simultaneously, as Nagel argues, Solidere "attempted to generate—or from

their perspective, revive—a civic consciousness and unified national identity" through

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[7] Yahya, "Communal Imaginaries," 115.

[8] On the lack of any substantial public memorial to the civil war or to its victims see Caroline Nagel, "Reconstructing Space, Re-Creating Memory: Sectarian Politics and Urban Development in Post-War Beirut," *Political Geography* 21 (2002): 723; and Saree Makdisi, "Laying Claim to Beirut: Urban Narrative and Spatial Identity in the Age of Solidere," *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 692. On the more general Lebanese "collective amnesia" concerning the war see Samir Khalaf, *Collective Resistance: Global and Local Encounters in the Middle East* (London: Saqi, 2001).

[9] Khalaf argues, building on Fawaz, that the presence of a strong merchant class in Beirut, as early as the nineteenth century, created a community bound by common economic interests and sustaining a degree of social tolerance: "intercommunal mixing, at least in the center of the town, was greater than is usually assumed. Merchants of various communities were partners in private business ventures… In the old souks and bazaars, artisans and traders worked side by side… Christians and Muslims continued to meet together at official functions and served on the same committees, courts, and mixed tribunals." Samir Khalaf, *Lebanon's Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 266; see also, Leila Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth Century Beirut* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[10] Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 73.

[11] Sandra Mackay, *Lebanon: A House Divided* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 86.

[12] Maroun Kisirwani, "The Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Lebanon," in *Remaking the Middle East*, eds., Paul J. White and William S. Logan (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 95.

the development of public spaces, and refurbished commercial and residential districts

"where Muslims and Christians intermingled as friends and neighbors."[13] Although

arguably successful in achieving some of the economic goals,[14] the creation of a stable,

unified national identity could additionally be seen to have faced significant obstacles in

the face of a confessional divided society.

The sectarian divisions in Lebanese society, enshrined in its political system since

the unwritten National Pact of 1943, were not resolved by the Lebanese civil war;[15]

rather, the Ta'if Accord ending the violence reaffirmed these fissures. In the wake of

Lebanese independence, political power was distributed between the various confessional

communities through the National Pact that designated parliamentary seats and important

government posts in line with the contested 1932 census.[16] However, as Picard notes,

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[13] Nagel, "Reconstructing Space," 723.

[14] In addition to an increase in tourism and tourist attractions in Downtown, economic development has included the participation of significant amount of Gulf capital. For example, in the "urban village" built in Downtown, called Saifi, approximately 40% of the residences are owned by expatriates and Gulf Arabs, Yahya, "Communal Imaginaries," 122n37. Additionally, an entrepreneurial class has grown in Lebanon and been primarily composed of "Gulf entrepreneurs:" a growing group who returned to Lebanon after amassing quick and large fortunes in the Gulf States. The most prominent of these people, of course, being Prime Minister Rafic Hariri himself. See Salim Nasr, "New Social Realities and Post-War Lebanon: Issues for Reconstruction," in *Recovering Beirut: Urban Design and Post-War Reconstruction*, edited by Samir Khalaf and Philip S. Khoury (Leiden, New York: Brill, 1993), 73. Others, like economist Kubursi, are alarmed by the $17 billion debt incurred by the reconstruction and the country's economic capacity to service this debt. Atif A. Kubursi, "Reconstructing the Economy of Lebanon," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1999): 69-95; see also, Richard Becherer, "A Matter of Life and Debt: The Untold Costs of Rafiq Hariri's New Beirut," *The Journal of Architecture* 10, no. 1 (2005): 1-42.

[15] The underlying reasons of Lebanese civil wars is a contested topic and includes discussion of political-economic marginalization along sectarian lines, and conflicts over the Palestinian resistance's presence in Lebanon. For an excellent account of the war see Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990). See also Helena Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon* (London: Hutchinson, 1985); Elizabeth Picard, *Lebanon, a Shattered Country: Myths and Realities of the Wars in Lebanon* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1996); Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Theodore Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation* (London: IB Tauris, 1993); and Khalaf, *Cultural Resistance* and *Civil and Uncivil Violence*.

[16] The ratio of Christians to Muslims in Parliament was 6:5. Christian seats were primarily allocated to Maronites. Sunni Muslims received eleven of the twenty-five Muslim seats, the Shi'i ten, and the Druze four. Shi'i political marginalization becomes more prominent when considering cabinet positions, that were equally divided between Christians and Muslims, with equal numbers of Maronite and Sunni members, and the fact that the President would be a Maronite, the Prime Minister a Sunni, and, the relatively powerless,

"this was not a pact between all the communities, but essentially between the two most

powerful [and elite] ones, the Maronites and the Sunnis."[17] The sectarian divisions of

political leadership sustained the "establishment of sectarian social institutions (e.g.,

schools, hospitals) rather than common ones."[18] Additionally, the rapid urbanization of

Beirut, resulting in part from its integration in a capitalist world economy, further

exacerbated economic, social, and regional disparities within Lebanon.[19] During the

fifteen years of violence that ensued, factions clashed over remaining government

resources and the urban landscape of Beirut increasingly reflected the growing

divisiveness of the nation.[20] In addition to the infamous Green Line, of war-damaged

buildings that divided East and West Beirut, "massive population displacements" resulted

in, for example, a decline in the Muslim population of East Beirut from 40 to 5 percent

by the end of the war.[21] In 1989, the Ta'if Accord ended the violence. However, in lieu of

offering the possibility of overcoming a history of sectarian division and increasing

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speak of Parliament, Shi'i. See Farid el-Khazen, *The Communal Pact of National Identities: The Making and Politics of the 1943 National Pact*, Papers on Lebanon No. 12 (Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1991).

[17] Picard, *A Shattered Country*, 72. Maktabi argues that the 1932 census was highly politicized and sought to provide a Christian majority in order to establish a "Christian nation." See Rania Maktabi, "The Lebanese Census of 1932 Revisited: Who are the Lebanese?" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 26 (1999): 219-41.

[18] Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern*, 73. This analysis is based on the extensive work of Suad Joseph. See Suad Joseph, "Muslim-Christian Conflict in Lebanon: A Perspective on the Evolution of Sectarianism," in *Muslim-Christian Conflicts: Economic, Political, and Social Origins*, eds., Suad Joseph and Barbara Pillsbury (Boulder: Westview Press, 1978); Suad Joseph, *The Politicization of Religious Sects in Borj Hammoud, Lebanon* (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1975); and Suad Joseph, "The Public/Private—The Imagined Boundary in the Imagined Nation/State/Community: The Lebanese Case," *Feminist Review* 57 (1997): 73-92.

[19] See Hassan N. Diab, *Beirut: Reviving Lebanon's Past* (Westport: Praeger, 1999); and Atif A. Kubursi, "Reconstructing and/or Reconstituting the Post-War Lebanese Economy: The Role of Infrastructural Development," in *Recovering Beirut: Urban Design and Post-War Reconstruction*, eds., Samir Khalaf and Philip S. Khoury (New York: Leiden, 1993), 167-82.

[20] On the increasing visibility of sectarian divisions and boundaries during the civil wars see Maha Yahya, "Re-Constituting Space: The Aberration of the Urban in Beirut," in *Recovering Beirut: Urban Design and Post War Reconstruction*, eds., Samer Khalaf and Philip S. Khoury (New York: Leiden, 1993).

[21] See Salim Nasr, "New Social Realities and Post-War Lebanon: issues for Reconstruction," in *Recovering Beirut: Urban Design and Post-War Reconstruction*, eds., Samir Khalaf and Philip S. Khoury (New York: Leiden, 1993), 68-9.

national cohesion, the Ta'if Accord sustained a "war-induced notion of communal

identity" in which "collective cultural identities are acknowledged and celebrated, [and]

group particularities defended."[22] It is against this sectarian history that Solidere

attempted to construct a unified, national identity.

Contemporary Beirut continues to exist as a space of contestation, where identities

are constantly under negotiation. In fact, Solidere, established under a plan proposed by

the Sunni Prime Minister, focused on the reconstruction of the BCD to attract capital

from Sunni-ruled Gulf states while ignoring much of the impoverished Shi'i southern

suburbs.[23] Despite the failed attempt at instilling a unified, stable national identity and the

ongoing marginalization of some groups, I would argue that Beirut is sustaining a certain

degree of civic consciousness and communal interactions. Consider, for example, the use

of Martyr's Square during both the so-called Cedar Revolution and the political impasse

surrounding the presidential successor of Emile Lahoud. Additionally, the BCD attracts

members of the many confessionally divided suburbs: "As a recent study on around 2,000

car users indicates, around 70% of those visiting the city center were from within its

municipal boundaries."[24] I, therefore, insist upon understanding Beirut, and particularly

the BCD, as "a text in an ongoing discourse about the shape and meaning of Lebanese

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[22] "The new Lebanese political system—the Ta'if Accord—was at once a return to and a restructure of the National Pact of 1943." Picard, *A Shattered Country*, 156-7.

[23] For a discussion of the history focusing on the southern areas of Greater Beirut, see Fuad Khuri, *From Village to Suburb: Order and Change in Greater Beirut* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1975); on the politics and reconstruction of these areas after the civil war see Mona Harb el-Kak, *Politiques urbaines dans la banlieue-sud de Beyrouth: Les cahiers du CERMOC* (Beirut: Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain, 1996), Mona Harb el-Kak, "Post-war Beirut: Resources, Negotiations, and Contestations in the Elyssar Project," in *Capital Cities: Ethnographies of Urban Governance in the Middle East*, ed. Seteney Shami, 111-33 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), and Mona Harb el-Kek, "Transforming the Site of Dereliction into the Urban Culture of Modernity: Beirut's Southern Suburb and Elisar Project," in *Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the Construction and Reconstruction of a Modern City*, eds., Peter Rowe and Hashim Sarkis, 173-82 (Munich: Prestel, 1998); and for a recent ethnographic study see Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern*.

[24] Yahya, "Communal Imaginaries," 122.

nationhood and identity."[25] It is precisely in this contested space that Helem and an emerging gay scene became visible and active.

I understand the gay scene to be constituted of those practices and locations that have been appropriated by a group of men in Beirut that, predominantly, chooses to identify itself as "gay."[26] The gay scene sustains a noteworthy level of visibility by building upon the state-endorsed discourses that characterize the BCD as a negotiable locale of economic growth, consumption, global integration, and increasing communal interaction. The three cafés, noted earlier in the chapter, that recently created a cruising area in between themselves are Starbucks Coffee, Dunkin' Donuts, and CinnZeo. The members of the gay scene, and the informants of this study, hail from a number of various confessional groups,[27] and the scene is constantly evolving, as locations are appropriated and contested.[28] There are undoubtedly many ways in which the fissures of a confessionally divided Lebanese society permeate even this small gay scene. The attentive reader may note in the subsequent chapter that it is the Shi'i informant that faced the greatest persecution or marginalization. Others could point out that when the

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[25] Nagel, "Reconstructing Space," 718. For a study of the rendition of Lebanese nationality and identity through literary narratives spanning the country's history, see Elise Salem, *Constructing Lebanon: A Century of Literary Narratives* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

[26] See "Table 3: Sexual Orientation," Appendix C: Survey Results. I am talking about, in the words of Merabet, the many "local homosexuals… [that] use the English word 'gay' as an individual qualifier, regardless of the language they actually speak." Merabet, "Queer Space in Beirut," 201.

[27] McCormick, whose work I previously stated shared many similarities with my own, makes the comparable observation that informants "were religiously mixed, representing virtually all the major sectarian groups: Shi'i, Sunni, Maronite, Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Druze. McCormick, "Gay Identities, Lived Realities," 244.

[28] The locations listed in this thesis were those that were a part of the physical gay scene during the fieldwork. However, the gay scene continues to grow—increasingly outwards into those areas immediately adjacent to the BCD (i.e. Gemmayzeh and Port de Beyrouth to the West, Achrafieh and Hamra to the South). More recent locations included the nightclubs Silicon (Sin el Fil) and Milk (Downtown); the restaurants Wolf Lounge (Hamra), BOA (Achrafieh), Dark Box (Achrafieh), and others in the Gemmayzeh area, the cafés Starbucks Coffee (Achrafieh) and Columbus (Achrafieh); and the Saint Georges Beach (Downtown). For a discussion of earlier locations throughout Beirut that were frequented by same-sex practitioners, although arguably not occupying the gay scene as conceived in this thesis, see Merabet, "Queer Space in Beirut."

gay scene extends beyond the BCD into the immediately adjacent areas, these are predominantly Christian or Sunni neighborhoods.[29] While still others could highlight more generally the confessional underpinnings of the state, and its use in participation as a citizen, schooling, and health care. While I welcome these insights and believe them to be valid routes of inquiry, I do not undertake an extensive discussion of sectarian divisions throughout the rest of this thesis. Although it may be argued that such a discussion is beyond the scope of the presented work, the exclusion was more evidently the result of the fieldwork. Many informants were at odds when asked about their religious or sectarian background, they either responded by stating that they are not religious, or by clarifying if I sought "What it says on [their] papers?" As will be demonstrated, for members of the gay scene other issues, including that of visibility, emerge as significant points of negotiation.

HELEM'S STRATEGIES OF VISIBILITY

Helem is a non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in Beirut publicly advocating gay rights. The organization was established in 2001 by a socio-economically homogenous group of educated, cosmopolitan, urban professionals—previously known as *Nadi hurriya* (Club Free)—that decided to work on issues related to the Lebanese gay "community." Nearly 75 percent of the Beirut gay scene, from which Helem's membership predominantly hails, completed at least some university training;[30]

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[29] Achrafieh is Christian, while Hamra Sunni. See footnote 26 in this chapter.
[30] "Table 8: Level of Education," Appendix C: Survey Results.

additionally, unemployment for the group remained below the regional average.[31]

However, what initially appears to be a fledging local civil rights organization, with approximately forty registered members, is more accurately a sprawling multinational grouping. The organization has developed a network of 'support groups' or chapters throughout the world: "Since many members of Helem have in the past either lived outside of Lebanon or had to leave the country for various reasons, mostly economic, we decided to start 'chapters' [or support groups] for the organization wherever there is a substantial-sized group of LGBT, Lebanese or Arab, willing to do so."[32] These support groups are located in Montreal (Canada), Paris (France), Sydney (Australia), and San Francisco (United States).[33] The size of Helem, spanning across a number of continents and involving members of the vast Lebanese diaspora, is indicative of the organization's location in the midst of larger transnational dynamics.

"Helem leads a peaceful struggle for the liberation of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community in Lebanon from all sorts of legal, social and cultural discrimination."[34] The primary objective of the organization, "the annulment of article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code which punishes 'unnatural sexual intercourse'," is pursued by the organization through a variety of activities and programs.[35] Central to the

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[31] Although unemployment statistics vary considerably depending on the parameters and methodology used, I calculated unemployment (referring to neither full- or part-time employment, nor enrollment in an educational institution) for male survey respondents to be approximately 8 percent. See "Table 6: Employment Status," Appendix C: Survey Results. The "Middle East" regional unemployment estimate for males in 2006 was 10.5 percent. See International Labour Organization, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2007).

[32] Ghassan Makarem (Acting International Coordinator, Helem Beirut), interview by Pascal Chahine, March 5, 2005. On Lebanese diasporic communities and social and economic links maintained with Lebanon see Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi, eds., *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of emigration* (London: IB Tauris, 1992).

[33] The function of the support groups is not officially stated by the organization, but will be addressed later in the chapter.

[34] "About Helem," Appendix A: Helem.

[35] Ibid.

debate about what form Helem's advocacy should take was the appropriateness of a

"strategy of increased visibility":[36]

> Visibility has been one of our main strategies since we started. The reason we started Helem in 2001 is that we needed an organization that is visibly LGBTIQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Intersex, Queer] and that it is not enough to create a safe space, a closed safe space, and that by becoming active in the society, this way we can provide the protection or the acceptance that we talk about. Any activity that we do, any program, has a component of visibility.[37]

Makarem outlines a general strategy of increased visibility. Some of the "activities," or

"programs," he is referring to include: a high-traffic website; a monthly newsletter,

Helem Pride, a tri-lingual quarterly magazine, *Barra* (Out); and media interviews. The

strategic purpose of visibility is articulated in a later interview: "[Visibility] can help

situate the issue of gay and lesbian liberation in the general political discourse. It is an

issue of how to create social change. Trying to work on LGBTIQ issues in Lebanon

means that you are going to use some of the tools that have been developed in the

West."[38] In this interview extract, not only is the association between a strategy of

visibility and its appropriation from a Western movement made explicit, but visibility is

specifically located in political discourse. In fact, this initially appears to be an almost

wholesale appropriation of 'the tools of the West'. This chapter explores this

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[36] In the context of a Western gay rights movement, "cultural visibility" is conceptualized as a necessary precondition for gay civil rights, and more broadly as a form of empowerment. See Rosemary Hennessy, "Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture," in *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, edited by Linda J. Nicholson and Steven Seidman (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). In *All the Rage: The Story of Gay Visibility in America*, Suzanna Walters shows that, for an assimilationist Western gay rights movement, cultural visibility has been conceived of as promoting awareness and producing sensitivities in the larger society, leading to a sense of inclusion or acceptance. See Suzanna Danuta Walters, *All the Rage: The Story of Gay Visibility in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[37] Ghassan Makarem (Acting International Coordinator, Helem Beirut), interview by Pascal Chahine, March 25, 2005.

