

# Sex, Patriotism, and Marriage: Conceiving Queer Citizenship in Jordan

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**Abstract**

In the 1990s, theorisations of social justice, group membership and the politics of belonging were increasingly negotiated through the lens of citizenship, owing in part to growing concerns over multiculturalism and nationalist movements in Europe (Kymlick and Norman 1994). Citizenship, as it were, ‘was the new black, and everyone was wearing it’ (Wilson 2009). However, citizenship is historically grounded in normative assumptions about gender and sexuality (Richardson 2018; Bell and Binnie 2000; Weeks 1998). Feminist, postcolonial, and critical race interventions furthermore revealed that citizen-subjects are always already sexed (Pateman 1990), gendered (Fraser and Gordon 1992), and raced (R. Ferguson 2009). The normalising powers of citizenship thus beg the question: can citizenship be queered? And, if not (Volpp 2017; Sabsay 2014), to what end do queer collectives employ citizenship discourse? This project presents a queer of colour intervention into and lends a critical legal lens to critical citizenship studies, to investigate the potentialities of queer(ing) citizenship in Jordan. Working through a performative theory of citizenship (Isin 2017), the thesis argues that queering citizenship amounts to a methodology capable of revealing the normative practices and assumptions that underlie it. It studies the legal regulation of good Jordanian citizenship, arguing that Jordanian citizen-subjects are necessarily inscribed in a reproductive, patriotic heteronormative family ideal. Finally, the project studies Amman-based conceptual webzine, MyKali, arguing that its work (as an entity and through its published content) makes claims to Jordanian citizenship, as opposed to acceptance or tolerance. It argues that My.Kali both queers Jordanian citizenship through a consistent, critical disidentification with its core tenets; and enacts queer citizenship in the digital sphere, making possible queer futures that link back and hope to transform the nation-state. Overall, the thesis thus revisits symptomatic debates on the articulation of queer strategies in/of the Arab Middle East in anglophone academia.

Sex, Patriotism, and Marriage

*For Grossvati*

*With endless gratitude to Layal*

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## Introduction

Fundamentally, the primary affiliation of the Arab is his family, his tribe, his community. Yes, we can speak of one shared Arab culture. But family is the core of who we are as people. Without his family, an Arab is nothing’.

(Saleem Haddad, *Guapa* 2016, 147).

My clothes might be too fashionable to be authentically Arab, I thought. My T-shirt was a little too tight, the jeans a tad too ripped (...) Was my homosexuality responsible? Or was it something deeper, something foreign in my soul?

(200)

In *Guapa*, Saleem Haddad narrates a day in the life of a young, gay Arab man (Rasa) in an unnamed country, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. The narrative is interspersed with flashbacks to the main character’s childhood growing up in one of the richer suburbs of the city and through to his time at an American university. Haddad presents an existential story of identity and belonging, centring (alternatives to) the ‘Arab family’ in Rasa’s relationship with his friends, always connecting and colluding at their favourite bar, Guapa; the role of language in the formation and maintenance of the self, with Rasa working as a translator narrating his ambivalent relationship to Arabic; and dialogue invoking postcolonial and queer theories, which present Arab-ness (and queerness) as a performance.<sup>1</sup> Haddad thus set out to create a ‘positive depiction’ of and ‘carve out a space for’ a queer Arab identity in queer literature and the complex manifestations thereof (Haddad, n.d.).<sup>2</sup> Belonging and identity are ultimately presented as malleable elements of the self that one must take effort to deploy and maintain in a country where national belonging is troubled in light of a violent state intent on suppressing opposition; and where family loyalty and blood kinship are troubled for Rasa’s inability to fulfil the sexually reproductive ideal by getting married. The novel

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<sup>1</sup> Performativity is a central –and often literal– theme in the novel, where drag features as an analogy for the performance of national loyalty and pride. When trying to extract themselves from an encounter with the police, Rasa asks himself: ‘what mask shall I put on for this performance to get me and Maj out alive?’ (122).

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.saleemhaddad.com/inspiration>

closes with Rasa and his friend Maj, a drag artist, returning to Guapa, where they plan on *making* plans, belatedly taking advantage of the (dying) revolutionary momentum. At the bar, ‘done with shame’ (291), they set out to change and to create change.

