

Dina Georgis

THINKING PAST PRIDE: QUEER ARAB SHAME IN *BAREED MISTA3JIL*

Abstract

This article offers a reading of the groundbreaking book *Bareed Mista3jil: True Stories*, a collection of the narratives of Lebanese queers. Here, I argue, a burgeoning collective queer experience is being mapped from the conditions of Western imperialism and globalization, from the legacies of a colonial past, and from everyday life in postwar Lebanon. Resisting the urge to reduce Arab queer identities as either Western or traditionally Arab, the article suggests that though Western constructions of sexualities have certainly been influential, these identities are also responding to the local and cultural context. If we attune our readings to the affects that underlie the stories in this collection, it becomes clear that the emotional strategies to survive and negotiate the difficulties of postcoloniality are different from the strategies of post-Stonewall pride culture. Rather than stifle shame with the insistence of queer pride, this community is creating itself by expressing its suffering from the effects of shame and social humiliation. The narrative thread that comes through is not pride but hope. That is because shame, as Elspeth Probyn contends, gives access to what is most important and, as Eve Sedgwick has argued, is a resource for imagining change.

In 1993, when my queer life was intelligibly launched into existence in Toronto, I recall my anxieties of not feeling queer enough. Awkward with the idea of perversion, with S/M and sex-positive culture, with my long hair, with my general racial self-consciousness, I could not walk or talk queer. By the time I started to feel like a bona fide queer subject, I had the opposite worry: I had figured out how to fit in all too well. I had become queer in a matter of just a few years, but with it was a pronounced feeling of shame. At the time, it felt like my final arrival to queerness was also my adieu to Arab culture—no thanks to my mother, who insisted that homosexuality did not belong to Arabs. Nonetheless, she did surprise me one day when she announced that she understood, and even identified with, my desires and suggested I consider the possibility of getting married to a man, starting a family, and keeping women lovers on the side. This, she said coyly, is how it's done, she had “heard” in Iraq. Unable to live up to the standards of Arab tradition, my relationship to my family—which was virtually my only Arab community at the time—took a significant beating, and our interactions diminished year by year. With only one Arab queer friend, I was unable to make sense of what it meant to be a queer Arab.

Dina Georgis is an Assistant Professor in the Women and Gender Studies Institute, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario; e-mail: dina.georgis@utoronto.ca

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

The groundbreaking book *Bareed Mista3jil* [Express Mail/Mail in a Hurry]: *True Stories* is an opening into the question of what it means to be an Arab queer.¹ *Bareed* was produced by Meem, an organized Lebanese group of 350 lesbian, bisexual, and queer women and transgender persons founded in 2007.² It aims to reach out to socially isolated queers and provides its members with workshops, support groups, individual psychological counseling, film screenings, and discussions at its volunteer-run Womyn House in Beirut. Meem's purpose in producing *Bareed* is to give voice to its members' lives and to "introduce Lebanese society to the real stories of real people whose voices have gone unheard for hundreds of years."³ *Bareed*'s editors compiled the "true stories" of forty-one individuals, mostly women, from transcribed interviews with over 150 members of Meem, whose names were withheld to protect their confidentiality and safety.

There are very limited historical and literary sources on nonhetero sexualities in the Middle East, particularly among women. The publication of *Bareed* was thus met with considerable attention; it was reviewed by online magazines such as *Menassat*⁴ and academic journals such as the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*,⁵ had a staged reading in San Francisco, and has been taught in college classrooms, including my own. What made *Bareed*'s publication in 2009 possible was the advent of social networking sites, which had helped to bring people together and form a community under the safety of online anonymity. As members of Meem who meet regularly, the contributors are not strangers to one another; their stories thus give us insight into a tightly knit community of queers in Lebanon and form a narrative archive of the entanglements of their emotional and politically implicated lives.

Deploying the familiar nomenclature of Western sexual identities and articulating goals—liberation, gay rights, and social recognition—that resonate with those fought for in Western contexts, these mostly 20-something and 30-something queer women and trans persons are not simply or naively appropriating Western queer epistemology. Rather, they are cultivating and negotiating their sexualities under a variety of local and geopolitical pressures. Their stories help us to begin thinking about how queer Arab becoming is postcolonial: mixed, complexly hybrid, and unfinished. In *Bareed*, collective queer experience is being mapped from the conditions of Western imperialism and globalization, from the shaming legacies of a colonial past, and from everyday life in postwar Lebanon. For the group of queer Arabs represented in this text, a significant aspect of the process of becoming a community is, as I see it, an openness to talk about shame. A striking feature of *Bareed* is how often shame comes up, both directly and indirectly, in the narratives. A close reading of the text will demonstrate how shame can be a generative resource for Arab queer becoming. Feeling shame, according to Elspeth Probyn, activates what matters, because "whatever it is that shames you will be something that is important to you, an essential part of yourself."⁶ In shame, our worries and concerns about our investments in relationality and belonging come through. As Eve Sedgwick has theorized, shame always happens in relation and thus gets us in touch with our deepest investments in each other.⁷ Also, since shame always has an immediate bodily effect, it invites reflection, even invention. Indeed, what comes through in *Bareed* is a burgeoning community that is creatively negotiating the painful difficulties of marginalization and shaming. Unlike the strategies of post-Stonewall pride politics, whose message was to overcome shame, this community is inventing itself *through* and

not *against* shame. To be clear, the authors' accounts are not devoid of Western pride and gay rights discourse, but most of the storytellers seem to resist making a choice between tradition and family (the sites of sexual shaming) and modern queer life. *Bareed* evinces a pronounced hope for a future where the price of gay rights and social freedom is not family ties or religion. In other words, for many of the authors, the loss of group belonging is not a sacrifice they want to make for the right to be "out."

WHAT TO MAKE OF DESIRING ARABS

Only two years before *Bareed* was published, Joseph Massad's widely cited book *Desiring Arabs* came out. Taking a very strong and unforgiving stand against the effects of Western gay imperialism on the lives of Arabs, his fundamental point, interestingly enough, mirrors my mother's views. He argues that in the Middle East gays and lesbians are produced and named where they do not exist.⁸ The fundamental premise of *Desiring Arabs* is that homosexuality, and its constitutive identity categories of queer, gay, or lesbian, is a Western conception that defines the Western sexual subject and should not be universalized to represent the sexualities of Arabs. Arabs who engage in same-sex encounters do not identify themselves as homosexual⁹ and are not, Massad asserts, interested in romantic coupling. Defining sexual freedom strictly as the freedom to declare and claim sexual preferences, gay rights organizations—which Massad collectively labels the "Gay International"—have adopted a missionary stance, imposing the "coming out" imperative on non-Western groups. In the Arab world, Massad points out, "it is the publicness of socio-sexual identities rather than the sexual acts themselves that elicits repression."¹⁰ In making this distinction, Massad suggests that Arab cultures have given permission to and tolerated same-sex sexual relations as long as they remain unnamed.¹¹ It is this longstanding practice of Arab sexuality that Massad seeks to protect against Western gay imperialism. His defense of this vision of traditional same-sex Arab sexuality situates him in judgment of the Arab subjectivities represented in *Bareed*, many if not all of whom deploy the nomenclature of Western sexual identities.¹²

