*Int. J. Middle East Stud.* **45** (2013), 253–269
doi:10.1017/S0020743812001614

***Michael Allan***

# QUEER COUPLINGS: FORMATIONS OF RELIGION AND SEXUALITY IN ʿALAʾ AL-ASWANI'S ʿ*IMARAT YAʿQUBYAN*

**Abstract**
Faced with the possible censoring of the film adaptation of *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan*, the book's author, ʿAlaʾ al-Aswani, responded, "Why aren't Italy, France, or the United States defamed by movies dealing with homosexuality?" Implicit in his defensive question is a perceived distinction between First World gay rights and social conservatism in the Third World. My paper considers this conventional coupling of gay rights and civilizational discourse in the global reception of *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan*. Against the author's remarks, I argue that the story is remarkable for staging an interplay between the putatively opposed characters of Hatim Rashid, an openly gay newspaper editor, and Taha al-Shazli, a young man lured into a terrorist group. By uniting these two characters along parallel tracks, *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* queerly couples the seemingly antagonistic forces endemic to the civilizational discourse of gay rights and offers us a means for imagining new constellations of queer politics.

When the film version of ʿAlaʾ al-Aswani's novel *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* (The Yacoubian Building) was initially screened in the summer of 2006, 112 members of the Egyptian parliament banded together to demand that profane scenes depicting homosexuality be censored.[1] Mustafa Bakri, an independent parliamentarian and the editor of the Egyptian paper *al-Usbuʿ*, rallied many of his fellow representatives and delivered a fiery speech on the parliamentary floor, incensed by what he saw as debauchery "totally against Egyptian moral values."[2] Bakri's widely reported speech helped to frame media coverage of the Egyptian film for international newspapers just months prior to its release at film festivals across the world. The story appealed directly to Western news outlets, which focused on the potential censorship of homosexuality in an Arab land: "Call to Censor 'Immoral' Egyptian Film" read the headline from *The Guardian*[3]; "Sa sortie au Caire a choqué ou ravi" (Its Opening in Cairo Shocked or Delighted) was the headline in *Libération*[4]; the BBC led with "Egypt Debates Controversial Film"[5]; and *Le Monde* included an interview with the film's director, Marwan Hamed ("Si le gouvernement et la censure m'autorisent à sortir le film de quel droit le parlement intervient-il?" [If the government and the censor authorize me to release the film, what right does parliament

Michael Allan is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Comparative Literature, University of Oregon, Eugene, Ore.; e-mail: mallan@uoregon.edu

© *Cambridge University Press 2013 0020-7438/13 $15.00*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

have to intervene?]).[6] A few months after Bakri's speech, Negar Azimi published an extended piece in the *New York Times Magazine* entitled "Prisoners of Sex," in which she alluded to the circumstances surrounding the film in order to discuss issues faced more broadly by gays and lesbians in Egypt.[7] All of this international coverage of the controversy tended to cast the film through the conventional storyline of conservative forces threatening homosexuality and free speech in an otherwise modernizing land.

Since its publication in 2002, al-Aswani's widely popular novel *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* has gone through eight editions and has been adapted to film and television and translated into some twenty-seven languages. The film is reportedly the most expensive Egyptian production to date, with a budget of three and a half million dollars underwritten by Good News Cinemas. Even with the outcry of Bakri and other parliamentarians, it eventually was not censored and went on to enjoy the largest opening in Egyptian film history. In the end, the controversy surrounding homosexuality in *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* only seemed to escalate its global visibility further.

By no means limited to local media, the terms of the controversy extended far beyond the Egyptian parliament and came to highlight tensions at play in discussions of queer politics internationally. Amidst the escalated attention, al-Aswani took the opportunity to respond to what he saw as attacks on his work. Speaking to the press, he focused on the issue of homosexuality specifically and posed the question "Why aren't Italy, France, or the United States defamed by movies dealing with homosexuality?"[8] In doing so, al-Aswani implicitly framed the possibility of censorship not simply as a matter of free speech but also in civilizational terms, contrasting the political climate in Egypt to his perception of queer politics in Italy, France, and the United States. What might have been a local issue pertaining to an Egyptian film was thus refracted through the prism of international gay rights, pitting the perceived open-mindedness of the cosmopolitan author against the supposedly hidebound views of select parliamentarians in Egypt. The author, the book, and the film all came to be understood through the terms of a broader civilizational discourse around gay rights.[9]

In a curious and yet predictable move, these sorts of comments align gay rights with the celebration of particular forms of liberal governance. We might say they echo what Jasbir Puar calls homonationalism, a framework that instrumentalizes gay rights for nationalist claims of tolerance while simultaneously ostracizing communities deemed intolerant.[10] When Judith Butler declined an award at the Christopher Street parade in Berlin, she warned against a gay rights movement linked to the demonization of immigrant communities in Germany and highlighted the responsibilities of forging alliances between queer politics and antiracism movements. "We all have noticed," Butler stated, "that gay, bisexual, lesbian, trans, and queer people can be instrumentalized by those who want to wage wars, i.e., cultural wars against migrants by means of forced islamophobia and military wars against Iraq and Afghanistan. In these times and by these means, we are recruited for nationalism and militarism."[11] Puar has shared this critique of homonationalism, noting in editorials how unsurprising it is that the conservative English Defence League now accepts homosexual members or that the "Brand Israel" campaign spotlights gay rights as part of appearing open and democratic.[12] As though drawing from such homonationalist rhetoric, al-Aswani performed a critique of Egypt by making recourse to an international framework, one that sees Italy, France, and the United States as more open to gays and lesbians. In this formulation, the figure of the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

homosexual comes to index a particular form of liberal governance and a particular sensibility about what it means to be modern, cosmopolitan, and free.