*Guapa* has been praised for its depiction of the dynamic relationship between personal struggle and national conflict (Atia 2019), as well as its contribution to the rather narrow archive of queer Arab literature. Others have criticised the novel for its inability to properly interrogate its own role in the perpetuation of the impossibility of articulating queerness in Arabic – since it was written in English, it implies the ontological impossibility of a queer Arab subject (Hanna 2017). Predictably, the focus in these analyses of Haddad’s work has been on the queer subject – the state of a (presumably, homogenous) queer community in a conflict-ridden, yet undefined Middle East. This is a tendency evident also in Anglo-American ethnographic work. Equally central to the novel, however, is the analogy between Rasa’s own journey of self-acceptance and his relationship to his home country. By planting himself at Guapa at the end of the novel with Maj, Haddad’s main character links his coming to terms with his sexuality with his resolution to make a life for himself and his community in the post-revolution era, rather than feeling it and fleeing his –perhaps ‘inauthentic’– Arab self. I would thus contend that the novel, with its emphasis on the self in relation to the state, the individual and the homeland, **speak** to the multiple frames and manifestations of citizenship.

Haddad’s novel clearly speaks to the interaction of queer Arab subjectivity with the global discourse of queerness, hinting at several key debates in the scholarly canon of critical Middle East gender studies – if that were an institutionalized field. Most obviously, *Guapa* brings to mind Joseph Massad’s infamous conceptualisation of the ‘gay international’ (2002; 2007), referring to the global LGBT movement and the universalisation of a ‘gay rights’ discourse. For Massad, organisations such as International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) act like a missionary collective seeking to universalise the gay and lesbian subject in a Western identitarian frame; which, in effect, displaces ‘local’ iterations of (same-sex) desire that may not be legible in this frame. To these ‘missions’, the Middle East represents space of repression and sexual conservatism, making their work necessary to liberate ‘Arab and Muslim gays and lesbians’ by transforming them ‘from practitioners of same-sex contact into subjects who identify as homosexual and gay’ (2002, 362). Finally, as globalised gay or lesbian subjects introduce ‘discourse about homosexuality where none existed before’ (2007, 188), Massad concludes that state violence extended towards those Arabs expressly identifying as gay or lesbian makes a point of retaliating not against nonnormative sexual behaviour, but against Westernisation on a nationalist basis (2002; 2007). Rejecting identification

with markers of Western sexual identities, then, is an anti-imperialist choice, essential to protecting both authentic Arab-ness and desire.

Unsurprisingly, Massad's claims have been heavily disputed, with many taking to highlighting the material consequences of his condemnation of Arab queer movements and groups – such as the Palestinian alQaws (2015, 271)– as native informants tasked with propagating a Western agenda.<sup>3</sup> The 'gay international' thus betrays the disjuncture between academic interventions and the reality of queer movements in the Arab Middle East (Atshan 2020; Abu Odeh 2013), while simultaneously promoting the idea of a prioritisation agenda, where queer projects are deemed both foreign and not priorities in light of more pressing political issues (Naber et al. 2018).

The dismissal of gay and lesbian rights activism and queer projects in the name of national pride and anti-Westernisation has, however, been a staple of anti-imperial as well as popular discourse in much of Arab media, with Jordan providing a poignant example. The Jordanian conceptual webzine and 'new activist' platform, My.Kali, is a case in point where such clashes become manifest within the 'cultural field'. Specialising in cultural content created by LGBT Arab youth, the platform has been geo-blocked in Jordan since 2016, following multiple rows with 'sensationalist' news outlets and a highly publicised clash with Member of Parliament, Dima Tahboub. Much of the criticism directed at the platform pertains to its content and sexual politics, which are deemed irreparably 'un-Jordanian'. However, rather than cementing the incompatibility of gay/lesbian identification and queerness with Jordanianness, My.Kali's editors and authors make consistent claims to Jordanian citizenship, begging the question: *why?* Is My.Kali simply practicing an assimilationist politics adjusted to the Jordanian context? What is/not radical or queer about these claims to Jordanian citizenship? Can citizenship be a site for queer resistance, and a means to form kinship and solidarity networks beyond the family? What are the political implications of routing queer belonging through the lens of citizenship, and thus within the borders of a postcolonial nation-state – what role *does* the nation-state still play in this utilisation of citizenship discourse? Finally, how do transnational narratives of gender and sexuality influence these 'queer' reclamations of citizenship discourse on digital platforms like My.Kali?