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said pointed out that the West's imperialist relationship to the Middle East has a sexual character. Positioning itself as masculine, the West used its reason to colonize and penetrate the feminized and oversexed Arab world.¹³ Shaming is arguably endemic to the logic of Orientalism, whose legacies live on in new social formations, the latest rendition being the rise of gay imperialism. Increasingly, "liberating" gay people in the Middle East has become a central discourse of neocolonialism. The implications are damaging to Arab queers, not only at a personal level, when the imposition of coming out pressures young people to live openly with LGBTQ identities, but also at a sociopolitical level. In the Palestinian context, queer lives are jeopardized both from within Palestinian culture and from Israeli occupation. In recent years, Israel has increasingly branded itself as an oasis of gay tolerance and gay rights in the Middle East, flaunting itself as a progressive democracy through its liberal gay discourses while shaming Palestinians for a purportedly backward and barbaric culture that violently oppresses its gay members. But though its claims are embedded in human rights discourse, Israel offers no rights or protections to Palestinian queers. Jasbir Puar refers to such contradictory configurations as instances of "homonationalism," in which the heteronormative nation includes gays and lesbians who have come to play

a significant role in defining Western democracies against Muslim-majority nations. Homonationalism has insidiously empowered certain states to pursue a war against “terrorists” who supposedly “repress” gays, while often refusing to provide sanctuary for those from the Middle East and elsewhere in the global South who claim refugee status based on sexual orientation.¹⁴

These important geopolitical concerns inform *Desiring Arabs*. I focus on Massad’s main argument because no account of contemporary Arab sexualities can be examined without taking into consideration transnational developments. Like Massad, I am concerned with the problems arising from an imperialist schema of sexuality that effectively works to shame and degrade Arabs. However, I am wary of a viewpoint that does not put tradition under rigorous intellectual scrutiny. Selectively reading Arabic literature and film, and without ethnographic evidence, he argues with epistemological certainty the ahistorical continuity of unnamed same-sex practices. What is unconvincing, however, is how the same-sex traditions he describes could have remained pure and untouched by any violent colonial interference or exposure to difference. He implicitly mounts a culturalist or essentialist argument of Arab sexuality, one that does not consider how the assertion of cultural authenticity, in Julian Awwad’s words, “has historically been bound with nationalist struggles against imperial forces in the era of decolonization, especially where sexuality is involved.”¹⁵ As many feminist and queer theorists have argued,¹⁶ the regulation of women’s bodies and of sexualities is the battleground on which the nation marks its difference as rooted in “a ‘virtuous’ nationalism against the backdrop of economic uncertainty.”¹⁷ Put differently, women’s rights and sexual freedoms are imagined as Western imports and threats to national sovereignty. Following Benedict Anderson, authentic tradition and community are “imagined” and instrumentalized in the fight against imperialism and globalization.¹⁸

Massad defends a notion of traditional same-sex sexual practices without accounting for the complexities of the postcolonial condition or a postcolonial perspective that understands that tradition is never static and, in the case of the Middle East, that it has been affected by colonial and neocolonial encounters in ways that continually alter what it means to be traditional.¹⁹ Although I value scholarship that examines the status of homosexuality in the Arab world through revisionist readings of tradition—for example, by “queering” the Qur’an or other ancient and aesthetic texts²⁰—I am interested in how contemporary sexualities in the global South are entangled (historically, politically, psychically) with the discursive structures of the global North. The aim of my analysis is not to defend Arab sexualities against racist attacks of barbarism and backwardness (although I understand the impulse). Rather, I am interested in making insights into how people are living with the feeling of loss of traditional cultures in the face of violent imperialisms. As Awwad rightly points out, gay epistemologies are evident in the Middle East, and in the case of Egypt gay subjectivity is actually invoked by the law. In 2001, for example, the state rounded up, detained, and tortured men found on the Queen Boat, a tourist and discothèque ship in Cairo known to be popular among gay men. This highly publicized event was evidence not only that homosexuality exists and is practiced in Egypt but also that it existed for Mubarak’s government to the degree that it was perceived as a threat. For Awwad, this presents a complicated dilemma to Massad’s critique of human rights gay discourse and activism. While it is true that human rights discourse has been epistemically injurious to Arabs and instrumentalized

politically in Israel and in Western democracies, I share Awwad's concern: human rights interventions are often problematic because they assume, as Massad argues, universal assumptions about same-sex practices, yet "non-intervention overlooks the plight of persecuted same-sex practitioners and renders the state unaccountable for its violations. This predicament reveals a tension between critiques of gay rights activism and the practical imperative to address state violations against same-sex practitioners."²¹

Massad is of course aware that "gay Arabs" exist and that they are derivative of globalization, the advent of mass media, and cultural imperialism. In his defense, he is offering an intellectual account of Arab sexuality, not a practical one, even if there are practical manifestations. My concern is with his epistemological account and its ontological implications. He views Arabs who assert a gay identity as victims, in Sahar Amer's words, of "orientalist fantasies, of colonial imposition, and of the universalizing claims of Western gay rights groups."²² His logic reduces self-identified gay Arabs as self-hating and assimilated to Western constructs. In so doing, Massad does not help move us beyond civilizational binaries and divisions to understand how the colonial entanglements of East and West have permanently transformed histories and sexual identities. And even beyond such entanglements, can we be so sure that there are no Arabs for whom traditional forms of private and contained sexual expression have not been difficult, now and perhaps even in the premodern Arab world? Our sexual desires and orientations are not so neatly packaged; they do not always adhere to the conventions of the present and cannot be so easily mapped and understood.

Same-sex Arab sexualities are neither homogenous nor sell-outs to Western hegemony. In varying degrees, all sexualities have been affected by colonialism and therefore are negotiated or lived between East and West, as postcolonial scholar Paul Gilroy argues in *The Black Atlantic*.²³ This is true even with the sexualities we might call traditional, because they are not immune to geopolitical forces. Indeed, tradition asserts itself against change and is therefore not static. For Gilroy, identities are transcultural, born metaphorically in the liminal space of the Atlantic, in its middle passage, neither here nor there. A feature of postcoloniality is the condition of having to negotiate worlds.²⁴ I am not talking about an easy definition of hybrid sexual subjectivities for queer Arabs; rather, I am suggesting that the process of living and working through the traumatic legacies of European colonial sexual shaming and the challenging conditions of contemporary globalization have given rise to reinvented sexualities. How to name Arab sexualities is contested because there is no easy way to make sense of the historical entanglements of precolonial traditions, colonization and sexual shaming, and gay epistemologies in the lives of present-day Arabs. Writing about the dilemmas of working through pain, Rinaldo Walcott suggests that "history becomes a process of learning fraught with the risks of arriving at an elsewhere that cannot be known in advance."²⁵ This is so even when Arabs deploy identities such as "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," "transgender," and so forth. Because when we actually examine the everyday lives of people, their subjectivities have complex layers of identification and are unsettled. Arab sexualities are in transition; though hard to define, they have an affective life. If we turn our attention to affects and their vicissitudes, we may learn how queer Arabs are negotiating in unexpected ways the interconnectivity of cultures and places. In other words, they are not doomed to two choices: abide by and assimilate to hegemonic modern sensibilities or retreat to a fantasy of static tradition.

