

# Queering Space: New Frontiers

By Noah Morrison



Photo by the Author

In accordance with the Swarthmore College Department of  
Sociology and Anthropology.

Submitted towards the partial fulfillment of a Special Major in  
Middle Eastern Studies.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Introductions.....	4
Chapter One: Review of Literature.....	19
Chapter Two: Queering Space in <i>Guapa</i> .....	35
Chapter Three: Cancelling Mashrou' Leila in Amman.....	65
Conclusions: Decentering Spaces and Subjects .....	86
Bibliography.....	95

## Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Professor Farha Ghannam, for being extremely understanding and constantly helpful when I've been in a tight spot. Secondly, I would like to thank my friends, host family, and program family in Amman. Without you all, I would be so much worse off as a person. I would like to thank my friends here at Swarthmore for supporting me during moments when I did not think that this thesis would get completed. I would like to thank my parents for raising me well, and (unwittingly) attuning my queer eye in the world. Finally, I would like to thank alumni benefactors of Swarthmore College, because without your funding, I would not have been able to have any of the experiences that informed this research.

## Abstract

In this thesis, I utilize autoethnography, textual and social media analysis to analyze the novel *Guapa*, and the cancellation of a Mashrou' Leila concert in Amman, Jordan in the Spring of 2016, both in the context of queer space. I privilege space as a locus of analysis throughout in order to study the movement of queer individuals and ideas. In analyzing *Guapa*, I look at queer characterization and space in the novel, as well as the social life of the novel within their physical spaces of Amman. In analyzing the Mashrou' Leila concert incident, I look at the band's lyrics and place them in a narrative of public space, sacredness, government power, and queerness. From these analyses, as well as a base of experiences in Amman, I argue that new queer spaces are being formed, virtual and physical, and that these networks are politically charged.

## Introductions



Photo by the Author

### The Author's Space

When it came time to name what I was to myself, and to the world around me, queer was what felt right. It was a decision vested in context, because queerness was a narrative that circulated among my friends at Swarthmore, whereas I had never even heard of it before attending college. Since the moment I decided I was queer, I've been trying to figure out why it fit so neatly without having known what exactly "queer" was. I knew I was not gay, nor straight, or even bisexual. Did it have something to do with fluidity, or movement, or creativity? Was I queer because travel was the only way I could feel fulfilled? Was I queer because being alone was desirable? Was I queer because my sexual desires and romantic desires were not neatly organized in relation to gender? Are anyone's really?

When I arrived in Amman in January 2016, after a depression fueled by loss of the only queer relative I knew, and the loss of a lover who helped me piece my identities together just as I felt they were irreconcilable, I was under the naïve impression I would be free of “queer” and whatever that meant for a moment. I had coded my experience to be asexual (and coded queer sexual) before I even stepped foot in the city. Quickly, I realized there is no freedom from queer. The confusion inherent in the identity is constantly produced, and thus constantly changes, whether you accept that or not. Thankfully, instead of conscious repression, which was hardly an option, I began to seek out any signs of others I could find who could possibly relate to this overwhelming fluidity. Through this search, I came to understand that fluidity inherent in queerness takes form in incredibly different ways.

Throughout this work, I interrogate how queerness interacts with different spaces, real and fictional. Queer as a nominative practice functions such that, “anyone’s use of queer about themselves means different from their use of it about someone else,” (Sedgwick 1994, 9). Yet queer as principle and philosophy can be, “a site of collective contestation,” (Butler 1993, 228) as well as “*whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence,” (Pickett, 2002). In its most basic form, queerness is a negation of, and a backlash to, dominant narrative, whether it is sexual, spatial, political, or literary. In this character, queerness is malleable, but it also produces further malleabilities. For the purposes of this research, queerness will be treated as such; a current of thought that runs counter to dominant powers, which is also productive in its lack of essence.

It is also important to note that the currents of queer that run through this research are often related to Jordanian identity. As someone who is not Jordanian, my positionality is key in examining this subject matter. I can never fully understand what it is like to be queer in Amman, as my entire existence there was predicated on its transitory character. What I directly observe and report should always be viewed with this in mind. Additionally, none of my subjects explicitly identified as queer. Most of them identified as gay or bisexual males. Throughout this work, I will question my own interpretations of events, and as often as possible defer to native, or more seasoned researchers such as Sofian Merabet.

## Amman, Jordan

### Getting Around **Amman**

an eight circle guide

The roundabouts of Amman function very much like the underground, where different "lines of circles" represent different parts of the city. Large circles and important routes are usually the city's hubs.

The most important of these routes are the eight circles of Amman, commonly known as "Circle 1", "Circle 2", "Circle 3", all the way through to "Circle 8".

Interestingly, these circles are your key to getting around town. This guide aims to show you West Amman from a circular perspective.

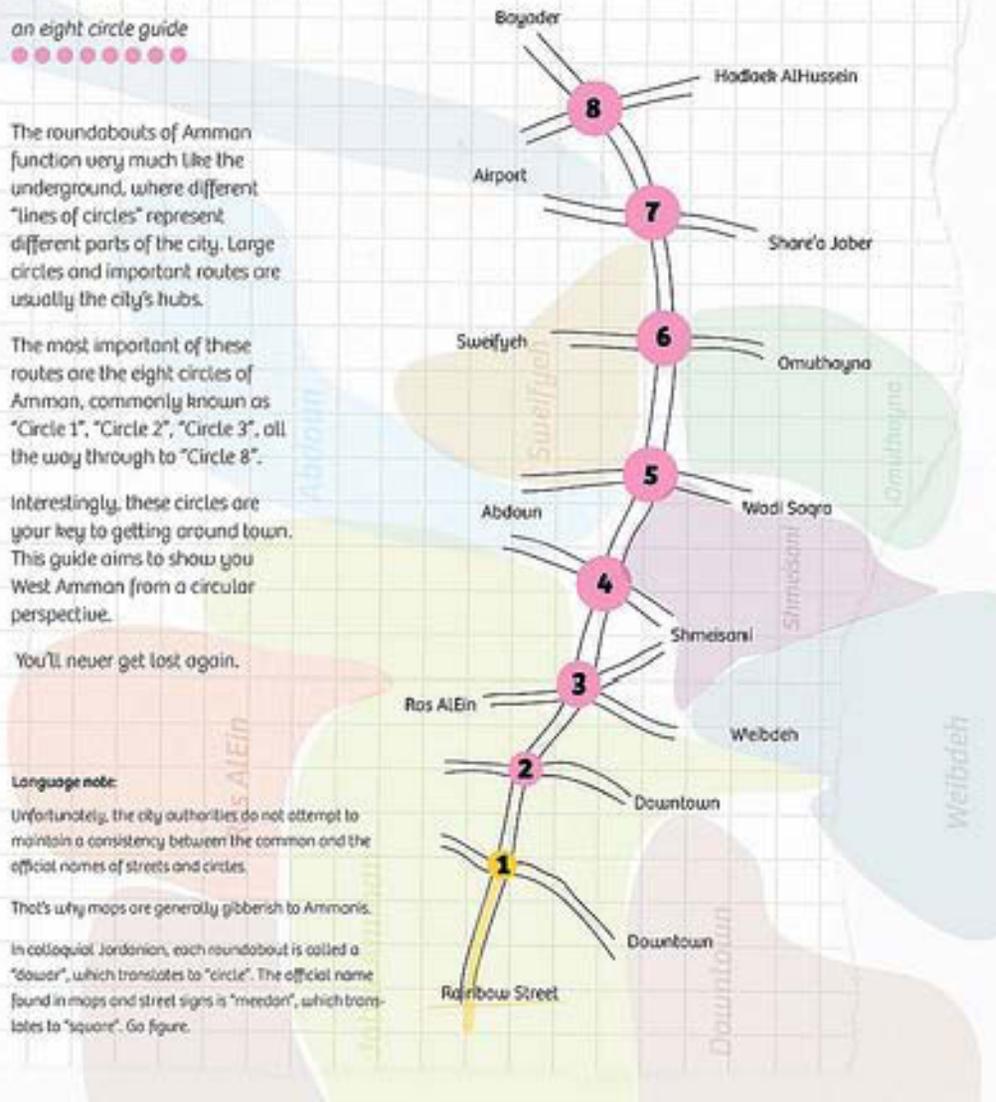
You'll never get lost again.

#### Language note:

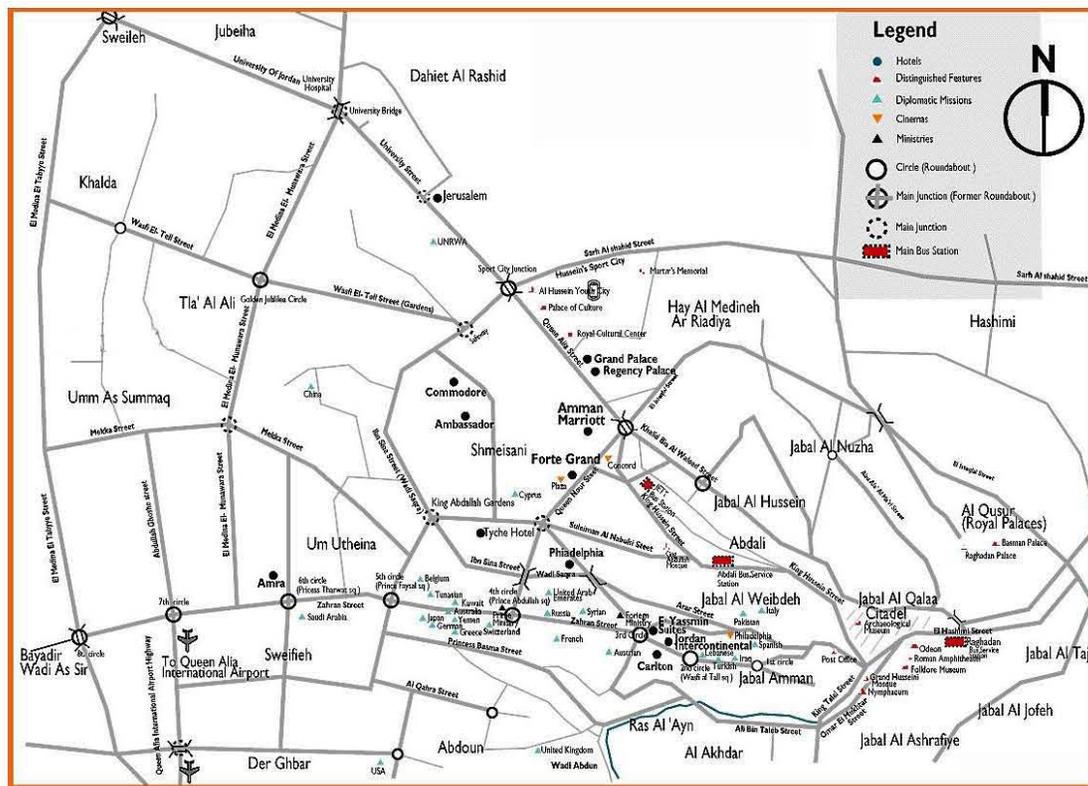
Unfortunately, the city authorities do not attempt to maintain a consistency between the common and the official names of streets and circles.

That's why maps are generally gibberish to Ammanis.

In colloquial Jordanian, each roundabout is called a "dawar", which translates to "circle". The official name found in maps and street signs is "meedan", which translates to "square". Go figure.



<sup>1</sup> Al-Assi, Roba. "Getting Around Amman." Digital image. AndFarAway. May 17, 2011. Accessed April 2, 2017. <http://www.andfaraway.net/blog/2011/05/17/andfaraway-infograph-how-to-get-around-in-amman/>.



The location of the study is significant because of the distinct cultural context in relation to queer space in Amman, and in Jordan. Amman, the capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, is home to over four million people (Hala 2016). The city, which was known as Philadelphia in Roman times, was made the capital of the state of Transjordan in 1921 (Kinghusein.gov.jo). The population of Amman, and Jordan at large, is an immigrant population, one which increases during every political crisis in the region. There were large influxes of Palestinian refugees in 1948 and 1967, Iraqi's during the Gulf War in the early 1990's and 2000's, and Syrian's from the current Syrian Civil War (Kinghusein.gov). Historically, immigration, particularly of Syrians and Palestinians during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been a fundamental part of the capital since the formation of Transjordan (Amawi 1996, 115).

<sup>2</sup> "Map of Amman Jordan." Digital image. Orange Smile. Accessed April 9, 2017. <http://www.orangesmile.com/travelguide/amman/high-resolution-maps.htm>.

Spatially, Amman is a city of hills and valley. Historically, the valley was settled first, and then with respective waves of immigration, the hills became populated (Rifai 1996, 134). Today, a defining spatial characteristic of the city is its eight circles, which serve as landmarks for navigation. The two roads that run through the circles “represent the tremendous power that grew out of the centre of Amman...The first is the road to Wadi Al-Seer and the second is the road to Salt via Sweileh,” (Rifai 1996, 136). Nine times out of ten that I would get in a taxi to go to a location, I would tell the driver the directions in proximity to one of the circles. In this respect, it seemed like the circles ran through the city. Yet, there was a whole section that I never visited.

During my time in Amman, I became informed of a deep divide between East and West Amman. Omar M. Razzaz writes, “The eastern parts of Amman are where moderate and lower income neighbourhoods, refugee camps, small industries, and informal marked places [are] located,” (Razzaz 1996, 501). The Eastern part of Amman is known for its Palestinian refugee camps, which arose with the waves of immigration in 1948 and 1967. In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the divide between East and West Amman grew larger, with “90% of [West Ammani] areas annexed by the Municipality...zoned as upper income residential plots,” (Razzaz 1996, 508).

The time I spent in Amman was mostly in the neighborhoods of Al-‘Abdali, where my host family lived, ‘Abdoun, where my school was, and Jabal Al-Lweibdeh, where I would work and hang out. ‘Abdoun and Al-Lweibdeh in particular provided me with many of the comforts of home: cafés to work in with Wi-Fi and lattes, bars to drink and socialize in, and fast food stores to lunch in (I was particularly fond of the Subway at

‘Abdoun Circle). Occasionally, I would visit friends or conduct research in Tla’ Al-Ali, or meet with academics at the University of Jordan in the far Northwest of the city.

### Spaces of (Queer) Collective Encounter in Amman

Had I not decided to study abroad spring of my junior year in Amman, none of this research would have come about. My program, run by the School of International Training, allowed us and encouraged a degree of freedom that enabled these queer encounters. Even more specifically, none of this would have been possible if I had not decided to go to a bar called Sekrab on Rainbow Street for my friend’s friend’s birthday on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016. This chance encounter in the space of the bar marked the first time in Jordan I had seen any other people I identified as queer.

At the time of the gathering, I had been talking to different people on dating platforms like Tinder and Grindr, which was the only connection I had to queer potential in Amman. These platforms had become extensive “site[s] of projections and dreams” for me, but because there was never a place we could meet up for sexual encounter, and I did not know the cultural terrain of being with another man in public space, I never engaged offline (Merabet 2014, 60).

The gathering, which was organized by students from one American university, who all happened to be in Amman at the time, was also the site where I was introduced to some of the first Jordanian’s my age. This convergence of desires into real space seemed purely coincidental at the moment. I later realized that, while mostly coincidence, the same people occupied the same spaces with enough frequency that chances were high I

would have ran into one of them one time or another. Yet, the setting was special, and I had returned to the bar that night for a reason.

### Bars, Clubs, and Cafés

Sekrab, located in an alley off Rainbow Street, six or seven blocks from the First Circle, was a decidedly queer space. The bar was made up of two floors, and a roof, filled with tables and a Volkswagen Beetle repurposed as a small lounge, that was open during the warmer months. “Sekrab”, an arabization of the English word Scrap, is a bar completely made up of used parts. Christopher Reed defines queer space as renovated space (Reed 1996). Sekrab took the concept of renovated space even further, aestheticizing renovation itself through its purposefully unfinished interior, and careful reappropriation of building materials, and artifacts of the past. The tables we drank on were doors, the coasters were floppy disks, and the bar’s exterior rusted steel planks. In addition to this, the actual downstairs bar was being renovated throughout my stay in Amman, creating a smaller space where all patrons would congregate, sometimes dancing, but usually just mingling.

The space of Turtle Green is integral to this study for a myriad of reasons. The café, located directly on Rainbow Street, was where I would go often to do my homework after school, or to meet up with friends. The first time I hung out with Laith one-on-one was at Turtle Green. I later found out he imagined this to be a date, a fact which I, clueless as ever, was oblivious to. Turtle Green also held many characteristics of queer space in its design. The space was made up of two tiers, with the majority of the seating being on a landing about ten feet above the downstairs. The feeling of the upstairs

of the café was very domestic, with couches for seating upstairs, and a large window that faced into a private garden next to the seating arrangement.

There were two club spaces we would frequent in Amman. One was Cube, located five minutes from the second circle. The physical space of Cube was small, with a bar that was constantly overflowing into the dance floor. There were several tables against two walls, surrounding an intimate dance floor. Cube was located directly across from another club called Jard, which included more outdoor and open space, complementing the stuffiness and claustrophobic feel of Cube. The second of these was Café de Paris, located right off Paris Circle in L'Weibdeh. This space was more neatly divided, with a room filled with stand up tables and a bar, and another room with tables and seating for reservation, as well as a large dance floor and DJ station. At Café de Paris, the most coveted seating was next to the DJ set up, or on the couch at the back of the dance floor.