Citizenship studies has been a principal player in academic and popular debates surrounding the politics of belonging, multiculturalism, and indeed lesbian and gay politics since the 1990s. Especially the rise of LGBT rights activism have ushered into the late 1990s and early

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<sup>3</sup> Sa'ed Atshan (2020) argues that, not only does Massad not recognise (or perhaps deny) the ways in which queer Palestinian activism on the ground is thoroughly anti-colonial (it strategically uses international funding to further its narrative) (191), but that his logic that locates the 'origins' of homosexuality in a Western construction à la Foucault is highly ironic.

2000s an era consumed by citizenship – ‘citizenship was the new black, and everyone was wearing it’ (Wilson 2009). Critical approaches to citizenship largely agreed on the dual nature of the concept; citizenship-as-rights and citizenship-as-group-membership. That is, citizenship functions both as a legal status that brings with it rights and obligations owed to the state that bestows it, and it maintains an affective dimension that is embodied and felt through cultural and interpersonal practices (Lister 1997; Kymlicka and Norman 1994). Citizenship as status as well as citizenship as praxis, however, function as disciplinary tools, marking certain behaviours as normal and thus indicative of good or successful citizenship.<sup>4</sup> The (good) citizen-subject, in other words, comes into being in relation to the non-citizen, or unsuccessful practitioner of citizenship. To that end, feminist, postcolonial, and critical race interventions to citizenship studies have consistently pointed out how the desirable citizen-subject created through the legal and social imposition of normalised citizenship (praxis), finding that this subject is always already sexed (Pateman 1990), gendered (Fraser and Gordon 1992), and raced (Ferguson 2009). Crucially, this canon has also exposed how citizenship is historically grounded in normative assumptions about sexuality (Canaday 2011; Bell and Binnie 2000; Richardson 2000, 2018; Weeks 1998). These assumptions are based on the ideal of reproductive sexuality; citizens must necessarily and literally reproduce the nation, to maintain a stable working population that, in turn, maintains the country. Furthermore, as *queering* emerged as a common practice in critical theory, promising to expose the normative underpinnings of seemingly stable concepts, it is only natural to wonder whether citizenship could also be queered – and to what effect.

Diane Richardson, who has notoriously documented the emergence of ‘sexual citizenship’ as an analytical tool in critical citizenship studies (2018; 2017; 2000), has described the very act of dissecting citizenship as an act of queering; it opens and extends citizenship (2018, 68). Others, invoking the anti-normative, radical orientation of queer politics, have however argued that for citizenship’s disciplinary character is never available to be queered (Volpp 2017). Attempting to do so would be a fundamental misunderstanding of the intentions of queer theory. Amy L Brandzel for instance describes the queer citizen as, fundamentally, an anti-citizen (2005; 2016). To Brandzel, campaigns seeking to legalise same-sex marriage globally merely represent assimilationist ideals that run contrary to the subversive, anti-(hetero)normative potential of queer(ing). These critiques of the potential for ‘queer citizenship’ have thus focused on the preoccupation of especially gay and lesbian activism with rights discourses. The emergence of

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<sup>4</sup> Like sexuality, citizenship can be understood as disciplinary tool construed in the imperial era, which functions as an emblem of coloniality. I use coloniality here in the sense developed by María Lugones’ reading of Annibal Quijano; where the interaction between race, gender, and sexuality function as the basis of the social classification of the world (2007).

these liberal demands in the name of previously unwelcomed citizen-subjects as has also been described as queer liberalism (Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz 2005), reflecting the switch from a gay and lesbian critique of the family and marriage to one demanding access *to* the nuclear family and its privileges. In interventions that contextualised and presented the rights-orientation of lesbian and gay activism in relation transnational discourses of sexuality and gender scholars have thoroughly investigated the adoption of homo-friendly narratives in conservative right wing nationalism and the normalisation and association with Western democracy of nonnormative sexual identities (Puar 2007; Duggan 2002); as well as the emergence of the queer subject as a model *capitalist* subject, linking development and hopeful futurity to the extension of the productive labour force to queer subjects ('homocapitalism': Rao 2020). Many of these critiques, however, engage only with citizenship-as-rights dimension of the concept, arguing that any sense of belonging that emerges through these claims reproduces heteronormative ideals of good citizenship. Additionally, as implied above, the geopolitical space-time in which these theories emerged is highly indicative of the limits to their potential for radical transformation – or lack thereof. In uninspired terms: context matters.<sup>5</sup> Could what appears as succumbing to a capitalist pipe dream in North America and Europe may well be part of a strategic engagement with popular discourse to make life liveable elsewhere?