[38] Ghassan Makarem (Acting International Coordinator, Helem Beirut), interview by Pascal Chahine, November, 14, 2006.

appropriation by examining how a strategy of "increasing visibility" was appropriated and its effect, both for Helem and for gay men in Beirut.

<div align="center">Negotiating Politico-Legal Currents</div>

Helem was established as an ad hoc organization created by members of Club Free.[39] It was not until 2003 that Helem attempted to seek official, or state, recognition as a NGO in Lebanon—previously it had existed "under the radar." Helem has not yet received a registration number from the Interior Ministry, but Helem's Local Coordinator, Georges Azzi, remains confident that "according to current jurisprudence, the fact that we have paid and received a receipt of registration will be accepted in courts as proof of state recognition."[40] The establishment of the organization as an NGO in Lebanon has been the result of what has been characterized as "The standard response of the [Lebanese] government to civil society initiatives: no repression, no encouragement, distant monitoring, no guaranteed rights."[41] This "standard response" has had more influence over the politics of visibility governing Helem and its objectives than any direct approval or rejection by the government. I do not seek to argue that the Lebanese government condoned the formation and establishment of Helem—although it may appear that it has done so through the absence of any restrictions; rather, as shown above, within the context of post-war Beirut there is both a simultaneous acknowledgement or

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[39] Sara Scalenghe, "'We Invite People to Think the Unthinkable': An Interview with Nizar Saghieh." *Middle East Report* 230 (Spring 2004): 30-33.
[40] *Integrated Regional New Networks (IRIN)*, "Lebanon: Homosexuals Still Facing Discrimination," December 8, 2005. Legal experts consulted, by Helem and independently for this research, confirm Azzi's assessment of Lebanese jurisprudence.
[41] Scalenghe, "Think the Unthinkable," 36.

defense of group differences and an attempt to minimize such acknowledgements in the construction of a unified national identity.[42]

Recently, there have been several legal cases regarding the establishment of state-recognized associations in Lebanon. One of these cases involved restrictions regarding what the state refers to as "secret societies." In an interview, Makarem notes the way that this case relates to the registration of Helem as well as the increased visibility of the organization in the media:

> By claiming that we were a 'secret society,' the government could have denied us registration. Fortunately, the courts have ruled now that those organizations that have been subject to open media coverage cannot be deemed secret societies. Since Helem has been covered in three major Arabic newspapers as well as in numerous French and English dailies, this definition then could not be applied to us.[43]

The visibility of the organization in the regional and international media serves the legal purpose of avoiding categorization as a "secret society." Since the organization has not yet secured official recognition, increasing its visibility is a strategy of protection from possible state suppression. In this case, an increase in visibility of the organization was carefully contained and attuned to existing politico-legal circumstances.

<div align="center">"Crack-down" in Tripoli</div>

In 2002, police in Tripoli—a city eighty-five kilometers north of Beirut—apprehended a number of men and obtained information from these arrests to proceed

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[42] In October 2005, Beirut municipality member Saad-Eddine Wazzan addressed the issue of an increasingly visible Helem noting that "this pervert phenomenon can cause great harm to social ethics affecting our children. Especially as the organization has released a magazine and is holding group discussions on school and university campuses, the Interior Ministry should put an end to it." *The Daily Star*, "News in Brief," October 12, 2005. However, these comments had a virtually unnoticeable effect. No significant mention was made about Wazzan's comments; they appeared unceremoniously in the "News in Briefs" section of *The Daily Star* newspaper and were accompanied by a rebuttal by Helem. For the organization, the comments did not result in a backlash and merely elicited a request by local law enforcement agents that the organization ensure that its actions were legal. Georges Azzi, (Local Coordinator, Helem Beirut), interview by Pascal Chahine, February 4, 2007.

[43] Makarem, March 25, 2005.

with a larger campaign of raids and arrests.[44] The larger campaign saw the arrest of

thirty-seven men who faced various charges and were given sentences of imprisonment

that gradually increased from two days to two-and-a-half years. As the case went on and

more lawyers and resources were employed, Helem began to take on an increasingly

prominent role in monitoring and advising the prisoners. Helem played an active role in

the case and generally sought a negotiated strategy of visibility in its activism by trying to

publicize the case on its website while limiting its exposure to other organizations. The

arrest of these thirty-seven men was not picked up by most human rights and gay rights

organizations.

Helem, although aware of the benefits of increasing visibility, was attentive to the

need to negotiate 'the tools of the West'. Makarem, speaking about the role of

international human rights groups in the arrests in Tripoli, said, "I hope they don't latch

on like they did with the Queen Boat case."[45] In a follow-up interview, Makarem

elaborates upon his reluctance to involve international human rights organizations during

the Tripoli case and in "gay rights" activism in general: "The concern is that the main

argument against Helem is that it is 'Westernized.' So if it seems that a campaign or

something similar is launched in the West, it will be easier for anti-gay persons to use it

against us here."[46] As he discusses the Tripoli case, Makarem implicates the issue of

visibility (i.e. "if it seems") within the specific regional discourse that the organization

faces—a regional political discourse of homosexuality as foreign and associated with the

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[44] There are unconfirmed reports that these men were tortured for the information. Ibid.

[45] Ibid. The comments are unsurprising when considering the effects of the Queen Boat case on the emerging group of gay men in Cairo. See Introduction, footnote 7.

[46] Ghassan Makarem (Acting International Coordinator, Beirut, Helem), in discussion with the author, February 14, 2007.

"West."[47] In many of its activities, Helem has therefore attempted to adapt a strategy of increased visibility to meet the conditions of the specific political context in which it operates. As opposed to becoming mere "informants" for the Gay International, Helem and its activists were consciously distancing themselves and the case from other international gay rights organizations as they attempted to negotiate their surroundings.

Although Helem was successful in limiting the visibility of this case, its ability to protect those involved was limited by its inability to operate outside of Beirut. The organization was often unable to gather sufficient information about the case:

> City life in Tripoli is quite disconnected from what happens in Beirut, and while Helem is able to work very actively and be very public in Beirut, we still haven't managed to reach out to the less developed cities around Lebanon – Sidon, Tripoli, etc. They are usually a little bit more conservative and there are numerous religious currents that don't have enough power in Beirut – both Christian and Muslim. … There is also no freedom for associations to work, to invite people to meetings, much less than it is in Beirut. So this is the reason why we don't have enough information about the case.[48]

In his analysis of the Tripoli arrests, and the advocacy attempted by Helem, Makarem emphasizes some of the themes that were noted in the discussion of a post-war Beirut. Makarem notes "freedom for associations to work" in Beirut, and the fact that no singular "religious current" has "enough power" in the city. Further, Beirut was reaffirmed to be "disconnected from what happens" in "less developed cities" around Lebanon. Although the particular meaning of "development" in this extract is not readily clear, it is economic development that becomes the focus at a later point in the interview, and this discussion is worth quoting at length:

> In Lebanon it's a little bit more Beirut versus the remainder of the country because of the nature of the economic system. It's a very centralized economic

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[47] For an excellent account of the development of Arab intellectual thought and modern Islamist discourse on homosexuality, as sin, crime, and disease originating from the West, see Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 191-268.

[48] Makarem, March 25, 2005.

system, any accumulation of capital that is happening in the country happens in Beirut. So you have a trend of what is referred to as the professional class; you cannot really call it a middle class, because economically they are not in the middle class. They're quite poor, but they're part of the professional class. [For example,] people who work at the advertising agency, on television, in the media, and in some of the other professions such as lawyers, doctors, [and] engineers. Who live in a mixed community.

It's not a coincidence that when we were looking for a location for Helem that we were able to find a location in this area of Beirut. This is an area of Beirut that has been confessionally mixed, [and] different classes lived here. So there is a tradition of diversity that exists. Even in this very small geographic location that plays a good part. And the class divisions are there, they exist. We cannot ignore the fact that there are class divisions in Lebanese society and I think they are quite extreme, between the very rich and the poor in the country there is a space where you get some segments that tend more to look up to a liberal tradition or Western tradition. And this is where the gay community has been able to start forming. … All the suburbs, not just the southern suburbs, they all have something in common: they are all very religious. There is a lot of power for religious movements.[49]

In this discussion, Makarem notes some of the trends discussed, including the pluralism that characterized Downtown. However, in addition to the entrepreneurial class that had been the focus at the onset of reconstructing Beirut, Makarem discusses the attraction of other classes to the area, including a developing "professional class." This professional class located in a pluralistic environment, cushioned from any one hegemonic confessional discourse, is reflective of Helem's membership and the gay "scene." Makarem notes that this segment of society looks "up to a liberal tradition or Western tradition." Although this phrase seems to corroborate Massad's claim that the Gay International has been successful in the "increasingly Westernized middle classes" of the Arab-Islamic world, it should be contextualized through the previous distancing of Helem and Makarem from the West—in the context of discussing the Tripoli case. As opposed to Massad's claim that such a phrase should be indicative of the "adoption of everything

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[49] Makarem, March 25, 2005.

Western" by this class, it is rather a negotiated relationship even within the limited context of gay rights organizations.

Conversely, if one were to consider the statement of a "developed" Beirut in less economic terms, an interpretation that such explanations sustain an Orientalist trope of regional backwardness is possible. It may be argued that Makarem, and by extension Helem, conceives of "development" as a linear trajectory with Beirut ahead of other locations such as Tripoli. Visibility, in this analysis, is the public display of homosexuality, and of the homosexual, that becomes possible only after a certain developmental stage is reached. Hence, Helem increases visibility to a Western audience and in Beirut but not to the "less developed" areas of Lebanon. However, I argue for another understanding of visibility—particularly in light of the conscious, if not explicit, distancing of Helem from such Orientalist approaches in the previous and subsequent case studies. Visibility is not matter of detecting or displaying empirical bodies but of knowledges—discourses, significations, modes of intelligibility—by which identities are, and can be, constituted. It is not a matter of linear development that will allow a successful increase in visibility, but a particular social arrangement that enables the gay man, as conceived by Helem and its members, as an accepted member of Lebanese society, to become visible. This gay man, representative of members of the gay scene, is quite socially unique and can only become safely visible through those discourses of the BCD (i.e. the means of consumption, global integration, "liberal" inter-communal relations) in such locations as Acid and X-OM nightclubs.

CASE STUDY: POLICE RAIDS ON ACID AND X-OM NIGHTCLUBS

On Saturday, 12 November 2005, Vice Squads of the Internal Security Force raided Acid nightclub, a known gay venue in the Sin el Fil district of Beirut.[50] Seven men were arrested and incarcerated for three days. No charges were brought against those arrested. The following Thursday another nightclub, X-OM, was raided—no arrests were made. These raids coincided with periods during which both nightclubs would be frequented by the largest number of gay patrons.[51] During the second raid on X-OM, officers asked the patrons if they were members of Helem.[52] It would be difficult to argue that these raids represented a concerted and sustained 'crack-down' on gay life in Beirut or on Helem. The raids coincided with a specific political situation—the withdrawal of Syrian troops—that resulted in an atmosphere of increased security. On the night of the first raid, dozens of other nightclubs in and around Beirut were also raided. The inquiries, relating to underage drinking and drug use, made during the second raid are commonplace. Both nightclubs have not suffered a decrease in attendance as a result of the raids, nor have such raids become more common or systematic.

The day following the first raid (on Acid), Helem released a statement directly to an international organization known as the Gay and Lesbian Arab Society (GLAS), which in turn posted it on its news website—Ahbab News.[53] This initial statement

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[50] For a detailed account of this event see "Police Storm Gay Nightclub in Beirut," *Daily Star*, March 31, 2005.

[51] Although Acid is widely known as *the* gay nightclub in Beirut, Saturday is considerably more popular and X-OM's LGBT themed nights are Thursday and Sunday, with the former the more popular.

[52] The inquiry into Helem members during the X-OM raid is most likely a result of the close—and visible—working relationship between the organization and the nightclub. Until February 2006, only two local organizations were featured on the homepage of Helem's website. One of these organizations is TAG>><events, which mainly organizes and runs music and entertainment events – including X-OM gay themed nights.

[53] "'Arrests in Beirut Gay Club': Helem Statement to Ahbab News," Appendix A: Helem.

included basic information about the events that took place and the reassurance that

"Helem is going to issue an official press release on the arrests to be sent out to NGOs,

the media, and other concerned bodies, as well as a list of ministers, parliamentarians,

and other key actors that might be of help."[54] Helem never followed through with its

proposed press release. Accordingly, a blogger and former member of Helem-Beirut

(http://qursana.blogspot.com) posted an update approximately a week after Helem's

statement in an effort to counter the "silence of everyone" and a supposed "blackout"

imposed by Helem, which amounted to "strategic incompetence" on the part of the

organization.[55]

Helem was quick to respond to Qursana's posting with a statement in which the

organization defended its strategies:

> Just to clarify that Helem did not "blackout" the news, nor did we ask people
> not to speak about it. We were requested by the detainees not to publicize the
> case, which is something you always face when actually working on such
> issues….
>
> I am glad that there are people out there who are interested in helping
> liberate LGBTTIQs (and by the way, Helem does not ask people to disclose
> their sexuality or conform to a gender identity when they join) everywhere,
> in addition to not necessarily publicizing all our work, which to a big extent
> is under very difficult circumstances. But there is a serious need to
> understand that not all issues are solved through a colonialist attitude. If
> sexual liberation is to happen in Lebanon, it should start here and from an
> indigenous movement. From experience we know that international
> intervention in such cases can do more harm than good, since unfortunately
> many supposed defenders of sexual rights would jump to the opportunity for
> fame without even checking the facts.[56]

The reference to "colonialist attitude" is qualified in the statement through a discussion of

how "international intervention in such cases can do more harm than good." If these

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[54] Ibid.

[55] "'Homosexuals in Lebanon! New Pink Dollar Equation!': Qursana Blog Posting," Appendix A: Helem.

[56] "'Georges Azzi, Ghassan Makarem, and Sarah About Ghazal Said…': Helem Response to Qursana Blog Posting," Appendix A: Helem.

statements are accompanied by those discussed in the previous case ("Crack-down" in

Tripoli), what becomes evident is Helem's awareness of the "colonist attitude" and

incongruity of certain "international intervention" in its activism. It consciously navigates

these dynamics with such regional discourses of homosexuality as Western or tool of

cultural imperialism. In fact, the organization attempts to further dissociate itself from

such political rhetoric and accompanying accusations of "Westernization" by alluding to

itself as an "indigenous movement." In other words, Helem defends its strategy by

pointing out the particular political context in which it is operating and applying a

carefully evolving strategy of visibility. The organization attempts to clarify that its

actions are not based on a simple choice between visibility and invisibility—between a

"blackout" and "publicity," or between "silence" and "voice." Rather, it is the strategic

adoption of visibility to particular audiences at particular moments for specific purposes

representing a negotiation of "global" and "local" discourses it simultaneously operates

within. Helem's response, or rather lack thereof, to these raids, and the counterdiscourse

that it generated among some Helem members, clearly gestures to the conflict between

the expectations of international gay activists and local members.

Shortly after this blog response, Helem finally posted an update on its website:

> On the night of November 12, 2005, 6 men were arrested in Acid nightclub, a known gay venue in Sin el Fil. No charges were pressed against them. The detainees were released after 3 days of detention. Although no physical abuse was reported, the police were verbally abusive towards the men.

> A week later, another known gay club, X-OM, was raided. The police checked IDs and inquired about drug use in the venue. No arrests took place that night.