For its defenders, al-Aswani's fictional story of corruption and deviancy provides not a meditation on homosexuality but rather an account of postcolonial decadence in Egypt.[13] The novel takes its title from the name of a building on Suliman Basha street in downtown Cairo funded by the Armenian millionaire Hagub Yaʿqubyan and constructed in 1934 by an Italian engineering firm. The narrative traces the entwined lives of the building's occupants, who represent a range of generations and class levels. There is the story of Zaki al-Dissuki, an aging playboy from a wealthy family; his sister Dawlat, who seeks his eviction; Hajj Muḥammad ʿAzzam, a corrupt local politician who is incredibly wealthy and outwardly pious; Taha al-Shazli, the doorman's son, who aspires to become a police officer; Buthayna al-Sayyid, an attractive young woman sexually exploited by her employer; Malak, a Coptic shirt maker living on the roof with designs on a downstairs apartment; Hatim Rashid, the gay editor of the French newspaper *Le Caire*; and ʿAbduh, a young man from Upper Egypt seduced by Hatim Rashid. In the entwined stories, no character is left entirely innocent, and the novel explores a number of notably poignant issues: political corruption, Islamic movements, homosexuality, domestic terrorism, sexual exploitation, and class privilege. It is, then, somewhat surprising for many of the novel's supporters that of all the corruption and deviancy, one particular storyline has dominated the attention of critics.

For those who admire the book, its author is a progressive social analyst capable of rendering the realities of modern Cairo in the world of fiction; as al-Aswani notes, "Novels and movies are not made to promote tourism but to deal with real issues of life."[14] As a public intellectual and until recently a practicing dentist, al-Aswani was quite outspoken against authoritarian dimensions of Husni Mubarak's government. In the 2005 protests surrounding the constitutional referendum, he aligned himself with the opposition alliance Kifaya, a broad coalition demanding the lifting of emergency powers restricting free assembly, the formation of political parties, and the release of political prisoners. And aspects of *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan*, especially the subplot of the corrupt local politician, offer a loosely veiled critique of political forms in downtown Cairo and of perceived contradictions in the lives of elected officials. In the range of issues addressed, homosexuality appears to emerge as just another fact of life, one story among others.

It might be tempting to understand the debate over homosexuality in the novel and the film as it is often presented: a progressive author and his literary work under threat from socially conservative parliamentarians in Egypt. It strikes me, though, that this framework is not only deeply reductive (for reasons I will explore in a moment) but also dangerously inaccurate. Al-Aswani's framing of the situation (which is to say the tendency to present the issue of homosexuality not in terms of being either for or against but in terms of levels of civilization) echoes other international instances pertaining to gay rights. Consider, for example, the requirement in Holland that recent immigrants be exposed to pictures of men kissing, supposedly to test their openness to free expression and personal freedoms.[15] In these instances, homosexuality comes to function both as a civic pedagogy and as an index for a particular mode of governing. It also leverages a distinction between those in need of this pedagogy and those presumed to understand it by virtue of their national affiliation.[16] And even if it might be easy to target al-Aswani for falling back on this version of the *mission civilatrice*, it is worth asking,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

more broadly, how and why homosexuality invites such civilizational rhetoric. Must discussions of homosexuality be accompanied by the hackneyed distinction between the supposedly modern First World and the socially conservative Third World? How might one engage in such discussions beyond the civilizational terms offered?

At the basis of much queer scholarship is the claim that homosexuality as a category is not timeless and universal but instead relies upon a set of social conditions that make the formation of sexual identity intelligible. In the context of the Middle East, we might think, for example, of the work of Khaled Rouayheb or Wilson Jacob, both of whom have helped to forge methods for a situated analysis of sexual identity that does not presume the simple trafficking of categories across historical and cultural contexts.[17] Extending these methods to literary studies and contemporary queer politics, Joseph Massad addresses the "missionary role" of what he calls the Gay International. He links this role to the way "white Western feminism" imposed its "own colonial feminism on the women's movements in the non-Western world"[18] and focuses on its claims "to liberate Arab and Muslim 'gays and lesbians' from the oppression under which they allegedly live by transforming them from practitioners of same-sex contact into subjects who identify as homosexual and gay."[19] Massad's critique is not targeted at gay and lesbians but rather at the conglomeration of organizations and nongovernmental organizations dedicated to the defense (and in Massad's argument, the production) of gay and lesbian sexual identities.[20] Both Massad's argument about the negotiation of sexual identity formation and the historical contingency articulated in Rouayheb's and Jacob's work have broadened the context of what it means to locate formations of sexual identity in modern Arabic fiction.

Another key to unthinking the binarism of civilizational discourse and gay rights, one that I will pursue in the following sections, is to note how fictional texts structure relationships, modes of identification, and the recognizability of sexual categories. In *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan*, the place of homosexuality in the social world of downtown Cairo is in fact distinctly structured and in a manner quite distinct from al-Aswani's remarks on the subject. Against the opposition between gay rights and religious fanaticism, the novel actually draws these two positions together in a common storyline. In what follows, I will turn to the ways in which *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* quite intricately weds the fate of two of its central characters and thereby complicates the conventional binarisms implicit in homonationalism. On one level, the story does bring a homosexual character into the view of an Egyptian (and international) reading public, but on another, it stages a direct interplay between two putatively opposed characters: Hatim Rashid, the openly gay editor of the newspaper *Le Caire*, and Taha al-Shazli, the doorman's son, who is lured into a terrorist group. Even though the novel presents these characters almost as caricatures of their described roles (the homosexual and the terrorist), it eventually unites them along parallel tracks. They are the only two central characters who are murdered, and it is sodomy that serves as the common thread between their respective fates. Looking closely at the textual dimensions of the story reveals an account that both differs markedly from the author's comments and actively refuses the binarism implicit in civilizational discourse.

Reading the confluence of these two characters against the backdrop of al-Aswani's civilizational discourse, I don't want to reduce the complexity of this Egyptian realist novel through the frame of homonationalism; rather, my goal is to examine how

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

modalities of recognition are folded within the text, blurring lines between sexuality and religion in the process. And curiously enough, in its narratological coupling of two queer characters, the book resists the simple localization of queer politics within a discourse of representation that would focus on good or bad depictions of homosexuality. Instead, the intricate connections between characters, the explicit allusions to Hatim's affair and to Taha's torture, reveal a complex social world wherein sodomy plays a crucial role in narrative development. The emergent world does not leave queerness in the simple discovery of a category of sexual identity but tethers it to the very heart of martyrdom in the book. What is ultimately queer, in other words, is less one character or another than the curious way in which the story places sodomy at the base of its narrative action. Sodomy is at once the site of torture and of liberation, the subjection and the subjectivation of both Taha and Hatim. Reframing identity with narrative events, *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* folds together two storylines that actively combat the conventional binarism between the First and the Third worlds, the West and the East, the liberated homosexual and the repressed fanatic, the cosmopolitan author and the conservative politician. In the end, *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* is not simply a case study in the limits of censorship around homosexuality but a text that actively theorizes the queerness of a coupling at the intersection of gay rights and civilizational discourse.