A fourth form of space we interacted with on a social basis was the “AirBnB”. During several of the weekends we spent in Amman, the other members of the program and I would rent different apartments across Amman to throw parties in. These spaces provided many of the students on the program an outlet to stay out later than the curfew imposed by their host families. Before we arrived at the AirBnB, there was usually some large alcohol purchase made, and often a large food purchase for cooking in the morning. These spaces were created for the needs of students on my program, but towards the end, would serve the queer desires of our Jordanian friends.

## Methodology: Autoethnography and Walking the City

My methodology is largely based in autoethnography. This is defined as, “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*),” (Ellis et. al., 2010). The methodology was born out of the postmodern tradition, challenging the discipline’s search for definitive facts and truths, and moving it in a direction that allows for works that are, “self-consciously value-centered rather than pretending to be value free,” (Ellis et. al., 2010). My thesis employs autoethnography because the events I attend and examine, and the people I encounter along the way, are directly tied to my identities, sexual, political, and racial. To center myself in the work through autoethnography privileges my subjectivity, and helps bring the broader picture into even clearer light. Writing the autoethnographic sections of this thesis was therapeutic and clarifying for me, and it is my hope that they allow the reader to understand connections between themselves and the phenomena I examine even more deeply.

Much of the research I conducted was done inside a library. However, the build-up to this research was almost all done in the streets, in the café, the bar, the club, or my friend’s homes in Amman. I doubt I would have done any of this if it were not for the walks I took from my neighborhood, Al-‘Abdali, to Rainbow Street in Jabal Amman almost daily in the months of April and May of 2016.

Walking around the city itself is intimately tied to my own queerness. As a teenager, and a young adult home from college, I would venture out during the evenings with my camera as companion, and walk. Sometimes a particular boy I liked determined

my path, or sometimes I even followed people until I sensed they noticed. Sometimes, I walked aimlessly, occasionally stopping to take a photo. The act of walking around the city for me was a way to escape the queer impossibility projected by my home, into an endless array of queer possibilities.

Merabet's section on "The Art of Walking: The *Flâneur*, the "Participant Objectifier," and the "Queer Stroller" was revelatory to me in that it made me realize I had unwittingly been participating in anthropological practices in Amman that had been written about extensively in relation to the city and its citizens. French philosopher Michel de Certeau writes in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*,

"The ordinary practitioners of the city live "down below," below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read it." (Merabet 2014, 79).

In Amman, my home represented a similar space of queer impossibility for me. I lived with a host family, and was informed at the start of my program not to broach LGBTQ related topics. When I finally decided to walk a route I would usually be driven through, I remembered the release inherent in this queer practice in urban space. Concurrent with this release was a different form of visibility, inherent of which was a conversation between self and other. As I walked, I saw people I had not on my previous paths, including Filipina maids, construction workers, the occasional homeless person, and single men sitting in their cars. I also became conscious of how I was seen as other

because I would most often be the only one walking on streets without sidewalk, weaving my way into hotel and apartment building driveways. These practices, in conversation with Walter Benjamin, who details that, “the *flâneur* gazes at passing strangers – one of whom, due to a reflection in a random mirror, may be himself,” and Michel de Certeau make up part of my methodology in this research (Merabet 2014, 79).

### The Significance of Space

Space as an analytical category is particularly important in this thesis. Defined as the physical area any given subject occupies, it is constantly produced. It is tentative, always giving way to new forms and being molded by various actors. I privilege space because it has historically been a site of intense contestation by queer subjects.

Whether in reference to the precarious position of bar’s and club’s geared towards queer subjects, or the increased tensions related to visibility of queer subjects in certain spheres of space, queerness matters when discussing space (Johnston and Longhurst 2010, 1). Throughout the literature that I examine, queer subject’s relationships to space are at the forefront. Building upon Sofian Merabet’s examination of queer space and zones of encounter in Beirut, I analyze the production and representation of queer space in *Guapa*. Throughout this novel, characters produce and are produced by queer narratives of space. In analyzing the cancellation of the Mashrou’ Leila concert in chapter three, the space of the amphitheater is centered in queer narratives created by the band and its fans.

The physical spaces are sometimes influenced by “imagined space”, which holds immense queer potential. This imagined space is not physical, but exists in a mental

world mapped out by queer subjects. It can come to exist in physical space, but can also exist only within the confines of the mind. However, it takes on a particularly strong character because of its potentiality related to the historical contestation of physical space by queer subjects. This imagined space comes to a head at various points in *Guapa*, as well as in regards to the protest planned at the site of the Amphitheater upon the cancellation of the Mashrou' Leila concert.

### The Influence of *Queer Beirut*

The influence of Sofian Merabet's study, *Queer Beirut*, on my own is great. In particular, as stated above, our methodologies align in regards to autoethnography and "walking the city". I intersperse the research he conducted throughout this thesis because there are so many salient connections between the literature and events I examine and his study of the production of queer space in Beirut. His discussions of zones of encounter, spaces that defy public-private binary and attempt to "transcend spatio-temporal fixities" resonated deeply because of observations I have collected throughout my life as a queer subject. Additionally, his study bore importance in relation to my querying of the Mashrou' Leila concert cancellation in regards to the contestation of public space by queer subjects and government entities.

Merabet writes importantly,

"[Queer Beirut] tackles the subject of contested identities and sexual difference through an interdisciplinary approach that positions the importance of gender and sexual identities at the center of an often over-simplified political understanding of the very notion of

identity. In Lebanon, that notion has traditionally been denied on the basis of sectarian and religious affiliation. I attempt to complement and expand on such a notion by providing a critical standpoint from which to deepen our understandings of gender rights and citizenship in the structuring of social inequality within the larger context of the Arab world.” (Merabet 2014, 3)

My study does not have goals as extensive as his, exists in a different location, and does not employ the same detail in terms of methodology. Additionally, it was temporally constrained in ways that Merabet’s was not. Yet, parallel to him, I seek to center queer subjects in a way that furthers nuanced understanding of constructions of power and social inequality within the wider Middle East. Merabet’s study acts as an inspiration, as well as a jumping off point for me theoretically, if in some ways not structurally.

### The Cast of Characters<sup>3</sup>

Throughout this thesis, you will often see references to Laith. I met him on that fateful night at Sekrab, he was the first Jordanian my age I had hung out with, and one of my closest friends in Amman during the month and a half we spent together. Stemming from this initial encounter with Laith, I met his childhood best friend Lena, as well as more recent friends Hala and Amal. The first time I met Lena, Hala, and Amal was at Turtle Green. Also usually contained within the space of Turtle Green was a man named Marwan I will reference. He could always be found (and I believe still can be) at any given café off Rainbow Street reading a different novel every day. My best friend on the

---

<sup>3</sup> All names have been changed.

program I was in, Jessica, was extremely close to Laith, probably even more so than I was. There was a rotating group of five or six people from the program who would come out when we rented AirBnB's.

## The Study

In this thesis, I attempt to interrogate notions of queer space in Amman through the lens of the novel *Guapa*, as well as the cancellation of a Mashrou' Leila concert in April, 2016. The study builds on experiences I had while in Amman that piqued my curiosity about the construction of queer spaces, and the role of queer people within them. This introduction is meant to provide context for my research, as well as introduce key concepts and spaces to the reader. The literature review provides further context for the study, as well as background information on sexuality in society, the discipline of queer studies, queer space, and uses of space in an urban Middle Eastern context (with Beirut as example). In the first chapter, I analyze *Guapa* in conversation with discussions on queer space, as well as Eve Sedgwick's definition of queer. In the second chapter, I analyze the cancellation of the Mashrou' Leila concert, looking to sources on Facebook and Twitter to paint a full picture of the response to the incident. I cull comments from the discussion section of the Facebook event for the protest of the government ban. Additionally, I searched hashtags on Twitter that were trending on the day of the cancellation to find tweets that referenced the event. The conclusion chapter ties together seemingly disparate points from each chapter in pursuit of a unique understanding of queerness in relation to space, the circulation of ideas, objects, and songs.

## Chapter One: Review of Literature

The most important literature related to this study deals with ideas of sexuality formation, queerness, and space. Additionally, I will discuss how studies of space and sexuality have been constructed in the context of the Middle East. The book *Sexuality* by Jeffrey Weeks provides a deep summary of the history of sexuality in a Western context from the Victorian times until very close to the present day. Weeks' analysis includes several other writers, scholars and philosophers that I will mention in this literature review, such as Michel Foucault and Eve Sedgwick. Regarding perspectives in relation to the Middle East, Brian Whitaker's book *Unspeakable Love – Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East* provides context and links to Weeks' study. I summarize key concepts from *Queer Beirut* by Sofian Merabet, an extremely rich analysis of queer space and subjectivities in and around the Lebanese capital, which ties together notions of sexuality, queerness, and space. I also provide analyses from various studies on queer space, particularly in the context of the city.

### Sexuality Formation

Jeffrey Weeks begins his book, *Sexuality*, with a chapter on “The Languages of Sex”. He brings up the important idea of translating the many languages we use to talk about sex. These languages are cultural, sociological, biological, psychological, bodily, psychic, etc. Quoting Foucault, he writes, “sexuality was a relationship of elements, a series of meaning giving practices and activities, a social apparatus which had a history—with complex roots in the pre-Christian and Christian past, but achieving a modern

conceptual unity, with diverse effects, only within the modern world,” (Weeks 2009, 15). The notion of sexuality is imbued with critical meaning in our modern, Western society, and has a specific relationship with power in various forms.

He contrasts ancient Greek notions of sexuality with current ones by stating that they placed value in the instinct, while current Western models stemming from the Enlightenment emphasize the object in sexual interaction. The introduction of marriage in the first century of Christianity was intended to prevent sin, and also introduced key ideas of sin, which follow us into the modern day (Weeks 2009, 25). In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the emergence of distinct sexual identities in the West was produced by Enlightenment ideals concerning individual freedoms, as well as the shifting role of state power. Foucault argues that, “...the very idea of ‘sexuality’ is an essentially bourgeois one, which developed as an aspect of the self-definition of a class, both against the decadent aristocracy and the rampant immorality of the lower orders in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,” (Weeks 2009, 30). The implications of this in the development of sexuality, especially in the context of the internationalization of sexual politics and frameworks of identity are many. Later in this chapter, the thread that runs from the development of sexual identity in Europe to modern contestations in Lebanon, as well as Jordan, will become clear.

Sexuality, as in preference for a sexual partner, is explicitly informed by gender, and by extension, biology (Weeks 2009, 39). Sexologists such as Havelock Ellis and Alfred Kinsey attempted to assign scientific meaning to sexuality in the early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In their search, however, they redefined and further polarized male and female difference, tying differences in gender into new notions of sexuality, and further

essentializing both. This “biological imperative” continues to hold sway over dialogue and practice related to sex and sexuality. Weeks writes importantly, “...all the time we like to indulge the fantasy that our sexuality is the most basic, the most natural, thing about us...In a culture preoccupied with sexual difference, as ours is, such beliefs have crucial social effects: to repeat, the way we think about sex shapes the way we live it,” (Weeks 2009, 40). Sexuality is shown to be malleable, and deeply informed by normative societal standards.

In relation to state and political discourses surrounding sexual diversity, Weeks constructs a mode of categorical deconstruction. Concerns regarding this deconstruction include the further proliferation of questions in relation to sexual difference. However, this is described as a positive effect for the disaggregation of sexual difference. Since sexuality is so entrenched in discourses related to power, and sexual relations have so much to do with power relations between two people, questions of sexuality inherently are political questions (Weeks 2009, 83).

Citing Foucault, Weeks writes that we lack a way of coping with a multiplicity of truths (Weeks 2009, 115). The multiplicity of truths about sexual difference is at the core of a new understanding of sexuality, or the queering of sexual identity. The necessity to not ascribe moral judgment to sexual object choice is at the center of this new understanding that Weeks proposes. This ties in with a new politics of difference, which legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw describes as intersectionality, in approaching innumerable social cross-sections, including sexuality.

Overall, Weeks book provides a solid historical and theoretical context for the current climate surrounding sexual difference in America and much of the West. He

unfortunately relegates several important factors to the sidelines, including race and class's roles in complicating the narrative of sexuality. The book does not read as an overwhelmingly intersectional text, especially given the ultimate stated purpose of redefining how sexuality is legislated in the West. The theoretical underpinnings undoubtedly come from a background rooted in White British and American scholarship. However, the importance of the book lies in its ability to deftly analyze the history of sexuality, and apply this analysis to a postmodern context where a multiplicity of ideas related to object choice (if slightly dated by 2016 standards) are regulated in ever more multiplicitous ways. The direction that Weeks takes his scholarship has deep implications for the study of sexuality in a Middle Eastern context, which I will describe through the writing of Brian Whitaker and Sofian Merabet in the coming sections.

### Middle Eastern Context

In *Unspeakable Love – Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East*, Whitaker focuses on case studies of lesbians and gays in various locations in the Middle East, as well as analysis of identity formation. At the very beginning of the book, Whitaker states unequivocally that, “Arab society is more concerned with sexual acts than sexual orientations or identities,” (Whitaker 2006, 10). He seeks to back this assertion up with specific stories from a number of gay and lesbian sources throughout the Arab world. The focus of the first chapter is on family dynamic surrounding the act of “coming out”. Whitaker applies a class-based analysis to the act of revealing ones sexuality to one or more members of ones family. Access to the Internet, where many texts exist shining positive light on homosexuality, is important (Whitaker 2006, 22).

Whitaker frequently engages with meaning making practices surrounding sexuality throughout the text. He situates Arab portrayals of homosexuality within the Orientalist tradition by detailing how states highlight otherness, initially inflicted through colonial laws, to attain greater control over their populations. Depicting homosexuality as foreign is a “familiar practice in cultures where it is considered morally or socially unacceptable,” (Whitaker 2006, 66). He argues that homosexual views in the socio-political contexts he investigates are a reversal of Western Orientalist depictions of the “licentious East”. This argument comes to bear with the parallel, if simplistic, argument that colonialist legal policies contributed to discrimination against sexual minorities in countries such as Egypt and Lebanon.

Where Whitaker does his most important work in regards to my own project is in his analysis of queer themes in various works of Arab literature. Whitaker discusses the book *The Yacoubian Building* by Alaa al-Aswani, which offers a broad critique of Egyptian society at the turn of the century (it was published in 2002). One of the main characters, Hatim Rasheed, is a homosexual newspaper editor. In the book, Hatim is not portrayed in an explicitly negative way for being a homosexual. Rather, he is portrayed negatively for abusing the power his wealth gave him (Whitaker 2006, 90-95). In *The Stone of Laughter*, written in 1990, a gay man is *the* central character. Whitaker argues this character, Khalil, is portrayed as any other straight character would be portrayed in the same situation (Whitaker 2006, 95-6). The content of the novel is less “shocking because [the author] narrates a real sentiment of love,” (Whitaker 2006, 99). Whitaker suggests through his analysis of this literature that the portrayal of homosexuality as

normal in Arab literature can come through portraying the homosexual's story arc as centered around love instead of his homosexuality.

Throughout the book, Whitaker is wary to confront his own positionality as a British journalist working in the Middle East. As a result of this, his project is marred. He constantly references Western influence in gay Arab identity formation, yet never situates himself in this tradition. In telling the individual stories of gays and lesbians in their own local contexts, Whitaker attempts to break against these assumptions, but instead the arc of his book falls in line with other individualistic and voyeuristic studies of sexuality in the Middle East, with a particular historical connection to Orientalist travelogues. He also argues near the conclusion that feminism's lack of success in Arabic societies is what disallows homosexuality from being accepted (Whitaker 2006, 179-80). This represents a more clear-cut view of how Whitaker analyzes sexuality without explicit self-awareness, and with a patronizing tone throughout.

At the conclusion, Whitaker quotes Egyptian activist Salim, who says, "We need to identify and explore non-Western ways of being gay," (Whitaker 2006, 216). In the context of the novel, however, the rehashing of that account can only be seen as trivial. However, the content cannot be entirely written off through this lens. Sofian Merabet, among other things, brings the unspoken politics of Whitaker's study to light in a much more specific, academically and theoretically rigorous study of Queer subjectivities and space formation in and around Beirut, Lebanon. Most importantly, Merabet begins his book by outlining his own positionality in relation to the place and subjects involved in his study.

## Queerness: Historical and Current Conceptions

Queerness as an analytical category has been constructed in a few different ways over the last half century. In the context of sexuality, queer was seen in the 1970's and 1980's as a derogatory term leveled at gays and lesbians," (Johnston and Longhurst, 2010, 9). In the 1990's the term became central in efforts by portions of the LGBT community to balance against conformity that they saw as dangerous. A seminal text in the reclamation of the term queer as political and troublant is a leaflet called "Queers Read This", distributed at the 1990 New York Gay Pride March. The pamphlet begins, "How can I tell you. How can I convince you, brother, sister that your life is in danger: That everyday you wake up alive, relatively happy, and a functioning human being, you are committing a rebellious act. You as an alive and functioning queer are a revolutionary," (Queers Read This 1990). Just this opening is necessary to understand the character of the pamphlet, which calls for a radical understanding of the LGBT subject. An act so basic as waking up is deemed revolutionary, and then rendered inseparable from the term "queer". The interlocking of this "queer" subject with revolutionary potential seeks to remap agency, balanced against heteronormative doctrine, which encouraged assimilation into normative structures, being spread around at the time by actors such as Andrew Sullivan (Sullivan 1989).