To different degrees, sexual identity for Arabs is a contested and painful site, whether in the diaspora or in the homeland. What Massad does not consider is that the assertion of traditional identity or authentic practice is just as much an effect of the trauma of colonialism on Arabs as is Western assimilation. That is because, as Walcott writes, the repression of trauma leaves people “continually repeating the condition of being in pain as the basis of identity or community formation.”²⁶ To aspire for “the possible ‘advance’ of the Arab world”²⁷ by participating in Western or gay epistemologies is a reaction formation from suffering—but so is the insistence on static tradition, when its psychic and political motive is to reclaim Arab sexuality from the Orientalist view, which once disparaged and attacked medieval Islam’s purported debauchery. It is certainly true, as Massad argues, that Arabs are condemned for repressing homosexuality by social Darwinists (in U.N. agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and human rights organizations, for instance) who view homophobia as a symptom of resistance to social progress. But must the struggle to address homophobia in the Middle East be compromised by the racism of Western liberalism? Can we not instead contextualize present-day homophobia in a history of colonialism that once shamed the Arab world for being “too free” in its sexual promiscuities and now shames it for not being free enough? If we historicize Arab sexualities with an interest in understanding how people are living with shame and defining and transforming who they are, then our strategies for how to account for and how to support Arab queers will less likely be defensive or judgmental.

My reading of the sexualities represented in *Bareed* is that they are neither modern nor traditional, neither Western nor non-Western; instead, they are in process, negotiating the pressures of conflicting worlds. As the book’s introduction states: “it is becoming harder for what the world calls ‘developing countries’ to study and look at sexuality outside of the Western construct of ‘LGBT.’”²⁸ The authors’ disposition is not defensive or naively complicit to Western imperialism but rather expresses a difficult reality: “Sadly, and for lack of Arabic expressions, queer people in Lebanon are more likely to frame their identity in English or French because that’s where these words exist more freely and where we find internet pages and papers written about sexuality.”²⁹

Despite the self-conscious awareness of Western influence, the authors’ sexualities are as muddled as their “Arabish,” an informal transliteration system utilized in online chatting to write Arabic in Latin letters. Originally born from limited access to an Arabic keyboard and from limited support for Arabic characters on the internet, Arabish made online communication among Arabs possible. It creatively transliterates Arabic sounds that cannot be expressed in Latin letters, by using numbers. For example, in *Bareed Mista3jil*, “3” stands for the Arabic letter ‘*ayn*. Though *Bareed* is not a digital book, the community of queers represented in it formed ties and relationships through online social networks where Arabish was widely used. Queer ties and by extension the queer community was made and narrativized through this hybrid form of communication.

Arguably, among the educated class of Lebanon, language tends to be a little “queer.” In the 1970s, I recall, I talked to my friends in some strange combination of Arabic, English, and French. In other words, linguistic hybridity precedes the recent phenomenon of Arabish. Indeed, the editors of *Bareed* explain that the authors were more comfortable writing in English, especially because the Arabic version would be written not in dialect but in classical Arabic, typically used in formal writing and media. They eventually

decided to write the book in English with a second version translated into Arabic. Each version carries the limits and challenges of writing in a single language. Queer jargon is hard to translate into Arabic, especially because a lexicon of sexual expression is constrained. Alternately, writing in English exclusively would not allow the use of Arabic colloquial sayings of everyday discourse. The “solution” is interesting: English with Arabish, and Arabic translation of the English with key phrases spelled to reflect the Lebanese Arabic dialect. Hence, even the version translated into Arabic is queerly muddled.

While it might be difficult for non-Arabic readers to appreciate the mix of Arabic and English in *Bareed*, it offers a window into the linguistic palette of many Lebanese speakers. In the English version of the text, the storytellers switch to Arabish when Arabic is required to get the full cultural reference or emotional resonance. Arabish, in my view, represents both the real and symbolic lived reality of queer Arabness in the 21st century. These young queers do not seem to be interested in lost same-sex sexual traditions. Their stories narrativize the experiences of existing in a world that is inhabited by the imposition of norms, by the traumas of war, religion, and secularism, by the legacies of French colonialism, by the present-day political dramas of the region, by the World Wide Web, and by the proliferation of other diverse media. Of course they are exposed to and influenced by Western epistemologies, from queer theory to Oprah; but almost all who recall the influence of Western media on their lives express only the relief they felt knowing that there were others in the world who shared their desires and feelings and that there was a name to identify those feelings. Certainly, the characteristics of a Western-imported queerness have filled this gap to some extent. But also expressed in their stories is how their queer lives are lived and shaped by the pressures, concerns, and values of the region.

My reading of the stories of *Bareed* is attentive to the emotional registers of its narratives, with a specific attention to shame, which is vividly present in the text. Though the temptation might be to read the accounts simply as brave coming-out stories, there is much more to be gleaned. My reading is less celebratory, but not less hopeful, and thinks through how these mostly young queers are writing and making their lives and their community from the painful site of shame. Their suffering informs who they are and likely who they are becoming as a new community. This is because social transformation is not merely an intellectual, ideological, or consciously political process; it is also a response to the difficult and hard to name affects of social relationships and to the precarity of human ties.

Nothing sets the conditions better for making insights into the affective undercurrents of the dilemmas of belonging and the complexities of subject formation than do stories. Stories bring narrative coherence and understanding to existence, which in psychoanalytic thought is key to how one comes to work through and bear injuries.³⁰ Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, story is the emotional strategy for surviving difficult experience and therefore an important resource for insights into postcolonial epistemologies. In stories we imagine our safety, resist threats, and construct the terms of community. Stories offer psychic consolation to hard to digest experience or social conflict. In so doing, they teach us how individuals or groups of people are negotiating difficulty. In almost every story of *Bareed*, a difficult event is narrativized or given a “plot.”³¹ Affectively, plots serve to stabilize meaning or solidify a group identity in ways that limit and constrain

people to the demands of community. But in the case of the Lebanese queers represented in *Bareed*, the plot is still young and indeterminate. In the process of reading a story, we potentially make contact with the conflicts and difficulties that haunt the plot or the existing narrative. In Avery Gordon's words, these are the ghostly matters of narrative, and when we read with an eye for ghosts, we get a sense of complex subjecthood, of how "people's lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning."³²

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF GAY PRIDE AND QUEER ARAB SHAME

Queer pride, as an epistemology, has informed queer history and identity in the Western context.³³ In its shadow is the proverbial closet of shame, which has stood as the symbol of a life with no future. To be queer and proud is to dare to live one's life shamelessly. Even in its mainstreamed rendition, to be proud is to claim that fear, repression, and shame have been liberated and unhinged. Queer pride is a speech act. As Foucault argued, what characterizes modern sexuality is that it is a truth to be discovered and, once knowable to the self, it becomes incumbent upon the self to confess it to the outside world, even a priest or a doctor.³⁴ Today, the demand to confess, as a testament of pride, is both a private and public act. Pride has a narrative plot: after you finally come out to yourself, you might tell your best friend, then your mother. You might cut your hair, get a piercing, or join an LGBTQ group. Being proud is about sharing with others the parts of you that may cost you your job, your friends, your family, your community. The ethos of pride has certainly won rights—rights I would not want to lose. But this very ethos is now implicated in a colonial discourse that fails to see that the right to come out and the right for legal changes are not the only strategies for queer becoming.