## HATIM RASHID AND CATEGORIES OF SEXUAL IDENTITY

The previous section offers a social backdrop for reading *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan*, noting the tendency to understand threats of censorship as an occasion to divide critics and proponents in terms of a broader civilizational discourse. But what constitutes a queer reading of this text? Do we, as readers, explore the thematization of sexuality in its characters? Do we seek aberrations from perceived sexual norms? And what is it to read a work of fiction with these concerns in mind? It strikes me that the quest to locate homosexual characters is the beginning but by no means the end of a queer reading. The suggestion, for example, that ʿIsa in Najib Mahfuz's *Awlad Haratina* or Kirsha in his *Zuqaq al-Midaq* are homosexual characters does little more than open up debates about what attributes of a sexual category are offered in each text. In what follows, I understand a queer reading to take normality (and not necessarily heterosexuality) as its logical obverse and to chart the system wherein queer becomes intelligible as a particular social formation.[21] I am focused both on the conditions of recognizability (what makes a certain character visible as queer) and on the terms within which this recognition takes place. And it is intriguing that within the queer couplings of al-Aswani's novel, we find a system that negotiates and intertwines two key characters through distinct narrative patterns.

It would be easy, following numerous other commentators, to focus our reading on the most conspicuously identified homosexual character: Hatim Rashid. The narrator's introduction of Hatim makes little secret of his status as the homosexual in the text, but here I hope to address the formal terms through which this identification is rendered. In what ways, in other words, does the novel enable the recognition of the homosexual? Before Hatim is even introduced, he is framed by a specific social context: the bar Chez Nous. "The Chez Nous," the narration goes, "is a few steps below street level, and thanks to the thick curtains the lighting is dim and shadowy even during the day."[22]

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The overall climate of the interior, described in terms of its low lighting and, later, the crisp air conditioning it offers on a summer day, draws attention to how the bar makes "you feel as though you had gone into hiding from daily life." And as we learn in this exposition to the chapter, "This feeling of privacy is the great distinguishing feature of Chez Nous, which made its name basically as a meeting place for homosexuals [*al-shawādhdh al-jinsiyya*] (and which has made its way into more than one Western tourist guide under this rubric)."[23] Whereas the Yacoubian building houses a diverse range of characters in the novel, the bar Chez Nous blurs the distinction between space and the identity category of its patrons, allowing the novel to present these homosexual characters almost as symptoms of the space they occupy.

That the social setting of the bar comes prior to the emergence of any character in particular is thus not surprising. For all of the supposed secrecy (of a space below street level that is dim and shadowy even during the day), this section of the novel delights in the slow unraveling of the codes of the bar and the practices of its patrons. The description of Chez Nous proceeds with a discussion of the bar's owner, ʿAziz, who we learn "is nicknamed 'the Englishman' (because, with his white complexion, yellow hair, and blue eyes, he resembles one), and he is a victim of the same condition."[24] This whole section mimics a sort of overhearing of secrets: "They say he took up with the old Greek who used to own the bar and that the latter fell in love with him and made him a present of the establishment before his death." What we learn of ʿAziz is brought to our attention via mysterious rumors: in the first instance, "*They say* [*yaqūlūn*] he took up ..." and in the very next line, "*They whisper* [or divulge, *yashuyūʿūn*] too that he organizes outrageous parties at which he introduces homosexuals to Arab tourists and that homosexual prostitution brings him in huge profits ..."[25] Precisely who are the "they" who say and whisper? Delighting in a manner of both knowing and not being directly a part of the community described, the narrative voice addresses the reader as though sharing the secret of this "they," the deviants (*al-shawādhdh*) of Chez Nous. And ʿAziz becomes the figure who makes possible the refuge that the bar provides: "He is blessed with a strong presence and *savoir faire*, and under his supervision and care homosexuals meet at Chez Nous and form friendships there, released from the social pressures that prevent them from advertising their tendencies."[26] The discussion of the space enables a game of pronouns, enfolding "us" as readers into the secrets of a community whose codes we come to know as though through rumor, the whispers "they" offer.

In moving from a description of the physical space to the bar's owner, the narration then abstracts entirely in order to describe general attributes of "places where homosexuals meet" (*amākin al-shawādhdh*).[27] For a novel seemingly so anchored in the place it describes (downtown Cairo), it is telling that this abstracted "places where homosexuals meet" becomes the basis for a rather curious, almost ethnographic, listing of characteristics. Whereas the discussion of ʿAziz is all on the level of what is overheard ("They say," "they whisper"), here the narrative voice speaks with an assumed authority: "homosexuals, like burglars, pickpockets, and all other groups outside the laws and norms of society, have created for themselves a special language [*lugha khāṣṣa*] that enables them to understand one another when among strangers."[28] In what follows, a listing of practices distances the narrative voice from the "they" that it describes: "Thus, *they* call a passive homosexual a '*kudyana*'"; "*They* call an active homosexual a '*barghal*'";

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"*They* call male-to-male sex a hook-up"; "*They* make themselves known to one another by means of hand movements."[29] What we learn as readers pertains to a set of codes that supposedly enables the recognition of the homosexual "they." The narrative voice performs an intriguing informant role, helping "us" as readers come to understand the attributes of the character we have yet to meet. Torn between the "us" of the reading public and the "they" of the homosexuals in the bar, the narration of the novel seems to cleave the reader apart from the homosexual community observed.