> Acid and X-OM were probably targeted by the police for their openly gay clientele, although legally they had no pretext for any arrests. Article 534 of the Lebanese penal code explicitly states that "penetrative sex against nature" is punishable by law, and not homosexuality per se or the adoption of a gay identity. Laws against public indecency may be enforced if excessive displays of affection or other such behavior is witnessed…

> Helem is working closely with lawyers and NGOs concerned with civil rights and liberties to make sure that incidents such as the haphazard arrests that occurred will not be repeated.[57]

What is significant about this highly public statement featured on the front page of the organization's website is what the organization chose to include. It is noteworthy that Article 534 is referenced; in the response to Qursana a few days earlier, Helem stated, "there is no clear evidence that [the detainees are] being charged under [Article] 534. They were caught under a public indecency law."[58] Although the annulment of Article 534 is Helem's primary objective, this particular case had no relation to the Article.[59] Finally, Helem implies that the raids and the arrests were the result of "homosexuality… or the adoption of a gay identity." This is a radical move when one considers how contentious this strategy of advocacy was in the Queen Boat case and Helem's previous remark distancing itself from the adoption of a particular sexual or gender identity. Therefore, it would be difficult to argue that this statement is intended for a local—or even regional—audience or that it is merely about the Acid/X-OM raids; the statement is clearly first and foremost intended for a particular international audience and is as much about Helem's particular needs as it is about the legality of the raids.[60] The statement sought to attract and sustain the attention, and financial support, of an international audience engaged in its various chapters. What may sometimes appear as contradictory

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[57] "'Acid and X-OM Police Raids': Helem Statement," Appendix A: Helem.

[58] "'Georges Azzi, Ghassan Makarem, and Sarah About Ghazal Said…': Helem Response to Qursana Blog Posting," Appendix A.

[59] It should be noted, however, that Article 534 is sometimes arbitrarily associated with such cases: "The great majority of judges consider [Article 534] to be outdated and would throw out a case based solely on 534. Unfortunately, it is usually used when connected to another 'crime', such as prostitution, drug use, or 'public indecency'." See Makarem, March 5, 2005.

[60] This web posting was reproduced, almost in its entirety, in Helem's downloadable monthly newsletter, *Helem Pride*. Notably the only omission was the qualifying sentence that followed the reference to 'gay identity'—pertaining to the law, of 'public indecency', under which the six men were *actually* detained—that reads: "Laws against public indecency may be enforced if excessive displays of affection or other such behavior is witnessed." See "Police Raids on Acid and X-OM," *Helem Pride* 1, no. 2 (January 2006).

statements or actions by Helem must contextualized by the fact that the organization straddles the increasingly limiting conceptions of "global" and "local;" it is global in its inclusive and macro-political strategies, and local in its specific, micro-political practices.

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FUNDING "GAY RIGHTS" IN BEIRUT:
THE GAY ARAB DIASPORA AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF "COMMUNITY"

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After the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in the early months of 2005, Beirut was flooded with journalists from a variety of regional and international news sources. Over the next couple of months, as a dangerous security situation escalated in the capital and various national and international bodies became enmeshed in existing Syrian-Lebanese relations, an ad hoc process began in which major international news sources began to shift resources away from Baghdad, covering the war in Iraq, to Beirut. As a result of this increased global press interest, in the last six months of 2005, Helem became the topic of articles produced by Reuters, the Associated Press (AP), and the United Nation's Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN). These articles have been syndicated in numerous news sources including *The New York Times*,[61] the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC),[62] and, the French daily newspaper, *Libération*.[63] Helem administrators were interviewed for all these articles.[64] As noted earlier, Helem's ability

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[61] Donna Abu Nasr, "Arab Gays Defy Laws, Venture Into Open," *The New York Times*, October 8, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com.

[62] Carine Torbey, "Lebanon's Gays Struggle with Law," *BBCArabia.com*, August 29, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4154664.stm.

[63] Isabelle Dellerba, "Les gays sortent du placard au Liban," *Libération*, October 5, 2005, http://www.liberations.fr.

[64] Specifically international coordinator Ghassan Makarem and local coordinator Georges Azzi, provided direct interviews for correspondents in Beirut. It is unconfirmed who initiated the articles, whether correspondents in Beirut sought out interviews with Helem or whether Helem sought out the correspondents. However, from my experiences with the organization, I am aware of that Helem had a

to become more visible at this time was also linked to political currents and the ascending

particular politics of visibility—a visibility that becomes possible only through the

existence of particular discourses at various historical moments. After the assassination of

Hariri, the Cedar Revolution—and by extension anything that could be interpreted to be

part of the "reform movement"—became a prime example of an expanding "civic

consciousness." The majority of these articles and reports were never syndicated in

Lebanese papers or disseminated more generally in Lebanese society.[65] Much like the

final statement by Helem concerning the Acid/X-OM police raids, these media reports

were not intended to be visible to a local, or even regional, audience. The reports,

however, did become visible to GLAS—mentioned in the case study—and the gay Arab

diaspora. The Lebanese disapora alone are thought to hold tens of billions of dollars in

foreign banks, and were courted as a major potential source of investment in Lebanon

after the civil war.[66] This section explores the financial motivation underlying the

strategic increasing Helem's visibility to a transnational audience.

<u>The Gay Arab Diaspora and Securing Funding</u>

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history of seeking out opportunities and providing interviews for international news sources. However, it was not until the Hariri assassination that Helem could provide such interviews with greater ease. Up until the mid-2005 the only major international news agency to mention Helem in its reporting was the Agence France Presse (AFP), in an article that mentioned other organizations and was not limited to Helem. The majority of the articles produced in the past nine months exclusively mention Helem.

[65] Other articles, however, did appear in the local press. However, these articles were more mixed in terms of the visibility being sought and included negative reporting and limited discussion of Helem, for example "Al-Arabiya.net Smear Campaign Against Helem," Appendix A: Helem. Only a couple other articles explicitly mentioned Helem. See "Lebanon's Homosexual Community Speak Out: Reports of Police Abuse and Societal Intolerance are among the Complaints of the Country's Gay Population," *Daily Star*, September 7, 2005; and "*Mithliyyu 'helem': ta'adad fi muajhat al-'azal al-ijtima'i,*" *Al-mustaqbal*, October 30, 2005.

[66] "Glimmer of Confidence: The Hopes of Lebanon's Prime Minister to Re-Build the Paris of the Orient," *Financial Times*, January 25, 1994, http://www.ft.com.

Helem's website has been one of the most significant components of its strategy of increased visibility.[67] By January 2006, the organization's website was averaging between 50,000 and 60,000 visits per month—a surprisingly large number for an organization that has less than 40 registered members in Beirut. Furthermore, Helem's most recent statistics state that 95% of the time, the website is accessed from outside Lebanon.[68] This website (http://www.helem.net) and the website maintained by GLAS (http://www.glas.org) use similar language, mostly in English,[69] and images to define and represent themselves, and it is likely that Helem's format has been heavily influenced by GLAS.[70] The use of the Internet during the Acid/X-OM events meant that Helem was able to strategically make visible the information relating to the police raids, using a space of visibility frequented and catering to a particular global audience or "community."

This transnational audience has no defined mission or relationship to the organization apart from staffing its chapter organizations outside of Beirut. However, in a recent interview, Makarem was careful to note that the organization needs to consider "that the 'investment' in Helem has been from the community itself."[71] Makarem is speaking specifically about a financial investment: indeed the relationship between Helem Beirut and its various chapters was overwhelmingly financial, with all chapters

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[67] In an interview describing how the Internet has been mobilized as a tool of visibility, Makarem states that "we've thought of the Internet as quite important." See Makarem, March 5, 2005.
[68] Christian Henderson, "Lebanese Group Tackles Biggest Taboo," *Al-Jazeera*, January 7, 2006, http://english.aljazeera.net/archive/2006/01/200841013324654679.html (accessed June 18, 2008).
[69] Recently, Helem's website has increasingly feature Arabic articles and postings possibly as a result of the fact that the organization has been able to secure large amounts of funding from the Heinrich Böll Foundation.
[70] Both websites promptly deploy the allusions to the rainbow flag: GLAS features a rainbow flag and Helem uses the colors of the rainbow for the fonts. Both organizations also explicitly associate themselves with "human rights," "discrimination based on sexual orientation," and "the global Gay and Lesbian movement." All these aspects are cited from the GLAS mission statement and represent specific information listed on the "About Helem" section of the website, "About Helem," Appendix A: Helem.
[71] Makarem, February 14, 2007.

sending financial support back to Beirut on a regular basis. Additionally, visitors to

Helem's website are both encouraged to become "members" (by filling out an online

form) and support the organization with donations (through electronic payments). In

2005, Helem Beirut posted revenue from "External Transfers" and "Donations" totaling

USD$40,025.67—or 90% of all revenues.[72] In a separate interview with Helem's Local

Coordinator, Azzi confirmed that the majority of the funding for projects undertaken by

the organization has been secured through international support groups.[73] Makarem is

explicit about the institutional effects of funding considerations that have plagued Helem:

"We might feel forced sometimes to put more effort on [*sic*] the sexual health issue (HIV,

STDs) because it is more 'accepted' by other organizations and funding priorities for

donors depend on it."[74] This transnational audience is, therefore, to some extent shaping

the projects and efforts of the organization.

The relationship between the transnational audience and their institutional control

means that in some cases the issues raised by the organization were in response to and

designed for this transnational audience. Gayatri Chakravortry Spivak notes the

relationship between international funding requirements and "local" advocacy priorities.

She writes that "to be able to present a project that will draw aid from the North, for

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[72] The figures were USD$24,968.00 and USD$15,057.67 from "External Transfers" and "Donations" respectively. In 2006, revenue from "External Transfers" rose nearly 80% to USD$44,922.00 the likely result of humanitarian work of the organization during the Lebanese-Israeli war of 2006, see "Helem After the War," Appendix A: Helem; cf. "Given the knowledge in public relations accumulated over the past couple of years, Helem and its supporters will surely be able to capitalize on their commitment to humanitarian causes in the hour of general disaster in order to further their own agenda in a time after the end of the Israeli aggression [of the summer of 2006]." Merabet, "Queer Space in Beirut," 201. On the financial figures cited, see Helem, *Profit and Loss Statement: The Years Ended 31/12/2004/2005/2006,* February 5, 2007.

[73] Azzi, February 4, 2007. Helem's transnational network of support groups unofficially maintain close ties, mainly through membership overlap, with various international NGOs focusing on issues of gay Arabs or Muslims. One of the primary organizations that Helem is closely associated with the GLAS mentioned earlier. GLAS and other organizations focusing on issues relating to Arab LGBT (i.e. Al-Fatiha Foundation) maintain their own network and are not explicitly part of Helem.

[74] Makarem, February 14, 2007.

example, to understand and state a problem intelligibly and persuasively for the taste of

the North, is itself proof of sort of epistemic discontinuity" with the "local"

membership.[75] Accordingly, such fundraising requirements, compelled Helem to pursue

and make visible issues that it may not have otherwise chosen to focus on—and which

are not necessarily of equal importance to or understood by its local members. With

regards the issue of sexual health, Helem recently conducted a survey on sexually

transmitted diseases (STDs) and the sexual behavior of men who have sex with men

(MSM)—a joint initiative with *Soins Infirmiers et Developpement Communautaire*

(SIDC).[76] Helem members gathered the information for the survey in Helem's resource

center, local universities, as well as various locations of the gay scene. In a number of

instances, Helem members were verbally abused and insulted, surveys were destroyed,

and solicitations by members were greeted with criticisms of Helem. Tellingly, the brunt

of the criticism of the project did not come from the public at large but from MSM, the

very group of men that Helem's survey initiative aimed to protect.

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Visibility and Identity:
Visible to Society as Homosexuals or "Coming Out"

</div>

A strategy of increased visibility demonstrates both Helem's susceptibility to the

discourses of the international movement and the subsequent contestation such

appropriations inevitably entail. As seen in this analysis, Helem often feels pressure to

pursue campaigns and issues that are not necessarily those that are most compelling for

its local membership—noting specifically the issue of sexual health. Further, in order to

develop and maintain a relationship with the gay Arab diaspora—its transnational

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[75] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Righting Wrongs," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, nos. 2-3 (Spring-Summer 2004): 524.

[76] SDIC is a local non-governmental organization with a long standing involvement and active role in providing support, awareness, and referral to HIV vulnerable populations.

audience and financial base—Helem has attempted to make itself, and homosexuals in Lebanon, strategically visible as members of a wider gay Arab "community." This has been partly pursued, as previously noted, through its website and the international media, but increasingly through other avenues of visibility as well. Visitors to its website are now able to download a magazine entitled *Barra* (Out).[77] *Barra* is described in terms that continue to associate the organization with a wider gay Arab population: "The first quarterly Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer magazine in the Arab world."[78] Through *Barra*, Helem is able to pursue the construction of a "community" and secure funding—the magazine can be downloaded for a small donation.

Over five thousand copies of *Barra* have been downloaded from Helem's website. However, *Barra*—the magazine that sought to construct Helem and homosexuality in Lebanon as part of a gay Arab "community"—has failed to attract the interest of the population in Beirut and does not enjoy widespread distribution in Lebanon. There have only been five hundred copies distributed in Beirut and its outlying suburbs; none have been distributed outside of greater Beirut. During my fieldwork, most of the persons surveyed or interviewed who were not members of Helem had never heard of the magazine. In an organizational meeting in June 2007, Helem members debated the issue of distributing *Barra* in more locations inside and outside of Beirut. Many members expressed concern that the magazine was not being distributed widely enough; others refused to cooperate in any larger attempts to distribute the magazine—in other words this latter group was contesting attempts by the directors to increase the visibility of

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[77] This magazine was explicitly conceived as part of the organization's strategy of visibility: "We have the magazine, which we just started, and it's more or less a reach out program trying to get more visibility." Makarem, March 20, 2005.
[78] *Barra Magazine* 0 (April 2006): 1.

Helem's work and to actively involve members in this process. One member who refused to cooperate in larger distribution strategies was an active member of Helem, attending every organizational meeting during which I was present, volunteering on various campaigns, and occasionally spending time in the community center. However, he resisted attempts to distribute *Barra* because, as he explained, "My parents don't know I'm *gay* [En.]. I can't be seen distributing the magazine."[79] For many homosexuals in Beirut, a strategy of increased visibility by Helem foregrounds the issue of being visible to society as homosexual; it implicates the visibility of identity and of "coming out."

At the onset of 2005, Helem actively engaged in a number of programs related to the increased visibility of individuals as homosexuals. These programs included the use of the slogan, "EXIST," that encouraged individuals to make themselves and their sexuality more visible—this slogan was prominently incorporated into their website and their anti-homophobia campaign that culminated in Helem's participation in the 1st International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) where the movie "I Exist"—a documentary about the gay Arab diaspora—was screened. During an interview in early 2005, Azzi stated, "Helem is rejected by parts of the gay community in Lebanon. We're not trying to copy the European model [of homosexuality] here at Helem. We encourage 'coming out' à la European model if you will, not necessarily a European gay lifestyle."[80] However, over the course of the year it became apparent that it was "coming out" that was being resisted and that such campaigns proved problematic for the future of the organization. By January 2006, Azzi came to acknowledge: "Helem was rejected by a big part of the community because they didn't want anything that visible. They wanted to stay

[79] Mohammed [pseud.] (member, Helem Beirut), interviewed by Pascal Chahine, July 4, 2007.
[80] Georges Azzi (Local Coordinator, Helem Beirut), interviewed by Pascal Chahine, April 1, 2005.

invisible."[81] During the summer of 2005, the slogan "Exist" was slowly removed from the organization's website—although remnants of its use can still be found in older webpages. Eventually, as was seen in the case study (Police Raids on Acid and X-OM Nightclubs), Helem began to actively dissociate itself and its strategy from the notion of an identity and "coming out" and minimized a strategy of visibility locally: "Helem does not ask people to disclose their sexuality or confess to a gender identity."[82] This evolution of Helem's practices is representative of the negotiation and contestation that Western discourses inevitably undergo as they are appropriated by different groups.

CONCLUSION

By negotiating and responding to the politics of visibility it implicates, Helem has been able to become the first gay rights organization in the Arab world. However, as we have seen, these strategies of visibility are limited by socio-economic factors and must negotiate the various discourses concerning homosexuality in the region. Helem has only a small group of members in Beirut—under forty—and this membership is quite socio-economically homogeneous: most members are part of an elite, cosmopolitan, urban gay scene in Beirut. Nonetheless, Helem remains rejected by many of the members of this gay scene. As Helem pursues a strategy of visibility—a strategy appropriated from the Western gay identity-rights movement—its efforts are negotiated to the particularities of

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[81] Henderson, "Biggest Taboo," January 7, 2006, http://english.aljazeera.net/English/archive/archive?ArchiveId=17652.

[82] "'Georges Azzi, Ghassan Makarem, and Sarah About Ghazal said…': Helem Response to Qursana Blog Posting," Appendix A: Helem.

its objectives and the situation and, occasionally, face resistance as some members seek to actively dissociate themselves from the organization.