This thesis is concerned with Jordanian citizenship, queer citizenship, and contextualised queer resistance. Said differently, it seeks to interrogate the theoretical and political potentials of queer citizenship when contextualised in the Arab Middle East – namely, Jordan. Therefore, the core question the project asks is: (how) can citizenship be queer(ed) in Jordan? I will engage with this question in three stages. First, I map the development of 'queer citizenship', as linked to the canon of sexual citizenship in critical citizenship studies. Given the legal and social dimensions to the norms underlying citizenship, I then ask how Jordanian law conceives of good Jordanian citizenship, outlining the law's reification of normative sexuality and gender – and, as such, of reproductive heteronormativity – which enable the very reproduction of the nation and the good 'citizen'. Finally, I analyse My.Kali to investigate the ways in which it (un)successfully invokes and enacts queer, Jordanian citizenship. An overarching consideration to these questions is the interaction between (the Middle) East and West, given that queer theory and citizenship studies emerged from the Anglo-American academy. It investigates how these theories function in the context of the Middle East and highlights how dynamics inform both my conceptualisation of queer citizenship, as well as the analytical practices of the case study.

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<sup>5</sup> Parallel to this rather obvious conclusion runs the discussion about the utility of theories developed in Anglophone academia elsewhere – particularly postcolonial contexts. The thesis reflects on these dynamics throughout.

As such, the thesis first and foremost presents a queer of colour intervention into critical citizenship studies. Queer of colour critique (Moussawi 2020; Manalansan 2018; Ferguson 2004; Muñoz 1999; Cohen 1997), which has been variously described as methodology, a theoretical lens, and a political stance (Manalansan 2018, 1287), departs from an intervention into the universalising tendencies of queer theorising that prioritises sexual identity, critiquing its single-issue approach. Concerned with the experiences of ‘queers of colour’, it sheds light on the ‘uneven terrain of bodies and desire’ (1288), interrogating social formations along the axes of race, gender, and class in addition to and in conversation with sexuality (Ferguson 2004, 149). In effect, queer of colour critique then does not idolise anti-normativity at whatever cost but complicates the relationship between ‘queer’ and the norm, finding that they ‘are constantly colliding, clashing, intersecting and reconstituting’ (Manalansan 2018, 1288). It is in this fluid relationship to the normative, to rigid sexual citizenship, that I read queer citizenship and the work of My.Kali’s editors and authors; in a constant negotiation, not for the sake of academic or cosmetic exchange, but to survive – and to *thrive*. Using disidentification (Muñoz 1999), I analyse how the work of My.Kali opens the doors for reimagining belonging in Jordan along the axis of citizenship.

As well as queer of colour critique, the thesis builds on critical legal analysis of the 2011 amendments to the Jordanian Constitution and the 2018 Medical Health and Accountability Law (MHAL) (see chapter 2). Critical legal theory understands the law as a (normalising) discourse that normalises certain bodies (in the Foucauldian sense of the term), since it is only certain bodies that are inscribed into the law, and that thus have full legal access to its privileges. (Croce 2019; Hunter 2019; Lacey 1997; Leonard 1995). In my analysis, the law actively participates in the creation of gendered and sexual citizens, which are then further entrenched in media discourse.

The project therefore makes extensive use of archival research, having ransacked the archives of both My.Kali and those of the Jordanian dailies, *Al-ghad*, *Al-rai*, and *Addustour*, as well as popular online news outlet, *Ammon News*. Chapter 3 furthermore offers close readings of segments of the My.Kali archive, having grouped into themes pairs of texts chosen from among circa 130 pieces that single out topics such as: the politics of belonging and citizenship, the indigeneity versus westernisation discourses with regards to homosexuality, and the potentials of queer activism for the emergence of new platforms where queer politics and citizenship can be imagined and enacted.