The radical document, spread by Queer Nation, came in the face of a community decimated by the AIDS crisis, searching for togetherness. Yet, in the document, we can see some of the concerns about queer's totality that would continue to be examined throughout the 1990's, 2000's, and into the present. The radical doctrine espoused in this pamphlet called for, "[calling ourselves queer as] a way of suggesting we

close ranks, and forget (temporarily) our individual differences because we face a more insidious common enemy. Yeah, QUEER can be a rough word but it is also a sly and ironic weapon we can steal from the homophobe's hands and use against him,” (Queers Read This 1990). The call to forget differences, even temporarily, underlines impositions of queerness during this time. It was conceived as a force of unification under a political umbrella. Yet, the centering of agency in the individual and the forgetting of individual differences come at contrast with each other. Some of these contradictions inherent in these early, formal conceptions of queerness would be examined further in the space of the academy.

In the early 1990's queer studies also emerged out of Gay and Lesbian studies as an academic discipline. Queer theorists, working from the postmodern and poststructuralist traditions, sought to disrupt binaries such as “gender/sex, heterosexual/homosexual, and man/woman” that had been accepted as truth (Johnston and Longhurst, 2010, 9-10). The works of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler complicated queerness even further. In brief, Sedgwick's text, *Epistemology of the Closet*, queries the heterosexual/homosexual binary and calls for its deconstruction based in its structural incoherence (Sedgwick 1990, 9-12). Judith Butler wrote *Gender Trouble* in 1990, which sought to theoretically disaggregate the concept of gender. She argued that gender is performative, stating, “The subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects,” (Butler 1990, 145). Butler located this process of repetition in the concept of performance, and further called for a troubling of the gender

binary based in performance. These seminal texts formed theoretical bases for future queer studies and advances in queer theory.

Queer studies today are indebted to the work of early scholars. The main criticisms of “queer” have revolved around its “implicit disavowal of overarching categories in social analysis,” (Boellstorff 2007, 19). Adam Green states, “This deconstructionist mandate, by definition, moves queer theory away from the analysis of self and subject position including those accruing from race, class, and gender and toward a conception of the self radically,” (Green 2007, 27). Green’s criticisms fall in line with queer theory’s initial rejection of previously articulated identity politics as a mode of identification.<sup>4</sup>

Additional tension occurs between queer theory’s troubling of identity categories and its negation of racialized bodies and subjectivities. Queer of color critiques seek to complicate some of these criticisms, and the pitting of identity politics against queerness. Kyla Wazana Tompkins writes, “The discursive and material violence attached to the production of erotic categories of normative and nonnormative being is real, of course, but what is also clear is that the queerness, as it were, of peoples of color emerges from the fire of modernity’s historical forges and has an energy to survive and create that is fiercely its own,” (Tompkins 2015, 175). In stating this, Tompkins brings into focus the historical importance of queers of color in their constitution as a body mirroring the bedrock of queer theory, survival as (political) resistance, but often left out of it’s discursive analyses.

---

<sup>4</sup> See excerpt from “Queers Read This”.

## Literature of Queer Space

Space has been constructed in a number of ways when in contact with queerness. Queer space has been historically constructed through looking at how queer subjects interact with and create space. Studies arose from the foundations of queer studies in the 1990's that sought to examine embodied performances of sexuality articulated in space. It was constituted that, "There are no spaces that sit outside sexual politics," (Johnston and Longhurst 2010, 2). Spaces that often merited examination include those of queer collectivity, namely bars and clubs. The home and the domestic sphere have also been examined in depth as sites of queer contestation. In particular, the queer home has been conceptualized as a space of renovation, one that "transforms what the dominant culture has abandoned so that old and new are in explicit juxtaposition," (Reed 1996, 68).

The city has functioned as a site of contestation in relation to queer space because of its particular relationship to subject's embodied performances. Cities are "spaces of illicit sexualities and nonconformist gender practices, yet they are also spaces which inscribe, or enforce, gendered and sexualized norms," (Johnston and Longhurst 2010, 70). Across many Western cities, neighborhoods have become known as "gay", as informed by the people who populate them. In these zones, queerness lays an explicit stake to space, but those who have adequate cultural capital, and those who control the city's image, often mediate that stake. Dereka Rushbrook writes that queer neighborhoods are, "tentatively promoted by cities both as equivalent to other ethnic neighborhoods and as an independent indicator of cosmopolitanism," (Rushbrook 2002, 183). Yet still, queer subjects in these spaces are fetishized and chastised, along sexual,

racial, and gendered lines. The space of the city, regardless of any designation of queer zones, overwhelmingly privileges heterosexual interests and gaze.

Queer space as an analytical junction has been criticized for its Western centrality. The queer city has been analyzed mainly from a Western perspective. Additionally the position and analysis of queerness in the field of geography has been criticized from a deconstructionist perspective. Critics within the field of geography are more recently trying to, “[highlight] the ways in which a queer approach can be deployed to understand much more than the lives of ‘queers’,” (Oswin 2008, 90). This critical understanding of queerness encompasses understandings of “pinkwashing”, or the use of a municipality’s treatment of queer subjects in an effort to distract from injustices it perpetrates against other minority citizens. Recent frontiers in queer geographies have included querying’s of time-space compression and time-space expansion. Time-space compression refers to any factor that has the ability to alter relationships between time and space. Time-space expansion, articulated by geographer Cindi Katz, was articulated in studies of the poor in Harlem and South Sudan where they were forced to go further from their homes to procure basic resources (Katz 2001). Queerness’s intersect with these forms of spatial interaction challenges the binary of compression and expansion, producing “varying forms of movement in, by, and through space,” (Giesecking 2013, 18).

### *Queer Beirut*

In discussing Sofian Merabet’s *Queer Beirut* one has to understand that this is just as much a study of queer space, and introspection into an anthropologists place in that space, as it is a study of queer subjectivities in a specific set of locales. In short, a

traditional summary of this book is unnecessary because of the intentional multiplicity of ideas surrounding space and personhood. I will attempt to corral these practices into a coherent and useful set of ideas for further analysis. The author draws heavily on the theory of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau. Notions of space discussed in the work contribute to the ever-fracturing picture Merabet paints of Beirut, but also centers performances of queer subjects in detailed analysis.

In each chapter, Merabet zones in on a specific quality of queer life in Beirut, or the areas around the city, from which he analyzes intersections of queerness in relation to space and identity formation. Centered in this long-spanning ethnographic research are the stories of the participants, many of which were friends, and occasional lovers, of the author. Often he injects historical analysis of events in Lebanon to provide context for specific performances in specific spaces in the city.

There are several core analytical tools as well as key definitions used in Merabet's work that I would like to apply. Foremost amongst these in relation to queerness as an analytic category is the concept of the *querdenker*<sup>5</sup>. Merabet defines this as a, "Lateral thinker whose very habitus is to invest in the countless ramifications of ever-shifting epistemological intersections," (Merabet 2014, 7). This approach allows the researcher to deal with complexities of urban landscape, as well as the fractured realities of participants' identity. Additionally, the author defines queer space broadly. Important in this conceptualization is queer space as, "Sites in which the socially assumed dichotomy between "public" and "private" cannot be easily applied," (Merabet 2014, 5). To understand queer space in Beirut's context, the author relies on different and often competing methodological and theoretical frameworks, which ultimately tie back into the

---

<sup>5</sup> German for "Queer Thinker".

notion of the *querdenker*. In conjunction with the concept of the *querdenker*, the importance of the flâneur is also brought up several times throughout the book. In the context of Beirut, as well as large swaths of Amman, walking most likely occurs in a utilitarian context. Thus, the act of walking around Beirut can be integrated into the “queer practice” of the researcher (Merabet 2014, 76). This method, described as “dialectics of seeing” is in conversation with Walter Benjamin’s writings on flâneurism, but is reconstructed to match a new set of histories and positionalities, situated around Beirut (Merabet 2014, 80).

Merabet spends a large amount of time describing the history of the country, and the intersections with this history in socio-spatial practice. Some of the spaces he describes include a local Dunkin’ Donuts, Paradise Beach, Downtown, The Corniche, emerging online chat rooms, café’s, and clubs. Each space has its own particular reason for its queerness. At the center of the analysis of these spaces is an analysis of the intersections between bodily practices of the inhabitants of these spaces. In a chapter mostly dedicated to Dunkin’ Donuts, these bodily practices are centered. Merabet describes regarding bodily performances at this particular location: “The deliberate construction of sociability for the purpose of creating a resource (social and cultural capital) by way of premediated bodily performances was crucial in order to sustain the larger network of relationships developing in and outside the coffee shop,” (Merabet 2014, 21). This conversation stems from observation of the proliferation of cultural capital in the shop, and its connection to bodily performances, shows of wealth, and power moves. Merabet’s continuous focus on bodily performance in relation to the acquisition of various forms of capital is key to the study of queer identity formation.

The study of Downtown, a neighborhood in Beirut, centers class as a variable in the performance of identities in public space. After fifteen years of civil war in Lebanon, dividing the country across sectarian and ethnic lines, and ten years of rebuilding from this, in 2001 Downtown was finally reopened and renegotiated as the center of Beirut (Merabet 2014, 44). Merabet defines Downtown as a space that “can lend an avowedly transgressive character to a queer individual whose contestation and appropriation of space always happens in conjunction with his or her studied bodily performance,” (Merabet 2014, 26). The contrasts between the posh café’s in Downtown and the public spaces where many queer youth hung out in open air brings to the forefront notions of access. Appropriation is a negotiation, which Merabet centers in the practice of specific bodily performance, but which also intersects with ability to transgress in a way that doesn’t explicitly challenge the social order amongst gays and non-gays. That is to say, just to be taking up space in Downtown represents a drive towards the cooption of social capital in a society where it is hard for those without the proper means to do so.

Whether intentional or not, the pursuit of visibility also produces social and internal discontents among queer men in Beirut. In various social spheres, both the production of (queer) desire, and the resistance to that desire become skills in a skillset informed by bodily practices, space, social status, and anonymity. The refrain among gays in Beirut, “ana mesh heyk”, or “I am not that”, indicates a hierarchy of socially acceptable performance and an urge to define oneself against him who deviates from the rung atop this hierarchy. The story of Ramzi illustrates some of the effects of this hierarchy. Ramzi was assaulted two times in a short span in public space in Beirut. The first of which was by a service driver who mocked him for his effeminacy, charged him

an exorbitant amount of money for a short ride, and then fought him in the street, with a crowd of onlookers, when he refused. Ramzi was taken to the police station, despite the fact that he was defending himself, and held for an extended period of time, while the driver was released quickly. With only the help of family contacts, Ramzi was released, but his spirit was broken in light of this violence against his identity (Merabet 2014, 151-154). This story illustrates the social and legal apparatus that prioritizes a hierarchy of socially acceptable performances, and penalizes transgression.

Quoting Gaston Bachelard, Merabet writes, “Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the purveyor. It had been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination,” (Merabet 2014, 240-1). Because of the fragmented character of the queer collective imagination, especially as negotiated in Beirut’s historical and political climates, the spaces themselves, often central, become tied to the obscene or transgressive. The people who inhabit these spaces utilize specific bodily performances that feed into this perception of obscenity, and are thus intricately tied to dynamic potentials of their own bodies in these spaces. Mimicry in this context becomes a mechanism for control over the “intricacies of Beiruti social space” and the “distinctive exhibition of signs and symbols” in the Lebanese capital (Merabet 2014, 244).

The general studies mentioned above, as well as more site-specific ones provide regional context. Yet, the work that I will undertake aims to provide yet another view into the intersection between sexual identity and space. I will rely on the theories explored by Sofian Merabet, in conversation with the history of the discipline detailed by Jeffrey

Weeks, and the work of Butler and Sedgwick Kosofsky to situate practices and events rooted in Amman in this ever-expanding gulf of research.

## Chapter Two: Queering Space in *Guapa*

### Introduction to the Novel

I first heard of the novel *Guapa* in passing as I sat at a popular café off the First Circle in Amman. I sat with my two Gay, Jordanian friends, Laith and Marwan, eating lunch and casually discussing the men around us, and topics consuming us at the time, such as the upcoming Mashrou' Leila concert, and the promise of the weekend. Our discussion eventually turned to literature, and Laith mentioned to me that there was a book that Marwan currently had that was supposed to be “*the Gay Middle Eastern novel*”. It turns out that I had heard of this book previously, and I had wanted to read it, but did not know there was a copy in Jordan. Laith told me that his brother had mailed it to him from London, and there were no copies yet in Jordan. Marwan was currently reading it, and I learned that there were a number of people who wanted to read it. I informed Laith that I wanted to read the book, and he believed that he could get it to me before I departed in a matter of weeks. We agreed on this, and continued to talk about books and boys, in between cigarettes, olives, and eggs.

By the time that I picked up *Guapa* to read, I had only one week left in Amman, and was feeling sentimental about a number of things. I lamented my inability to capitalize on a number of potential love interests, language opportunities, cultural, and social events. The book's entry into my life, within the context it was given to me, quite literally seemed like a bookend. The book became a catalyst for nostalgia, as well as reckoning with current queerness in a place where its contours had been reshaped. Before I even opened the first page, the book became larger than itself. Only in picking up the

book for a second reading for this research, one year removed, could I realize the context defined the initial experience of the novel.

The novel is primarily set over one long day, with flashbacks from other times interspersed throughout. The main character is a 27-year-old man named Rasa, who works for a translation startup company with his friend Basma. Rasa's lover is Taymour, who comes from a good family and is a doctor. Rasa's childhood best friend, Maj, is central to the story in both flashbacks and the present. Guapa is the bar at the center of the novel, run by a lesbian woman named Nora, and populated by a variety of queer people from in and around the city. The setting is ambiguous on purpose, but it is meant to be an anonymous Middle Eastern city. Each of the characters and spaces mentioned above contribute in their own way to the novel as queer. The novel itself is about many different things, exile, politics, death, love, sexuality, and who gets to live authentically. However, the form of the novel combined with the numerous queer spaces and encounters that each of the characters pass through is combined to create a queer work.

In this chapter, I will first give a biography of the author, and an overview of his positions taken from a variety of sources including online interviews and talks. Secondly, I will examine the contours of different spaces and their interdependency with queer characterization in the novel. Thirdly, I will use the novel, in conjunction with the theory of Sofian Merabet and others, as a lens to analyze Guapa's variant connections to reality outside of the book. Finally, I will conclude and reconnect the contents of the book anew to the context in which the book was revealed to me.

## The Author

The author of *Guapa*, Saleem Haddad, is a queer Kuwaiti writer from a self-avowedly mixed background. He identifies as “Palestinian, Lebanese, Iraqi, German, Muslim, Christian, Queer and Arab”.<sup>6</sup> Haddad speaks frequently in interviews of the connection between dominant media narratives and conceptions of self. As someone with so many identities negotiated across different cultural contexts over the course of his life, Haddad’s writing reflects this reckoning. His first novel, *Guapa*, which takes place in an unnamed Middle Eastern city and an unnamed American city, is the story of a young, gay journalist named Rasa. However, the identities that Rasa identifies with change constantly for various reasons related to the spaces he travels through. This sentiment partially echoes the author’s experiences as a queer Arab writer often finding himself in Western environments, or among American or European peers.

The author wrote the first draft of the novel between the years 2011 and 2014 as he was working for an NGO that focused on peace-making initiatives during and following the Arab Spring.<sup>7</sup> Throughout various interviews, it comes out that Haddad was inspired to write a fictional work because he felt that revolution necessitated discussions of the personal as political and vice versa.<sup>8</sup> He speaks about the personal as political in his own life as well, in writing what my friends and some reviewers would call “*the Gay Arab novel*”. He says in one interview, “the burden of having to represent hundreds of thousands of queer Arabs — with their own unique experiences and challenges —

---

<sup>6</sup> "Being Arab and Queer: an Interview with Saleem Haddad." Muftah. March 07, 2016. <http://muftah.org/queer-arab-an-interview-with-saleem-haddad-the-author-of-guapa/#.WKST5RlrKR8>.

<sup>7</sup> "Being Arab and Queer: An Interview with Saleem Haddad." March 07, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> "What Is Life Like For an Ordinary Gay Muslim Man?" Out Magazine. July 20, 2016. <http://www.out.com/art-books/2016/7/20/what-life-ordinary-gay-muslim-man>.

initially paralyzed my writing. Ultimately, I could only write once I absolved myself of the need to represent anyone.”<sup>9</sup> The author’s need to absolve himself of representing someone runs slightly counter to his desire to make the personal political, but the writing process is full of contradiction. Also, his positionality taken alongside the main character, Rasa’s, is one where contradiction is inherent, and working through and within these contradictions is a part of continual identity shaping.

Themes of shame permeate both interviews with the author and the novel itself. The first line of the novel is, “The morning begins with shame,” (Haddad 2016, 3). Haddad says the concept of shame (*‘eib* in Arabic) in Arab society is a kind of social code that constantly forms and deforms acceptable behavior. He experienced this kind of shame as a young, gay Arab, from a background that was not easily characterized.<sup>10</sup> The notion that a character that is unable to be boxed easily into one identity is one that deals with the contours of shame culture (*thaqafat al-‘eib*) differently is fleshed out in interviews and in *Guapa*. Haddad often speaks of *‘eib* as something that is used frequently, but in that frequency has the effect of a double-edged sword; it exists both as a bonding element between people and communities and as a force of suppression and oppression. In this duality, *‘eib* becomes entrenched in identity formation as a marker of what is acceptable or not and a cultural marker which ties any subject to their family and the larger society.

---

<sup>9</sup> "What Is Life Like For an Ordinary Gay Muslim Man?" July 20, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Cain, Sian. "Saleem Haddad: 'I put everything into this novel and it was a relief'" The Guardian. December 15, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/dec/15/saleem-haddad-first-book-guapa-gay>.