As will become evident in the next chapter, through my ethnographic fieldwork and research with Helem and its membership, as well as with gays in Beirut, I was able to see the gravitational pull exerted by a meta-narrative of global gay activism—in which visibility is linked to identity rights—on the subjective experience my informants. Even while Helem strains to present its visibility campaign in terms of strategic necessity rather than as identity, this distinction was not always maintained in the interviews I conducted, where visibility was often associated with being "*out*." The dissonance and contradictory positions that we see in the intentions and interpretations of Helem's visibility campaign—among the organization's directors and its membership—reflect the way in which subjective experience falls into and out of discursive alignment with the master narrative of a global gay identity. My intention in this work is to explore the significance of some of these discrepancies in terms of gay experience, and the politics of representing that experience, in Beirut. The following chapter explores many of the issues implicated in Helem's strategy through the particular experiences of the gay men that make up this group.

3. NEGOTIATED SUBJECTIVITIES:
DISSOCIATION WITHIN AN EMERGING "COMMUNITY"

This chapter builds upon the previous chapter's exploration of a resistance towards Helem's strategy of increased visibility. My analysis here is primarily concerned with the subjective experiences of gay men in Beirut and, particularly, the population that includes the existing membership of Helem (i.e. professional, bourgeois, cosmopolitan, and urban gay men)—it should be noted, however, that a significant amount of the ethnographic material in this chapter is gathered from informants who were not members nor had ever heard of Helem.[1] All informants for this chapter have lived their entire lives in Lebanon. The analysis considers some of the spaces and techniques of visibility discussed in the previous chapter (i.e. the internet) while, additionally, engaging those which have been central in the experiences of gay men living in Beirut (i.e. the family, nightclubs and cafés).

THE INTERNET AND THE VIRTUAL GAY "COMMUNITY"

The primary internet resource for gay men in Beirut is Gaydar (http://www.gaydar.co.uk), a website that is based in the United Kingdom. In comparison to the resources provided by Helem, Gaydar has no association with, and makes no claims to tackle, issues relating to "gay rights"— indeed, it announces itself as "the ultimate gay personals website." While the website is structured around the concerns and needs of a Western audience in Britain, it does, however, also cater to a transnational

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[1] For example, according to the surveys conducted nearly half (i.e. 45%) those surveyed as part of the gay scene had no knowledge of Helem. See "Table 9: Knowledge of Helem," Appendix C: Survey Results.

usership, and is divided into "Area Lists" that includes "Lebanon" among others. While

Helem's internet resources remain scarcely utilized by the Lebanese population, Gaydar's

"Lebanon Area" typically has between sixty to one-hundred-and-twenty users logged in

at any given time—the majority citing "Beirut" as their primary location.[2] Furthermore,

users on Gaydar appear to be significantly comfortable displaying images of themselves

and maintaining comprehensive individual profiles. While the content of Gaydar is

predominantly provided in English, these descriptions are produced in Modern Standard

Arabic, English, or French. Users employ these profiles to make themselves visible to

varying degrees: choosing to display images of themselves, providing personal

information, using nicknames in addition to, or in lieu of, their real names, and

occasionally providing contact information. As this section will partly argue, while these

individual users in Gaydar's online community may feel themselves to be part of—or

trying to articulate a relation to—a transnational gay community, they do not see

themselves, concomitantly, as being part of local one.

<div align="center">

Mohammed:
The Internet as a "Safe Space" for (Homo)Sexual Exploration

</div>

Mohammed, a Sunni Muslim living with his family, is an active member of

Helem; he regularly attends organizational meetings and assists in a variety of projects.

He is twenty-two years old and identifies as a gay man. He has been sexually active with

both men and women. As a professional model, Mohammed claims that he has little

difficulty finding sexual partners but admits to having used the internet as a result of a

fear of unintended visibility:

> So I started going *online* [En.]. I didn't have a problem meeting guys; quite the
> contrary. It was quite scary and difficult. In Lebanon, if my parents saw me

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[2] http://www.gaydar.co.uk (accessed between June 2005 and June 2007).

> they'd know about me. I was very scared. So I used fake names and when I decided to meet someone offline, I would tell them that I would be wearing things that I knew I wouldn't be. Eventually, I met someone and we were together for a while. Later, when we weren't together anymore I started going back online again and I met some more guys through the *internet* [En.]. Then I had a friend, who went to the same university, and I met him online and we told each other that we were *gays* [En.]. He introduced me to nightclubs and we started going out and stuff.[3]

For Mohammed, the internet represented a locale for negotiable visibility through which to continue his (homo)sexual experimentation—a locale where his (homo)sexuality can slowly be reconciled with its surroundings, resulting in a comfortable level of visibility. Mohammed had been sexually active prior to his online activity—he described four sexual experiences with other men before the age of puberty. However, he admitted that such experiences remained "scary and difficult" because of his family: the possibility of his parents knowing or seeing him. He, therefore, pursued his (homo)sexual exploration in a space in which he could negotiate his visibility, through the use of "fake names" and employing special tactics (i.e. lying about his appearance). While the internet is clearly not risk free, it proved to be a space for expression and experimentation.

These comments by Mohammed are illustrative of a few aspects of how gay men in Beirut have appropriated the internet into their experiences and understanding of what it means to have sex with men. Certain discourses mark these same-sex practices in Lebanon as socially and culturally taboo—to be repressed when presenting and constructing an identity. Additionally, local discourses have produced and made visible to society the homosexual subject as a social outcast and as culturally foreign—a Western import. In such an environment, these male same-sex practitioners often choose, or are compelled, to negotiate these discourses and construct individuated gay subjectivities that

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[3] Mohammed, [pseud.], interviewed by Pascal Chahine, July 4, 2007.

may coexist with them. For many individuals, including Mohammed, the internet

provides a space in which (homo)sexual exploration and their (homo)sexuality maintain a

socially approved level of visibility. For Mohammed, the internet appears to be a tool that

enables him to access other gay men in Beirut without having to belong to a gay

"community," understood as a stable and unified group of gay men. Mohammed, like

many of my other informants, was drawn to the internet precisely because it is a space in

which identity is individually constructed and remains fluid—"virtual"—which allows

subjectivity to be constantly reconceived to meet the needs of the moment.[4] While the

internet was not the only avenue of (homo)sexual exploration, for many of my informants

it represented a crucial point of entry.

<u>Gaydar: Exploring the Virtual Gay "Community"</u>

The internet allowed Mohammed to explore his (homo)sexuality in a variety of

ways: to meet other gay men in Beirut, pursue sexual encounters or relationships with

other men, and discuss his sexuality with individuals he already knew. In this way, the

internet and Gaydar become increasingly "local" tools and may initially appear to be

fostering a "community" of like-minded gay men. As I have stated, Gaydar is advertised

as "the ultimate gay personals website" and the overwhelming majority of my informants

used the website to meet other gay-identifying men, both abroad, but also in Beirut.

However, beyond this common denominator, users of Gaydar pursued their (homo)sexual

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[4] Sebastian Abdallah shows how youths in internet cafés—most notably because of their association to the Internet—(re)construct and pursue a more fluid identity extending beyond the treatment of (homo)sexuality that I focus on in this chapter: "They experiment in sensuality, sexuality and communication with the opposite sex through online chatting and visiting pornographic web-sites. Normally, these activities would be more constrained, but Internet-cafes [and the Internet] seem places where social control can be circumvented. In their online communication, they use an Arabic chat-code in Latin script that not many people… understand. They engage in aggressive online sectarian styles of confrontations. They use violent network games to ventilate political grievances." See Sebastian E. Abdallah, "Internet-Cafés in Beirut: Youth Subculture, Economic Limitations and Cultural Estrangement," (M.A. thesis, American University of Beirut, 2004).

exploration in a multitude of directions—often relying on the website's more unrestricted environment.

For some men, Gaydar and the associated activity of meeting other men served almost exclusively to secure the possibility of a sexual encounter.[5] When informants were asked how they met other men for sexual encounters, the most common response was the internet or Gaydar. One gay man, a member of Helem, immediately noted Gaydar when asked where he finds same-sex sexual partners, even though he later went on to note that he could find them almost anywhere: "Gaydar. [pause] There isn't a specific place. I could find him anywhere. I could find him in Helem. I could find him at work. I could find him on the street. I could find him in a cab. I could find him in my building—he could be my neighbor."[6] Statistically, the internet represented the second most common means through which men surveyed for this study had met their last sexual partner; while around 20% cited the internet, almost 30% of those surveyed had met their last sexual partner in a nightclub, café, or bar.[7]

For most, Gaydar provided an opportunity to engage in a discussion with, or "meet," other homosexual men—inside or outside of Lebanon. If a user chose to meet men from Lebanon, he could restrict his activity to the "Lebanon Area." However, if a user wished to meet men from other regions—including, but not limited to, other Arab states—one could take advantage of the "Travel" feature on the website and view users from around the world. When asked why he uses Gaydar, one informant replied, "To meet people from abroad most of the time. I have made many friends abroad, this is in

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[5] To an extent Gaydar particularly facilitated this type of activity. In the "Lebanon Area" users are listed alongside their most salient sexual characteristics: sexual role, body type, body hair, safe sex and drug use preferences.
[6] Abbas, [pseud.], interviewed by Pascal Chahine, August 10, 2007.
[7] "Table 5: Where/How Did You Meet Your Last Same-Sex Sexual Partner?" Appendix C: Survey Results.

case I'm going to travel there. Plus you never know what can happen, so I just kept [my

Gaydar account]."[8] The interaction between members of the Beirut gay scene and

foreigners was not limited to the internet. As one of my interviewees remarked,

ironically, "There are no Lebanese here!"[9] Additionally, Beirut has long been known as a

preeminent tourist destination in the Middle East, and it is increasingly becoming a

favored gay tourist destination.[10]

   Many users also used Gaydar, and the interaction with non-Lebanese users, to

"learn" about their sexuality and the sexuality of others. Numerous informants admitted

to accessing Gaydar and discussing their sexuality online in order to understand "being

gay." All users of Gaydar must create a profile. They must identify themselves as "gay"

or "bi" and their sexual role as "top," "bottom," or "versatile."[11] For many of these

informants, the process of learning about being gay involved appropriating and defining

the vernacular and idioms that were used online. Conversations with these informants

about their sexuality generally led to questions they had about what "gay" and "bi" meant

and if their current definitions or understandings were correct. In one conversation with

Hussein, he gave me a brief summary of the main characteristics he believed constituted

"gay" before turning to me quizzically and asking, "That's what gay means, right?"[12] For

the majority of informants, these terms remained ambiguous and any challenges to the

understanding they had developed inevitably raised more questions. I shared the results

of my survey with an informant, specifically that almost 60% of those who identified as

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[8] Saad, [pseud.], interviewed by Pascal Chahine, July 20, 2007.

[9] Elie, [pseud.], interviewed by Pascal Chahine, July 9, 2007.

[10] See "Tourism: Lebanon as a Gay Holiday Destination," *Barra* 0 (April 2005), 7; and Lee Smith, "Beirut Unexpected," *OutTraveler*, 2006, 62-71.

[11] Specifically, users must select one of the following options to the category "I am/We are:" Single Gay Man, Single Gay Woman, Single Bi-Man, Single Bi-Woman, Gay Male Couple, Gay Female Couple, Bi-Couple, Group (Gay men), Group (Gay women), or Group (Mixed).

[12] Hussein, [pseud.], interviewed by Pascal Chahine, August 15, 2007.

gay men either were married and/or also slept with women. This information challenged

his definition of "bisexual": "Bisexual means having sex with girls and guys. That's the

definition of a bisexual. How can you say that a gay guy sleeps with girls too?"[13] This

relatively superficial confusion over terminology clearly gestures to far more profound

differences between what is understood to constitute "gay" identity in Beirut. As noted

throughout this thesis, members of the gay scene explicitly employ the English/Western

term "gay". However, the appropriated vernacular is itself a field of negotiation in which

a "gay" identity is contested in the "local" setting.

Some of the ways that individuals have used Gaydar can be interpreted as

indicative of the development of a virtual gay "community": members of this

"community" are pursuing gay practices and defining identities in a seemingly collective

manner. Users interact with one another within the same chosen virtual space at an

increased frequency and become familiar with each other.[14] Furthermore, members of

this virtual gay "community" are (re)defining the idioms and vernacular of "being gay,"

and gay subjectivity more generally. It may even be argued that this "community" is part

of a global gay community as a result of the Western terminology and the overwhelming

transnational population of Gaydar. Nonetheless, while the evidence thus far may be used

to corroborate such claims, it also underscores that they have done so in distinct ways that

have produced a multiplicity of gay practices and identities, rather than a single gay

"community." One of the most significant examples of how users are sustaining both

transnational and local gay consciousness can be seen in the idioms and definitions used

in the various profiles: while users in the "Lebanon Area" are familiar with and employ

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[13] Elie, [pseud.], interviewed by Pascal Chahine, July 16, 2007.

[14] Some informants could describe Gaydar users—and occasionally identify their names and other personal characteristics—using only their Gaydar nicknames.

terms such as "gay" and "bisexual" they have also developed "local"—"Lebanon Area"—idioms such as "*discreet*."

<div align="center">Discreet/Discrete: Dissociation Among Gay Men</div>

Even a cursory analysis of the profiles found in the "Lebanon Area" reveals a general trend: many users identify themselves using the English word "*discreet*." Although discreet is primarily used as an adjective describing oneself, for gay men in Beirut, the term has increasingly been used to identify and describe a particular type of gay man. One can speak about acting discreet, about being discreet, about having discreet friends, or about being attracted only to discreet men: in all these cases it is implicit that reference is being made to gay men. Furthermore, there is a slight slippage in the use of the term discreet as an adjective and as a noun, and phrases, such as "There are too many *discreets* [En.] online," are not wholly uncommon. However, to understand what discreet means one should note that some users identify themselves both as discreet and as the English phrase "*straight acting*"—"*str8 acting*." For these men, being discreet and being str8 acting may coexist but the terms do not collapse into one another. To be discreet is not synonymous with acting straight—or, conversely, not acting gay. The inclusion in these profiles of both terms is illustrative of the fact that discreet does not strictly refer to a behavior nor to the rejection/appropriation of a sexual identity. Nonetheless, the term remains closely associated with the rejection/appropriation of both homosexual behavior and homosexual identity; it is a bit of both.

The term discreet refers to a particular negotiated understanding of homosexuality.[15] For those who identify as discreet, their sexual identity and homosexual

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[15] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines an act or a speech as "discreet" when it is "prudent, circumspect, and cautious" especially when such speech or act "would be inconvenient."

experiences have been understood primarily by their limited visibility to society: "I'm so *discreet* [En.]—no one knows about me [sleeping with other men]."[16] To be discreet, therefore, is to maintain that one's homosexuality should only be pursued in a "safe space" where there are no consequences. One informant described what it means to be discreet in terms that alluded to the use of "fake names" discussed in the previous section: "In my opinion, someone who is discreet has the option of taking off the fake mask but he doesn't want to. He wants to stay this way. He likes to."[17] To be discreet is to both appropriate and reject a homosexual identity by engaging in and—partly through str8 acting—dissociating oneself from homosexual behavior in various social contexts. Discreet homosexuality might be viewed as a form of performativity that negotiates a discourse of homosexuality as taboo and draws upon a common Arab-Islamic ethos of avoidance in acknowledging sex and sexualities—the "will not to know."[18]

In dissociating from homosexual behavior and rejecting a homosexual identity, the term discreet often implicitly means discrete as well, in the sense that it highlights an individuated, rather than communal, understanding of same sex practice. For many of these men, the possibility of interacting and meeting men outside of the virtual gay "community" simply does not correspond to their subjective understanding of homosexuality. Elie, an informant whom I met online, admits: "I don't like being *discreet*. Being *discreet* means that no one knows that you do stuff that are taboo. Maybe if the Lebanese mentality was more open towards gay issues, I wouldn't have to be

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[16] Elie, July 16, 2007.
[17] Abbas, August 10, 2007.
[18] Stephen O. Murray, "The Will Not to Know: Islamic Accommodations of Male Homosexuality," in *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature,* edited by Stephen O. Murray, and Will Roscoe (New York: New York University Press, 1997). On performativity see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

discreet. Maybe being *discreet* means not telling my friends, not going out to gay places, not having gay friends."[19] Elie highlights how being discreet implies a level of dissociation from homosexuality and homosexuals: he does not frequent gay nightclubs or cafés, discuss his homosexuality with his friends, or have any gay friends. As discreet, Elie views his homosexuality as discrete from that of other gay men: unconnected, individual and separate. He explains: "I don't have a single, not one, gay friend—not one. I can't stand them."[20] In marking himself as discreet/discrete, Elie underscores that his activities are individuated and not part of a collective or gay community. Additionally for Elie, being discreet/discrete is the result of his social reality: the "Lebanese mentality" towards gay issues. His sexual identity and his dissociation from other same-sex practitioners is closely related to the social consequences associated with homosexuality—and the fact that it continues to be viewed as taboo.