It is these sorts of passages describing the codes and behaviors of homosexuals that interest Massad in his discussion of al-Aswani's novel. His study charts tendencies in modern Arabic fiction broadly, drawing from authors such as Hanan al-Shaykh, Sunallah Ibrahim, and Muhammad al-Bisati. Addressing a wide range of novels, he notes that the "new modern Arabic subject that modern Arabic literature imagines is a proper, middle-class, heterosexual, enlightened citizen." On one level, Massad focuses on what differentiates *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* from other modern Arabic novels, "namely, the invention of the homosexual deviant as a fully articulated social and communitarian identity." On another level, though, what interests Massad is how flawed al-Aswani's descriptions are and how, in effect, they neglect that much of the vocabulary in the gay community in Egypt actually stems from "popular belly dancers or *awalim*."[30] Indebted as my reading is to Massad's argument, it seems important to consider not only the empirical dimensions of the novel's description of homosexuality but also the formal terms within which the narrative makes these categories intelligible. Al-Aswani offers us categories through a narrative voice that gazes upon those it describes, all the while disavowing its own participation in their practices.

When we finally are introduced to Hatim Rashid, it is through his entry into this predetermined homosexual space: "A little before midnight, the door of the bar opened, and Hatim appeared with a dark-complexioned young man in his twenties wearing inexpensive clothes, his hair cropped like a soldier's."[31] If the space already conditions how it is that Hatim is understood, then it is all the more revealing that he is described not in terms of his appearance but in terms of the man who accompanies him into the bar. And even before we learn of Hatim's background, we learn of his status, thanks to yet another use of a narrative "they." "The people in the bar were drunk," we are told. "All the same, as soon as Hatim entered, their racket diminished, and they took to observing him with curiosity and a certain awe."[32] Following the common locution of speaking through the observers, the narration proceeds, "They knew that he was a *kudyana*, but a forbidding natural reserve prevented them from acting familiarly with him, and even the most impudent and obscene of the customers could do no other than treat him with respect." As readers addressed by the narrational "us," we look upon Hatim initially through the eyes of the "they," the community to whom he supposedly belongs and with whom he shares these open secrets. We come to know Hatim through the eyes of those who observe him, and these are eyes both borrowed and disavowed by the narration.

Hatim and his relationship with ʿAbduh (with whom he enters the bar) unfold in manifold directions in the novel, and yet Hatim's recognizability as a homosexual is never in question. Much later, long after the relationship between ʿAbduh and Hatim has developed, we are still left alternating between the particularities of the story and broader reflections on the category of homosexuality. And so another section begins:

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"Homosexuals, it is said, often excel in professions that depend on contact with other people, such as public relations, acting, brokering, and the law." We learn that this success can be understood as "attributable to their lack of that sense of shame that costs others opportunities, while their sexual lives, filled as they are with diverse and unusual encounters, give them deeper insight into human nature and make them more capable of influencing others." As if the opening description were not affirmation enough of some of the most clichéd understandings, the passage continues: "Homosexuals also excel in professions associated with taste and beauty, such as interior decoration and clothing design" and goes on to attribute skills in clothing design to homosexuals' "dual sexual nature [that] enables them to design women's clothes that are attractive to men and vice versa."[33] Much like the abstracted narrative voice at the beginning, here again the novel is an occasion for a sort of ethnographic musing that might otherwise seem parenthetical to narrative action.

That the novel dwells so extensively on the category through which to understand Hatim Rashid is quite telling. In both the discussion of Chez Nous and this excursus on homosexuality and professions, Hatim is the figure through whom homosexuality (as a category of sexual identity) is most visible in the text. We learn that he in fact has "refined taste" and "authentic talent" in "choosing colors and clothes." And we learn that he extends this taste when buying clothes for ʿAbduh, dressing him in "tight pants that showed off the strength of his muscles, shirts and undershirts in light colors to illuminate his dark face, and collars that were always open to reveal the muscles of his neck and the thick hair on his chest."[34] We learn too that Hatim cares deeply for ʿAbduh, who, "despite his youth and his ignorance, was capable of sympathizing with Hatim's feelings and became more accepting of their relationship."[35] As the two celebrate ʿAbduh's birthday, for example, they eat at a fish restaurant in Muhandisin for a cost of more than 700 pounds and then spend time in bed, during which "Hatim almost wept with the delicious pain."[36] In each of these instances, Hatim is always an occasion through which the narrative weaves together supposedly general attributes of a sexual identity with the particularities of a single character.

For all of the legibility accorded to Hatim at the outset, the actual narrative events—dinner, lovemaking, and conversation—destabilize the authority of the abstracted commentary about homosexuals. During the scene of the birthday dinner, references to homosexuality are not limited to abstracted allusions to sexual identity but emerge as a topic of conversation between the characters. After eating at the restaurant, for example, the two discuss ʿAbduh's underlying fear of punishment, and ʿAbduh quotes his prayer leader Shaykh Darawi: "'Beware sodomy [*al-liwāṭ*], for it is a great sin and makes the throne of heaven shake in anger." Homosexuality here shifts from love between men, as Hatim frames it ("You think Our Lord will punish us because we love one another?"), to the issue of sodomy. As Hatim wrestles with ʿAbduh's reflections, he smokes and drinks whiskey, urging ʿAbduh to understand that "Our Lord is big and He has true mercy, nothing to do with what the ignorant shaykhs in your village say."[37] In the end, he returns to the fact that he and ʿAbduh just love one another and that ʿAbduh ought to be happy on his birthday. What occurs is a fracturing of the framework through which the relationship is understood.