From an emotional standpoint, pride has been the story form in which Western queer survival has been imagined. And because its psychic function is survival, its status has become ontological. But the origin of pride culture is of course historical. It was the Stonewall riots of 1969 in New York City that launched gay activism and pride in the U.S. and beyond. The riots were a response to frustrations with persistent police raids of a queer bar, especially popular among drag queens, trans women, and people of color. When Judy Garland, an icon for trans women and gay men, died suddenly from a drug overdose after a life of personal struggle, it triggered feelings about the community's own struggles and unleashed anger against police humiliation and harassment. Shameless and proud, the protesters came "out of the bar and into the streets" with pride and dignity. What Stonewall set in motion, within the historical context of the civil rights, antiwar, and feminist movements, is a teleological narrative that begins with prepolitical homosexual practice and culminates in an "out," liberated, and modern gay subjectivity.

Naturalized as the way to be and become queer, coming out proudly is therefore not simply an event in one's life but also informs what it means to be with oneself. As the queer community's lifeline, pride has not made room for shame because feeling shame carries the weight of feeling backward and being regressive. Indeed, pride is the antidote to a life of shame. But despite the ubiquity of pride culture, shame nonetheless lives in the dark corridors of queer identity, sometimes as an embarrassing secret and sometimes in excess of what one might think of oneself and what one stands for. That is because the discursive logic of queer pride is the sustained defeat of shame. In other words, without

shame there is no pride. Not that shame can ever be eradicated, nor should that be a goal, as Eve Sedgwick points out,³⁵ but the fantasy of pride is that one can and should live a life without shame. At a community level, the stability of pride has come with a political and emotional cost.

At a personal level, the pride narrative has not prepared and does not prepare queers for the struggles and difficulties that often accompany coming out. Potentially, pride in one's identity might feel like an obligatory requirement for queer belonging. I remember feeling the desire, and in retrospect the pressure, of coming out to everyone I knew, including my sisters, the morning after my first date with a woman. I am not suggesting that these are conscious dynamics; however, the pressure to be shameless might foreclose, or at the very least discourage, the possibilities of a more careful process of coming to terms with the challenges, and in some contexts the dangers, that one might face as a queer person. Feeling proud, in other words, does not abate shame and arguably keeps it alive, especially if we are not able to live up to its demands. As Probyn cautions: "The imperative not to represent in a colonizing manner the feelings and fears of others is especially difficult in highly emotional times."³⁶ As a political strategy, pride has certainly had the effect of repairing historical injury and gaining social recognition from a history of degradation. But its success has ironically eroded its goals of achieving queer shamelessness, the very premise on which it stood. The taste of recognition has not only had the effect of foreclosing the pain of shame but has also paved the way for accepting the logics of neoliberalism (consumer and domestic private rights rather than citizen rights and systemic change) in return for more social acceptance. Increasingly, prominent lesbian and gay rights organizations embrace agendas that vie for recognition within contemporary economic and political systems. As Lisa Duggan argues, dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions are not contested but rather upheld and sustained in "homonormative" or family-oriented formations associated with domestic partnership, monogamy (against promiscuity, to prevent AIDS), adoption, and gender-normative social roles.³⁷ Pride parades all over North America, Europe, and Israel celebrate these achievements, which is to say pride discourse is increasingly implicated in neoliberal attitudes.³⁸ These attitudes and political formations have shaped the social and cultural context that underpins Massad's important critique of Western gay rights organizations that impose their own epistemologies and assume the role of liberator of Muslim or Arab sexualities.³⁹

I have engaged in this lengthy discussion on pride epistemology not to suggest that queer Arab becoming is not implicated in its discourse but rather to begin to make insights into their complex interconnectivities. What *Bareed* evinces is a collective queer narrative and community emerging from the challenges of having to grapple, much like their Western counterparts, with cultural censure, social repression, and collective suffering. However, what is interesting, as my analysis will demonstrate, is the permission Meem members seem to give themselves to talk about suffering directly, to canalize their pain, humiliation, and shame. This is a striking difference, especially in the context of Western queer pride, which as I have suggested tends to privilege victory or the defeat of suffering and social humiliation. Indeed, Heather Love is concerned with the tendency in queer studies to foreclose pain and shame in order to affirm positive queer existence and identity, usually as oppositional to heterosexism. Affirmative accounts of queer history, even as they reclaim disparaging words like "fag" and "dyke," are embedded

in a modern discourse of triumphalism and moving forward.⁴⁰ While almost all of the authors of *Bareed* are proud to be queer, what is also pressing for this group is to imagine and narrate hope in the face of difficulty and shame. They are less inclined to convince us that they have expelled shame and its sources (family, culture, etc.) from their lives as they are to communicate that they are not entirely broken by it. The message that must come out *bareed mista3jil*, or in a hurry, is the very existence of these stories, which is to say that queers are thriving and inventing themselves despite difficult conditions.

As an emotional and political response to homophobia, pride was, and in some contexts continues to be, a courageous and creative intervention into homophobia. And shame was the affect that rendered it possible. This was Sedgwick's point in her extraordinary treatment of shame. For Sedgwick, shame holds the promise of cultural production; in shame, what's possible is near because the gaze of the other evokes an intense vulnerability that cannot be easily disavowed. Shame, Probyn argues, is actually felt in the body: it makes one blush. In shame, we always have an experience of ourselves in relation to an actual spectator. Unlike guilt, shame has a stage and is a public encounter and a public experience, even if the public only consists of two. Its potential, explains Sedgwick, lies in its performative nature: shame effaces itself, shame points and projects, shame turns its skin inside out. In shame, the self is on display and this creates the conditions for transformation. As Stephen Barber and David Clark, reading Sedgwick, rhetorically ask:

What pleasures and pain flourish, what lives are possible when one is born into a world that is experienced aslant? What unpredictable futures await those for whom being shamed is a condition of personal and political efflorescence rather than emaciation or incarceration? What new optics will need to be created through which even to glimpse the fecund boundary zones at once fierce and playful, of "shame-creativity"? How to look to the side of the white-out glare of the other spectacles of visibility, *Gay Pride*, for example?⁴¹

What unpredictable futures and new optics does shame hold for queer Arabs? Shamed locally (when socio-moral codes are publically violated) and globally (for being too gay or not gay enough), queer Arabs are proverbially damned if they do and dammed if they don't. Contradictory demands and competing risks are arguably inciting fecund dreams from which the formations of hybrid identities are taking shape. Of course, I cannot speculate on or define these new formations too concretely, but I read *Bareed* for how its storytellers are articulating and symbolizing their shame, their pain, their conflicts, their longings, and their visions for the future. My reading attempts to put to words the plot that emerges from the emotional strategies of their survival, which animate their narratives. I treat *Bareed* as both a literal and imaginative resource for beginning to make insights into queer Arab subjectivities.