His position as someone afforded opportunities many queer, Arab men would not have is conspicuous in regards to this choice.<sup>11</sup> The writer's life story is one that many Arab readers, queer or not, could not relate to. He has lived in several countries in the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and North America and currently lives in London with his boyfriend. Yet, something about the book made the friends that I made in Jordan claim that I must read it. The book was passed around from friend to friend, read in café's and bedrooms, and each time I heard someone comment on it, the characterizations and writing were praised. It is my goal in this section to figure out the meaning of this praise in relation to *Guapa*, and to the subtext of my friend's lived experience in relation to it.

Haddad wrote the novel in English because that was the language he "felt [the novel] should be written in," because, "[he feels] more comfortable writing in English, even though [he speaks] a mix of [English and Arabic]."<sup>12</sup> The use of English obviously alienates many of the people he would ideally reach, whom he discusses in the novel. The question of elitism is present throughout the novel and in many of the author's choices in discussing the novel. He does address this somewhat in the novel by presenting us a poor Other in relation to Rasa's relatively privileged existence.

From interviews, it becomes easy to see how the novel is semi-autobiographical. Haddad says, "Emotionally, it is very autobiographical. Plot-wise, less so."<sup>13</sup> The novel's autobiographical nature may have lent to an authentic reading from the perspectives of my friends. There are undoubtedly elements of authenticity in relation to the identity crises Haddad presents in the novel, mediated through his own. What I would like to

---

<sup>11</sup> In regards to sexual identification, what I gauged from interviews was that the author used "gay" and "queer" interchangeably in relation to himself.

<sup>12</sup> "Being Arab and Queer: An Interview with Saleem Haddad." March 07, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> "Saleem Haddad: 'I put everything into this novel and it was a relief'", December 15, 2016.

know most concretely is how this unstable identity presented both by the author in interviews and in the novel itself as constantly shaped by a variety of factors out of the subject's control, can be spread to those who would not seek this out? In absolving himself of the need to represent anybody in writing *Guapa*, does the author definitively designate personal truth as the most viable form of identity? Does he do so while also disaggregating expectations surrounding identity in multiple contexts? Where do the contradictions presented by someone whose identities are seemingly contradictory become too incompatible to be coherent? Is coherence a necessity? These are some main questions I will probe in my analysis of the novel *Guapa* in the context of my experiences in Amman.

### The Uses of Space in *Guapa*

“By troubling distinctions and meaning alike, queer comes to represent what cuts across or athwart conventional distinctions, and literary language becomes an ideal location for such troubling possibilities,” (Hardie, 208).

- Melissa Jane Hardie

The contours of space in *Guapa* shape, and are shaped by, comfort of expression between gay men. The main characters, Rasa and Taymour, weave in and out of space with various performances of their relationship in tow. Rasa, the (unreliable) narrator, takes us through a series of private, semi-private, and public spaces upon which his emotions are mapped. The locus of queer intimacy in the novel appears as the bedroom,

and the novel begins with the bedroom being broken into by Rasa's grandmother (Haddad 2016, 1-3). From this moment on, the notion of privacy in connection to queer and Arab identity is challenged through examinations of space, place, and travel.

The novel constantly interrogates queerness in ways that are related to Eve Sedgwick's definition: "a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, *troublant*... The word 'queer' itself means across... the immemorial current that queer represents is antiseparatist as it is antiassimilationist. Keenly, it is relational, and strange," (Sedgwick xii, 1993). In constantly centering and decentering queerness in relation to other identities throughout the novel, but centering it in a politics of resistance, Haddad engages the moment, movement, and motive Sedgwick references. The setting of the novel, in an unnamed Middle Eastern city, which combines elements of several real and imagined ones, queers the work through the potential to keep the reader at a distance, constantly relating and distancing themselves to and from potential realities.

In *Guapa*, Haddad presents a city and a world that is divided along multiple lines. The city he lives in is divided between the West and the East, with the former being rich, developed, protected and westernized, and the latter being poor, war-torn, political, and religious. The entire second section of the novel describes Rasa's experience as a college student in America, where spatial division post-9/11 awakens his socio-political consciousness. Both forms of spatial division are important in understanding the forms of queerness expressed in *Guapa*. Yet, in his movement through space, Rasa, who constantly is oscillating between anonymity and outburst, clearly marks queerness in the novel.

### East/West in Guapa

A central scene to focus on in the book is one where Rasa crosses into the eastern part of his city. His work as a translator (a locus of meaning on its own) allows him to act as a bridge within spaces where he would normally have no place being. His entry into the eastern half of the city (Al-Sharquieh) is mediated through a Western journalist named Laura. The mediation provided by Laura between Rasa and the Eastern half of the city exists on multiple planes. There is undoubtedly a classed element resultant from it, but there is also a queerness, which is rendered safe by a Western presence and a translation job.

Laura enlists Rasa to travel to Al-Sharquieh to interview a man called Ahmed who “is high up with the opposition” (Haddad 2016, 65). They encounter several checkpoints en route to Ahmed’s house, all manned by gendarme men who cause Rasa anguish related to his performance of masculinity. Once Rasa arrives at Ahmed’s house, he begins to interpret for Laura. He muses, “For a long time interpretation felt like the purest form of bridging worlds,” (Haddad 2016, 78). The interpretation is unusual because Ahmed understood English, denying Rasa his ability to change phrases around. He is only to act as the direct conduit in this situation.

Haddad portrays Rasa as repressed and frustrated about connection with his countryman on multiple fronts in this situation. He constantly oscillates between attempting to connect with Ahmed and Um Abdullah, his wife, and being disaffected with their inability to understand him fully. With his abilities as an interpreter castrated, and his freedom of expression structurally limited by his job, Rasa becomes angry. Ahmed asks Rasa to pray with him, and, cornered, he obliges. This moment of supposed

peace in prayer culminates in an extended fantasy. Rasa imagines himself dancing with Ahmed, inquiring what would happen if he would “choose ambivalence.” He then goes further, imagining, “[making] love to Ahmed, [forcing] his dishdasha up, [grabbing] him by the thighs, and [taking] him in [his] mouth. [To] show him a good time, help him loosen up,” (Haddad 2016, 91). This fantasy posits a hierarchy of enjoyment, informed by the stress of the immediate situation, where non-normative sexual pleasure liberates from the rigidity of religion. This is a momentary feeling in Rasa’s life, but is also indicative of greater narratives permeating the storyline regarding the perceived opposition between religious people and queerness.

The space of Al-Sharquieh, which appears as a major Other in the book, is a form of shared space in Rasa’s mind, in that it exists in the same city as his. Every time Al-Sharquieh is mentioned in the novel, it is presented as something untouchable for Rasa. The bartenders at Guapa, located in a Western neighborhood, are straight boys from Al-Sharquieh. Rasa’s mother, who abandoned him at a young age, used to go to Al-Sharquieh to paint and set up art clinics, much to his grandmother’s dismay. There is mass dissent against the government in Al-Sharquieh, which threatens Rasa’s already tentative safety. Rasa’s oscillation between anonymity and outburst is confused in this space. This is aided by his inability to be true to his identities in terms of his job as an interpreter, as well as his sexuality, in a private space. Rasa is made anonymous through interpretation in this situation in his role as a direct vector for other people’s thoughts, but the forced quality of it allows him to contemplate outburst.

On a larger scale, it is revealed that the values Rasa hold related to country and identity come at odds with his fellow citizens’. He muses, “Another thought occurs to

me, the realization that we are from the same country, the same city even, yet we never truly knew each other,” (Haddad 2016, 90). When Rasa fantasizes as he prays with Ahmed, he is projecting this disjunction silently, still in the role of (queer) interpreter. In its oscillatory, unpredictable character, this form of repression, complimented with imagined outburst in a private space within a conflict zone, fits into the queer narrative of the novel. The oscillation that characterizes Rasa’s interactions in private space which is not his own trails him throughout the novel.

### Transitory Spaces

The transitory spaces in *Guapa*, such as the taxicab, take on a particular queer character in their tight spatial design and ability to move through different spaces. Additionally, movement through space in the novel always is connected to a heightened anxiety about being uncovered. The taxicab serves as a site for a negotiation between anonymity and outburst in its privacy. By this, I mean that the privacy of a taxicab is cloaked in anonymity, and in the novel it is introduced as a space of service and socialization. The contours of this mix of service and socialization between men, combined with the physical tightness of the space, breed queer encounters. The novel begins with a scene in a taxicab, directly after Rasa’s grandmother discovers him and Taymour in bed.

The dynamics that arise in the space of the taxi can be read as queer and specific to the Arab culture Rasa lives within. Rasa enters the taxi and avoids the driver’s gaze by looking out the window. The taxi driver then has to lure Rasa into conversation, speaking regardless of whether Rasa responds or not. When Rasa does take the bait, smiling at a

comment, “the driver chuckles and lights a triumphant cigarette,” (Haddad 2016, 19).

This interaction and the space of the taxi cause a flashback to “the first time [Rasa] operated purely on instinct,” (Haddad 2016, 26).

In this flashback, Rasa is a barely pubescent fourteen years old, sitting in the back of a taxicab. In relation to queerness, Rasa appears close to outburst, stating, “I had no control over my destiny [at this time], and everything around me could suddenly die or run away,” (Haddad 2016, 26). These feelings stem from the death of his father and the abandonment of his mother of the family. This lack of control is mapped onto the space of the taxicab through the closeness that Rasa feels with the driver. He details, “The large veins running under his skin awoke a sensation inside me I had never felt before. I wanted to connect with him in some way, to be closer to him somehow,” (Haddad 2016, 27). This longing for commonality is mediated by anonymity inherent in interaction with taxi space. When Rasa innocently asks the driver about his muscles, the driver invites him to sit in the front of the car. Rasa muses, “I hesitated. It would be *eib* to say no, although it also felt *eib* to say yes,” (Haddad 2016, 27). We see that in between *eib*’s, the overarching power mechanism of society in Guapa, queer potential in transitory space is mediated. In other words, when societal expectations are confused in taxi space, queer potential arises.

This queer potential turns into queer action when the driver “put his thing in [Rasa’s] mouth,” (Haddad 2016, 29). The first sexual act in Rasa’s life occurs in taxi space precisely because of its potential to disregard societal power structures, rendering queer desire actionable. The anonymity of the taxi space, connected to its transversal character, also diminishes class divisions, and makes possible sexual action between an

adolescent from the Western suburbs and a young driver from Al-Sharquieh. Inherent in the social dynamic of the taxi is age and place; a boy of a certain age sits in the back, and a man in the front. When Rasa accepts the invitation to sit in the front seat, he tacitly understands that queer potential is connected with his position of a man. The breakdown of societal expectations around age and place further creates queer potential. Finally, the fact that they stop the taxi to engage in the sexual act further inscribes notions of queerness as tied to motion, and anonymous sexual action being both a root of queerness and merely one facet of a larger framework.

It is not by coincidence that the flashback comes directly after the initial taxi scene. Both scenes treat the factor of anonymity in different ways. In the first taxi scene, Rasa attempts to escape *towards* anonymity, but is pulled back into interaction by a clever quip of the driver. In the flashback, Rasa attempts to escape *from* anonymity, longing to feel human connection in space that holds strong social expectations of service and politeness. In either case, Rasa's queerness becomes clear as the social expectations of anonymity, mediated by *eib* push him closer to outburst.

### The Bedroom and Bathroom

An analysis of *Guapa* through a lens that queers space would not be complete without examining the contours of private space. Two of the most important private spaces in the novel are in Rasa's apartment: his bedroom and bathroom. The third of these private spaces I want to examine is Guapa itself, the bar that gives the novel its name. Each of the spaces in Rasa's house, which he shares with his grandmother, serves a different purpose related to privacy. The bedroom and the bathroom are complimentary

queer spaces within the novel. Each scene in Rasa's bedroom is indicative of his relationship with queer intimacy in relation to his lover, Taymour. The bathroom provides the ultimate sanctuary for Rasa, where he can be fully alone, and thus exist in his own world. The third space, Guapa, allows a form of collective privacy to the larger queer community present in the novel. Each of these private spaces provides windows into idealistic representations of queerness to be acted out in public.

The bedroom is introduced in *Guapa* as the space that Teta (what Rasa calls his grandmother) peered through, catching him and Taymour together. To describe the bedroom without describing the beginning of Rasa and Taymour's relationship would be incomplete. The first time they meet, the contours of their relationship are formed in queer spaces: Guapa, the car, and finally the bedroom. In Guapa, Rasa and Taymour meet initially, in the presence of Rasa's girlfriend. They meet as Rasa is at a crux in his relationship and life, deciding on whether he should live the life of a heterosexual or not. In the car, Taymour asks Rasa if their earlier companion was his girlfriend, and he says, "I suppose so, yes," and Taymour responds, "And yet you're in the car with me?" (Haddad 2016, 258). This queer admission in the transitory space of the car brings the unspoken attraction both have for each other into focus. Rasa invites Taymour into his house, where they drink whiskey in his bedroom. They spend all night talking, until the morning call to prayer rings out, and then proceed to "[descend] on each other" as "two souls suffering the same pain." (Haddad 2016, 262). The connection that they make is undoubtedly one that allows Rasa to feel complete as queer. The fatefulness of two queer men (souls) finding each other through a perfect storm of events, mediated between

private spaces, marks a queer potential realized in a moment away from Rasa's characteristic queer oscillation.

Rasa writes after being caught by his Teta, in a note intended for Taymour, "My room was our sanctuary. Otherwise it was rushed, in moving cars, as we struggled to drive with one hand and fool around with the other, always on dark streets. It was an exercise in logistics that settled cravings, rather than indulged them," (Haddad 2016, 115). In this way, the bedroom completes the queerness partially learned in the space of the taxicab for Rasa. He remarks that his private space is a space in which he can indulge craving, or move towards a queerness that is less oscillatory, intimate, and stable. The space of the bedroom is a stage that provides assimilatory happiness to Rasa, where the laws of *eib* do not apply. When his grandmother, the arbiter of *eib* in his life, invades that space, the space thereafter is permanently changed (Haddad 2016, 35).

The character of the bathroom is even more individual than that of the bedroom. It is a space where, in its total privacy, Rasa transforms inklings of queerness into personal reality. He first tests out words to match his queer feelings in his bathroom mirror, starting with *gay*, then moving on to those more in line with his Arab identity, trying *louti*, and then *khawal*. He narrates, "In the end, it all boiled down to the fact that I did not want to be different. I needed to belong somewhere, even if it was between the syllables of an obscure word in the dictionary," (Haddad 2016, 104). This most private space for Rasa becomes one where he attempts to fit himself into societal definitions. The space was one where he could reckon with reality and dream at the same time. Rasa details how the bathroom would become his space for masturbation later on (although it

is not described as such). It is no wonder that a space, which aided an adolescent Rasa in transforming the unclear into the concrete, becomes a space of masturbatory fantasizing.

The bathroom appears again as a site of respite in Rasa's home after *'eib* has invaded his bedroom. As he "sit[s] naked in the empty bathtub and sip[s] [his] iced Nescafé, smoke[s] Marlboros, and play[s] Candy Crush Saga on [his] phone," he embraces the private quality of the space imbued in his adolescence (Haddad 2016, 148). In a space where he was free to queerly fantasize as a child, about himself and others, Rasa now escapes reality. The boundary between reality and fantasy in the bathroom points to a mapping of the oscillation that defines Rasa's queerness throughout the novel, with anonymity usually correlating with fantasy and outburst as reckoning with reality. The private character of the bathroom allows anonymity for Rasa, but also acts a precursor to forms of outburst, or the move away from anonymity/fantasy to outburst/reckoning with reality.

#### Guapa: The Bar

The space of Guapa itself is critical to the queerness in the novel. The bar is owned by Nora, who also lives in the space which becomes converted afterhours into the "real Guapa". The real Guapa is the only Guapa ever described in detail in the novel. The basement bar attracts a wide range of queer clientele from across the city and the world, and acts as a center for queer spectacle, safe from the prying eyes of the government, *eib*, and straight people. The first time Guapa is mentioned in the novel it is in connection not to its queer character, but to the political discussions that occurred within it (Haddad 2016, 15). Its introduction as a space of political possibility before its introduction as a

queer space belies the political root of queerness that is examined and alluded to throughout the novel.

The bar operates as an open secret, which instills a higher form of privacy unto its clientele. When Taymour first goes to the bar with Rasa, he perceives this form of privacy as scary. Taymour says, “Are you sure there’s no one here who will recognize me?” Rasa says to him, “I’m positive. And even if they do, that would mean you would recognize them as well, so your secret would be safe,” (Haddad 2016, 127). This points to an implicit code of conduct that exists in Guapa, one that cannot be broken by any member. In other words, entering into the bar basement is tacitly acknowledging your own queer identity mediated through homosexual desire. Taymour responds to Rasa saying, “That’s not the point. It’s not that I want my secret safe, it’s that I don’t want anyone to know. No matter who they are,” (Haddad 2016, 127). Taymour relates to the privacy afforded by Guapa not as liberatory, but as confining, because the most private thing to him is his sexuality. While for Rasa, Guapa represents a space where he can exist in all of his identities without fear of retribution, placing Taymour in Guapa represents an admission to a queer public of his sexuality, regardless of how private and accepting of a space it may be.