Amidst this underlying tension between love and sodomy, another struggle arises. Hatim arranges for ʿAbduh to live on the roof of the building with his wife and son,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

FIGURE 1. From Marwan Hamed, director, *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* (Cairo: Good News, 2006). [A color version of this figure can be viewed online at http://journals.cambridge.org/mes]

and everything seems to be in order for the relationship to flourish. But when ʿAbduh's son dies, even with the help of Hatim's connections at the hospital, suddenly ʿAbduh's concerns shift to the well-being of his wife and to his duties as her husband. Near the end of the novel, ʿAbduh returns one last time to see Hatim, who explains that he has found a job for ʿAbduh as the doorman at the French Cultural Center and writes him a check for 1,000 pounds to cover expenses until the job begins. He also makes one last request: "ʿAbduh," he says, "I never forced our relationship on you. If you've decided to leave me, leave me. But I have one last request to make of you."[38] And so he urges ʿAbduh to spend the night. The narration welcomes us into ʿAbduh's conflicted thinking, leading to his conclusion that "he would satisfy Hatim's body one last time, get the position and stop sinning."[39] After a few drinks, ʿAbduh "could not contain himself, pounced on Hatim . . ." and "slaked his lust in Hatim's body three times in less than an hour without uttering a single word . . ."[40] The issue for ʿAbduh is the mere consummation of the act of sodomy, whereas for Hatim the agreement was spending the night. When ʿAbduh tries to leave, tensions escalate, and eventually ʿAbduh murders Hatim in a passionate struggle: "He grabbed hold of him by the neck and started beating his head with all his might against the wall till he felt the blood spurting hot and sticky over his hands."[41]

The killing of the sodomized is the tragic end of this particular subplot. Hatim's neighbors, we learn, had heard the commotion, but "had not interfered because they were aware of the nature of his private life."[42] In the film, Hatim is killed not by ʿAbduh but by a random stranger, who first strangles him and then steals his money (see Figure 1). In the novel, the bonds of a relationship unfurl over the question of sodomy; in the film, a depressed Hatim is killed by a stranger, as though a victim of his "private life." But in moving from the abstracted category of the homosexual to the particularity of a death at the end of the story, this subplot finds its echo in the death of the doorman's son Taha al-Shazli. If the category of the homosexual haunts the text, then the category of the sodomized actually unites these two plots, complicating the simple identification of what makes this book such a queer read.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

TAHA AL-SHAZLI, THE OPEN SECRET, AND THE FORCE OF LAW

While Hatim offers a most visible and explicit homosexual character, claims of persecution in the novel are not held by the homosexual but by the terrorist. Among the other residents in the building is Taha al-Shazli, the doorman's son, who undergoes a series of transformations in the novel; he is initially a virtuous young man seeking a place as a police officer and eventually a terrorist intent upon overturning the very laws he had once sought to enforce. Unlike Hatim, to whom we are introduced through the space he inhabits, Taha comes to be known through a series of confrontations with the law. He undergoes a sort of double persecution in the text: in the first instance, for being working class and in the second, for being involved with a demonstration at Cairo University. It is not my contention here that we read Taha as a homosexual but rather that we trace the terms in which he is martyred at the end of the novel. And with both his death and the terms of his persecution, we come to see that *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* unites the two sodomized characters on parallel tracks.

The emergence of a character like Taha is by no means unheard of in modern Arabic novels or film. Famous parallels are ʿAbd al-Muniʾm in Najib Mafuz's *al-Sukkariyya* and Muhammad in the film *al-Abwab al-Mughlaka*.[43] In both cases, a young man lured into terrorist activities is seen as an outgrowth of a struggle with a postcolonial condition, something Massad notes as a broader tendency of the modern Arabic novel.[44] And much like many of these other stories recounting the pull of Islam for disillusioned youth, *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* offers an understanding of religiosity as a category like any other. By making religion and homosexuality identity categories, the story frames both as positions within a social order and as part of the apparent diversity of modern society. What matters, though, is not the simple recognition of the categories but the manner in which the categories come together in the end. It is this parallelism that I hope to trace in this section.

In contrast to Hatim, who is framed largely in terms of the social space at Chez Nous, Taha comes to be understood mainly in terms of his life ambitions as a young man who "has dreamed of becoming a police officer and has devoted all his efforts to realizing that dream."[45] Not only has he achieved a 98 percent on his final secondary exam in the humanities, but he has also done so without private tutoring, which he could not afford. We learn of Taha as a most upstanding character whose daily routines are punctuated with either praise or insults by residents of the building, who recognize in him tremendous intellectual promise. Some respond by encouraging him in his studies, while others, jealous of his success, find small details in his work with which to harass him. In instances of insult:

> He would meet their outbursts with silence, a bowed head, and a slight smile, his brown face at these moments giving the impression that he did not agree with what was directed at him and that it was entirely in his power to rebut the insult but that respect for the other's greater age prevented him from so doing.[46]

It is ultimately his determination and ambition that lend him modesty and confidence, and he believes firmly "that God would make all his dreams come true."[47]

Insofar as the novel builds up Taha's virtuous pursuit of becoming a police officer, so too does it rely on the reversal of fortune, revealing the extent of his disappointment

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

when rejected from the academy. We are introduced to Taha the day of the interview as he nervously awaits the big event. He has prepared assiduously for the questions posed by the panel, having rehearsed his answers and even acquired new clothes. All the while, though, Taha harbors a secret, hidden in couched language on his application. In fact, for a young candidate with such promise, Taha is remarkably self-conscious of the secret, to the extent that much of his behavior, preparation, and comportment seem to stem from an effort to compensate for it. At the near conclusion of his interview, "The presiding general smiled and nodded with frank admiration," and yet Taha finds himself face to face with one last question: "Your father—what's his profession, Taha?"[48] Taha had described his father's profession as that of a "civil servant" (*muwaẓẓaf*), but the interviewer pushes him further, asking whether his father is a civil servant or a property guard (*ḥāris ʿaqār*). Taha's honest reply, the disclosure of what he was hiding, leads to his dismissal from the room and the rejection of his lifelong dream.

In utmost despair, Taha eventually drafts a letter to the president of the commission, outlining the grounds for his rejection. "Is it then just [*ʿadl*]," Taha asks in the letter, "that I should be denied admission to the police force for no better reason than that my father is a decent but poor man [*rajul sharīf wa-faqīr*] who works as a property guard?"[49] Mere pages later the letter in response is printed; the Public Complaints Administration finds Taha's complaint unfounded.[50] And so, the virtuous young Taha becomes the victim of discrimination, unable to achieve his goals on account of his father's profession. That the structure of this narrative is itself quite queer, mimicking the sorts of inquiries and confession faced by homosexual characters, is telling. When we meet Hatim Rashid, he is actually atypical of the homosexual character in literature, where most frequently a character's sexuality haunts the text like an open secret. Here I gesture to what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes as "the epistemology of the closet" or D. A. Miller "the open secret," but I do so largely to point out that a character like Hatim, in being relatively open, evades the logic that pervades the sorts of queer readings Sedgwick and Miller provide in works ranging from Melville's *Billy Budd* and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to Dickens' *David Copperfield*.[51] By contrast, Taha, who suffers at the hands of the law after the confession of his father's profession, actually mimics the conventional structures of the open secret and its discovery. This is to make a claim not that he stands in for the homosexual but instead that the structures of queer reading are drawn outside the purview of any simple identitarian claim.