Meem's dreams for the future are not unlike those we have seen in the West: full citizenship rights, public visibility. Its strategies are also similar in that its members are making themselves more visible by coming out to friends and communicating their thoughts to the outside world by blogging their everyday experiences, creating online media projects, and participating in the feminist movement in Lebanon. The desire for change and increased empowerment is linked, in the mind of scholar Sofian Merabet, to the political context of postwar Lebanon, especially following the assassination of ex-prime minister Rafik Hariri in 2005 and the subsequent withdrawal of Syrian troops from

the country, which jolted political culture into action. The perceived moment of liberation incited, according to Merabet, “a general shaking off of fear, but also a concerted ‘coming out’ by the LGBT group HELEM.”⁴² Some of the stories in *Bareed* evince a kind of empowerment we might associate with Western coming out: falling in love with a best friend, the centrality of bar culture in queer life, butches on motorcycles, resistance to gender normativity, the thrills of a first kiss, and changing sex. But the stories also offer an emotional world that exceeds these familiar discourses and practices. Not only is shameless pride lacking from the discourse that these storytellers are communicating, but the stories also elaborate subjectivities struggling with culturally defined shame. Though many of the authors share their experiences of shame, and name it as a site of difficulty, oppression, and pain, none of the stories actually references shame as an obstacle to political liberation. Unlike the context in which I came out in Toronto, there is not a sense with this community that one needs to be ashamed of shame.

‘*Ayb*, the word for shame in Arabic, which is closely linked to what is deemed morally wrong by society, is commonly used in everyday conversation in the Arab world. When children are told that their behavior is ‘*ayb*, they learn early on that that behavior is censored by the outside world, which is not forgiving of moral violations. The anxieties around violating social norms are often less attributable to the behavior being *ḥarām* (a sin or religiously forbidden)⁴³ as to the fear that it will lead to *kalām al-nās* (what people will say) and therefore public reckoning. Certainly in my mind as a child, I was far more afraid of ‘*ayb*’s immediate consequences of *kalām al-nās* than of God’s wrath upon me. Asifa Siraj, in her study of Muslim gay men, finds that many men were not concerned with committing a religious sin, despite their identification with Islam; what prohibited them from coming out to their families was that they felt their parents would be concerned with what people would say and in particular what the extended family would think.⁴⁴ This point is reiterated in the introduction to *Bareed*: “Tradition and public views of morality are often just as powerful as religious texts and institutions, and this is especially true in Lebanon.” Of course, neither I nor the editors of *Bareed* mean to suggest that religion is not a censoring reality. But religious institutions usually follow public morality. In the case of Lebanon, “civil war and regional tensions enforce the fanaticism of all sects towards their own people”⁴⁵; sectarian belonging is marked by virtuous practice and regulated by the fear of shame.

My intention, then, is not to make overarching or essentialist cultural claims about Arab shame. In all cultures, shaming and the fear of shame encourage obedience to social moral codes, and what is considered shameful is never culturally static. At the same time, it is probably not a generalization to say that the fear of social retribution and ostracization in a culture that intensely values family ties and religious/sectarian loyalty is the emotional reality for most Arabs. As the editors of *Bareed* point out, children in the Arab world do not generally leave their parents’ home until marriage, and once married are expected to care for their elderly parents, who eventually end up living with one of their children. To maintain this structure, familial bonds that rely on heteronormativity must remain intact. Any violation of conventional life, especially if it’s public in nature, including a marriageless life, divorce, adultery, or any type of sexual scandal, threatens the social fabric. Indeed, in the absence of a strong public service sector, family ties are essential for general welfare and security. In other words, the attachment to familial cultural practices is not playing out a romance with tradition, but often enacting an

investment in material and emotional survival. In Jared McCormick's qualitative study of the lives of gay Lebanese men, he found that homosexual life is kept tightly private because of "economic considerations and the security the family continues to provide in this regard."⁴⁶ And in the words of the author of Bareed's story, "When You Burn," who describes herself as lower working class, "Your friends will not break their backs to make sure you survive. Your family will."⁴⁷

Shame appears in the lives of *Bareed's* authors as an articulated experience, but when examined closely it also offers important subtle meaning. As Probyn argues, shame "illuminates our intense attachment to the world, our desire to be connected with others."⁴⁸ When one feels shamed, one's stakes and interests in the other are exposed and our vulnerabilities staged. Shame signals our investments and dependencies on one another, even with those we might regard as our enemies but from whom we want recognition. This is most strongly articulated in "Becoming," one of the more devastating stories about family and social discipline in *Bareed*. Tolerated as a tomboy by family and friends when young, the storyteller's life takes a painfully wrenching turn at puberty, when "girls suddenly return to school wearing bras, legs waxed, eyebrows plucked. . . . Suddenly, it was no longer about girls vs. boys. It was about girlfriends and boyfriends."⁴⁹ But for this storyteller, what made life unbearable was not so much the pressures to look feminine as her naïve belief that loving girls was "natural," and not a social problem or a religious sin. It was not until she came across a passage from the Bible one day, which spoke of God abandoning people for their "vile passions," that she felt, as she put it, "doomed."⁵⁰ This hit especially hard because her childhood fantasy was to be a Christian missionary. Later, she stumbled upon a Lebanese TV show that was interviewing gays behind masks and curtains as well as a supportive priest who insisted that homosexuality was normal and that Christianity was tolerant of gay people. Her hopes, she says, returned and were then brutally dashed again when, naïve of the ways of the world, she told her Bible teacher that she was struggling with her homosexuality. Her announcement, though made privately, was a public admission and as such was treated as a public event. Within an hour, our storyteller relates, the teacher had shared the news with the principal, the supervisors, and the other teachers, one of whom was her mother.

What followed was the brutality that comes with being regarded a sexual deviant (*shādhda*). Her mother, angry, ashamed, and crying, dragged her into the bathroom and scrubbed her in the tub, and then locked her in her bedroom for twelve days with nothing but cheese sandwiches and intermittent scrubbing sessions in the bathroom. When she was finally allowed to return to school, our storyteller was not permitted to interact with anyone and sat at the back of the classroom. In protest and love, her friends moved their seats to the back of the room to sit with her. It is this gesture of solidarity that would inform her politics and would inspire Meem, which she founded.