Accordingly, the relocation and negotiation of the terminology used in the gay scene has pointed to the disjunctures between identity and practices. In addition to the appropriation of some Western terms, most notably "*gay*," gay men in Beirut negotiate other terms that are useful as they try to understand and convey their sexuality to one another. In the discussion of gay the fault lines of a fixed, stable identity and sexual practices became visible as informants appropriated gay in their self-identification and maintained both homosexual and heterosexual practices. Those choosing a discreet self-identification disassociated from a stable homosexual identity while maintaining certain homosexual practices. These discussions of how "local" ethos bear on the creation of new categories, and the negotiation of existing "global" ones, point to the ways in which

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[19] Elie, July 16, 2007.
[20] Ibid.

informants' conceptualization of sexuality refract limited understandings of (homo)sexual

identity/practices.

<div align="center">
Problematizing "Coming Out":
Fluid (Homo)Sexualities and Dissociation Between Gay Men
</div>

Resistance to self-identification as homosexual, or as "gay," by many gay men in

Beirut is partly the result of the way in which they understand their sexuality. Saad, an

informant I met at the gay night held by X-OM nightclub, was a regular fixture at the

majority of the gay nightclubs and cafés as well as online. Since his first sexual

experience at the age of 16, Saad had been sexually active exclusively with men.

Nonetheless, Saad did not self-identify as gay. I asked him if he would ever have sex with

a woman:

> If it happens. How the night picks up, then yeah. You know, I have this Middle
> Eastern or seventeenth century thing in me, I'm very gallant and elegant. I
> admire women way more than men. It's just elegance. I think when a gay guy
> tells me, "Go get me a drink." I wouldn't go. But if a girl tells me to get her a
> drink, of course I will go. It's just how I was raised, and manners. And so yeah, I
> think women are very pretty and beautiful, I admire women. But I haven't had
> intercourse with them, and I don't think I'm very tempted. But maybe, perhaps.
> But I'm not confused. There's a difference between being confused and knowing
> what you want.[21]

This passage is illustrative of the way in which most gay men in Beirut conceive of their

sexuality. Firstly, sexuality is understood as fluid and unstable. For Saad, his sexuality

and his sexual inclinations are dependent on a variety of factors: beauty and elegance,

admiration, how he was raised, manners, temptation, and a certain element of

randomness. Some informants spoke about their sexuality temporally: "What am I

supposed to [do], sleep with men my whole life? No way—maximum four more years.

Then I'll never think about it again."[22] This was made even more obvious in my

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[21] Saad, July 20, 2007.
[22] Elie, July 9, 2007.

interview with Mohammed: "I slept with men before. Then there came a point when I slept with women. Then a period with men."[23] What is also particularly interesting about this passage is that it highlights Saad's awareness that the fluid sexuality he is describing falls outside existing constructions of sexuality: he poignantly qualifies his discussion by saying, "I'm not confused." This affirmation was a recurrent trope in many discussions. There is clearly a perceived need for members of the gay scene like Saad to defend their sexual ambiguity in the face of normative constructions (i.e. homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual) that cannot contain or capture their fluid sense of sexuality. Resisting self-identification was partly the result of a fluid sexuality that is at odds with existing normative constructions of sexuality and limited understandings of sexual identity/behavior.

Another interesting point to emerge from this discussion was the way in which sexuality is understood in terms of desires and compulsions, rather than as an identity to which one adheres. When Saad began to defend his sexuality, he stated: "I'm not confused. There is a difference between being confused and knowing what you want." It was "what you want"—your desires—that were fundamental to his sexuality. One informant summarized his sexuality by saying, "I like guys, I get excited."[24] Since sexuality was fluid and unstable, these desires could also be so. At one point Mohammed—whom I cited earlier—discussed his sexuality in terms of his sexual experiences with both men and women:

> From the beginning I knew that I wanted to sleep with guys. At the beginning of my adolescent years, it happened that I found guys to have sex with. But later on, still in my adolescence, all my friends were guys but they all had girlfriends. And I – well, girls used to have crushes on me. And it was a plus for me to have a

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[23] Mohammed, July 4, 2007.
[24] Elie, [pseud.], interviewed by Pascal Chahine, July 26, 2007.

girlfriend. All my friends were couples and I'd be all alone. And the girl I was with wanted sex. So we started to have sex. I wasn't lost. You understand. I wasn't confused, am I this or am I that. I knew very well that I don't enjoy sleeping with a girl.[25]

Mohammed speaks about his sexuality in terms of what he "wanted," his desires. Although he wanted men "from the beginning," as he grew older his desires changed: he didn't want to "be all alone." Like Saad, he is aware that he is describing a sexuality that is outside normative categories: "I wasn't lost. You understand. I wasn't confused, am I this or am I that." Dissociation between gay men, therefore, does not have to signal or be read as dissociation from homosexuality or a homosexual identity, but, rather, as the dissociation from a particular type of highly visible, stable homosexuality.

Furthermore, dissociation between gay men was not the result of resistance towards self-identification as homosexual, or the disavowal of homosexuality, as Merabet argues in "Disavowed Homosexualities in Beirut."[26] Many informants discussed other gay men in terms of similar "desires" and "sexuality" but subsequently dissociated from them. Unlike the majority of informants, Saad knew about Helem and its activism—he had even visited their resource center and attended a couple of their organizational meetings:

> I've been to a couple of the meetings. But I never went back. Because I'm not a – I don't have that type of character. I'm oriented towards myself and my own issues. And at the same time I don't conceive of a gay culture outside of the clubbing, going out scene. Which might be bad because I can't see it. But I think I don't have anything in common with these people except my desires, my compulsions. So, I don't see any reason to be with them. If you're gay you're not my friend; you don't have to be my friend.[27]

Although Saad discussed members of Helem and himself as having common "desires and compulsions," he nonetheless dissociated himself from them. For Saad, dissociation from

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[25] Mohammed, July 4, 2007.
[26] Sofian Merabet, "Disavowed Homosexualities in Beirut," *Middle East Report* 230 (Spring 2004): 30-33
[27] Saad, July 20, 2007.

Helem resulted from a level of indifference: "I'm oriented towards myself and my own issues." Saad spoke of a "gay culture" composed of "clubbing and the going out scene"; a gay scene that exists in the commercial gay spaces. However, even then he notes, "if you're gay you're not my friend; you don't have to be my friend." This interview illustrates how contradictory perspectives coexist side by side, often within the same individual.

Talal, a Sunni bisexual-identifying man, was a regular fixture at Acid nightclub—part of the gay "scene." However, Talal notes that he primarily frequents Acid and only attends other gay spaces (i.e. Vogue, X-OM, UV) occasionally:

> When my gay friends from abroad are in Beirut, I take them out to all the gay clubs. But now they're not here, I don't go to Vogue or Orange (X-OM). If they're not here, I only go to Acid. There's a lot of people I know at Acid. Sometimes I take my straight friends or my girlfriend. … I can't spend time with most of the gay men from Lebanon. I don't get along with them. Other gay men, yeah of course—I love spending time with them.[28]

Even though Talal participated in the gay scene, he dissociated himself from other gay men in Beirut. However this was a selective, if not superficial, dissociation from some gay men: "I don't get along with them." Talal was not attempting to resist self-identification with homosexuality—he often brought his straight friends or even his girlfriend with him to Acid and had numerous gay friends from abroad or at Acid. For both Talal and Saad, dissociation from other gay men occurred on a level of indifference and was not based specifically on others' (homo)sexuality—in fact Saad explicitly associated his sexuality with that of other gay men. One informant summarized the sentiment bluntly: "What can I talk to a gay friend about apart from sex?"[29] Nonetheless, for most gay men, sexuality was not a sufficient justification for associating with one

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[28] Talal, July 9, 2007.
[29] Elie, July 16, 2007.

another. In response to the possibility of a gay pride parade in Beirut, one informant responded: "I'm not into it. No. These people are gay it doesn't mean I can walk with them. I can walk with other people that are "I-don't-know-what"-sexuals, but with whom I share an idea about something specific."[30] As the behavior of a nascent gay scene becomes increasingly legible and thus visible to society, some gay men have begun to dissociate from one another. For some, like the discreet/discrete subjects mentioned above, behavior has been guided primarily on the need to remain less than totally visible to society. Although gay men were resisting self-identification as "gay" or "homosexual," such disavowal was partly the result of a subjective understanding of sexual identity as unstable and fluid.

While gay men in Beirut have appropriated certain practices (i.e. (homo)sexual exploration through the internet and the development of a urban gay culture) and vernacular, other aspects of the dominant Western discourse of homosexuality have not been appropriated.[31] Speaking freely about his sexuality, Saad recounts an event that represents his most enjoyable sexual experience:

> Once at this party, we all got drunk on vodka, and I swear to God I kissed all the straight guys and all the straight girls. It was one hell of an orgy. I love it. It's stuff you don't have to talk about in the morning, you know. I love that.[32]

The passage not only reaffirms a discussion of fluid sexuality but articulates how his sexuality is conceived of in terms of another desire: the desire not to talk about his sexuality. Similarly, Elie recounted a sexual experience with another man: "It was really

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[30] Hussein, August 15, 2007.
[31] However, as the anthropologist Tom Boellstroff has noted in his study of homosexual practices in Indonesia, "homosexuality (like any other cultural logic) globalizes (or "translocates") not as a monolithic discourse but as a multiplicity of beliefs and practices, elements of which can move independently of each other or not move at all." Tom Boellstroff, *The Gay Archipelago: Sexuality and Nation in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 173.
[32] Saad, July 20, 2007.

great. It happened and we would never talk about it again. Never again."[33] For the

majority of informants, the conjunction of sexuality and confession found within a

Western discourse of homosexuality has not found resonance in this context. For the most

part, informants were aware that the confession in this context would mark

homosexuality as taboo and, as will be seen below, as a disease to be cured.

"COMING OUT" IN BEIRUT

While the confessional model was not a structuring feature of subjective

experience and sexuality for gay men in Beirut, the analysis of "coming out" and of the

confession remain significant in understanding those discourses that are implicated in a

homosexuality that is visible to society. Foucault defines the confession thus:

> The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the
> subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power
> relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence)
> of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the
> confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish,
> forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the
> obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and,
> finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external
> consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it.[34]

For Foucault the confession is located at the intersection of power and knowledge. The

confession or coming out of gay men is located in a coercive relationship that renders a

"true" homosexuality intelligible: it is "a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship

[and]… in which the truth is corroborated." Examining the experiences of coming out by

gay men in Beirut provides an analysis of the discourses making homosexuality visible to

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[33] Elie, July 16, 2007.

[34] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 61-2.

society and, hence, that sustain the process by which these men continue to dissociate from one another.

As Mohammed began to pursue his homosexual exploration, he sought a space through which his homosexuality could negotiate a necessary level of visibility. For Mohammed the family constituted the most significant coercive relationship in which his homosexuality could be seen and known: "In Lebanon, if my parents saw me they'd know about me. I was very scared." For this reason, the majority of informants would recount their experience of confession, or coming out, as one that was centered upon the family. Additionally, discussion of visibility in society often appeared to be conflated or synonymous with visibility in the family. One man I interviewed, when describing why discreets/discretes choose to remain invisible to society, noted that: "They're afraid of society. They're afraid that their parents will know about them."[35] For Elie, a Christian discreet/discrete informant who was introduced earlier, the decision to be discreet/discrete was informed by the fear that he might have to talk about his homosexuality with his family. Asked about whether he talks to his parents about sex, he confirms "Yes, about everything."[36] When asked specifically if this included discussion about his homosexuality, he quickly clarifies: "Of course not. That's the only part. Everything else about sex, it's ok to talk about. But because I'm so *discreet*. No one knows about me. But we do talk about gay life and stuff."[37] For Elie, being discreet/discrete was clearly not only about remaining invisible to society – where he was already an anonymous individual – but was more concerned with the need to keep this part of his life out of sight from his family. These uncertainties and anxieties that were

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[35] Ziad, [pseud.], interviewed by Pascal Chahine, July 23, 2007.
[36] Elie, July 16, 2007.
[37] Ibid.

bound up with the desire to be visible to certain people and to remain firmly invisible to others were a recurrent feature of my interviews, as was the refusal to engage the confessional model in relation to the family.

<div align="center">Fuad: "Connecting" the Individual and the Family</div>

In a context where homosexual practices are viewed with hostility and censure, any discussion of coming out to one's family instantly conjures up sensationalistic stories of individuals who have paid a heavy price for their honesty. Recently, the Associated Press (AP) released the most widely syndicated article about gay men in Beirut entitled "Arab Gays Defy Laws, Venture Into Open."[38] The article began with a provocative and disturbing personal account of the coming out experience of one gay man:

> When [Fuad] told his mother he is gay, she took him to a psychiatrist, thinking he had a disease that could be cured by antidepressants.
>
> When that didn't work, she urged him to date a woman. He ignored her advice. "So now, whenever she sees me, she beats me with anything she can lay her hands on: a metal hanger, leather belt, her shoes."[39]

The article, unlike the majority of journalistic accounts written about gay men in Beirut, was syndicated in the Lebanese media under the title "Lebanese Mother Beats her Gay Son with Anything in Sight." However, for Fuad, as well as for other gay men, the actual experience of coming out to one's family is obviously a much more complicated process, which attention grabbing headlines do not do justice to.

I met Fuad at a Helem organizational meeting about four months before the release of the AP article—three weeks before he came out to his mother. Fuad, a Shiʻite Muslim, recounted his experiences in detail. Although the information provided in the AP article was in fact relatively accurate, Fuad described details that demonstrate that

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[38] Nasr, "Arab Gays," October 8, 2005.
[39] Ibid.

coming out implicated a variety of discourses and issues that remain absent in the skeletal

description. His mother did take him to a psychiatrist to be cured:

> The moment I said that I was gay she got upset and became hypertensive. Afterwards, she calmed down and she hugged me and said, "Everything has a solution, you don't have a problem. We can just go to a psychiatrist." She already knew a psychiatrist and she called him and fifteen minutes later we were at his office.[40]

However, Fuad later admits that his mother "doesn't believe in psychiatry or

psychiatrists."[41] I therefore asked him why she had chosen to take him to a psychiatrist:

"Because at that point she felt completely helpless. She wanted to take me to a place that

was professional—supposedly professional to her—to help me. She didn't find anyone

else to turn to at that time."[42] In a context where there is very little discussion of

homosexuality in mainstream popular discourse, bar the odd inflammatory article in the

press, Fuad's mother felt the only group which she could turn to was the medical

profession, underscoring the lack of understanding or awareness about this issue.

A discourse of homosexuality as disease has become regionally prevalent with the

growth of an Islamist movement.[43] Additionally, a psychoanalytic discourse surrounding

homosexuality has begun to find its way to Lebanon through academic and pop

psychology, along with topics like "trauma" which has become a favored topic of post-

war discourse. Local reality programming has played a crucial role in raising awareness

about homosexual psychology. Recently, on the Lebanese television network *Future

Television*, Zaven Kouvoumjian—the self-styled male "Arab Oprah"—held a discussion

about cross-dressing and sexual-transgressions. Such reality programs often include

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[40] Fuad, [pseud.], interviewed by Pascal Chahine, August 2, 2007.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] For a discussion based on modern Arab intellectual thought, see Massad, *Desiring Arabs*.

medical and religious "experts" that provide insight and information on the discussion.[44]

The decision by Fuad's mother to turn to a medical practice that she "didn't believe in"

was in part due to these discourses. One psychiatrist at the American University of

Beirut who is regularly consulted by patients on issues of homosexuality, Bridgette

Khoury, notes the majority of her gay patients are brought in by family members who

regard homosexuality as a psychosomatic condition that can be clinically treated.[45]

Another informant, Mohammed, noted how his sister instinctively turned to psychiatry

when she was confronted with her brother's homosexuality: "And when she started

suspecting [that I was gay] a lot, she wanted to take me to a psychiatrist and she said that

she would pay for it. She got very depressed."[46]

In the context of coming out experiences, it is not solely the referral to the

medical profession that informants foreground. For Fuad, he described the fact that his

mother became "upset and hypertensive"—she was taken to the hospital a few days later

he mentions—and that she felt "helpless." Mohammed notes how his sister became

depressed and went on to state that: "Since then I've denied that I'm gay… I tried to

undermine the topic and make it silly."[47] When discussing the process of "coming out,"

informants emphasize the effects on other family members as much as—if not more—

than the effects on themselves. Mohammed shares that he often discusses sexuality freely

with his parents—although not homosexuality: "The sex conversations between my

parents and I are very open—but not about homosexuality. … I sometimes benefit from

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[44] In fact, Foucault discusses the history of the confession in terms of the both religion and medicine. He writes, "it is in the [Catholic and psychiatric] confession that truth and sex are joined," and describes the way in which the Catholic and the psychiatric confession elicited an extremely detailed retelling of the sexual act. See Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 61.
[45] Bridgette Khoury (clinical psychologist, American University Hospital), interviewed by Pascal Chahine, March 28, 2007.
[46] Mohammed, July 4, 2007.
[47] Ibid.

their opinions and thoughts on the subject even though its about heterosexuality. Even if

it's small things, I still benefit from these conversations—like about diseases, relationship

advice, stuff like that."[48] Mohammed expresses how he appropriates many of his family's

"opinions and thoughts" about sexuality for the development of his own sexuality.