Not only does Taha face discrimination on account of his father's employment, but he also later faces the law in a second very pronounced manner. His trajectory in the novel follows a decidedly dramatic arc: his rejection from the police academy, his failed efforts to have his case reconsidered, his radicalization while a student at Cairo University, his torture when arrested for protesting, his participation in an even more militant group, and his eventual death at the end of the novel. If the term "homosexual" functions to identify Hatim from the outset, then Taha's development is traced, his radicalization is explained, as a sort of social phenomenon, a symptom of a larger problem possibly stemming from his sense of unfounded rejection. Within this trajectory, it is telling that each man's sodomy eventually results in death—in Hatim's case, murder at the hands of ʿAbduh in the novel and a stranger in the film, and in Taha's, a sensational death and murder at the hands of the man who sodomized him.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

If the first interrogation occurs during Taha's effort to become a police officer, then the second places him even more explicitly as a victim of the law. Following his capture, Taha is hung by the wrists, beaten, and eventually sodomized in a quest to find out the organization to which he belongs. In one of the most visceral scenes in the novel, we learn that Taha suffers a fate that haunts him for the remainder of the story:

> They threw him face down on the ground, and several hands started to remove his *gallabiya* and pull off his underclothes. He resisted with all his might, but they set upon him and held his body down with their hands and feet. Two thick hands reached down, grabbed his buttocks, and pulled them apart. He felt a solid object being stuck into his rear and breaking the tendons inside, and he started screaming. He screamed at the top of his voice. He screamed until he felt that his larynx was being ripped open.[52]

That the novel describes this scene in utmost detail and that the chapter ends with Taha's screams only heightens the sense in which this traumatic event transforms his course. But it also highlights the relationship with more subtlety than in the film, where Taha's torture is made explicit through all that we come to know of Hatim Rashid.

Where the novel can refer to Taha's sodomy explicitly, the film evokes the act by making an allusion to the homosexual character. Sodomy, in this sense, is never explicitly shown but is made visible by virtue of its association with the one character whom we do see being sodomized. In a series of cuts, the film moves from a shot of Buthayna's face watching police officers gather Taha's books to the sound of the interrogator's footsteps walking up stairs, down a hall, and ultimately into the interrogation room. As we see the interrogator light a cigarette, a voice introduces the name Taha al-Shazli, and the camera pans out to reveal Taha, his bloodied face blindfolded and his hands tied behind his back. As Taha responds to questions, the film cuts to a shot of the interrogator and Taha from the side. Drawing a seemingly strange association, the interrogator asks what Taha knows about Hatim Rashid. Taha responds that he knows of Hatim as a "respectable journalist" (*ṣīḥāfī muḥtaram*), but his interrogator pushes further, leaning in to ask if he know "anything else" (*ḥāga tānī*). Shot again in close up, the interrogator explains that he knows everything, including details about Taha's mother's infidelity.

With the heightened intensity of the interrogation, the scene proceeds to make Taha and Hatim's shared fate even more explicit. When pressed further by the interrogator, Taha confesses that he knows that Hatim is a deviant (*shādhdh*), to which the interrogator responds, "What does that mean, 'deviant,' Taha?" (*yaʿanī eh "shādhdh," yā Ṭāhā?*) The camera pans out, the interrogator claps his hands, and then he proclaims that they will do to Taha what is done to Hatim. Another close-up on the lighter, then on the interrogator's face, and we find ourselves in a scene reminiscent of the famous Dera' incident in *Lawrence of Arabia,* where much of what transpires is indicated through the cough of the observer.[53] As the interrogator commands the assistants to take off Taha's clothes, the camera cuts to Taha leaning against the wall. A close-up reveals blood on his face. We hear Taha's screams as the camera pans out, and the screen fades to black. Between Taha's screams and the rising music in the background, the film cuts to a shot of Taha cowered on the floor naked, crying in the corner. The shot holds for an extended duration, focusing on Taha as he cries, turning his eyes upward and then curling up further into a ball (see Figure 2).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

FIGURE 2. From Marwan Hamed, director, *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* (Cairo: Good News, 2006). [A color version of this figure can be viewed online at http://journals.cambridge.org/mes]

In the film, more so than in the novel, sodomy is merely insinuated, and Hatim is a key means of suggesting all that occurs between the close-up on Taha's bloodied face and his position against the wall. But in both the film and the novel, Taha emerges with an all-out resolve to avenge his violation. The closing scenes not only bring him face to face with the man who sodomized him but also depict a joint murder. As part of a mission, Taha encounters the torturer: "It was he," we learn, "he was the one who had supervised his torture, who had so often ordered soldiers to beat him and shred his skin with their whips and force the stick into his body." In the heat of the moment, Taha "lost all awareness of what he was doing" and leaps toward the officer, shooting him with an automatic rifle. Then, abandoning the command to flee immediately, Taha "disobeyed the plan and remained where he was so that he could watch the officer as he died."[54] But the goal of watching his abuser die has its consequences, and as Taha tries to escape, running in a "zigzag course as they had taught him during training," he "felt a coldness in his shoulder and chest, a coldness that burned like ice and took him by surprise."[55] Concluding a narrative arc that passes from Taha's innocent beginnings to his rejection from the police academy and ultimately to his torture at the hands of the state, the novel draws his story to a close with his death, leaving him both avenged and defeated in these last pages.