If narrative is the strategy of survival, how does our storyteller construct her survival from the threat of losing family love, especially in a context where familial ties hold so much material and emotional security? For the author of "Becoming," shame became a resource negotiating her place in the world. That is because in shame, we become witnesses to our entangled lives and the collective narratives that define the strict terms of belonging. We become aware of the fragility of human connection and the power that others have over us. In this way, shame is generative: it activates the imagination for

reconstructing the terms of relationality or community, either by reinvesting in them or by finding and creating new ones. In her words: “that little tomboy who wanted to be a missionary is now an activist for social justice. . . . I grew up to be exactly what I wanted to be.”⁵¹

Stories such as “Becoming” elaborate how shame brings up our deepest wants and worries where love and recognition is concerned. In shame our investments and interests are interrupted or threatened. It makes us reflect on who we are, or who we had to become to hold on to love. As Probyn puts it, shame “emerges as a kind of primal reaction to the very possibility of love—either of oneself or of another.”⁵² Shame puts us in touch with our very survival and raises the specter “of being left to starve outside the boundaries of humankind.”⁵³ Similarly, Judith Butler challenges the notion that humans are autonomous and in control. She argues that “our relations with others hold us,”⁵⁴ and in so doing they have the capacity to destroy us, and sometimes makes us want to be destructive. We are all vulnerable to the possibility of being undone by each other. Indeed, it is this sort of dependency that keeps us bound to the laws and norms of culture because breaking them comes with an enormous emotional cost.

Early in her life, the author of “Becoming” learned the meaning of not heeding or understanding the rules of normativity, tradition, and belonging. In reaction to the storyteller’s “immorality,” her mother in full theatrical drama communicated the cost of social disobedience by threatening loss of family love. It is hard not to think of this scene as anything but a performance, as Sedgwick would argue, where every act was imbued with symbolic and emotional significance. Adults do not wash their children’s mouths with soap to rip their mouths clean from filthy words or scrub their bodies to scour away immoral desires. These actions are not so merely literal. Rather, their performance is an elaboration of what is emotionally at stake. Her mother’s corporeal punishments expressed her disgust for her daughter, but also invoked an intense terror in the mother. One is often terrified by the “unclean body,” especially when it drips, leaks, and oozes.

Marked as dirty and unruly, a woman’s body is disciplined and controlled, sometimes by violence and abuse, as attested by several of the storytellers of *Bareed*, who were vulnerable and susceptible to shame. In “Wetness,” we learn of a young woman who “panicked” when she experienced a “strange wetness” in her pants for the first time upon hearing the beautiful voice of a woman singing. “I was ashamed that the disgusting part of my body was the one to react most strongly to the beautiful voice I had heard.”⁵⁵ The storyteller of “My Private Revolution” explains that around the same time that her mother taught her that women’s bodies “are dirty; they do dirty, unholy things that we need to hide away from the world,” she also learned she “could trade her body in for what [she] thought was love.”⁵⁶ In “Becoming,” the storyteller’s mother is not just morally disgusted and ashamed by and of her daughter; she is afraid: for herself, for her daughter. For years, my mother was terrified to tell her closest friends and family that I was queer. As hard as it was for her not to find comfort and solace in friends, the thought of losing them was that much more terrifying.

Even though all the stories in *Bareed* are, I would argue, about survival, “Becoming” perhaps takes survival as its object because it tells how the narrator picks up the pieces of a traumatic childhood and becomes anew. Of course, not all survive as well as this storyteller. Not all can digest the events enough to narrate the story. Though traumas change a person forever, what comes of becoming is not predictable on an individual

level. Yet, as a shared experience, collective narratives emerge and offer consolation by way of group identification and bonding.⁵⁷ “Becoming” is exemplary of many of the stories of *Bareed* in that it has a teleological construction wherein after hardship, the storyteller arrives at a better place. From a history of being traumatically shamed and finding solidarity in the love of friends, she creates a safe community for queers in Meem.

Many of the stories in *Bareed* similarly speak of hardships and end with a glimmer of hope. One storyteller tells us that she is now more able to “assert herself” as a bisexual,⁵⁸ another gets to acknowledge to herself that she is a lesbian after years of associating that word with ugliness and feelings of disgust,⁵⁹ and another is finally able to tell her shameful story of rape and begin the work of mourning.⁶⁰ Others end with the hope and promise of better futures. For instance, one storyteller decides to come out to her mother with the belief “there was no other option but for things to improve,”⁶¹ another ends her story by insisting that one day it will feel less shameful to hear the question *shāb walla bint?* (are you a boy or a girl?),⁶² and many of the storytellers share how the existence of Meem not only changed their lives but will also transform their society with more equality and recognition for LGBT people.

In contrast to pride epistemology, what the storytellers of *Bareed* are collectively narrating is not a defiant future where feelings of shame are conquered. Nor are they “proud” of their sexualities and gender identities. Instead, this is a future implicated in shame. The subjectivities that arise from shame are complex. This is because shame is an invitation for learning. It exposes our investments in cultural values and in our idealizations of the other, such as a parent. Probyn explains: “In shame, our habitus [Pierre Bourdieu’s term for how the social environment defines and limits movement] becomes reordered, shaken up, admits other possibilities and in turn allows for more interest to be registered.”⁶³ Blushing is the tip of the iceberg, “the visible part of everything that makes us open to shame.”⁶⁴ In shame, we become that much more transparent to ourselves because we feel our interest in the other and in the group. Though feeling shame is no guarantee for insight or other possibilities, it creates the conditions for us to begin to recognize how we are bound and vulnerable to the other and what we should do about it. Its presence potentially attunes us to our attachments, to our desire to belong in community and the limits of being able to do so. When we write shame, as the storytellers have done, we can be sure that the process of learning is afoot. This is because, as Probyn’s contends, in writing “we seek to generate new ways of thinking about how we are related to history and how we wish to live in the present.”⁶⁵ Arguably, one way queer history can be traced is through its relationship to shame. And if shame is a response to our social environments that in turn moves us to become and transform, then writing shame offers a queer historiography and insight into queer identities that is both culturally/locally contextual and simultaneously an effect of contaminated histories, globalization, and Western imperialism.

Feeling shame is universal, but there are varying potentialities in how it gets narrativized or treated emotionally. Lest I be misunderstood, I do not want to endorse or downplay the damage of shaming on individual lives and on cultural life, something that Probyn considers very seriously. For many of the authors in *Bareed*, what is being narrativized are the damaging effects of anticipating shame or actually being shamed for betraying the values and mores that hold personal, family, and religious/sectarian

relations together. Though they struggle with shame, it would seem that it is not “shaming to admit to shame.”⁶⁶ Similarly, it is not shameful or considered a political failure to help people conceal their sexual identities from their families. What is getting circumvented is not the feeling of shame itself, but the consequences of being publicly shamed and the possibility of community and family expulsion, the very thing that the logics of shame and shaming seek to protect.