Nonetheless, when it came to his own sexuality, this was a topic that could not be

broached:

> I don't want to tell them as long as I am living at home. I feel that my mom—. I love my mom a lot and she loves me a lot. If I told her she'd get upset. She suspected for a while and she got very depressed. So there's no point in telling her now. Why would I want to tell her?[49]

Although Mohammed began his response by mentioning the fact that he was still "living

at home," the rest of his narrative focuses on his fear of upsetting his mother. A handful

of informants mentioned their continued financial dependence on their parents when

discussing coming out—nearly 70% of gay men surveyed were living with their

immediate family.[50] One of the few informants that was "out" to his parents begins

explaining why he chose to come out by noting: "I had already started living on my own

and working."[51] However, for the majority of informants it was other family members

and their emotions that dominate the discussion of one's own coming out.

When Saad spoke about why he had not come out to his family he notes, as did

Mohammed: "I don't see it as a necessity." He goes on to explain how theoretically he

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] See "Table 7: Do you Live with your Parents," Appendix C: Survey Results. McCormick points to this as compelling pressure "for men not to reveal any nonheterosexual proclivities until they can be more financially independent of their families. It is within this context that the prospects of coming out remain inextricably associated with the survival of the family as a venue for economic security." McCormick, "Gay Identities, Lived Realities," 250.

[51] Abbas, August 10, 2007.

thinks he would be more comfortable coming out to the male members of his family as opposed to his female members:

> It's easier for me to come out to my father or my brother, more than my sisters and mother. It's a little bit weird, but that's what I feel. … I feel that my mom or my sisters would think that they did something that made me avoid women or made me repulsed by women—which I'm not, but let's say. I think they would feel guilty more than my brother or father.[52]

As Saad describes why he has chosen not to come out he describes coming out in a similar way as did the majority of other informants: primarily in terms of other family members feeling "guilty," "depressed," "upset" or "hypertensive." However, Saad also notes how he believes that other family members (i.e. his mother and sisters) would think that they "made him avoid women." Other family members would feel guilty imagining what impact they might have had in shaping his sexuality. In a similar disclosure, Mohammed had noted how his parents and family played a fundamental role in how he conceived of fundamental aspects of his sexuality (i.e. relationship advice).

In *Intimate Selving in Arab Families: Gender, Self, and Identity*, the Lebanese feminist Suad Joseph argues that Western psychodynamic theory has valorized the individuation of the self—"the self separated from the other by clear and firm boundaries"—and assumed that such individuation, autonomy, and separateness are psychodynamically necessary for healthy maturation.[53] Through her ethnographic study of families in greater Beirut, Joseph develops a theory of connectivity for understanding the process by which individuals mature. She defines connectivity as thus:

> By connectivity I mean relationships in which a person's boundaries are relatively fluid so that persons feel a part of significant others. Persons do not experience themselves as bounded, separate, or autonomous. They may try to read each other's minds, answer for each other, anticipate each other's needs,

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[52] Saad, July 20, 2007.
[53] Suad Joseph, *Intimate Selving in Arab Families: Gender, Self, and Identity* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 4.

expect their needs to be anticipated by significant others, and often shape their likes and dislikes in accordance with the likes and dislikes of others. Maturity is signaled in part by the successful enactment of a myriad of connective relationships.[54]

Indeed, as Saad described the possibility of coming out he attempted to read the thoughts of his mother and sisters (i.e. "they would think that they did something") and anticipated their responses and the responses of other family members (i.e. "they would feel more guilty than my brothers or father"). Mohammed, described how he was shaping his sexual likes and dislikes partly in accordance with the likes and dislikes of his family members (i.e. "I benefit from these conversations about [sex]"). Furthermore, when Fuad came out to his mother, it was in effect a coming out to the entire family: "I told my mother on Monday. My sister who lives in Lebanon knew on Tuesday and she called all my other sisters who live abroad. And my brother knew by Friday of the same week."[55]

For the majority of informants, the family members represented what Joseph noted as "significant others." In fact, Joseph locates the family as the primary locus in which individuals mature and identity is formed. She goes on to note:

> In a culture in which the family is valued over and above the person, identity is defined in familial terms, and kin idioms and relationships pervade public and private spheres, connective relationships are not only functional but necessary for successful social existence.[56]

Indeed, in the coming out experience of Fuad, his identity was conceived and discussed in familial terms:

> It was about reputation. My brother told me, "I'm a dentist and my livelihood depends on my reputation. So I have to keep a good reputation and people can't find out about this." Actually they don't care about me as much as they care about reputation. My sister told me that the two things I have to keep in mind are, "Do not taint our reputation and do not sell the house."[57]

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[54] Ibid., 12.
[55] Fuad, August 2, 2007.
[56] Joseph, *Intimate Selving*, 12.
[57] Fuad, August 2, 2007.

These quotations seem to corroborate the position advanced by Suad Joseph, in that the

Western, liberal model of the self, in which certain sensibilities, rights and

responsibilities inhere, a self that can be "liberated," is not applicable in the Beirut, where

the notion of self is always "connective" and relational. When Fuad came out, or

confessed his homosexual identity, this revelation was framed as threatening to the

reputation of the entire family, rather than being threatening to himself specifically. This

concept of connectivity is clearly also pertinent to the argument that I have been making

throughout this thesis, that in considering homosexuality in this context it should be

understood in terms of shifting practice, rather than as a collective gay identity, since

communal identity in this context is first and foremost understood in terms of family and

extended kin.

<div align="center">

Constructing a Sexual Identity:
The Imperative to Marry and Hegemonic Masculinity

</div>

By extension of this family-centered logic, the majority of my informants

conceived of sexuality as both something set apart from family life, and at the same time

as something that needed to be brought back into the family fold. When discussing their

sexuality, gay men would often note the imperative to marry. When I asked Mohammed

if he will ever get married he responded thus:

> Well, there's a belief held by Arabs, and the Lebanese, a person has to get
> married and have kids. And as he grows older, they take care of him because he's
> gotten old and stuff like that. And sometimes if you think about the possibility of
> living alone—if I don't have a *boyfriend* [En.] and was living alone—that is kind
> of hard. To be alone at the end. It's not nice. As a person grows older, he loves
> the people around him more and more—and the more that he wants more people
> around him. At the beginning I was scared that I'd be alone. I couldn't get past it
> and I got very depressed for a while. But then I was like "No, I'll stay in an old

folks home." So it wasn't as saddening anymore that I wouldn't be getting married.[58]

While Mohammed begins to describe the imperative to marry in terms of a normative social model, his discussion quickly begins to echo the process of maturation that was described in the previous section. As Joseph noted, "maturity is signaled in part by the successful enactment of a myriad of connective relationships."[59] Mohammed describes exactly this process of maturation as he states: "As a person grows older, he loves the people around him more and more—and the more that he wants more people around him." For Mohammed his sexual identity threatened the way in which he understood his sense of self and he "got very depressed for a while." It was not until he considered the possibility of a substitute for the family that would protect his sense of self (i.e. "an old folks home") that he was able to accept a homosexual identity. For Mohammed—as for virtually all gay men in Beirut—sexual identity could not be conceived outside of the possibility of connective relationships with significant others. And for "Arabs, and the Lebanese," these connective relationship are normatively constructed through the family—family members constitute the significant others. What seems significant about this account is that Mohammed appears to be willing to restructure his obligations to kin and family to accommodate his sexuality – he is willing to live in an old people's home rather than deny his sexuality. It is in comments like these that one is perhaps able to discern the first signs of collective and connective structures that are not simply understood in terms of family.

The discussion of the imperative to marry and of how Mohammed struggled with his (homo)sexuality reinforces a subsequent point Joseph makes in her work:

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[58] Mohammed, July 4, 2007.
[59] Joseph, *Intimate Selving*, 16.

> Among Arab families, however, connectivity is often intertwined with local patriarchy to produce what I call *patriarchal connectivity*. I use patriarchy here to mean the privileging to males and seniors and the mobilization of kinship structures, morality, and idioms to legitimate and institutionalize gendered and age domination.[60]

Therefore, individuals construct their (sexual) identities in familial terms as they mature through not only a process of connectivity but, more specifically, a process of patriarchal connectivity. Kinship structures, including Lebanese conceptions of the family, are mobilized as they legitimize and institutionalize gendered domination. Sexuality, therefore, emerges and is understood through the discourses in which it is implicated by virtue of ones gendered role.

R. W. Connell, in *Masculinities*, develops a concept of "hegemonic masculinity" which he defines as follows:

> Hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations a position always contestable. … Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.[61]

Examining "the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position" in Beirut, therefore, provides an analysis into existing discourses that sustain patriarchy and, hence, patriarchal connectivity. It is these discourses, within a psychodynamic process of connectivity, that construct (homo)sexual identity for men. The question of what constitutes "masculinity" in the context of everyday practice,[62] as opposed to abstract

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[60] Ibid., 23.

[61] R. W. Cornell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 77.

[62] For such an account in rural Lebanese society based on fieldwork conducted prior to the Lebanese civil wars, see Michael Gilsenan, *Lords of the Lebanese Marches: Violence and Narrative in an Arab Society* (London: IB Tauris, 1996).

theorizing, was something that I found particularly intriguing, and so all informants were

asked, "What does it mean to be a man in Beirut?"

> A man is someone who provides for his wife or takes care of her well, so she doesn't need anything from anyone else. There are other definitions of what it means to be a man. The more problems/fights he starts the more of a man he is. The more dominant he is over his wife, the more of a man he is. It varies.[63]

> Study, get a job, get a wife, and live happily ever after. Have a lot of grandchildren. And then help your parents when they're old. That's technically how it goes. You have to do almost everything that doesn't have to do with cooking and cleaning and shopping.[64]

> He has to be 'macho', most importantly. He has to be able to get or buy the latest things. Has to be able to buy a house. He has to get married. And he has to fuck girls.[65]

> A man has to be macho, has to fuck girls, has to screw around--start fights.[66]

These responses, and those from other informants, help provide a thicker description of

what Lebanese hegemonic masculinity means for men living in this particular cultural

context. Firstly, the imperative to marry is central. One must "get a wife," "get married,"

and "provide for [one's] wife." Secondly, issues of heterosexuality appear numerous

times: "he has to fuck girls." Thirdly, there is a financial or economic discourse that is

implicated: "buy a house," "get a job," "provide for his wife." Finally, hostility and

aggression were also often traits that were required to be a real man: "start fights."

Therefore, for informants in this study, hegemonic masculinity centers on discourses of

kinship/family, heterosexuality, wealth or economics, and aggression.[67]

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[63] Mohammed, July 4, 2007.
[64] Saad, July 20, 2007.
[65] Abbas, August 10, 2007.
[66] Elie, July 16, 2007.
[67] The omission of a more sustained discussion of masculinity as it is constructed in the particular context of the Arab-Islamic world should be noted and qualified. This omitted discussion is central to the argument of this chapter and this thesis—that attempts to disrupt "universal" categories which clearly includes that of the "masculine." The omission is based on the length constraints of this particular work. For a more nuanced discussion of masculinities in this regional context I refer you to Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb, *Imagined Masculinities: Changing Patterns of Identity for Middle Eastern Men* (London: Saqi, 2000); Deniz Kandioyoti, "The Paradoxes of Masculinity: Some Thoughts on Segregated Societies,"

Explaining Dissociation Between Gay Men in Beirut

The sense of self developed by many of my informants can be generally understood through patriarchal connectivity. Identity is constructed through numerous connective relationships—primarily through those that exist within the family and that implicate discourses of hegemonic masculinity. When individuals are constituted in such relational matrixes, the pursuit of connective relationships that reject discourses of masculinity, or other "local" discourses, threaten to undermine other connective relationships—including those that are primary in one's sense of self. It is not uncommon for gay men to dissociate from one another in an attempt to avoid such a conflict and to maintain certain established connective relationships that form the basis of their understanding self in relation to society. This dynamic is perhaps most vividly illustrated through the discussion of "*femmes* [En.]." In his discussion of "Disavowed Homosexualities in Beirut," Sofian Merabet focuses on a particular episode in which some gay men, those he describes as "overtly feminine," were refused service at a Dunkin' Donuts branch—a well-known locale within the gay scene.[68] Merabet notes that many gay men were "undisturbed" by this discrimination and continued to frequent the branch, as well as a "general lack of solidarity among those queer-identified individuals still sitting at Dunkin' Donuts."[69] The analysis Merabet presents is based on the

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in *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*, eds., Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne (New York: Routledge, 1994); Lama Abu-Odeh, "Crimes of Honor and the Construction of Gender in Arab Society," in *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives*, eds., Mai Yamani and Andrew Allen (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and Michael Gilsenan, *Lords of the Lebanese Marches: Violence and Narrative in an Arab Society* (London: IB Tauris, 1996).
[68] Sofian Merabet, "Disavowed Homosexualities in Beirut," *Middle East Report* 230, no. 34 (Spring 2004): 33. For a detailed discussion of the event see, "Dunkin' Donuts Accused of Discriminating Against Gay Customers," *Daily Star*, July 25, 2003, http://www.dailystar.com.lb.
[69] Ibid., 30.

repudiation of the "conspicuous," "overtly feminine" male other. "Conspicuous,"

"overtly feminine" male others are referred to as *femmes* by gay men in Beirut—a term

that may include, but is not limited to, drag queens. The repudiation of *femmes* is a

particular example of dissociation between gay men. Mohammed explains:

> If someone is *femme* [En.] I can't walk next to them in the street, I'm still afraid
> of my parents finding out by seeing me. Or even someone else seeing me. There
> are a lot of gay men that fear that straight people think that all gays are *femme*.
> Even people who are very open minded are afraid of them. The way they see it is
> that if people start thinking that all gay people are like that then they're going
> think that I'm like that too.[70]

Mohammed clearly feels bound to the structures of patriarchal connectivity. Gay men

who are dissociating from *femmes* are trying to avoid connective relationships—fearing

that their identity will become associated with, and constructed through that of *femmes*.

Because *femmes* are highly visible they are often viewed as inherently threatening

not only to a hegemonic construction of masculinity and society, but also to

discreets/discretes and those negotiating levels of visibility who fear that the

conspicuousness of *femmes* behavior may provoke a backlash against all gays. Another

informant who currently performs as a drag queen and a male belly dancer expresses the

same sentiment: "I use to hate them [*femmes*] a lot, I used to think they are the people

that ruin being gay."[71] Mohammed, a self-identifying gay man, dissociates from them as

well. He invokes his parents and the family as the primary justification for his

dissociation; these connective relationships are seen to conflict with those that exist

within the family.

However, these disassociating gay men—described by Merabet and constituting

the majority of informants for this study—are part of a gay scene. This gay scene is

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[70] Mohammed, July 4, 2007.
[71] Abbas, August 10, 2007.

composed of visible and public commercialized gay spaces in which gay men can often be seen and indeed, where they go precisely for that reason. Since connective relationships can be performatively expressed (i.e. "being seen," "walking together"), gay men who choose to frequent such locations are, in some sense, signaling that they are willing to pursue connective relationships with one another. These connective relationships, however, do not necessarily reject discourses of hegemonic masculinity, and in fact, often implicate certain aspects of masculinity, for instance the question of wealth. By choosing to be visible in commercialized spaces that are associated with the entrepreneurial elite, they are effectively saying that they can afford to buy into this style of life. It is perhaps no coincidence that these spaces are dominated by Western-style cafés and shops – like Dunkin' Donuts and Starbucks, where more traditional forms of social interaction and masculine practice, which one would associate with the conventional Arab coffee shop, or narghileh smoking room, are marginalized. In quite literal ways, gays who frequent these spaces, are gays that can afford to be visible.