Given the multiple registers of narrative action in the text, readers are commonly inclined to see Taha, as Massad states, "as the model of manly self-respect."[56] He cannot submit to the violation he underwent and therefore fights to the bitter end to achieve revenge for his torture. For Massad, Taha "prefers death to being feminized in this manner," and there are plenty of moments where the novel explores Taha's destruction and emasculation following his torture.[57] That said, the fact that Taha and Hatim are brought together in parallel deaths at the conclusion of the story invites the consideration of just how to understand the juxtaposition of these two fates. The parallelism invites a set of associations that complicate the conventional binarism the two characters might appear to occupy.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

## SODOMY, SUBJECTIVATION, AND POSTIDENTITARIAN CONSTELLATIONS

In an interview with *The Guardian*, al-Aswani claims that Taha's character is based largely on a young man from his literary salon in downtown Cairo. The author speaks of Taha as though he stands in for a broader category, that of the young fanatic. He states, "I'm proud that we've had young fanatics there; some have become my friends. I feel a commitment towards these young people, who don't really have an education." Equating fanaticism with the condition of being uneducated, al-Aswani elaborates further, "To be fanatic is to categorise people, not to see the human being. Literature is the opposite, it's a very individual vision of life."[58] For someone who crafted a novel with such recognizable categories (homosexuality with Hatim and fanaticism with Taha), al-Aswani's remarks about literature as the individual vision of life seem potentially contradictory. What is remarkable, however, is that in his remarks fanaticism emerges as a category like any other, including homosexuality. The transmutation of categories, which come to share in structure what they might not share in content, plays out in fruitful ways when we look closely at the parallelism in the text. Hatim and Taha are rendered structurally analogous, even if substantively distinct. The novel, it would seem, makes possible structural similarities in identity formation, even if it furnishes an apparent "individual vision" for each.

I have argued here that *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* not only presents two seemingly opposite characters on parallel tracks, both of them sodomized and martyred, but that it also invokes a common narrative structure in doing so—a structure that revolves around sodomy. We could say, then, that al-Aswani's novel "makes the rectum a grave" insofar as it suggests that being sodomized necessarily leads to death—murder in the case of Hatim and a double murder in the case of Taha.[59] When all is said and done, the film and novel are queer less for the homosexual storyline than for the fact that, at bottom, they entwine a tale of two parallel deaths. For all of the decadence and supposed sexual deviance, be it Hajj ʿAzzam's second wife or Dissuki's seduction of Buthayna, only Hatim and Taha come together in this queer coupling. Merely focusing on the homosexual character is to miss the ways in which *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* recruits, defines, and renders both storylines identifiable. Ignoring this parallel, it seems, means overlooking the delicate operation complicating the terms of a civilizational discourse that would place the homosexual and the terrorist at opposite ends of a divide.

It is quite surprising, then, that *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* complicates stable identifications in spite of itself, refusing the legibility of Hatim Rashid while enfolding queerness into Taha's moral center. There is no normal in the text. If we take the author at his word, that literature humanizes, then it might be worth asking in what ways it does so. I have focused here on narrative dimensions, but it is worth noting that the novel stages the conditions by which we are to understand motivations. Taha's transformation is notable in this regard, and it is a transformation precipitated both by an initial sense of injustice (at his rejection from the police), alienation (in his time at Cairo University), and ultimately violation, at the hands of the law. One could say it would be reductive to claim that narrative action, or even Taha's impetus to kill his torturer, derives from the experience of sodomy, but so too would it be reductive to see any action deriving from another. We observe in Hatim's death less the psychological complexity of violation

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

than the seemingly precarious situation of a lover's quarrel. My claim here is not to point out causality but to point to narratological analogies—and ultimately to a blurring provided by the couplings of storylines.

What *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* offers is less a politics of difference (based on any uniquely individuated story) than a sharing of language, tropes, and codes, staged in the martyrdom of the two characters. It is not the case that these characters simply occupy opposite ends of the ideological spectrum; rather, precisely because of their placement in the narrative, they offer a certain constellation of complementary fates. And this constellation is crucial for thinking of queer politics in an age of civilizational discourse—that is, learning to recognize analogous modes of persecution amidst tendencies to polarize and cleave apart structural affinities.

In ending, I thus return to the opening of this article and the apparent division between the comments of Mustafa Bakri and ʿAla' al-Aswani on the issue of homosexuality. I do so to resist the antagonisms ordinarily posed in the context of mainstream gay and lesbian politics. I am not contending here that fiction makes legible the politics that we ought to pursue in the world, but I am suggesting that learning to read queerly means avoiding the simple recognition of queer characters in texts. As scholars of the Middle East, we have a responsibility not to recapitulate the conventional tropes demonizing Muslims and immigrant communities in the global North. Hatim is conspicuously identified textually, but he is—in the novel and even more explicitly in the film—structurally entwined with his apparent opposite. For all that al-Aswani feels he has accomplished in his novel, I argue that his novel goes further than he thinks. In the end, it invites a parallelism unseen when we focus strictly on identity categories without engaging the conditions in which persecution occurs. The imaginative parallelism in the text is foreclosed if we fanatically cling to a conception of queer reading tethered solely to representations of homosexuals.

What, then, does it mean to write about queer theory in the Middle East at a time when headlines proclaim an intrinsic antagonism between Muslim minorities in the global North and gay (often coded white) metropolitan populations? A headline in the *Toronto Sun*, "Gay-Bashers Thrive in Modern-Day Netherlands," only reaffirms this civilizational discourse in tabloid form, making little secret of its Islamophobia in the process: "If you think Amsterdam is the gay capital of Europe, you're half right but ten years out of date. Today it's the gay-bashing capital of Europe. Because Amsterdam isn't just gay. Now it's Muslim, too."[60] Amidst such headlines and the division of the world into the tolerant and the intolerant, it would be easy enough to read *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* as a story with a homosexual subplot cast against the story of a fanatical terrorist. Doing so, however, would be to remain blind to the shared fate of these putative opposites. At its richest, the queer coupling in the novel invites us to imagine parallels, analogies, and common struggles across the politics of difference. And in doing so, it draws us into a world where queer reading reinvigorates solidarity across identity categories and allows for the reimagining of a shared future.