Meem, as an organization, makes a great deal of effort to provide friendship and sanctuary for queers. Though a loving and safe space, Meem is not claiming that it can replace people’s ties to family nor does it seek to estrange people from their families. The organization does not produce itself in the terms of providing a “chosen family” to replace the biological family of its members; rather, Meem is like a family. If it claimed family status, Meem would likely alienate many because people are in fear of their families and want to sustain family ties. As the writers of the introduction explain, “family pressure and the fear of being ostracized remains the single biggest fear facing the queer community in Lebanon.”⁶⁷ In many of the stories, there were references to the strength and belief in family love, even under difficult and sometimes violent conditions. Almost all of the storytellers who speak of their families defend not the values of their families or what families do in the name of tradition, normativity, and so forth, but family love itself and the desire to maintain family ties. In coming to terms with what her mother did to her, the storyteller of “Becoming” explains: “I’ve learned that it is only out of love that [my mother] did what she did. I’ve learned that she was really worried about me being unhappy and dealing with society’s homophobia.”⁶⁸ If family belonging is a significant Arab value, then it is one feature of traditional culture that persists as a desire for these queer Arabs. In “When You Burn,” the storyteller says that coming out to her mother is simply not an option because her mother has already suffered so much loss in her life: abject poverty, her brother’s life to the war, and more. And in the words of the storyteller of “This Land Is Not My Land”:

To me, being queer is not only about loving women, but also about being aware of my family and how they are feeling . . . My world revolves around the well being of my mother, my father and my siblings . . . They have done so much for me that I just can’t say “yalla, bye” to them.⁶⁹

If “interest and shame are deeply connected,”⁷⁰ and give way to the possibility of love and its reorganization, then for Arabs, or for at least many of the Arabs represented in *Bareed*, queer becoming and queer community are being negotiated not in defiance to family and group ties (religious, societal, cultural) but in reparative responses. In the West, especially in the early stages of queer activism, defiance of society, culture, and religion was the building block that produced a strong, proud, and alternate community for sexual minorities. To say that the queers of *Bareed* are subscribing to normativity, however, would miss the point. As I have argued, Arab queers are negotiating and transforming their lives and the meaning of their identities in ways that address their geopolitical, cultural, and affective attachments and ambivalences. This might be most transparent in stories that express inventive articulations of religious practice such that (desiring) such practice comes to serve new interests and the new conditions of existence. For instance, in “My Hijab and I,” the storyteller relays both her hatred and her love of the hijab. Early in life she wanted to wear it, even before coming of age, because it marked her as a woman. Later, exposed to Western media, she came to despise it. This

was exacerbated by the fact that the hijab required feminine clothing designed to attract men and she wanted to signal to the world that she was a tomboy dyke. After moving to Beirut from her Shi'i Muslim community in the south, judgment of the hijab within the lesbian community was difficult; few would accept that a dyke could wear a hijab. Between a rock and a hard place, our storyteller tells us she decided to keep her veil on because taking it off would mean "ripping out a part of [herself]. It would have also caused a lot of problems with [her] family."⁷¹ In her hijab, she tells her readers, she feels protected from being objectified by other women and people are more likely to listen to what she has to say than to focus on what she is wearing. A dyke in hijab, she is neither "traditional" nor modern, but a nonnormative queer learning to live in between two worlds.

I want to end with "Untitled," whose storyteller equates her butchness with wearing a symbolic hijab. Written in powerful vignettes, her narrative gives you access to how she has resisted feeling shame. She balks at the lesbians whose online profiles offer nothing of themselves: "Each one derelict, like buildings abandoned by war or disaster. So this is how far our erasure goes. Our shame. Our fear."⁷² She is mouthy then silent when her mother presents her a brochure for an "ex-gay" conference. And she is stone when she tells us of the time school resident advisors called her in to a meeting and presented her with a picture that showed her putting her head on the lap of her best friend. Accused of ruining the reputation of the dorm, she became isolated and was treated like a social pariah at school. She retorts, "Shit. I wish I was actually getting some lesbian action."⁷³ This story suggests a metaphor for becoming out of shame and difficult affect, between two epistemologies, articulating what is yet to have a name or a theory but has an emotional shape. But in the vignette entitled "dyke hijab," we learn of the storyteller's vulnerabilities and emotional strategies against the public disgust at her masculinity. She explains, "*My femininity is not for everyone, I say. Not for the public. I decide who sees it and who does not. My public butchness is a hijab for my private femininity.*"⁷⁴ Thinking, however, of her friend who actually wears a hijab, she goes on: "Underneath her purple feminine hijabs and ladylike coats, she's a badass butch. Cut-off t-shirts and short hair. Her public femininity is a hijab for her masculinity."⁷⁵ What is interesting is that a religious practice, to which she does not even subscribe, offers her a way to think about how gender is anxiously lived in the body. In a context where gender deviance is not articulated as subversion, defiance, or pride, but with how to survive difference and the vulnerabilities associated with gender shaming, our storyteller is not simply expressing gender play, one preoccupation of Western queer theory. She is instead navigating her gender identity, and that of others, between what feels possible in private and what feels difficult or impossible in public, a difference more acutely negotiated when she is attuned to shame. Put differently, butch identity, arguably an export from the West, is lived, realized, and transformed within the terms of Lebanese religious, social, and cultural existence.

In this article, I have asked us to make conceptual room for sexualities lived in between East and West, lived in process and not yet fully conceived. Their complexity is born from the emotional task of working through the legacies of colonial humiliation, exposure to imperial gay epistemologies, and the pressures of morally virtuous and shaming nationalisms. My reading of *Bareed* has been made with an eye for how difficult affects are animating meaning. What I have suggested is that the queer Arab subjectivities

represented in *Bareed* are creations from histories of suffering, conflicted desire, civil war, and geopolitical realities. There is nothing easy or simple about who they are, what they are becoming, and the challenging conditions through which their subjectivities are emerging and taking shape. It is my hope that this analysis, if nothing else, has invited a discussion on the complex subjectivity of queer Arabs.

NOTES

¹Meem, ed., *Bareed Mista3jil: True Stories* (Beirut: Meem, 2009). My pairing of “Arab” and “queer” here is intentional because most of the authors of *Bareed* identify themselves as queer (and feminist). Additionally, since *Bareed* is a collection of the stories of not only women but also a few transsexual men, “queer” as an anti-identity stance is capacious and inclusive because, by definition, it is always becoming and changing. See Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), which argues that the meaning of queer must never be settled.

²Meem was created when a few members of Helem, an established LGBT group in Beirut, decided that they needed a separate group for women and trans people. “Meem” is the Arabic name of the first letter of all the words in *majmū‘at mu‘āzara li-l-mar’a al-mithliyya* (support group for homosexual women).

³Meem, *Bareed*, 1.

⁴Tania Tabar, “Bareed Mista3jil (Express Mail)—New book presents stories from Lebanon’s lesbian and transgender community,” *Menassat* (2 June 2009), <http://www.menassat.com/?q=en/news-articles/6591-bareed-mista3jil-express-mail-new-book-presents-stories-lebanons-lesbian-and-tran>.

⁵See Nadia Dropkin, “Bareed Mista3jil,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 9 (2011): 111–14.

⁶Elspeeth Probyn, *Blush: Faces of Shame* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), x.