Although widely known to be frequented by gay men, these spaces, which have become associated with Beirut's gay "community," are careful to distance themselves from any overt labeling as a "gay". Most nightclubs do not advertise themselves as gay or do not advertise their gay events. Those that do choose to advertise their gay events, do so through subtle marketing: UV and Vogue nightclubs use SMS to send announcements to cellular phone numbers collected at the door. The contemporary strategies of marketing imply the emergence of new connective networks that do not reject established codes of masculinity wholesale but do bypass family-centered models of relation and belonging. They also signal the strategic role of technologies, such as SMS and the

internet. Suad Joseph also explains that the relational matrixes are "shifting and situational"—emerging between those who choose to form connective relationships and who can choose this. For those non-discreet/discrete gay men whose homosexuality is not primarily defined through a strict and sustained invisibility to society, a burgeoning collective community is possible through new visible and performative connective relationships. Furthermore, the rejection of members of this community to coming out— to the family—can be read as an attempt to protect other connective relationships and their existing sense of self. However, bearing in mind the location of the confession and coming out between power and knowledge, the resistance to coming out can, and should, also be read as a desire that their sexuality—and by implication the sexuality of the burgeoning community—remain unintelligible and avoid the normative discourses that are implicated with a legible homosexuality, which in the Arab-Islamic world include those of the diseased, foreign "other." This community—highly visible especially to one another as it emerges through performative connective relationships—is strategically choosing to reaming invisible in specific situations and is aided by technologies that permit such a selective and strategic use of visibility.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has endeavored to examine various theoretical and activist approaches that animate and articulate the construction of sexual minorities in Beirut. In part, it has sought to foreground and explore the intersections and disjunctures that exist between the Gay International, and local understandings of homosexuality, and gay rights advocacy. While Helem's work has undoubtedly been influenced by a Western model of identity rights based on a politics of visibility, its application of a discourse of identity rights has been far more circumspect and reflexive. By exploring and questioning the validity of the assumptions that inform the dichotomy of identity versus behavior—through ethnographic research that incorporates both an institutional perspective and the subjective experience of same-sex practitioners living in Beirut—I have sought to demonstrate that these rigid and static categories of identity and behavior, employed in defining and fixing sexual minorities, are essentially false.

I chose to focus in particular on the question of visibility because it is a concept that straddles institutional practice and subjective experience, while also offering an insight into the various points of intersection between local and global forms of activism. In chapter two we saw that the strategy of increased visibility appropriated—from a Western model of gays rights activism in which the guiding principle continues to be "I am out, therefore I am"—and deployed by Helem was not an attempt to create a stable, "gay identity," or a gay collective in Beirut. Rather, the organization was driven by strategically necessary choices within the various political and legal contexts it operates in. It was a decision informed by shifts in government policy (i.e. the implementation of the anti-secrecy law), by the pressure of international human rights networks, and by the

organization's financial needs (i.e. securing funding from gay Arabs living in the diaspora). Similarly, the subjective understanding and practice of visibility among same-sex practitioners in this context—be they discreet/discrete, *femme*, etc.—is not strictly about challenging heteronormative structures in Lebanese society, or establishing the contours of a gay identity discourse. It is a strategy that varies from person to person and according to the social, cultural, and spatial context in which it is employed. In both institutions and individuals, therefore, we see how visibility is not understood in opposition to invisibility; nor does it represent the choice between silence and voice. It is rather a highly fluid concept whose meaning is constantly shifting to meet the needs of specific contexts.

Although this analysis of visibility has enabled a critical examination of the assumptions that inform activism and local subjective practice, this study—much like the majority of the literature on the relationship between visibility and gay civil rights—has rendered invisible the socio-historical conditions that make possible certain strategies of visibility.[1] As gay experience becomes increasingly common in Beirut, through the globalization and commodification of the internet, gay tourism, the media, and the return of Lebanese exiles who fled the country during the civil war, a gay scene is beginning to develop in certain locales, primarily in bars and clubs of Beirut. Put simply, these practices of visibility are often about consumption, with access limited to the elite and wealthy. While Helem has been careful not to conflate its strategy of visibility with identity politics, it has been less attentive to the material conditions that sustain these

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[1] See Rosemary Hennessy, "Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture," in *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, edited by L. J. Nicholson and S. Seidman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

strategies of visibility, and determine—in very literal ways—who is included and excluded from its membership.

A cursory glance at its website suggests that Helem's activism has been, and continues to be, primarily focused on privileged same-sex practitioners with the financial resources to participate in the gay scene in Downtown. Indeed, all the locations and venues that it recommends in its online "Beirut Queer Guide" are located in areas associated with wealth and privilege.[2] Those locations that fall outside of the boundaries of this gay scene—most obviously the Corniche, a walkway along the beachfront in the city, which remains a well-known site for random sexual encounters[3]—are affixed with a warning in part because they are associated with the poor underbelly of Beirut. The distinction between what is incorporated into a visible gay space, and what is left out, is clearly defined in economic terms—in the ability of individuals to buy into a certain style of life. Places like the Corniche, by contrast, are viewed as transient, "cruising areas," which do not make possible the connective relationships between gay men. Less than a quarter of gay scene respondents had ever frequented such "cruising areas," and the Helem site warns that these areas are "very risky" and cautions intrepid explorers to, "Beware of thieves and of undercover police."[4] Thus, while Helem is willing to challenge police raids at Acid and X-OM nightclubs through strategies of visibility and publicity,

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[2] http://beirut.helem.net.
[3] For greater insight on homosexuality and the Corniche, including Ramlet al-Bayda, see Nabil Kaakoush, "Hey Handsome," in *Transit Beirut: New Writing and Images*, ed. Malu Halasa and Roseanne S. Khalaf, trans. Sarah al-Hamad (London: Saqi, 2003): 166-73; and Sofian Merabet, "Creating Queer Space in Beirut," in *Sexuality in the Arab World*, ed. Samir Khalaf and John Gagnon (London: Saqi, 2006), 219-24.
[4] http://beirut.helem.net/cruises.htm.

these "cruising areas," and the discrimination of same-sex practitioners that take place in them, remain firmly invisible in its activism.[5]

While this thesis focused its critique on the uncritical application of fixed categories of sexual identity, much of the scholarship and activism that discussed here is animated by another, equally troubling dichotomy: male/female. As I reviewed the existing literature on Arab-Islamic homosexuality, what was made visible—and privileged—was male-male sexuality. To date, there exists little academic scholarship on the history of female same-sex practices in the Arab-Islamic world. Indeed, female homosexuality is rendered largely invisible. While Helem's activism has sought to empower gay men, it has been blind the issues and concerns affecting female homosexuals in Beirut. Although the organization has witnessed dramatic increases in its membership, expanded its community center, and increased its programs and campaigns, gay women remain largely absent. Apart from a handful of lesbian activists working with the organization, gay women have, until now, not featured as a significant group either in its activities or its membership.[6]

By rendering lesbians and poor same-sex practitioners living in Beirut invisible in this thesis, my own research has not escaped these considerations. My aim, however, has not been to offer a comprehensive study of homosexuality in Lebanon, but instead has sought to focus on a particular socio-economic segment of this community living in

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[5] Massad notes, "It is not the Gay International or its upper-class supporters in the Arab disapora who will be persecuted, but rather the poor and nonurban men who practice same-sex contact and who do not *necessarily* identify as homosexual or gay." Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 189, emphasis in original.

[6] There are signs that Helem is actively trying to challenge the male/female binary that has hitherto characterized its activism. The first issue of *Barra* featured a cover story on female homosexuality in Beirut, and a "Women's Committee" was created to consider the ways Helem's activism can be altered to better meet needs and concerns of lesbians. Accordingly, in the past few months, a new "Lesbian Support Group," *meem* was launched (http://www.meemgroup.org).

Beirut. In a sense this thesis should be read as an intervention in a transnational gay rights discourse on behalf of those whose sexuality confounds a universalized global gay identity and locally conceived sexual practices—which are always more fluid and partial. A human rights discourse that relies on issues of representation in order to protect vulnerable individuals must be attuned to the strategic status of visibility. It must be attuned to the possibilities and advantages of visibility—in addition to its consequences. Therefore, this thesis, while appearing to ignore lesbians and poor gay men in Beirut, should be read, in part, as an appeal for the analysis of the various other local homosexualities being negotiated.

Additionally, through this thesis I attempted to present some insight into the many entanglements of being a gay man in the growing Beirut gay scene. A sustained ethnographic analysis of the scene revealed the sites of contestation and negotiation of these gay subjectivities. Accordingly, I sought to convey two main points in this work. First, I maintain that these constructions of sexuality exist precariously at the intersection of numerous binary constructions (i.e. global/local, identity/behavior, visible/invisible, West/East) that often fail to represent the multiplicity of same-sex practice in Beirut. Second, I endeavored to privilege the words and experiences of those caught at these intersections. As discussions of Arab-Islamic sexuality increase both in Western scholarship and in popular culture, it is these lived realities that offer a plethora of insights into sexuality. Such research and analysis offers the potential to provide insights into numerous fields of study.

ABOUT HELEM

Mission Statement
Helem leads a peaceful struggle for the liberation of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community in Lebanon from all sorts of legal, social and cultural discrimination.

Identity
Helem (the Arabic acronym of "Lebanese Protection for Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgenders"), is a non-governmental non-profit organization registered in Québec (Canada) as of February 11, 2004. As mentioned in Helem's constituting act, our action encompasses Lebanon and Canada. Helem has also established support groups in Australia, France and the United States, in addition to Canada. Although it focuses on gay and lesbian issues, Helem membership is open to any person who shares our values based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Helem is also strongly opposed to any kind of segregation, both in the services it offers or in the struggle it leads.

Goal
Helem's primary goal is the annulment of article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code which punishes "unnatural sexual intercourse." This law is primarily used to target the LGBT community by violating the privacy of its members and by denying them basic human rights. The abolishment of this law will help reduce state and societal persecution and pave the way to achieving equality for the LGBT community in Lebanon. Helem's other main objective is to counter the AIDS epidemic and other sexually transmitted diseases while advocating for the rights of patients.

Field of action
Helem, a group previously known as Club Free, has been working on LGBT issues in Lebanon for the past 4 years. Our activities have included social and cultural events to bring the gay community together, extensive work on HIV/AIDS related issues, advocacy for prosecuted LGBT individuals and lobbying with other human rights organizations for the advancement of human rights and personal freedoms in Lebanon.

Plans
Helem's immediate concern is to empower the LGBT community in Lebanon through rights and health awareness. Shielding LGBT individuals from persecution and discrimination also involves systematic monitoring of human rights violations and thorough follow up on individual cases. Helem.net and a planned on-location community center are formidable tools for the empowerment of LGBT individuals by offering useful information, and for the struggle against homophobia through visibility. Helem will also take part in all civil society activities deemed necessary to attain its goals. After all, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community is an intrinsic part of the Lebanese social fabric.

http://www.helem.net/about.zn (accessed June 18, 2008)

"ARRESTS IN BEIRUT GAY CLUB": HELEM STATEMENT TO AHBAB NEWS

Monday, November 14, 2005
Arrests in Beirut Gay Club
We received the following story from HELEM, the Lebanese LGBT organization:
Last night (12-11-05), 11 people were arrested at Acid nightclub. We don't know if there were any women among those taken in. They were charged with article 534 and are now in Hbeich. An emergency meeting was held in Helem on Sunday and a preliminary plan of action was put together following contact with our lawyers and a gathering of testimonies from people at Acid that night and a relative of one of the men arrested. Tomorrow, the parliamentary committee is holding its meeting with the Arab Human Rights Network and we have contacted parliamentarian Elias Attallah who will present our case at the meeting.
Our prime concern at the moment is to get the arrested people out as quickly as possible. Legally speaking, the arrests fall outside the scope of 534, which states explicitly that "moujama3a" (i.e. penetration) against nature is punishable by law, since the arrests happened on the presumption of homosexuality and not on any evidence of penetrative sex. This is the argument our lawyers are going to be using to push our case and get the people released.
Helem is going to issue an official press release on the arrests to be sent out to NGOs, the media, and other concerned bodies, as well as a list of ministers, parliamentarians, and other key actors that might be of help. We are not going to mobilize any international body at this time.
This is the first time such a raid on Acid has resulted in mass arrests specifically for 534.
We will keep you updated if we find out more information.
In solidarity,
Updates to follow
http://ahbab.blogspot.com/2005/11/arrests-in-beirut-gay-club-we-received.html
(accessed June 18, 2008)

"HOMOSEXUALS IN LEBANON! NEW PINK DOLLAR EQUATION!": QURSANA BLOG POSTING

Last week, Lebanese police in civilian clothes paid a visit to Acid, a Lebanese nightclub known for its homosexual clientele. As witnesses described it, the music was lowered and people were asked for IDs. One eyewitness reported his friend was dancing on the bar when he was asked to step down for "they" wanted to talk with him outside. There, he was addressed as a "Lotti" while they took him into the police jeep awaiting outside. The night resulted in 11 arrested men who stayed in detention until Tuesday morning.
It is frequent that the police raids Acid to put pressure on the owner in the hope of blackmailing more money. Though in most cases these "visits" do not result with arrests. Rumors spread that the owner accompanied the arrestees hoping to speed their release; he ended up being detained with them.

News of the arrested men being verbally abused, threatened and one of them being slapped by the police forces have been circulated; to the silence of everyone.

In Lebanon, though homosexuals enjoy a relatively relaxed environment compared to their Arab counterparts; homosexuality is "illegal" according to article 534 which deem up to one year of jail for homosexuals. Helem is the first, and until today remains the only, LGB rights group working openly under the sovereignty of an Arab state. (Helem claims LGBTIQ, though no reported work is happening on TTIQ issues)

Recently, Helem's website (only on the english page), read the following disclaimer "Helem is aware of the recent police raids at Acid and X-OM Clubs, and we are making the right contacts to gather more information." No information has been provided since.

Later this week, Acid has been reported to be closed with "red tape." Within the same week, the police raided another club, X-OM, under the claim of drug searches. X-OM used to be called Orange Mechanic and was known as a homosexual popular spot. Nowadays, X-OM has one night a week that is unofficially known as the "gay night," and is relatively popular among the Gay Scene in Beirut. Surprisingly, the police chose to raid on that single night of the week though no arrests were reported, at least not of homosexual persons.

The Lebanese police have for years benefited from the silence of the Lebanese government which turns a "blind eye" on homosexuality in Lebanon. They have used this along with article 534 to secure a profit. It is common for policemen to blackmail mainly homosexual men and the few "gay-friendly" businesses. Blackmailing was reported several times, where a series of threats have been used. Among threats usually used are outings to family or in workplaces, an "illegal" procedure known as the "anal probe" which uses a myth of anal-virginity verified by a physician (in some cases the examination took part in the police station with the presence of unneeded number of policemen), social scandals, and physical and/or verbal violence.

As "illegal" immigrants, workers, refugees, political opponents…etc, homosexuals pose an easy target for manipulation and abuse. This new equation of discrimination between business owners and the police does not concern nor include homosexual individuals. Discrimination and repression has to end now, whether direct or indirect.

http://qursana.blogspot.com/2005/11/homosexuals-in-lebanon-new-pink-dollar.html
(accessed June 18, 2008)

"GEORGES AZZI, GHASSAN MAKAREM, AND SARAH ABOU GHAZAL SAID…": HELEM RESPONSE TO QURSANA BLOG POSTING

Just to clarify that Helem did not "blackout" the news, nor did we ask people not to speak about it. We were requested by the detainees not to publicize the case, which is something you always face when actually working on such issues. On the other hand, there was no clear evidence that they were being charged under 534. They were caught under a public indecency law and it would have been stupid to tell the police about 534, because this is exactly the opposite of what Helem wants.

The post, in its hastiness, contains several mistakes. The number of arrested were 7. It doesn't make much difference but facts are important to some. The information about the police wanting to extort money has not been confirmed either. In addition, ACID was NOT closed. You can go this Friday if you like. There is information that the raids also targeted straight clubs, under a drug pretext.

I am glad that there are people out there who are interested in helping liberate LGBTTIQs (and by the way, Helem does not ask people to disclose their sexuality or conform to a gender identity when they join) everywhere, in addition to not necessarily publicizing all our work, which to a big extent is under very difficult circumstances. But there is a serious need to understand that not all issue are solved through a colonialist attitude. If sexual liberation is to happen in Lebanon, it should start here and from an indigenous movement. From experience we know that international intervention in such cases can do more harm than good, since unfortunately many supposed defenders of sexual rights would jump to the opportunity for fame without even checking the facts.

http://qursana.blogspot.com/2005/11/homosexuals-in-lebanon-new-pink-dollar.html
(accessed June 18, 2008)

"ACID AND X-OM POLICE RAIDS": HELEM STATEMENT

On the night of November 12, 2005, 6 men were arrested in Acid nightclub, a known gay venue in Sin el Fil. No charges were pressed against them. The detainees were released after 3 days of detention. Although no physical abuse was reported, the police were verbally abusive towards the men.

A week later, another known gay club, X-OM, was raided. The police checked IDs and inquired about drug use in the venue. No arrests took place that night.