The description of Maj’s performance inside Guapa is indicative of the liberatory potential of the space. He begins by stepping out of the bathroom in full niqab, with a print of Marilyn Monroe on the cloth covering his face, to the song “Genie in a Bottle”. Maj then proceeds to jump on a coffee table, continuing his performance there (Haddad 2016, 129). The ability to experiment with gender, religious symbols, sexuality, and proper notions of space are clear markers of Guapa as queer. Additionally, the space of

Guapa is characteristically queer in its “low imageability” and its reappropriation of domestic space (Reed 1996).

Guapa is read as queer in a twofold manner, stemming from the uncharacteristic appropriation of space as well as the use of that space to harbor official queer performance. Both of these defining characteristics interact with privacy in different ways. The fact that the space doubles as Nora’s bedroom suggests that the bedroom is private and safe (as we have seen with Rasa’s bedroom), and that there is a queer comfort in a merger of the domestic and the public realms. This queer comfort is possible because of the low imageability of the space, but also serves to further mark the space unintelligible to outsiders. This positive feedback loop against imageability is key to the maintenance of its privacy.

### Queer Boundaries of Space

Each space mentioned in this section is marked by its relationship to privacy and queerness, two interlocking factors in the novel. Public space, transitory space, semi-private, and private spaces examined here all retain queer characteristics whether or not a queer character is in contact with them. As I have shown, the spaces that inherently subvert societal norms, particularly those related to shame, are those that can be characterized as queer. When they come into contact with queer desire, the queer character of these spaces is further brought to light. In their interactions with these spaces and the people within them, the characters in the novel see queer potential and transform this into action.

## *Guapa* in Beirut: Maj and Georgette

The queer character of *Guapa* extends past the cityscape and country it presents to us. The location of the novel itself is queer when placed in the framework of reality, as it exists as a slightly reworked continuum of places, memories, historical events, cultures, and events. For example, many of the spaces and events that occur in the book have bearing in events in the queer collective memory in certain countries in the Middle East. Haddad further queers real events and locations by connecting new characterizations to their existence. In this section, I will analyze these spaces that make the novel intelligible to queer audiences, and further its concrete connections to the real world.

One of these spaces is the movie theater, present as an intersection of public morality mediated by the government and public space. In the novel, Rasa's best friend Maj becomes entrapped by the police in the movie theater while engaging in a homosexual act. The way that the novel treats this scene, and Maj's imprisonment in its wake indicates how semi-public spaces become queered within the text. However, it also connects the novel directly to a queer history outside of the text through its explicit reimagining and melding of real events. This insertion of real events places the characters in the novel into the queer history presented very deliberately.

Maj's absence dogs Rasa through the entire first part of the novel. When he finally is found, the call comes from a prison, confirming Rasa's worst fears. Maj had always presented as femme throughout his life, originally to Rasa's detriment, as they would be bullied when they were children together. However, at the time the novel was set, Rasa says, "It is rare to meet someone who cares so little about what others think of

him, and at the same time has an unwavering faith in the human race. I feel shame for many things, but my friendship with Maj is one of the few things in my life I am proud of,” (Haddad 2016, 123). Rasa’s friendship with Maj presents a concentration of queer possibility to the reader. He is unabashedly femme and politically active in public space. Maj says importantly, detailing the relationship between himself and Rasa, “How is a woman with her Armani bag, or a man who slams his bruised forehead down on the floor five times a day, or a police officer who walks around with his baton, puffing out his chest like a gorilla, any less of a performance than when I wear a wig and dance? We are all performing. The problem with *you*, Rasa, is that you want to integrate. But look around. There is nothing *real* to integrate into,” (Haddad 2016, 289). Haddad draws more clear parallels to queer theorist Judith Butler’s performance theory than anywhere else here. Maj constantly pushes Rasa to accept that he is in fact queer, in its destabilizing and antiassimilationist quality, rather than the queerness represented by Taymour.

I have laid out this characterization of Maj because it is integral in understanding his time in the spaces of the movie theater and prison. The movie theater in this context is being used as a space where men, who have no private spaces of their own to fulfill their homosexual desires, go to hook up.

Maj, although a less developed character, is in many ways a foil to Rasa. Because the oscillation between anonymity and outburst is reconfigured out of a framework of repression and into one of expression with Maj, his queerness is more easily read and understood. An outburst, with the same framework in mind, for Maj is a performance of “War-on-terror neo-Orientalist gender-fucking” in the basement of Guapa, (Haddad

2016, 128). His anonymity has repeatedly been rendered impossible by his femme gender performance, and thus outburst becomes his modus operandi. This outburst takes place in the streets just as much as it takes place in the basement of Guapa. The space of the movie theater serves as a continual troubling of the queer spectrum of anonymity and outburst under government surveillance. The spectrum is collapsed within the semi-public space of the movie theater, where the queer space intended to preserve anonymity becomes a site for the contestation of public morality.

This collapse is furthered in the space of the police station where Maj is literally stripped of his clothes, and has his queerness figuratively stripped down to bodily function with the egg test. If, in the space of the movie theater, Maj is rendered anonymous, in the police station he is rendered hyper-visible. Yet hyper-visibility under the government seems to conflate queerness with bodily function, which Maj understands is a false equivalency. It is not unintentional then, that Maj is foiled when at his most anonymous, within a space of anonymous character, yet emerges almost unshaken from the police station, with his (queer) spirit in tact. However, Rasa does note, “For the first time, I hear shame in his voice and can see it settling in his features,” (Haddad 2016, 144). Despite Maj’s publically queer persona, the social “tyranny of ‘*eib*” in connection with the government’s violent control over queer bodies breaks a part of him in a way only Rasa perceives.

In *Queer Beirut*, Sofian Merabet writes about various theaters around Beirut that were patronized by men who sought out sexual encounters with other men (Merabet 2014, 85). The people who frequented these theaters came from a diverse ethnic and

locational background, which ties in with the anonymity of the theater space being able to collapse normal social distinctions. During the Lebanese Civil War, men from warring militias joined in the space of one of the main theaters, Pavillion Theater in the basement of the Hotel Pavillion, to release. Many of the men who frequented the theater were “in their thirties or forties, [and] would rarely have use the English word *gay* to identify themselves,” (Merabet 2014, 85). The movie theater offered these men “an overall enclosed space of possibilities that had the capacity to run against any outside social prescription,” (Merabet 2014, 86),

In the novel, Maj describes his experience in the theater as such:

*“They got me in the bathroom stalls. I was with this guy, lives in Al-Sharquieh, gorgeous cock. Then the fuckers storm in. Not dressed in uniform or nothing. Looked like every other guy there. Lots of yelling, people running away. I guess they closed off the exits because they rounded us up like sheep. Up against the wall. Frisked. Said they were looking for ‘satanic paraphernalia.’”* (Haddad 2016, 284).

In congruence with the experience of men in theaters around Beirut, Maj experiences a flattening of social order within the theater, hooking up with a man from Al-Sharquieh. However, Haddad collapses the binary dynamic that Merabet details between the theater and the outside. Plain-clothed government forces in a raid penetrate the theater. This penetration turns what is a queer space for anonymous, habitual encounter into a space of outburst and shame.

Merabet describes similar police raids of queer club spaces in Beirut. When the police arrived at the club, “bright white spotlights were turned on,” and “terrified customers...stood there totally humiliated and in petrified anticipation,” (Merabet 2014, 230). The raid is conducted amidst a debate over public morality, centered in a fear of “devil worship” invading Lebanon (Merabet 2014, 228-230). In Haddad’s fictional account, the police use the same rationale to invade semi-private space that is known for being tolerant or permissive of queer interaction. The raid in the novel also begs comparison to similar police raids such as that of the “Queen Boat” in Egypt, where over 50 men were arrested and forced to prove their homosexuality under police custody (Whitaker 2006, 50).

The experience of proving one’s sexuality under the watch of government forces is examined in *Guapa* as well as *Queer Beirut*. In *Guapa*, Maj is hosed down with freezing water at the police station, has his legs pulled apart, and has an egg inserted between them (Haddad 2016, 143). When Maj tells Rasa of the incident, he notices, “...Something happened to [Maj]. Something [he’d] never seen before. For the first time, [he] hears shame in [Maj’s] voice and can see it settling in his features,” (Haddad 2016, 143-144). The same egg test is performed on Georgette, a friend of Merabet’s, in Beirut, except the context is different. Georgette has to go to a government doctor to see if he was fit for compulsory military service, but at the doctor he is read as effeminate, called a *luti*, made to strip naked, and then has an egg inserted between his butt cheeks, which proceeds to break into his anus and on his legs (Merabet 2014, 40).

The experiences of Georgette and Maj happened in markedly different contexts, yet each felt a deep and lasting shame in their aftermath. This seems to be indicative of

the meeting of queerness and government intervention. Both Georgette and Maj, who are not ashamed to be femme in public, and consequently to defy their societies' expectations for gender performance, experienced the deepest shame when their sexuality became subject to a physical test. In addition to the shame attached in being sexually assaulted by anyone, the egg test seems particularly laden with shame because it is a way for the government to exact power upon bodies that it does not consider whole or healthy. The government collapses the complexities of sexuality and gender expression to a test of anal virginity. This test represents the power of government spaces and forces to reduce queerness to the sexual, and reducing people who desire intimacy as a part of their queer identities to medicalized subjects. The "official" spaces where these tests are administered only serve to further the gap between the egg test and intimacy.

In both the novel and in Beirut, the subjects of the test emerge resilient. We see Maj returning to Guapa at the end of the novel, the area around his eyes shaded with kohl to hide his bruises (Haddad 2016, 354). In Beirut, Merabet notes, "Georgette continues to assert his presence even in those places where he was regarded negatively by people whose judgmental gawks he tried to ignore, even if always with difficulty. In an almost ironic way, the experience he went through at Fayadiyyeh barracks made him stronger...at least as far as his outside demeanor was concerned," (Merabet 2014, 41-42). The vein of strength that runs through both of these characters seems to be based in a mutual struggle against anti-queerness at the hands of the government. The power that they dredge up from the pits of embarrassment is a testament to their characters, and the commitment to maintenance of a queer femme public persona.

## Queerness Between the Lines

Queerness exists in the novel on an individual level, through the stories and actions of Maj, Rasa, and Taymour. It also exists on a spatial level, through Guapa, the taxicab, the movie theater, and the city itself. Yet, there are also signifiers of queerness built into the structure of *Guapa*. These include not appearing to adhere to chronology, and interweaving stories in ways that elucidate multiple, sometimes contradictory conclusions. The movement through scenes expands the framework of queer oscillation that works through the character Rasa, leading us to believe that outburst is possible in any prolonged moment of anonymity, and that a scene of outburst will be followed by a scene of anonymity.

For example, Haddad intersperses the scene in the taxi where Rasa has his first sexual experience with a modern scene in the taxi, after his grandmother caught him with Taymour. The memories of the events in the taxi during Rasa's childhood are triggered by characteristics of the space of the taxi themselves, namely the smell. Throughout this recollection, sensual elements are centered. He describes watching the muscles in the driver's arms tighten, which, "awoke a sensation in [himself] that [he] had never felt before," (Haddad 2016, 27). When Rasa performs the sexual act within the taxi space, the narrative focus is not upon the act, but the gestures, "the warm hand at the back of [his] neck," how he "swallowed a few more times until [his] mouth was wet," (Haddad 2016, 29-30).

Intersperse between guilt and taxi space is equally examined in both scenes. The connection between sensuality of the taxi space continues past the sexual encounter itself as Rasa mentions, "the gooey liquid in the back of [his] throat" in connection to telling

his grandmother a lie right before he comes back to the present, “smoky with cigarettes and summertime,” (Haddad 2016, 31). Upon his mental return, Rasa narrates his guilt about not being able to help refugees in his own country, all around him (Haddad 2016, 31).

The intersperse and flow between these two scenes, informed by sensuality vis a vis queerness, particularly that of the taxi space, informs the queer flow of the novel. Sensuality in form is invoked reflected from that directly present in the text. The flow between sensuality and guilt is equally indicative of the queer and sexual potential of taxi space, rendering said space full of masochistic urge. Yet this specific flow also bridges a gap between expressions of sexuality and citizenship, and how oppression touches those inside and outside the taxi.

#### ‘Eib

The apparatus of control, mediated by Taymour, that Rasa applies to his own presentation as queer belies his constant oscillatory struggle between anonymity and outburst. Control of his presentation predicates his own safety, and as shown in many scenes mentioned in this chapter, safety becomes a guiding principle across spaces in the novel. The guiding form of social control throughout the novel is presented as *eib*. The novel begins with the meeting of queerness, private space, and *eib*. In the space where Rasa feels safest, the arbiter of *eib*, Teta, intervenes. The contours of *eib*, safety, and space are where queer conclusions arise in *Guapa*.

Throughout the novel, notions of privacy are contrasted with the fear of being uncovered, or outed. In this way, the initial incident taints the entire experience of the

novel, despite its chronological place after most of the other events. The fear of being outed is coupled with discussions around *'eib*, which Haddad ties explicitly to Arab identity. He writes, “The implication of *eib* is *kalam il-nas*, what will people say, and so the word carries an element of conscientiousness, a politeness brought about by a perceived sense of communal obligation,” (Haddad 2016, 35). In this way, *'eib* acts as a preserver of safety through constant social regulation. However, *'eib* itself is malleable, and can be used as a social tool by those that it constrains, such as Rasa. He says, “...if worn correctly, the cloak of *'eib* is large and malleable enough to allow you to conceal many secrets and to repel intrusive questions,” (Haddad 2016, 36). The reappropriation of a tool of social control to preserve safety is recognizably and importantly queer in this context.

### The Novel's End

The conclusion of *Guapa* takes place at the wedding of Rasa's best friend from college in America and Taymour. This arrangement is hinted at throughout the book but is finally revealed as Rasa and Basma are en route in Basma's car. The wedding is a clear comment on the politics of queer assimilation by Saleem Haddad. This is especially apparent as the wedding scene is contrasted with the final scene, where Rasa meets up with Maj at sunrise and they both head to Guapa.

The climax of the novel, if one were to have to be chosen, would be the last scene at the wedding. Rasa, in an ejaculatory moment between *eib's* and in highly heteronormative space, is forced away from anonymity by social function, which he sees rightfully as false and contrived. The assimilatory power of the wedding is masked by the

knowledge that the marriage is arranged and that Taymour is Rasa's lover. The confusion surrounding the contours of mental and physical space at the wedding, which had been so in line in his bedroom, pushes Rasa towards outburst. What comes to a head is that Rasa knows so much yet cannot say anything, and this is mediated through the space of the wedding hall.

At the end of the night, Rasa fights with a childhood bully of his at the wedding who ended up working for the government, and pushes him into a fountain, creating a large spectacle (Haddad 2016, 324). This show of drunken retribution represents a pole of Rasa's queerness that had been teased at throughout the novel, but had not been acted upon explicitly. Yet, inherent in this outburst is the notion of its opposite, that the violence that is enacted on Rasa, and all those that suffer under the friendly but bullying arm of the government, is much greater than the spectacle of pushing this man into a fountain. The public spectacle is a culmination and a show, put on for Taymour because he can be the only one who knows how Rasa felt. The spectacle, a way of being noticed for Rasa, bridges the gap between mental and physical space, queer public space and private space, and ends the relationship between the two men on terms with which they are both familiar.

In the aftermath of the incident, Rasa gets up to leave, but Taymour stops him before he makes it out of the door. Rasa says:

*“Habibi. I'm so sorry.”*

*Taymour shakes his head. “You can't call me that here.”*

*[Rasa smiles]. “But that's what you are. My habibi.”*

*Taymour's mask begins to crack. "Please," he whispers. "I beg you to stop calling me that. Can't you see what it's doing to me?"*" (Haddad 2016, 325).

The spectacle of this interaction, with Taymour being the center of attention as the groom, almost seems impossible in this space. The intense privacy of their interaction seems more a comment on the failure of queerness as publically accepted identity in the novel, rather than a reflection of earnest reality.

Rasa had before proved his position as an unreliable narrator, detailing an entire story about a sexual escapade with this boy in college in America, only to refute the entire story as a lie a few pages later (Haddad 2016, 223). When Haddad writes, "Taymour's mask begins to crack", the visual of a carefully groomed public persona falling apart at the hands of outburst in tightly regulated heteronormative space and in the face of multiple *'eibs*, is rendered queer. This queer expression may or may not be real, but to Rasa, who holds the interpersonal as sacred, it is as real as anything else he narrates in the novel.

### Roots of Queerness

With queerness being examined throughout as both indigenous and Western, and with no one really knowing the source of this mysterious identity and lifestyle that everyone in the novel is touched by or experiences for themselves, the novel can be read equally as a comment on hegemonic power and the (queer) discourses it produces. The conversation in the space of Guapa that Maj, Nora, and Rasa have, very close to the end of the novel, is indicative of the tyranny of multiple discourses in producing stable

identities. I include the entire section below because of its importance as an entire conversation:

*“Nora raises a finger in the air. “Just because someone is religious does not make them against gay people. Many are simply against a rigid framework of sexuality imposed by the West. Those who oppose homosexuality without distinction are misreading the Quran.”*

*“That is not true,” I argue. “Remember the story of the Prophet Lot? Islam explicitly condemns homosexuality, and any so-called progressive cleric who suggests otherwise is delusional.”*

*Maj laughs. “By the very nature of being a religious cleric they must be delusional. Besides, Islam or not, there is a long acceptance of homosexuality by Arab society that stretches back to the pre-Islamic period. It was those prudish Victorians who spoiled the party.”*

*“And you’re wrong Rasa,” Nora says. “When God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, it was not because of homosexuality, it was about lustful acts in general, and criminality, and general debauchery, really...”*

*“Much like Guapa...” Maj quips.*

*“Yes, much like Guapa. Make no mistake, if there’s a hell we’re burning in it.”*

*“This conversation is my idea of hell,” I say,” (Haddad 2016, 285).*

The conversation is Rasa's idea of hell because he realizes his identity, as an infirm, untethered, queer formation, can never be located firmly in his culture, in his religion, even among his friends.