## NOTES

*Author's note:* I thank Hicham Bouzid, Saba Mahmood, and Damon Young for their comments on earlier drafts of this article. I have also benefited from discussions with members of the CRESS Seminar at the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

University of Oregon, especially Sangita Gopal and Amanda Powell, as well as from the *IJMES* anonymous readers.

[1]Marwan Hamed, dir., *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* (Cairo: Good News, 2006).

[2]Quoted in Gihan Shahine, "A Taboo Too Far?" *Al-Ahram Weekly*, no. 803, 13–19 July 2006.

[3]Brian Whitaker, "Call to Censor 'Immoral' Egyptian Film," *The Guardian*, 6 July 2006.

[4]Claude Guibal, "Sa sortie au Caire a choqué ou ravi," *Libération*, 23 August 2006.

[5]"Egypt Debates Controversial Film," BBC News, 5 July 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/5150718.stm (accessed 17 August 2010).

[6]Jérôme Provençal, "Entretien avec Marwan Hamed," *Le Monde*, 23 August 2006.

[7]Negar Azimi, "Prisoners of Sex," *New York Times Magazine*, 3 December 2006.

[8]"Lajna bi-Majlis al-Shaʿb al-Misri li-Mushahadat ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan," *al-Jazeera*, 6 July 2006.

[9]For astute criticisms of how this civilizational ruse operates, see Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Saba Mahmood, "Feminism, Democracy, and Empire: Islam and the War of Terror," in *Women's Studies on the Edge*, ed. Joan Scott (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008).

[10]For a discussion of homonationalism in particular, see Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag," *Social Text* 20 (2002): 117–48; and Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007). Lisa Duggan's work has also been foundational for discussions of homonormativity (from which Puar derives her title); see Lisa Duggan, "Equality, Inc.," in *The Twilight of Equality?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003). It is worth noting that in this context, the invocation of gay rights is less a call for nationalism than a critique of Egyptian politics, albeit one that still turns upon distinctions between countries.

[11]Judith Butler, "I must distance myself from this complicity with racism, including anti-Muslim racism," *'Civil Courage Prize' Refusal Speech. Christopher Street Day,* 19 June 2010, http://www.egs.edu/faculty/judith-butler/articles/i-must-distance-myself (accessed 24 September 2010).

[12]Jasbir Puar, "To Be Gay and Racist Is No Anomaly," *The Guardian,* 2 June 2010; and "Israel's Gay Propaganda War," *The Guardian,* 1 July 2010.

[13]Even the critic Joseph Massad concedes the national dimensions of the novel: "*The Yaʿqubyan Building* . . . make[s] not sexual deviance but a community of sexual deviants the manifest sign of postcolonial degeneration." See *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 389.

[14]"Egypt Parliament to Scrutinise Film," *Al-Jazeera English*, 5 July 2006.

[15]For a discussion of this policy, see Judith Butler, "Sexual Politics, Torture and Secular Time," *British Journal of Sociology* 59 (2008): 3–4.

[16]Applicants from Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Switzerland, and the United States are all exempt from the exam.

[17]See Khaled Rouayeb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); and Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011). Outside of the context of the Middle East, see Inderpral Grewal and Caren Kaplan, "Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality," *GLQ* 7 (2001): 663–79; and Michael Lucey, *The Misfit of the Family: Balzac and the Social Forms of Sexuality* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).

[18]Joseph Massad, "Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World," *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 361.

[19]Ibid., 362.

[20]See, for example, Massad's interview with Reset Doc: "The West and the Orientalism of Sexuality: Joseph Massad Talks to Ernesto Pagano," http://www.resetdoc.org/story/1530; and "I Criticize Gay Internationalists Not Gays: Joseph Massad Counter-replies to Ghassan Makarem," http://www.resetdoc.org/story/00000001554 (accessed 17 August 2010).

[21]I draw inspiration here from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's reading of *Billy Budd* in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1990).

[22]ʿAlaʾ al-Aswani, *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 2005/2002), 51; and Alaa Al Aswany, *The Yacoubian Building*, trans. Humphrey Davies (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004), 35.

[23]Ibid., 52/35.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid., my emphasis.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press

[26]Ibid.
[27]Ibid.
[28]Ibid., 53/36.
[29]Ibid.
[30]Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 393–95.
[31]Al-Aswani, *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan*, 54–55/37.
[32]Ibid., 55/37.
[33]Ibid., 181/130.
[34]Ibid., 182/131.
[35]Ibid.
[36]Ibid., 185/133.
[37]Ibid., 186/134.
[38]Ibid., 328/232.
[39]Ibid., 330/234.
[40]Ibid., 331/234–35.
[41]Ibid., 334/237.
[42]Ibid.
[43]Najib Mahfuz, *al-Sukkariyya* (Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1957); and Atef Hetata, dir., *al-Abwab al-Mughlaka* (Cairo: Misr International, 1999).
[44]Massad, *Desiring Arabs,* 413–14.
[45]Al-Aswani, *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan,* 28/16.
[46]Ibid., 30/18.
[47]Ibid., 32/20.
[48]Ibid., 83/58.
[49]Ibid., 97/68.
[50]Ibid., 112/79.
[51]Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*; D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1988), esp. the chapter "Secret Subjects, Open Secrets."
[52]Al-Aswani, *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan*, 216/153.
[53]For an astute reading of the Dera' incident, see Kaja Silverman, "White Skin, Brown Masks," in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
[54]Al-Aswani, *ʿImarat Yaʿqubyan*, 342/242.
[55]Ibid., 343/243.
[56]Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 399.
[57]Ibid. See also Hanadi al-Samman's reading of this novel in the context of emasculation, "Out of the Closet: Representations of Homosexuals and Lesbians in Modern Arabic Literature," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 39 (2008): 286–87.
[58]ʿAla' al-Aswani as quoted in "Cairo Calling," *The Guardian* 23 August 2008, http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/aug/23/fiction9 (accessed 22 September 2010).
[59]Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" *October* 43 (1987): 197–222.
[60]Ezra Levant, "Gay-Bashers Thrive in Modern-Day Netherlands," *Toronto Sun*, 10 October 2010.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743812001614 Published online by Cambridge University Press