Acid and X-OM were probably targeted by the police for their openly gay clientele, although legally they had no pretext for any arrests. Article 534 of the Lebanese penal code explicitly states that "penetrative sex against nature" is punishable by law, and not homosexuality per se or the adoption of a gay identity.

These arrests and raids are not haphazard. The increasing political tensions in the country are being manifested in severely heightened security measures that include augmented activity by the Vice Squads of the Internal Security Forces across Lebanon. Helem is working closely with lawyers and NGOs concerned with civil rights and liberties to make sure that incidents such as the haphazard arrests that occurred will not be repeated.

We will keep you updated on our work in this regard. In the meantime, please make sure to read about your legal rights.

http://www.helem.net/news.zn?id=2 (accessed June 18, 2008)

HELEM AFTER THE WAR

For the past two months, Helem's center, equipment, and resources were used as operations headquarters for the Sanayeh Relief Center, which tended to over 13,000

displaced individuals in Beirut. Today, we have re-assembled our group and are working on re-launching our community center, services, and activities.

We would like to express our utmost gratitude for your assistance and solidarity during the difficult times in Lebanon over the past weeks. The international response to our relief effort has touched us all profoundly and helped us raise over $27,000 in aid for the displaced families in Beirut.

http://www.helem.net/news.zn?id=49, September 4, 2006 (accessed June 18, 2008).

AL-ARABIYA.NET SMEAR CAMPAIGN AGAINST HELEM

After the substantial local and international media attention Helem has received following its appearance on New TV's interactive talk show Al Hal Bi Eeddak and its public event to mark the International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) in May, it was expected that some backlash would occur from regressive and homophobic opponents of Helem's fight for the civil liberties of LGBT people.

However, Al-Arabiya.net has consistently compromised its journalistic integrity by launching a smear campaign against Helem, spreading dangerous and odious rumors about the organization. In its coverage of the IDAHO event on May 20 (http://www.alarabiya.net/Articles/2006/05/20/23904.htm), Al-Arabiya.net ran an article by UPI, a conservative, right-wing wire service known to have ties to the controversial Unification Church, with the title "Perverts Announce their Activities and Screen Sex Films in a Beirut Hotel." This headline deliberately distorts the reality of the event, as Helem's film screenings contained nothing pornographic and the text of the article itself makes note of the fact that the films were social in nature, dealing with the lives and struggles of LGBTs in the Arab world. It is worth noting that of all the major media coverage the event received, Al-Arabiya.net's was the only one to portray it in a negative, inaccurate light.

Helem contacted Al-Arabiya.net asking them to correct this mistake to no avail, and the website continued to run UPI's obsessive coverage of Helem. On May 29, it ran a piece in which Beirut municipality councilmember Saad-Eddine Wazzan publicly called on Lebanese PM Fouad Sanyoura and Minister of Interior Ahmad Fatfat to shut down Helem (http://www.alarabiya.net/Articles/2006/05/29/24200.htm). This statement was not found anywhere else in the local press, and points to UPI's deliberate and suspicious targeting of Helem, as one might question whether Wazzan would have made this statement had UPI not contacted him. A few months earlier, Wazzan had filed an official complaint against Helem, accusing it of endangering society and public morality and of trying to impose Western values that run contrary to local beliefs and tradition. An investigation was launched and then dropped due to lack of evidence.

In the latest of UPI and Al-Arabiya.net's distorted and outright fabricated news pieces, an article posted on June 8 covering an Egyptian campaign to combat nudity in Arabic video clips contained a fictitious correspondence between Helem and the man responsible for the campaign, Mohammad al-Sayyed. Al-Sayyed alleged that Helem had contacted him about the campaign, hurling insults and claiming that it was heavily supported (presumably an implicit claim that Helem is backed by the United States or other foreign governments), and that it had received one and a half million US dollars

with which it intends to open other similar organizations across the Arab world (http://www.alarabiya.net/Articles/2006/06/08/24499.htm). The way that this fabrication was framed is clearly intended to play into local fears of an encroaching domination of what is perceived as 'western degeneracy and lack of morals', in this case in the guise of 'sexual perversion' imposed on the Arab world with the help of abundant amounts of foreign money.

      This allegation carries dangerous political overtones. Regressive elements in Arab societies have continuously used emotive language and accusations of playing into the demands of Western imperialism in order to silence any internal socio-political dissent, whether that be in the form of attacking women's rights defenders, stifling local voices of opposition, or most recently, attempting to silence the debate on the rights of sexual minorities in the Arab world before it even begins. By the same token, the American government has also co-opted the language of human rights in order to serve in own agenda, claiming, amongst other things, that women's liberation was part of its goal in its deplorable wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Both of these underhanded and disingenuous strategies need to be denounced and shown for what they really are, and the media in particular needs to stand up to its responsibilities in upholding the values of journalistic integrity and honesty and maintain objectivity in its coverage of events.

      http://helem.net/news.zn?id=32, June 9, 2006 (accessed June 18, 2008)

APPENDIX B:
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions: Helem Coordinators

1) What is Helem?
2) When was Helem begun?
3) Why was Helem founded?
4) What social, governmental or international organizations does Helem work with?
5) Is there a gay community here in Lebanon or, more specifically, in Beirut?
6) How do you try to reach out to the gay community?
7) The following questions are about the members and conversations that happen at Helem or with the general gay community:
   a) How, if at all, are issues of religion brought up?
   b) How, if at all, are issues of social persecution brought up?
   c) How, if at all, are issues of HIV/AIDS brought up?
   d) How, if at all, are issues of stereotypes brought up?
   e) How, if at all, are financial considerations brought up?
   f) How, if at all, are/is drug use brought up?
8) What spaces do gay men in Beirut frequent? Has there been an increase in space appropriation?
9) How important of a factor is the internet? In the work that Helem does and in the general lives of the gay population?
10) What terms and terminology (language) are used when talking about homosexuality?
11) Do any of the following components, themes or emotions come up in conversation about homosexuality:
   a) Isolation (from peers; from society; from family);
   b) Denial/Disavowal (Requests to make it go away?);
   c) Pride;
   d) Anxiety;
   e) Solidarity;
   f) Sadness/Regret;
   g) Separation from sexuality.
12) Some, in academia, have attempted to break up the gay community in Beirut into three distinct categories (i.e. disavowed macho homosexuals, poorer non-identitarian homosexuals, and middle class looking more stereotypically gay). What do you think of this division?
13) How open has Lebanese society been to issues of sexuality, and homosexuality?
14) Why are there more men than women at Helem?
15) Would you characterize the work being done at Helem as part of the development of Lebanon? Is it a necessary component of national development efforts? Should it be a necessary component of development efforts throughout the Middle East?
16) How seriously are issues of human rights taken in Lebanon, politically or socially?
17) Do you see the role of foreign human rights organizations as purely beneficial?
18) In conversations in Helem members, or in your outreach programs, what links are made between homosexuality here in Lebanon and homosexuality abroad?

19) Is there a sense of solidarity or commonality between members of gay community here and members of the gay community outside of Lebanon?
20) How does Helem feel about gay foreigners in the country? Do they help? Hurt?
21) How does the gay community in general feel about gay foreigners and gay tourism?

<u>Interview Questions: Same-Sex Practitioners</u>

1) Talking about sex:
   a) Do people talk about sex?
   b) Do you talk about sex with your family?
   c) Do you talk about sex with your friends?
   d) Do you talk about sex with your girl friends?
   e) How is it different talking about sex with your male than female friends?
   f) What things is it okay to talk about and what is it not okay to talk about?
2) Being a man:
   a) What does it mean to be a man in general here in Beirut?
   b) What do you think it means to be a man for you?
   c) Is it different being a man here in Beirut and being a man in France?
   d) What do you think about feminine acting men?
   e) What do you think about masculine acting women?
3) How do you meet guys that you have sex with here?
4) Do you go gay nightclubs? Why or why not?
5) Do you use Gaydar? Why?
6) Is it different having sex with girls than it is having sex with guys?
7) How often do you have sex?
8) Are you proud of being gay, bi, or sleeping with men? Are you ashamed?
9) Do your parents know that you have had sex with men? Your siblings?
10) Where did you go to school? Did you ever have sex with any guys or girls from school? Did you know if people were having sex with each other?
11) Are you religious? What is your religion? Are your parents religious?
12) Do you hang out with straight guys? Do you hang out with gay guys? Why (not)?
13) Do you know if any of your other guy friends sleep with men? Do you ever talk to them about sleeping with men?
14) How difficult or easy would it be talk about or tell me that you sleep with men?
15) Have you heard of Helem? What do you think of them?
16) Have you been to other places in the Arab world? Have you ever slept with men in other places?
17) Would you like to see a pride parade here?
18) Have you ever been in a (physical) fight?
19) Is there violence towards gay men in Beirut? Violence between gay men?
20) What are some of your goals? Why are you studying or working?
21) What do you do for fun?
22) Who supports your family? Your siblings?
23) Do you want to get married?
24) Have you ever had sex with a tourist?
25) What does it mean to be discreet?

APPENDIX C:
SURVEY RESULTS

Two surveys were administered to one hundred and sixty-four (164) self-selecting individuals during the summer of 2007. I administered the first survey orally in Modern Standard Arabic, Lebanese dialect, French, or English at the following locations: Helem-Beirut Office (Zico House), Starbucks Coffee (Downtown), Dunkin' Donuts (Downtown), CinnZeo (Downtown), Vogue nightclub (Downtown), Walimat Wardeh restaurant/bar (Hamra), Acid nightclub (Sin el-fil), and X-OM nightclub (Achrafieh). The second survey was self-administered and written in Modern Standard Arabic. It was distributed at the following locations: Helem-Beirut office, Acid, and X-OM. The first and second surveys had sixty-two (62) and one hundred and two (102) respondents, respectively. In some cases the two surveys collected the same information (i.e., Tables 1-4). Nonetheless, each survey included a number of unique questions. My intention was to better understand the sample that populated the gay scene prior to asking a cross-section of informants to respond to additional questions during a follow-up interview.

Table 1: Age

Respondents	Age	Percent
4	Under 18	2.6
91	18-24	59.1
44	25-30	28.6
15	Over 30	9.7

Table 2: Sex

Respondents	Sex	Percent
143	Male	88.3
6	Female	3.7
7	Inter-sexed	4.3
6	Transsexual	3.7

Table 3: Sexual Orientation

Respondents	Sexual Orientation	Percent
101	Gay	69.7
31	Bisexual	21.3
4	Transsexual	2.8
9	Other/Unsure	6.2

Table 4: Lived Entire Life In Lebanon?

Respondents	Lived in Lebanon	Percent
87	Yes	56.5
67	No	43.5

Table 5: Where/How Did You Meet Your Last Same-Sex Sexual Partner?

Respondents	Where/How	Percent
33	Nightclub/Café/Bar	35.9
20	Internet	21.7
12	Through a Friend	13.1
7	Street/Cruising Area	7.6
6	Beach	6.5
14	Other/Not Applicable	15.2

Table 6: Employment Status

Respondents	Employment Status	Percent
26	Employed – Full Time	44.2
14	Employed – Part Time	23.7
14	Student	23.7
5	Unemployed	8.4

Table 7: Do You Live with Your Parents?

Respondents	Living with Parents	Percent
67	Yes	65
36	No	35

Table 8: Level of Education

Respondents	Level of Education	Percent
3	Elementary	5.3
10	Secondary	17.5
42	University	73.7
2	None	3.5

Table 9: Knowledge of Helem

Respondents	Knowledge of Helem	Percent
33	Yes	55
27	No	45

APPENDIX D:
RESEARCH COMPLIANCE CERTIFICATES

McGill

Research Ethics Board Office   Tel: (514) 398-6831
McGill University   Fax: (514) 398-4644
845 Sherbrooke Street West   Ethics website: www.mcgill.ca/researchoffice/compliance/human/
James Administration Bldg., rm 419
Montreal, QC H3A 2T5

Research Ethics Board I
Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Humans

REB File #: 76-1006

Project Title: Same sex desiring subjectivities in Beirut, Lebanon

Principal Investigator: Pascal Chahine   **Department:** Islamic Studies

Status: Master's student   **Supervisor:** Prof. S. Manoukian

Funding Agency and Title: N/A

This project was reviewed on ___19 OCT 2006___ by   Expedited Review _____
                                                            Full Review   ✓

Catherine Lu, Ph.D.
Chair, REB I

Approval Period: _October 26, 2006_ to _October 25, 2007_

This project was reviewed and approved in accordance with the requirements of the McGill University
Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Subjects and with the Tri-Council Policy
Statement: Ethical Conduct For Research Involving Humans

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*All research involving human subjects requires review on an annual basis. A Request for Renewal form should be
submitted at least one month before the above expiry date.
*If a project has been completed or terminated and ethics approval is no longer required, a Final Report form must be
submitted.
*Should any modification or other unanticipated development occur before the next required review, the REB must
be informed and any modification can't be initiated until approval is received.
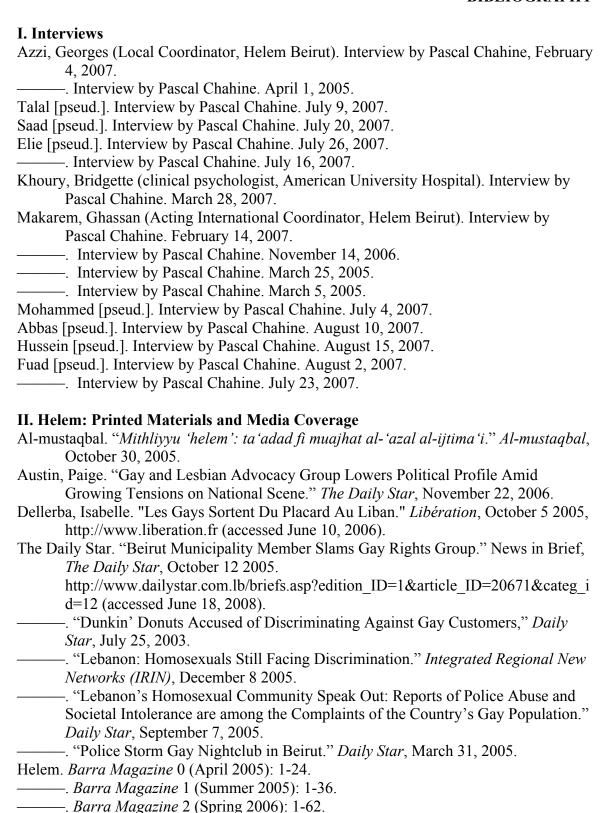
McGill University

ETHICS REVIEW
RENEWAL REQUEST/FINAL REPORT

Continuing review of human subject research requires, at a minimum, the submission of an annual status report to the REB. This form must be completed to request renewal of ethics approval. If a renewal is not received before the expiry date, the project is considered no longer approved and no further research activity may be conducted. When a project has been completed, this form can also be used as a Final Report, which is required to properly close a file. To avoid expired approvals and, in the case of funded projects, the freezing of funds, this form should be returned 3-4 weeks before the current approval expires.

REB File #: 76-1006
Project Title: Same-Sex Desiring Subjectivities in Beirut, Lebanon
Principal Investigator: Pascal Chahine, B.A.
Department/Phone/Email: Islamic Studies (Arts) / (514) 965-2335 / pascal.chahine@mail.mcgill.ca
Faculty Supervisor (for student PI): Setrag Manoukian

1. Were there any significant changes made to this research project that have any ethical implications? ___Yes _X_No
   If yes, describe these changes and append any relevant documents that have been revised.

2. Are there any ethical concerns that arose during the course of this research? ___ Yes _X_ No. If yes, please describe.

3. Have any subjects experienced any adverse events in connection with this research project? ___ Yes _X_ No
   If yes, please describe.

4. _X_ This is a request for renewal of ethics approval.

5. ____ This project is no longer active and ethics approval is no longer required.

6. List all current funding sources for this project and the corresponding project titles **if not exactly the same** as the project title above. Indicate the Principal Investigator of the award if not yourself.

Principal Investigator Signature: _p___l Ch Li__ Date: 11/9/07.

Faculty Supervisor Signature: __Sth Me__ Date: 11/9/07
(for student PI)

For Administrative Use	REB: ✓REB-I ____REB-II ____REB-III

____ The closing report of this terminated project has been reviewed and accepted

✓ The continuing review for this project has been reviewed and approved

✓ Expedited Review ____ Full Review

Signature of REB Chair or designate: _J M°Lu__ Date: _Oct. 3, 2007_

Approval Period: _Oct 26, 2007_ to _Oct 25, 2008_

Submit to Lynda McNeil, Research Ethics Officer, James Administration Bldg., rm 419, fax: 398-4644 tel:398-6831

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