## Conclusions

*Guapa* is read as a queer novel because, "Queer becomes truly universal precisely at the moment when it's targeted for elimination as a perverse, impure, community-destroying anomaly. Paradoxically, the universal reach of queer is only underscored by its motivation of the very 'acting out' that seeks to eradicate it," (Penney 2014, 14). In its examination of the oscillation between anonymity and outburst through the lens of the queer narrator, *Guapa* gets at the dialectic of precision and reaction that produces and contains within it queerness.

The hype surrounding the novel among my friends in Amman can possibly be understood through the novel's treatment of several, compound issues, and through its queer characterization and form. Like many of the characters in the novel, my friends in Amman had the opportunity to complete some of their education abroad. Yet, this obviously cannot explain fully the connections between the characters and the Ammani readers. The novel's relationship to my friend's lives, as well as events from *Queer Beirut* render it worthy of analysis in the context of queer subject's lived experience. Hopefully in my chapter examining the cancellation of the Mashrou' Leila concert, and in my conclusions, I will be able to pinpoint connections between lived experience and identity that connect back to the novel and the fanfare it inspired.

## Chapter Three: Cancelling Mashrou' Leila in Amman

Around a month before my stay in Jordan ended, I was informed by Laith that the band Mashrou' Leila would be coming to Amman. It was not the first time that the band had come up in conversation. He, and many others from my group of friends, including some Americans on my program, had expressed deep admiration for them. I decided I would take a listen, and Laith recommended the band's last album, "Ibn El Leil" to me. I listened, but was surprisingly not taken with the music. I thought maybe it was because I didn't understand the lyrics, or because the tune itself wasn't relatable to me? Regardless of my feelings towards the music, the next week, I discovered that the band was coming to play a show at the Roman Amphitheater, and that it could not be missed. I dedicated myself to listening again and again to their albums. I partially did it to better understand the Arabic in which they were singing, but also to better understand if there was something I was missing beyond translation. As soon as I could, I went to Turtle Green, which functioned as an official ticket selling station, and bought a ticket to the concert. What ensued over the next few weeks was a spectacle that caught the attention of those far outside the boundaries of Amman.

In this chapter, I will first introduce the band and its history, stemming from its creation at the American University of Beirut until the present. I will then examine the uproar from the government, my friends, and the Jordanian people in general surrounding the cancellation of the band's concert at the Roman Amphitheater. In the next section, I will connect Mashrou' Leila's lyrics to local and global currents of queerness, examining discourses of authenticity in relation to public spectacle and public space. Finally, I will

conclude by discussing personal and observed connections between expressions of queerness and public space.

### The Band

Mashrou' Leila, which has multiple meanings in English, is most often translated as "The Night Project". Leila is a common female name in the Arabic speaking world. It also references "Layla and Majnun", one of Arab literatures most famous works (Tsioulcas 2016). The multiple meanings of the band's name hint at the extensive wordplay in their lyrics. The band was formed in 2008 as a result of a series of jam sessions at the American University of Beirut (Tsioulcas 2016). After their formation, they quickly went on to win the Radio Liban Modern Music Contest's juried and popular prize, which landed them a recording contract with the label Incognito (I want to be Leila, 2009). Hamed Sinno, who is openly gay, leads the five-part band (Tsioulcas 2016).

Mashrou' Leila has released four albums to date, and performed across the world. The political character of their lyrics bleeds into their performance, and they do not shy away from provocation. At one concert they performed their song "Al Hajez" (At the Checkpoint) in front of the Prime Minister Saad Hariri, which included lyrics within it that called him a "fucker" (Von Aue 2014). The band's lyrics are political, sexual, and far from the mainstream pop music that populates the airwaves in their native Lebanon. These lyrics, which I will delve more into later in this chapter, involve issues surrounding gender and sexuality, which have caused outburst in the past. Of this controversy, Hamed Sinno says, "[we] just sing about what matters to [our] generation. We go down those roads when we feel it's necessary," (Salfiti 2013).

The context for the emergence of the band was political itself, coinciding with the Arab Spring. Thus, the lyrics and style of their music have changed over time, from their emergence during the beginnings of the uprising to 2016. In a 2013 profile by the Guardian, a companion to the release of their third album “Raasük”, the author writes, “On Mashrou' Leila's early records, you can hear Sinno's voice heavily filtered through what sounds like a speakerphone, as though the band were literally at a protest, perhaps even in Egypt's Tahrir Square,” (Salfiti 2013). The band’s popularity comes from their sound as well as their willingness to tackle topics that are important to younger generations in the Middle East.

### The Incident

*“We respectfully ask the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to reconsider its stance towards our message, and our art, and urge the Kingdom to choose fighting alongside us, not against us, during this ongoing battle for a culture of freedom against the regressive powers of thought control and cultural coercion.”<sup>14</sup>*

*- Excerpt from the statement released by Mashrou' Leila upon the cancellation of their concert by the Jordanian government*

The members of Mashrou' Leila are no strangers to controversy, usually located in their native Lebanon. The band’s experience playing in public spaces, many of which have historic, cultural, and political significance, has most often been framed through

---

<sup>14</sup> .Mashrou' Leila." Facebook. April 26, 2016 "مَشْرُوع لَيْلَى"  
<https://www.facebook.com/mashrou3leila/posts/10153568551603806:0>. (April 1, 2017).

their overwhelming popularity. Their fan base is large, fervent, and young, a fact that I learned firsthand in Amman. Despite their lyrics, which challenge not only the government, but in many cases the social order, they are festival staples across the Middle East. Just in the summer of 2016, they played two separate festivals in Lebanon and one in Tunisia.<sup>15</sup> By the time they were slated to play at the Roman Amphitheater in Amman, they had already played there three times, each time to a large audience (Halabian 2016).

In the weeks before the concert, the fervor surrounding the impending arrival of the band was palpable. The event often dominated conversations, and served as an active diversion from the schoolwork that all of us were suffering with. We would often sit in Turtle Green, sip coffee, smoke cigarettes, intermittently do work, and discuss which member of Mashrou' Leila each of us had the best chance with. As a neophyte to the world of Mashrou' Leila, I was not versed in the individual personalities of the band members as my friends were. As the date got nearer, the fervency of our discussion grew, and the fantasies became more elaborate. We all spoke about how we were going to position ourselves close to the front so that we could catch Hamed Sinno's eye and invite him back to Laith's house for an after party. There was half-joking half-real fantasy talk of a massive orgy with the band members, with each one of us getting a piece of each one of them. Laith told us that he was going to bring his rainbow gay pride flag, which was somehow disguised to look more like a country flag, and wave it in the air so the band members could see him. The concert was a promise for my friends not only of musical release, but a projection of queer fantasy in public. The fervor leading up to the concert

---

<sup>15</sup> "Mashrou' Leila - Mashrou' Leila ". <http://www.mashrouleila.com/#tour>. مشروع ليلى.

allowed my friends to imagine a queer space on multiple planes: musical, sexual, social, lyrical, contextual and physical.

I remember walking into Turtle Green and knowing something was wrong. My friends normally had a frenetic spirit about them, but this time the frenzy was marked by a sadness and anger I had not seen previously. Laith was the first to tell me that there was no more concert because the government had abruptly cancelled it. The next few days were some of the most hectic I experienced in my time at Jordan, with protest and dissent constantly in the air, and anger marked by repeated trips to the bar combined with a lingering depression.

In the wake of the initial decision, a string of articles came out, first in the Jordanian press, then in the global press. The widely reported statement made by the government to the band was that the “performance clashes with the historic heritage of the site,” (Ziber 2016). Yet, the primary and most trusted source of information came directly from the band, in two separate Facebook posts, three days apart. They clarified in the first post on April 26<sup>th</sup> regarding the cancellation, “Our understanding is that said authorities have pressured certain political figures and triggered a chain of events that ultimately ended with our authorization being withdrawn. We also have been unofficially informed that we will never be allowed to play again anywhere in Jordan due to our political and religious beliefs and endorsement of gender equality and sexual freedom” (Mashrou’ Leila, Facebook 2016). This clarification magnified the distrust between the band, its fans, and their representative governments.

By highlighting the contrast between what the band was officially and unofficially told, they intentionally attempt to provoke public outrage against practices they determine to

be uncouth. They even preface the previous statement by saying, “Informally, the story is much more problematic,” (Mashrou’ Leila, Facebook 2016). This outrage was undoubtedly rendered potent because the direct, unfiltered words of the band, like its lyrics, attempt to shift power to populations that have been marginalized or made invisible by state and social forces. In the face of the cancellation of this event, Mashrou’ Leila’s Facebook post was not only a statement of dissent, it was a queer call to arms.

After the initial Facebook post on April 26<sup>th</sup>, rumors about event continued to be spread. There were murmurings that the event wasn’t really cancelled, that all the international pressure from media organizations was forcing the Jordanian government into a tight spot. There were even brief moments of hope in the three days between April 26<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> where people believed that the Antiquities Department of the Jordanian government would apologize, repeal the ban, and all would be harmonious once again. A general sadness and disbelief, connected to the form of queer possibility presented by the concert, marked these three days.

A Facebook page titled in Arabic, “Bedna Leila Fi Amman” or “We want Leila in Amman” was formed on April 26<sup>th</sup>. The initial intention of the group was to rally people to gather at the Roman Amphitheater at 4pm on the day the concert was supposed to take place. At the time of my writing, 1,300 people said “attending” on the event page, and a further 3.3 thousand said “interested”.<sup>16</sup> The sheer number of people who said that they would attend a public protest in support of Mashrou’ Leila, who had just denounced “the systemic prosecution of voices of political dissent... systemic prosecution of advocates of sexual and religious freedom... [and] the censorship of artists anywhere in the world,” sent a powerful

---

<sup>16</sup> "بَدْنَا لَيْلَى فِي عَمَّانِ" Facebook. April 26, 2016.  
[https://www.facebook.com/events/877582632377366/?active\\_tab=about](https://www.facebook.com/events/877582632377366/?active_tab=about). (March 29, 2017).

message to the government (Mashrou' Leila, Facebook 2016). A Change.org petition was started alongside the planned protest, titled "Let Mashrou' Leila Play in Amman, which 1,778 supporters signed to this day.<sup>17</sup>

The result of all of this pressure, from inside and outside the country, was detailed by the band as a letter of approval for the concert, sent by the Governor of Amman, and endorsed by the ministry of interior.<sup>18</sup> This was announced by the band via Facebook at the end of a long post criticizing the Jordanian government for their lack of nuance regarding freedom of speech, art criticism, and plurality. They follow this admission by stating, "However, the approval was sent too late for us to still be able to play the concert, as it was issued after the Ministry of Tourism was closed, meaning the organisers would not be able to possibly secure the venue in time, let alone reorganise the entire event in 24 hours," (Mashrou' Leila, Facebook 2016). This admission effectively ended the semi-blind hope that we had been operating on between the 26<sup>th</sup> and the 29<sup>th</sup>. In concert with the proclamations on government that came before the admission of defeat, the entire statement resonated among my friends as a bitter moment. Even the final admission from the band regarding the incident, a statement of thanks to the Jordanian people, was not enough to make any of them hopeful about their country, and themselves within it.

---

<sup>17</sup> "Mashrou' Leila play in Amman." Change.org. April 27, 2016 (مَشْرُوع لَيْلَى (Let: وزارة السياحة والآثار: [https://www.change.org/p/وزارة-السياحة-والآثار-let-مَشْرُوع-mashrou-لَيْلَى-leila-play-in-amman?source\\_location=petition\\_nav](https://www.change.org/p/وزارة-السياحة-والآثار-let-مَشْرُوع-mashrou-لَيْلَى-leila-play-in-amman?source_location=petition_nav). (March 29, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Facebook. April 28, 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/mashrou3leila/posts/10153572373778806:0>. (March 29, 2017).

Lyrical Imaginations in Public Space: Al-Mudarraaj Al-Romani

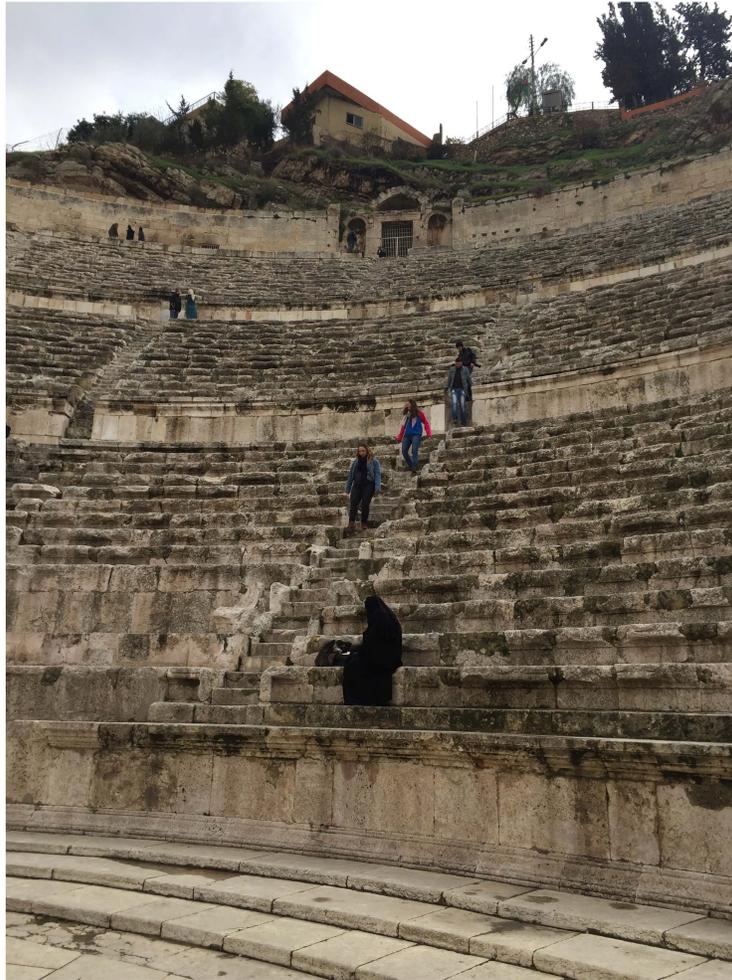


Photo by the Author

*“They wrote the country’s borders (upon my body;  
upon your body)*

*In flesh-ligatured-words*

*My word upon your word (as my body upon your body)*

*Flesh-conjugated-words*

*You feel me feeling what you feel*

*So why all the shame? Just feel what you feel.*<sup>19</sup>

*- Lyrical Excerpt from Kalam (S/He) off the album Ibn El Leil by Mashrou' Leila*

It is not without irony that the members of Mashrou' Leila are all former architecture and design students (I want to be Leila 2009). Haim Papazian, the violinist comments, "Maybe because we were architecture students, we have this thing, this different perception of relations with the city. Beirut gives you a lot of inspiration," (I want to be Leila 2009). Sofian Merabet examines the city space of Beirut in depth, especially in conjunction with queerness and national history. Beirut's physical space has to a large extent been defined by the Lebanese civil war, which destroyed wide swaths of the city. The war ended in 1990, and the new Lebanese regime began to rebuild Beirut to different ends, residential, touristic, and pleasurable.

Downtown (pronounced with an emphasis on the D and T) was one of the main public spaces that was rebuilt following the civil war. It was "one of the few public places in prewar Lebanon with a decidedly mixed ethno-religious pedigree," (Merabet 2014, 24). This character proved detrimental during war, making it prone to extended shelling. In the summer of 2001, a rebuilt Downtown was opened, and with it a reimagined past physically mapped onto the present. This rebuilding/reimagining effort reconfigured the contours of public and private space, and precipitated the creation of "zones of encounter" (Merabet 2014, 24-26). Merabet defines these zones of encounter as particular urban locations that "foster attempts... to transcend spatio-temporal fixities," (Merabet 2014, 5). The people that inhabit these zones of encounter mark them queer

---

<sup>19</sup> Leila, Mashrou' "Ibn el leil / son of the night." Ibn el leil / son of the night. <https://www.ibnelleil.com/>.

with how they specifically perform in relation to each other. The layout of public space in Beirut and its queer contours undoubtedly influenced the band's style and their lyrical content.

### The Amphitheater

My fifteen-year-old host brother in my house in Jordan would hang out at the Roman Amphitheater on the rare occasion his parents would let him see friends afterschool. The first time I ever stepped foot there, I could see why it was somewhere my host parents deemed safe for him. It was guarded, touristic, open faced, and defied gravity. It would allow any straggler or group thereof to have a degree of freedom from the city around them, to hide in plain sight. I saw a woman in niqab praying at the steps, groups of boys sitting, or jumping dangerously around, some far younger than my host brother. The space itself disrupted the city around it, and in this quality, became a unique zone of encounter.

The Roman Amphitheater in Amman was originally built during the reign of Antonius Pius, between 138 and 161CE in the Roman city of Philadelphia.<sup>20</sup> In Roman times, this theater served as the centerpiece of the city of Philadelphia, and was used mainly for theater showcases. Interestingly, the amphitheater's role in Roman times was highly classed. The first amphitheater was built in the imperial capital, Rome, in 55BC, after much debate regarding the potential impacts on public morality it would have. (Artsnap). The amphitheaters were built with social programming in mind, with "substructures serving as passageways to the appropriate seating section that assured inappropriate intermingling never occurred," (Artsnap).