⁷Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁸Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁹Massad is not the only one to make this point; see Samar Habib, *Islam and Homosexuality* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2009); Brian Whitaker, *Unspeakable Love: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East* (London: Saqi Books, 2006); and Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History and Literature* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1997). But Massad raises important political questions by arguing that transnational queer organizations insist on rescuing Arabs from their “backward” premodern sexuality. His argument is therefore also concerned with the geopolitical implications of the legacies of Orientalist and racist writing on how Arabs are constructed and instrumentalized. This is a very important consideration with respect to Arabs such as the authors of *Bareed*, who are negotiating their sexual subjectivities under these conditions.

¹⁰Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 197. See also Suad Joseph, ed., *Intimate Selving in Arab Families: Gender, Self, Identity* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1999); Evelyne Accad, *Veil of Shame: The Role of Women in the Modern Fiction of North Africa and the Arab World* (Sherbrooke, Quebec: Editions Naaman, 1978); James Gilligan, “Shame, Guilt and Violence,” *Social Research* 70 (2003): 1149–80; and Joseph Ginat, *Blood Revenge: Family, Honor, Mediation and Outcasting*, 2nd ed. (Portland, Ore.: Sussex Academic Press, 1997) for similar accounts on how repression and shaming are activated in the Arab world. What provokes reaction is not the act of sexual unfaithfulness or sexual illicit behavior but rather the act becoming public knowledge such that it brings shame to the family or community.

¹¹Arguably, the biopolitics and technologies of control and of “sexual freedom,” which characterize the Western sexual modernities identified by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), also underwent a process from nondiscursive expression of sexuality to the proliferation of discourse on sexuality. The difference, of course, is that these technologies are being exported and violently imposed on the global South.

¹²See the debate between Massad and Ghassan Makarem, the founder of Helem, who argues against Massad on political grounds: <http://www.resetdoc.org/story/1542> (accessed 1 December 2012). According to Makarem, Massad’s epistemology of Arab sexuality not only stands in judgment of people who identify as homosexual or gay but also covers over actual and legal violence toward groups such as Helem (and Meem).

¹³See also Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Deniz Kandiyoti, *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996); Jarrod Hayes, *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002); and Elizabeth Thompson, "Public and Private in Middle Eastern Women's History," *Journal of Women's History* 15 (2003): 52–69.

¹⁴Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007).

¹⁵Julian Awwad, "The Postcolonial Predicament of Gay Rights in the Queen Boat Affair," *Communication and Critical/[EPS]Cultural Studies* 7 (2010): 320.

¹⁶Kandiyoti, *Gendering the Middle East*; Iderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Minnesota University Press, 1994); McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*; Guyatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005).

¹⁷Awwad, "Queen Boat," 321.

¹⁸Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

¹⁹In the case of Lebanon, constructions of sexuality and gender were negotiated in complex ways over the course of French colonial rule and became central to forging class identifications and sectarian differences. See Jens Hanssen, "Sexuality, Health and Colonialism in Postwar 1860 Beirut," in *Sexuality in the Arab World*, ed. Samir Khalaf and John Gagnon (London, San Francisco, Beirut: Saqi, 2006), 63–84. Though Hanssen does not use the language of sexual shaming, his research makes clear the impact of colonial sexual anxieties on Lebanese cultural psychic life.

²⁰See Samar Habib, *Female Homosexuality in the Middle East: Histories and Representations* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007); and Dervla Shannahan, "Some Queer Questions from a Muslim Faith Perspective," *Sexualities* 13 (2010): 671–84.

²¹Awwad, "Queen Boat," 319.

²²Sahar Amer, "Joseph Massad and the Alleged Violence of Human Rights," *Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16 (2010): 652.

²³Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

²⁴See Rinaldo Walcott, "Pedagogy and Trauma: The Middle Passage, Slavery, and the Problem of Creolization," in *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma*, ed. Roger Simon, Sharon Rosenberg, and Claudia Eppert (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 135–51; Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, eds., *Theorizing Diaspora* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003); and Gil Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs and the Limits of Separatist Imagination* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

²⁵Walcott, "Pedagogy and Trauma," 147.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 137.

²⁷Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 49.

²⁸Meem, *Bareed*, 2.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 7.

³⁰The key text in psychoanalysis that makes the relationship between trauma and narrative is Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

³¹Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984).

³²Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 5.

³³I am making allusions here to Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1990), where she argues that definitions of homosexuality and its incoherences have produced and structured the closet.

³⁴Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*.

³⁵Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*.

³⁶Probyn, *Blush*, 101.

³⁷Lisa Duggan, "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neo-Liberalism," in *Materializing Democracy*, ed. R. Castronovo and D. Nelson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 173–94.

³⁸Arguably, Western queer history, and its devotion to pride, shares a history with black pride and women's pride.

³⁹See also Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*; Jin Haritaworn, "Loyal Repetitions of the Nation: Gay Assimilation and the 'War on Terror,'" *Dark Matter* 3 (2008), *Special Issue on Postcolonial Sexuality*, <http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/> (accessed 22 June 2012); Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004); and Martin Manalansan, "In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining Gay Transnational Politics and Diasporic Dilemma," in Brazil and Mannur, *Theorizing Diaspora*, 207–27.

⁴⁰Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁴¹Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark, eds., "Introduction: Queer Moments: The Performative Temporalities of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick," in *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer Culture and Critical Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 27.

⁴²Sofian Merabet, "Creating Queer Space in Lebanon: Zones of Encounter within the Lebanese Male Homosexual Sphere," in Khalaf and Gagnon, *Sexuality in the Arab World*, 201.

⁴³See Nader Al Jallad, "The Concepts of al-Halal and al-Haram in Arab-Muslim Culture," *Language Design* (2008): 77–86.

⁴⁴Asifa Siraj, "On Being Homosexual and Muslim: Conflicts and Challenges," in *Islamic Sexualities*, ed. Lahoucine Ouzgane (London: Zed Books, 2006), 210.

⁴⁵Meem, *Bareed*, 15–16.

⁴⁶Jared McCormick, "Transition Beirut: Gay Identities, Lived Realities," in Khalaf and Gagnon, *Sexuality in the Arab World*, 250.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 192.

⁴⁸Probyn, *Blush*, 14.

⁴⁹Meem, *Bareed*, 54.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 56.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 61.

⁵²Probyn, *Blush*, 3.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁴Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 23.

⁵⁵Meem, *Bareed*, 76.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 217.

⁵⁷See Dina Georgis, "The Perils of Belonging and Cosmopolitan Optimism: An Affective Reading of the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict," *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* 12 (2007): 242–59; Roger Simon, *A Touch of the Past: Remembrance, Learning and Ethics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); and Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁵⁸Meem, *Bareed*, 51.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 148.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 105.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 37.

⁶³Probyn, *Blush*, 72.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 55.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 162.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, xiii.

⁶⁷Meem, *Bareed*, 18.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 61.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 96–97.

⁷⁰Probyn, *Blush*, ix.

⁷¹Meem, *Bareed*, 176.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 185.

⁷³*Ibid.*

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 183.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*