---

<sup>20</sup> "Jordan - Touristic Sites - Amman." Kinghussein.gov.jo. <http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/tourism1.html>.

### The Lyrics

Much of what specifically drove the controversy surrounding Mashrou' Leila's performance were the lyrics of Djin, a song off their album Ibn El Leil. The chorus of the song relies heavily on the interplay between the Arabic word "djinn", commonly translated as "devil" or "evil spirit", and gin. A four-line sequence in the song reads,

"Liver baptized in gin,  
I dance to ward off the djinn.  
Drown my liver in gin,  
In the name of the father and the son."

(Mashrou' Leila 2016, Ibn El Leil).

The chorus undoubtedly caused much of the controversy among the Christian community in Jordan, as the father and the son are evoked. Yet, the true threat inherent in this lyric is the queer reimagining of a religious concept (djinn), with a ritual of bodily movement replacing prayer.

The last section of the song goes,

"But hangovers hurt  
Far less than these woes.  
Between myself and my joy,

A wall as thick as a wine glass;  
Berlin's could not stand;  
Pour me another; tear down the wall."

(Mashrou' Leila 2016, Ibn El Leil).

These words contain multitudes, as the majority of Mashrou' Leila's lyrics do. However, in the context of the incident, they appear even more curious, powerful, and queer. The song appears to be about a struggle with finding happiness in escape, whether it is into the night, alcohol, religion, or nature. In what I feel is the saddest part of the entire incident, the lyrics that were interpreted as satanic by the government and religious forces were truthfully about the loneliness inherent in queerness (Pickett 2002).

The lyrics that start off the song, which were those read as "satanic" by the Jordanian religious authorities, incredibly paradoxically, refer to society as a whole. They go,

"We keep watch from the forest moon,  
Drink from the gazelle's heart,  
Draw stakes into the ground,  
To draw wine from the spring.  
All the women and the men  
Arrive shrouded in hides,  
Awaiting he who dies,

And then returns to life.  
We heed the wisdom of the vines;  
Vines guard all wisdom of life.  
We relinquish self,  
But the god is with us.”

(Mashrou Leila 2016, Ibn El Leil).

By using the pronoun we, Hamed Sinno places himself in this society. For the remainder of the song, the singer uses the pronoun “I” to elicit the personal dimension this society inflicts upon him. Thus, in condemning the satanic lyrics of the song, the government engages with Mashrou’ Leila’s queering of the satanic. There is a knowing inherent the lyrical content of Djin that subliminally confirms the criticisms of the government. It is made clear that there is no solution for the woes that the singer details, yet he returns to habitual and self-harming actions to mask this inevitability. Yet still, the escapism provides endlessly seductive. This interplay between escapism and the inevitability of loneliness is something even the government cannot control.

With the act of calling out the lyrics, the government recognizes and bolsters its power. In its confirmation of the subversive nature of the lyrics, the government affirms queerness as subversive. In the bands second statement, they write,

“We had not realized that the ministry had such a penchant for cultural criticism and poetic analysis, given their more frequent artistic choices, which some would regard as populist. What we see here is superficial cultural criticism, simple, reductive, and basing itself on the extraction of certain words from their structural context within their songs, and then from their figurative framework as metaphors. The critic then offers a simplistic analysis of the song, stripping the writer from his freedom to use metaphor within the texts, to conclude that the writer is a satanist. At best, this is faulty art criticism, and at worst, and most realistically, it is the undemocratic slander of the band members, whereby the critic doesn’t even inquire into the band’s intentions by referring to the artist's own statements.” (Mashrou Leila, Facebook 2016).

The simple importance of the band’s statement notwithstanding, what is brought to light here is that the rhetoric of “Jordanian traditions and customs” erases the artistic nuance so present in Mashrou’ Leila’s lyrics, as well as the queerness that runs as current through this nuance. The delineation of the government’s use of power to eradicate nuance acts as a clear criticism, and in that character transversely proposes a guideline for a better government. This duality is consistent with that in the cultural practice of “throwing shade”.

### The Shade

Shade is defined by Merriam-Webster as, “a subtle, sneering expression of contempt for or disgust with someone—sometimes verbal, and sometimes not,” (Merriam Webster 2017). The genealogy of the word stretches from the cotton fields of the

American South to RuPaul's Drag Race, a television show centered on drag culture popular in the queer community (all of my Gay friends in Jordan were big fans). Anna Holmes writes, "Shade has always been subversive. It has roots in slave culture, in the development of what [Professor E. Patrick Johnson] calls the techniques that evolved to allow African-Americans a measure of assertiveness despite being in constant physical and psychological peril," (Holmes 2015). The practice, rooted in Black American suffering, can now be read as a global tactic used by the marginalized to defend and deflect. Yet, it has also become cultural code and object, easily translated from one marginalized culture to another. In this respect, throwing shade challenges the dominant order. In practicing shade in the release of their statements, Mashrou' Leila accesses a language the government may not be familiar with, but that many of their fans will be. Their statements are consistent with their lyrics in this way, and uncompromisingly queer in respect to Eve Sedgwick's definition.<sup>21</sup>

The discussion of shade brings into light the shifting currents of power that marginalized people have access to. The Arab Spring put the importance of social media's inherent organizing potential into focus. Charles W. Anderson writes, "Where the classic objective of revolution has been to seize state power and unseat old regimes, youth and other constituencies engaging in "horizontal practice" partake in, and help to create, a broader and less top-heavy vision of how to make meaningful political change and begin to deconstruct and remedy some of the pathologies of authoritarianism," (Anderson 2013, 154). The space of the Internet, particularly Facebook and Twitter provided an important platform for the organization of a collective resistance against the

---

<sup>21</sup> See the section titled "The Uses of Space in Guapa" for this definition.

ban of the concert. The response to this call for collective resistance brought to light some of the “pathologies” of governance in Jordan. The collective resistance provided a part of the eventual coalition that forced the government’s hand in revoking the ban, even if it could not ultimately get Mashrou’ Leila to Amman.

The Facebook event that was planned, called “Bedna Layla Fii Amman”, never actually happened on the day of the cancelled concert. However, the organizing potential that surrounded the event concurrently brought a debate that was historically waged in private space, if at all, into public. The aim was to overtake the public space of the Roman Amphitheater, in some form mixing revolt for the government with the celebration of Mashrou’ Leila. In addition, the space of Twitter was used to promote hashtag campaigns calling for the revocation of the ban. Within hours of the decision to ban the group, Mashrou’ Leila was trending on Twitter, with the hashtags, “Bedna Leila Fii Amman”, “Mashrou’ Leila”, “Ad’am Leila” (I Support Leila), and “Ibn El Leil Fii Amman” being the most popular, each one appearing in thousands of tweets (Al Bawaba 2016).

Many of the tweets, as well as posts in the discussion on the Facebook page for “Bedna Leila Fii Amman”, utilized playful repositionings of the bands lyrics in order to situate the meaning in context of the incident itself. Yasser Alfayoumi commented on the Facebook page on April 26<sup>th</sup> a selection of lyrics from Mashrou’ Leila’s song “Inni Mnih” which read, in translation, “Let’s burn this city/and build a more honorable one/and let’s forget this age.”<sup>22</sup> Mohammed Al Nori commented lyrics from the song, Wa Noeid (And We Repeat), “We can open our eyes, when they throw dust in them, tell them

---

<sup>22</sup> Comment on discussion in Bedna Leila Fii Amman’s Facebook Event Page, April 26, 2016 (9:53 PM), <https://www.facebook.com/events/1093269790724416/>. (April 1, 2017). Translation by the author.

we still see.”<sup>23</sup> On Twitter, a user under the handle @siwarLeila commented part of the lyrics to Falyakon (So be it), writing, “But dress me up in smiles/Joy becomes me/Whatever will be, just may be, I’ll still be/Standing here singing my melody,” followed by a #bedna\_Leila\_b’Amman and a picture of the band standing together and smiling.<sup>24</sup> These are just a few examples picked out of the dozens of posts that used the band’s lyrics as political rallying cries. However, from these, one can glean the impact Mashrou’ Leila’s lyrics have with their fans in their ability to be used as political tools. The lyrics are often diatribes against the government, but in this case, they are also *used* as a tool of dissent against the government, mediated through social media. These uses bring into focus the immutable and translatable shade inherent in Mashrou’ Leila’s lyrics.

### The Sacred

The incident also brought into focus the role of religion in the public sphere, and how it mediates debate surrounding public morality in Jordan. One of the proponents of the ban, Father Rif’at Bader, the director of the Catholic Center for Studies and Media in Amman wrote on his Facebook page that the “band was supposed to perform on Great Friday,” a sacred holiday for Jordanian Catholics (Azzeh 2016). He added, “...no investment or tourism is allowed at the expense of morality, culture and respecting religions,” (Azzeh 2016). The governor of Amman reformulated these words when he stated that the band’s songs “contain lyrics that do not comply with the nature of Jordanian society,” (Azzeh 2016). In delivering the remarks on the concert at the behest

---

<sup>23</sup> Comment on discussion in Bedna Leila Fii Amman’s Facebook Event Page, April 27, 2016 (4:18 AM), <https://www.facebook.com/events/1093269790724416/>. (April 1, 2017). Translation by the author.

<sup>24</sup> @siwarLeila, Twitter Post, April 28, 2016, 4:50am, <https://twitter.com/siwarLeila/status/725653396775161856>. (April 1, 2017). Translation provided by <https://www.ibnelleil.com/>. Transliteration of the hashtag by the author.

of religious figures in Jordan, the governor rearticulates “morality, culture, and respecting religions” as a Jordanian state mandate.

The disparity in power between religious and political forces in Jordan and queer subjects was made apparent by the spread of information around this event. The cancellation of the concert was mediated between religious figures and governmental figures, with members of Mashrou’ Leila only finding out after the Ministry of Antiquities sent a letter to Citarra, the organizer, stating that the performance “clashes with the heritage of the historic site,” (7iber 2016). In the midst of all this, the public was left confused and had to find out directly from the band that it had been cancelled. The authorities abilities to cancel the concert at such a late date without informing the public challenged the power of the public in Jordan, and in particular a queer public.

The sacred mediates discourse in public space, and, as I have previously stated, Mashrou’ Leila queer the sacred in their lyrics. At the core of this queering of the sacred is a threat to power, reiterating their queerness as troublant. The connection between the sacred apparent in the band’s lyrics and the religious figures that seek to ban their performance is mediated through the practice of shade, which is used to queer the sacred and the government through a productive series of undercuts.

### New Spaces

Mashrou’ Leila’s lyrics and artistic style, much of which is heavily influenced by the events of the Arab Spring, calls into question the authoritarian characteristics of their Lebanese government, as well as those throughout the wider Middle East. Alternative public spaces are queered in tandem with the production of global and regional

discourses around queer assertion in public space. The Internet, in places where it is readily available, provides a forum marked by indeterminate public or private character, for queer people to assert their (political) presence. In *Queer Beirut*, Sofian Merabet writes of the Internet chatroom (in a world before Grindr and Tinder's mobile hegemony), where gay men would talk to each other. He profiles a conversation two interlocutors had in the chatroom, which reveals the platform as, "a site of projections and dreams that, for the most part, are impossible to realize," (Merabet 2014, 60). This impossibility is similarly present in regards to the public protest planned. Much of the posting on the Facebook page and Twitter involved a reimagining of personal utility, articulated through queer channels, including the throwing of shade. In this role, Facebook and Twitter, read as public space, have major roles in deconstructing borders forced upon the marginalized.

### Conclusions

Laith told me that he wanted to leave Jordan after the concert got cancelled. He said that he was happy to defend his country to people before the event, but now, there was no defense he deemed credible. He now understood his government to be hostile to basic freedom of speech, gay identity notwithstanding. The event marked a crux in Laith's understanding of his relationship to his country, and I am sure he is not the only one who experienced this.

There is an understated irony in the fact that Mashrou' Leila was banned from performing in a site firmly rooted in pre-Islamic history for producing lyrics deemed offensive to Abrahamic religions, and thus Jordanian values, customs, and traditions. The incident put into spotlight the unique position of those citizens who exist outside the

borders of normativity have in changing social relations. The social media related discourses revealed around the time of the Arab Spring, the cultural object of “throwing shade”, and the lyrical content of Mashrou’ Leila all channel queer, global paths of information that inform queer participation in public space. In all likelihood, the government paradoxically created a larger event than what ever would have been if Mashrou’ Leila were to have merely performed. Even though the event itself failed, the convergence of this current of symbols, in opposition to a government that proved hostile to understanding, served to queer the Roman Amphitheater *in absentia*.

A couple of weeks after April 29<sup>th</sup> had come and gone, Laith and I went to Citarra’s offices at a business park in Jabal Amman to get our 20 dinar tickets refunded. The moment was truthfully one of the most bittersweet I had experienced in all my time in Jordan. I took a taxi to the address Laith provided me, and walked out into a space far removed from that of the Roman Amphitheater. The business park was sprawling, with giant buildings filled with offices for some of the biggest companies in Jordan. Some of the offices looked no different from those one would expect from a tech start-up in New York. The architectural modernization, as well as the number of young people around, spoke to me of a Jordan I had only begun to experience in the past few days. It was a Jordan that made me realize I had been experiencing culture shock for some months.

I sensed Laith was out of sorts when we met, so I suggested we sit in the pavilion at the center of the park and have lunch. During the lunch, we spoke extensively about how sad it was that the event had gotten cancelled, and that we were at this business park, of all places, instead of the Amphitheater. The lunch, the sun, and the shiny, chrome gloss of the buildings could not mask the dark pallor that hung over the day. The actual

refunding process went smoothly, but I distinctly remember Laith making a sardonic comment when he got the money back along the lines of, “this is the only twenty dinar’s I wish I never had.” Laith could not find his car for the longest time after we got our refunds, and it must have been near 100 degrees out. By the time we got to the car, our collective disgruntledness had reached its peak. We drove out of the park sweaty and tired, and curiously, I saw someone running to catch a cab along a desolate sidewalk. I looked back and it was a familiar face, Marwan’s, and I thought with a smile on my face, “what a funny coincidence.” I looked over and saw Laith smiling too.

## Conclusions: Decentering Spaces and Subjects



Photo by the Author

The same night that I left Jordan, I had to return my copy of *Guapa* to Laith. I walked the path from my house in Al-‘Abdali towards Al-Lweibdeh, where he was sitting in a café called Rumi. I felt bad because I had made him wait an hour, and when I arrived he appeared exasperated. This exasperation was quickly replaced with a sweet and melancholy interaction, as this was the last time, perhaps, I would ever see him. We smoked, and sat outside the café as the sun began to set, talking with an ease and intimacy that we had not had before this moment. He began by asking me what I thought of the book, and I explained to him that I was too overwhelmed to even begin to describe how I felt. I had spent the 72 hours before this sitting in my room fervently reading, like I hadn’t since my childhood, in an effort to finish it before my flight. I had neglected

hanging out with my host family in our last days, or seeing friends from my program because I was so engrossed in *Guapa*.

As the sun set more definitively, we began to walk around the neighborhood, searching for a shawarma shop that Laith knew well. We got our shawarma and continued to talk about a series of topics, including Laith's life in London during the year he was in school there, mental health, and queer life in Jordan. With our shawarmas in hand, we went to sit in Laith's car, which was parked right on Paris Circle. As we sat in the car, eating shawarma and listening to Mashrou' Leila, a wave of intense sadness swept over me. As I gulped down the last morsels of fatty chicken and ate the last fry, I realized that my time had come to an end in Jordan, and it seemed too short. But even more poignant was the realization that I was just a visitor, and that I genuinely had felt for the last few months like Amman was home, like no other place in my life.

We drove off from Paris Circle as 3 Minutes, the Mashrou' Leila song, played through Laith's car speakers. We arrived closer to Al-'Abdali, where a giant skyscraper project loomed over the neighborhood across the street from my home. Passing the blue dome of the King Abdullah I Mosque, the conversation turned to lament. We spoke mostly of wanting to have more time to spend together. We finally stopped on the side of the road right before we got to my house, and Laith told me, trembling slightly, that if I had stayed for any longer, he would have "made a move". I told him that I thought I probably would have too. There was an awkward pause, and then some nervous laughter, a few sighs of relief, hugs, and then nothing. Laith's car sped away with Laith, and a queer dream that never was realized became permanent fantasy.

In this conclusion, I seek to make visible connections based in shared sexual identification between different cities, texts, subjects, and spaces. The goal of this thesis thus far has been to analyze a novel and an event (or lack thereof) in the context of space and its contours. With these two analyses in mind, I would like to further query a queer continuum of spaces and community across national borders; one that has antiseparatist, *troublant*, and productive characteristics, but often encompasses multiple definitions. Hopefully, with this ends in mind, a clearer picture will emerge of new queer spaces in Amman and beyond.

### Queer Connections: Between Guapa, Mashrou' Leila, Beirut, and Amman



Throughout this thesis, queerness has been defined in relation to sexual identification, space, research methodology I have brought in Eve Sedgwick Kosofsky's definition of queer as, "a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, *troublant*... antiseparatist as it is antiassimilationist... relational, and strange," (Sedgwick xii, 1993) in relation to certain characters and spaces in *Guapa*. There is also

queer defined by Judith Butler as “a site of collective contestation,” (Butler 1993, 228) as well as “*whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence,” (Pickett, 2002). Queer has also (simply) been used to define those subjects who do not identify as heterosexual. The multiplicity of definitions that I have brought in to define queer across contexts correlates with criticisms of queerness related to its imprecision. Yet, responses to these criticisms have sought to reiterate the imprecision as a central analytical site, from which an intersectional perspective can be utilized as a means to analyze and broaden understandings of conditions that oppress many minority populations. In this conclusion, I would like to reiterate connections between queerness’s analyzed in this thesis, and discuss the implications of these connections for queer subjects, as well as Jordanian subjects at large. I will analyze connections between the texts and events I examine throughout the thesis, and further speak to the implications of this work.

The queerness that runs through Mashrou’ Leila’s lyrics, and the general response to the cancellation of their concert, as well as Guapa, is decidedly political. Whether in regards to the characters in Guapa, and their participation in public demonstrations against the government, or the organization of a protest in public space against the government in real life, the intersection between queerness and political action is constant. In the case of Guapa, political action is mediated through identity, sexual and national. Both Maj and Rasa demonstrate in general against the government, with their queerness not explicitly tied to these demonstrations in the text. When the protest,

“Bedna Leila fii ‘Amman” was planned, the explanation explicitly stated the music as the connecting factor between fans. Yet, the subtext, read through the lens of shade in regards to the Mashrou’ Leila incident and characterization in Guapa, renders the book and the response to the event cancellation queer in a way that centers political action.

In relation to the political, there is a tension between how characters and real life actor’s self-identity and how they are characterized by state powers and other organizational bodies. Inherent in this tension is the possibility of violence, as we saw actualized in the cases of Maj in Guapa and Georgette in Beirut. This potential violence is also connected to the convergence of the queerness and political action in public space. The appearance of queerness in the form of lyrical reimagining of the sacred, which threatened religious leaders in Jordan, as well as government officials, was enough to necessitate a revocation of license to play in public space. The revocation of the license precipitated protests, which, despite not happening, saw queer and allied subjects confronting this possibility of public violence.

This discussion of violence brings me to a point where I feel it necessary to discuss the stakes of queerness, both from the researcher’s perspective and throughout a wider social network. In Guapa, Maj’s desire to have sex with men in a space that was used for public enjoyment (the movie theater) got him arrested. Upon his arrest, the government devalued his queer personhood and identity and privileged the sex act. Through the anal egg test they enacted on him, the police officials showed that their understanding of Maj was purely sexual and thus functional. This understanding from the perspective of the government was reiterated in Sofian Merabet’s study of Beirut with

Georgette. Naming something as queer, whether it is a person, a work of literature, or art, challenges a government's execution of biopower. In challenging this crucial framework, queer subjects pose a threat to government's as coherent, organizational bodies. Beyond the relationship between the government and its citizens, naming a person or object as queer in a certain context can bring societal or familial violence or isolation.

Thus far, I have discussed connections between physical spaces and ideas mediated through various imagined and non-physical space. However, there is also another form of connection present in this research, which is between a wide range of real queer figures, symbols, and texts. The tweet at the start of this section displays one level of connection that occurs between figures in my research. Yet, Saleem Haddad's recognition of Mashrou' Leila does not stop at that tweet. On his website, there is a link to a playlist of "music that inspired and appears in the novel", and on it there are two Mashrou' Leila songs, Leesh Mkashar and Shim El Yasmine, out of eleven total (Haddad 2016). These connections between queer, Arab figures imply the existence of a larger community, existing in a space that transcends the physical.

The Internet, and particularly social media websites, provides an interface for interactions across this virtual queer plane. From Sofian Merabet's discussion of chatroom arrangements in Beirut to the discussions formed over Facebook in the wake of the concert cancellation, various Internet platforms have demonstrated an ability to form queer community. The planning of the protests online showed that queer and allied subjects were willing to claim public space for themselves in the face of a government that opposes their agency. The fact that the protest never occurred reiterates the

overarching power of the government, yet also confirms the power of social media sites as new queer spaces in the Middle East, where solidarity is formed across borders through politically informed resistance tactics.

A final point is that the production of art in these contexts seems to have a great deal to do with the production of social change. Whether it be a relatively new Lebanese band producing work that resonates with younger populations, centering global narratives in a nuanced regional, socio-linguistic framework in their lyrics, or a Queer, Iraqi-German-Palestinian Muslim writer authoring a novel about queer lives in a palatable, and resonant context, the production of art based in marginalized subject's realities causes social change.

Within the text of *Guapa*, several queer characters produced queer spaces where each felt a varying degree of safety and security. This creation of queer space ran parallel to the queer spaces that Gay and Lesbian subjects in Amman created when talking about the novel in public, and circulating knowledge around it over the Internet. The mere fact that queer subjects were reading the novel and speaking about it in public represents a production of social change. It has gone without mention that the ideas present in the novel are inspiring, and produce an exciting mix of emotions in a queer subject, but particularly one who related to the spatial and social arrangements in *Guapa*. The art is in the text, but it is also the existence of the text itself.

In regards to Mashrou' Leila's concert, the social change that occurred was the formation of new bonds within a mixed gender, sexually diverse community in Jordan. This change was notably spurred on by the government's inability to waver in deference

to the older, religious standard bearers of Jordanian national customs and traditions. The uproar around this disparity in values between the government and its citizens, as alluded to in the previous chapter, moved new community interactions to spaces they may not have existed in otherwise, such as Facebook and Twitter, and fundamentally changed their orientation. The understanding and acceptance of nuance in relation to Mashrou' Leila's lyrics, and the dismissal of that nuance as projected onto the space of the Amphitheater by the government, represents a critical convergence point in the creation of social change.

Queerness, as a concept and identity with defined history but that escapes definition, is liberatory in some ways and potentially dangerous in others. In the context of this study, we see that queer subjects have utilized it in ways that privilege the sharing of knowledge across traditional media, and in the face of government oppression. In *Guapa*, we see characters rooted in the urban Middle East whose characterizations are decidedly queer. In the circulation of *Guapa* in Amman, we see ways in which queer experience is discussed and channeled among queer subjects. My friends, myself, and countless unnamed others discussed the novel in public spaces of cafés and bar's, and the circulation of the single copy of the novel and knowledge about it further aided in the queering of these spaces. In regards to the Mashrou' Leila incident, the government's cancellation of the concert aided in the creation of queer networks of dissent online, and new formation of bonds between mainly Jordanian citizens under the umbrella of support for the band. Here, we see the potential of queerness to stir cause discontent that is potentially dangerous because of the disparity between government definitions of queer

subjects and their own. Yet, at the end of the entire controversy, the only measurable result was the strengthening of community dedicated to the promotion of free speech and respect for all people in Jordan.

I always thought that the temporal and spatial interactions between Laith and I on my final day in Amman were extremely important. In particular, an importance lies in the relationship between the conversation we had about Guapa on a bench outside Café Rumi in Al-Lweibdeh and Laith expressing his feelings for me inside his car near my home in Al-‘Abdali. I walked a mile from my home to Café Rumi to meet Laith and to return the book, the final scene where Rasa escapes outburst at the wedding to the queer mystery of Guapa running through my head. When we met, both of us seemed on the verge of outburst, if joyous and nervous. An hour later, in the space of a stalled car on the side of the road, Laith and I settled tension that had been seething for over a month, and then left each other. In the end, our relationship represented a queerness askew from any definition treated in this thesis. It was mediated through queer texts and events, and the ever-present sexual and emotional tension was never acted upon. It was never necessarily troubling, or oscillating, or at odds with the normal as far as I could tell. It was mostly just sweet. If I hadn’t left Amman that night, I’m sure I would have gone with Laith to get a drink at Sekrab, talking about Rasa and Maj along the way, with Ibn El Leil playing loudly in the background.

## Bibliography

- Al-Assi, Roba. "Getting Around Amman." Digital image. AndFarAway. May 17, 2011. <http://www.andfaraway.net/blog/2011/05/17/andfaraway-infograph-how-to-get-around-in-amman/>. (April 2, 2017).
- Amawi, Abla M., "The Transjordanian State and the Enterprising Merchants of Amman." In *Amman: The City and its Society*, Beirut, Lebanon: Cermoc, 1996.
- Anderson, Charles W. "Youth, the "Arab Spring," and Social Movements." *Review of Middle East Studies* 47, no. 02 (Winter 2013): doi:10.1017/s2151348100058031.
- Azzeh, Laila. "Ban on Mashrou' Leila concert triggers controversy." Jordan Times. April 27, 2016. <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/ban-mashrou-leila-concert-triggers-controversy>.
- Boellstorff, Tom. "Queer Studies in the House of Anthropology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 36, no. 1 (2007): 17-35. Accessed November 23, 2016. doi:10.1146/annurev.anthro.36.081406.094421.
- Butler, Judith P. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. 1st ed. Vol. 1. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. 1st ed. Taylor and Francis, 1990.
- Cain, Sian. "Saleem Haddad: 'I put everything into this novel and it was a relief'" The Guardian. December 15, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/dec/15/saleem-haddad-first-book-guapa-gay>.
- Ellis, Carolyn; Adams, Tony E. & Bochner, Arthur P. (2010). Autoethnography: An Overview [40 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1), Art. 10, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108>.
- Elshaikh, Eman. "Being Arab and Queer: an Interview with Saleem Haddad." Muftah. March 07, 2016. <http://muftah.org/queer-arab-an-interview-with-saleem-haddad-the-author-of-guapa/#.WKST5RIrKRrs>.
- "!بدنا ليلي في عمان" Facebook. April 26, 2016. [https://www.facebook.com/events/877582632377366/?active\\_tab=about](https://www.facebook.com/events/877582632377366/?active_tab=about). (March 29, 2017)

- Facebook. April 28, 2016.  
<https://www.facebook.com/mashrou3leila/posts/10153572373778806:0>. (March 29, 2017)
- "Fury in Amman after unconformist Mashrou' Leila banned." Al Bawaba. April 27, 2016.  
<http://www.albawaba.com/loop/fury-amman-after-mashrou-leila-banned-833964>.
- Ghazal, Mohammad. "Population stands at around 9.5 million, including 2.9 million guests." Jordan Times. January 30, 2016.
- Giesecking, Jen Jack. "A Queer Geographer's Life as an Introduction to Queer Theory, Space, and Time." In *Queer Geographies*, 14-21. McNaughton & Gunn Inc., 2013.
- Green, Adam Isaiah. "Queer Theory and Sociology: Locating the Subject and the Self in Sexuality Studies." *Sociological Theory* 25, no. 1 (2007): 26-45.  
 doi:10.1111/j.1467-9558.2007.00296.x.
- Haddad, Saleem. *Guapa*, New York: Other Press, 2016.
- Haddad, Saleem. "More on 'Guapa'" Saleem Haddad سالي م حداد. Accessed April 10, 2017.  
<http://www.saleemhaddad.com/fiction/>.
- Halabian, Written By Layla. "The Politics of Fear: An Interview with Mashrou' Leila's Hamed Sinno." Live Nation TV. May 06, 2016.  
[https://livenation.vice.com/en\\_us/article/an-interview-with-mashrou-leilas-hamed-sinno](https://livenation.vice.com/en_us/article/an-interview-with-mashrou-leilas-hamed-sinno).
- Hardie, Melissa Jane. "Post-Structuralism: Originators and Heirs."  
*The Cambridge Companion to American Gay and Lesbian Literature*:  
 doi:10.1017/cco9781107110250.015.
- Holmes, Anna. "The Underground Art of the Insult." The New York Times.  
 May 14, 2015. [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/17/magazine/the-underground-art-of-the-insult.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/17/magazine/the-underground-art-of-the-insult.html?_r=1).
- "I want to be Leila." I want to be Leila. June 30, 2009.  
[https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/i\\_want\\_to\\_be\\_leila](https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/i_want_to_be_leila).
- Jadaliyya Reports. "Statement from Mashrou' Leila on Jordanian Government Banning of Their Show." Jadaliyya. April 26, 2016.  
<http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/24337/statement-from-mashrou-leila-on-jordanian-governme>.

"Jordan bans Lebanese rock band, Mashrou' Leila." Middle East Online. April 27, 2016.  
<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=76547>.

"Jordan - Touristic Sites - Amman."  
Kinghussein.gov.jo. <http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/tourism1.html>.

Katz, Cindi. "On the Grounds of Globalization: A Topography for Feminist Political Engagement." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 26, no. 4 (2001): 1213-1234. doi:10.1086/495653.

"Map of Amman Jordan." Digital image. Orange Smile. Accessed April 9, 2017.  
<http://www.orangesmile.com/travelguide/amman/high-resolution-maps.htm>.

"Mashrou' Leila." Facebook. April 26, 2016.  
<https://www.facebook.com/mashrou3leila/posts/10153568551603806:0>.

Mashrou' Leila "Ibn el leil / son of the night." Ibn el leil / son of the night.  
<https://www.ibnelleil.com/>.

"Mashrou' Leila - Mashrou' Leila." مشروع ليلى. -مشروع ليلى.  
<http://www.mashrouleila.com/#tour>.

.Mashrou' Leila play in Amman." Change.org (مشروع ليلى والاشارة: Let) زارة السياحة والاشارة  
April 27, 2016.  
<https://www.change.org/p/leila-ليلى-mashrou-مشروع-let-والاشارة-السياحة-وزارة>  
play-in-amman?source\_location=petition\_nav. (March 29, 2017).

Massad, Joseph. "Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World."  
*Public Culture* 14.2 (2002): Web.

Merabet, Sofian. *Queer Beirut*. Austin, TX: U of Texas, 2014. Print.

Oswin, Natalie. "Critical geographies and the Uses of Sexuality: Deconstructing Queer Space." *Progress in Human Geography* 32, no. 1 (2008): 89-103.  
doi:10.1177/0309132507085213.

Pickett, Brent. "Homosexuality." Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. August 06, 2002.  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/homosexuality/>. (April 2, 2017).

Penney, James. "Currents of Queer." In *After Queer Theory: The Limits of Sexual Politics*,  
London, UK: Pluto Press, 2014.

"Queers Read This." Queer Resources Directory. Accessed April 24, 2017.  
<http://www.qrd.org/qrd/misc/text/queers.read.this>.

- Razzaz, Omar M., "Land Conflicts, Property Rights and Urbanization East of Amman." In *Amman: The City and its Society*, Beirut, Lebanon: Cermoc, 1996.
- Reed, Christopher. "Imminent Domain: Queer Space in the Built Environment." *Art Journal* 55, no. 4 (Winter 1996): doi:10.2307/777657.
- Rifai, Taleb, "Amman City Centre: Typologies of Architecture and Urban Space." In *Amman: The City and its Society*, Beirut, Lebanon: Cermoc, 1996.
- Rushbrook, Dereka, "Cities, Queer Space, And The Cosmopolitan Tourist." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8, no. 1-2 (2002): 183-206. doi:10.1215/10642684-8-1-2-183.
- Salfiti, Jad. "Mashrou' Leila: the Lebanese band changing the tune of Arab politics." *The Guardian*. September 13, 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2013/sep/13/mashrou-leila-lebanese-arab-politics>.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "Foreword." In *Tendencies*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Shami, Seteney. "Re-Searching the City." In *Amman: The City and its Society*. Beirut, Lebanon: Cermoc, 1996.
- @siwarLeila, Twitter Post, April 28, 2016, 4:50am, <https://twitter.com/siwarLeila/status/725653396775161856>. (April 1, 2017).
- Sullivan, Andrew. "Here Comes The Groom." *New Republic*. August 28, 1989. Accessed April 24, 2017. <https://newrepublic.com/article/79054/here-comes-the-groom>.
- Tompkins, Kyla Wazana. "Intersections of Race, Gender, and Sexuality: Queer of Color Critique." *The Cambridge Companion to American Gay and Lesbian Literature*, June 2015, 173-89. doi:10.1017/cc09781107110250.013.
- Tsioulcas, Anastasia. "Tiny Desk: Mashrou' Leila." NPR. June 24, 2016. <http://www.npr.org/2016/06/22/483096040/mashrou-leila-tiny-desk-concert>.
- "Values, traditions, and church objections: how Mashrou' Leila was banned from performing in Amman." *7iber | حبر*. April 27, 2016. <https://www.7iber.com/culture/how-mashrou-leila-was-banned-from-performing-in-amman/>.

Von Aue, Mary. "Lebanese Indie Rock Band Mashrou' Leila Is Doing a Lot More for Gay Rights Than Your Band." Noisey. May 30, 2014.  
[https://noisey.vice.com/en\\_us/article/lebanese-indie-rock-band-mashrou-leila-is-doing-a-lot-more-for-gay-rights-than-your-band](https://noisey.vice.com/en_us/article/lebanese-indie-rock-band-mashrou-leila-is-doing-a-lot-more-for-gay-rights-than-your-band).

Weeks, Jeffrey. *Sexuality*. London: Routledge, 2009. Print.

"What Does 'Throw Shade' Mean?" Merriam-Webster. February 2017.  
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/shade>.

"What Is Life Like For an Ordinary Gay Muslim Man?" Out Magazine.  
July 20, 2016. <http://www.out.com/art-books/2016/7/20/what-life-ordinary-gay-muslim-man>.

Whitaker, Brian. *Unspeakable Love: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East*. Berkeley: U of California, 2006. Print.

"3 Cool Things You Might Not Know About the Roman Theater of Amman, Jordan." Artsnap. <http://artsnap.org/3-cool-things-you-might-not-know-about-the-roman-theater-of-amman-jordan/>. (March 30, 2017).