Chapter breakdown:

Chapter 1 traces the theoretical developments of critical citizenship studies, focusing on the feminist and postcolonial interventions that brought to the fore the stable and exclusivist citizen-subject as created in the law and manifested through social interactions. Through the frame of sexual citizenship, it revisits the theoretical possibility and potentials of queering citizenship as well as the notion of queer citizenship. It reads this alongside performative theories of citizenship (Isin 2017; 2009) that emphasise the praxis of citizenship over the symbolic weight of its legal status, as well as the theory of citizenship as (queer) methodology (Mikdash 2014).

Chapter 2 moves the discussion to its chosen locale, investigating the legal and social (re)production of the good Jordanian citizen. The chapter studies the amendments made to the ‘rights & responsibilities’ chapter in the Jordanian Constitution after the eruption of the Arab Spring and reads them alongside increasingly stubborn legislative tools that entrench both a normative sexuality and gender expression through the MHAL. This is followed by a discourse analysis of the media practices that further thrust into the public sphere normative Jordanian citizenship.

Finally, Chapter 3 offers an in-depth analysis of My.Kali,<sup>6</sup> the webzine set up in Amman in 2007. My.Kali concerns itself with the representation of the art and voices of LGBT Arab youth, with ‘visually engaging features’ that are intended to ‘fight repressive forms and norms’ (My.Kali n.d.).<sup>7</sup> To that end, it seeks to develop an archive of ‘nonnormative voices’ that offer social commentary, ‘empowering’ its readership in the process – it offers up a space in which they can recognise themselves amid the rigidity of the Jordanian national imaginary, until they are no longer unseen, or until they are no longer punished for being seen. The chapter argues that My.Kali, as a platform and through its published content, both queers Jordanian citizenship effectively disidentifying from it (Muñoz 1999), and *enacts* queer citizenship by creating a queer counterpublic in the Anglo-Arabic digital sphere. It does so through a close reading of its contents and an analysis of My.Kali’s involvement in a series of controversies (moral panics) that have solidified its contrarian reputation in the Jordan mediascape.

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<sup>6</sup> I refer to the webzine as ‘My.Kali’ as opposed to using its domain name (mykalimag.com) both for clarity and to reflect its interaction with the Jordanian mediascape as an entity; it is more than just a website that its editors and writers maintain.

<sup>7</sup> See My.Kali’s ‘About’ page: <https://www.mykalimag.com/en/about/>

## **Chapter 1: Critical Citizenship, Sexual Citizenship, and (the) Performance (of Rights Claims): Revisiting the Theoretical (Im)possibility of Queer(ing) Citizenship**

In 1994, Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman announced the ‘return of the citizen’, citing an exploding interest in the notion of citizenship in the early 1990s after a period of relative disinterest. Kymlicka and Norman suggest stresses over an ‘increasingly multicultural and multiracial population’ in Western Europe, concerns over evolving European nationalisms, and the ‘natural evolution’ of political discourse to include considerations of belonging as potential explanations for the emerging trend (1994, 352). The popularity of citizenship as an analytical lens to study group belonging has barely faded since, leading (critical) citizenship studies to establish itself as a field comprising the work of political theorists, critical theorists, sociologists, anthropologists, jurists, and economists. To that end, one of the core draws to citizenship studies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been the ever-relevant question of border-making in an increasingly digital, globalised world (Shachar, Bauböck, Bloemraad and Vink 2017; Somers 2008).

This chapter lays out the foundational debates in critical citizenship studies pertaining to the relationship between the state on the one hand and sexuality and gender on the other; how these figurations (namely, feminist, postcolonial, and queer critiques of traditional approaches to social citizenship) speak to one another; as well the theoretical potentialities of queering citizenship and the concept of ‘queer citizenship’ when centring performance and citizenship praxis.

### **1. Interrogating ‘citizenship’**

At its broadest, citizenship denotes the relationship between nation-states and their subjects, citizens. It has historically been used interchangeably with nationality in legal discourse, especially in the realm of international law (UNHCR 2015). This is the case in the pre-eminent legal instruments developed to address the rampant issue of statelessness after the Second World War, such as the 1954 UN Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. In these accounts, citizenship signifies membership to a sovereign state: it constitutes a universal right that entitles individuals to the protection of said state and provides them access to an array of social and political rights. This is what Iris Marion Young calls the ‘ideal of universal citizenship’ (1989). The foundational ‘right’ in the international legal framework is thus as *the right to have rights* within an organised community, to use Hannah Arendt’s famous phrase (1973).

The critical academic study of citizenship – be it in sociology, critical theory, or migration studies – has also been developed in or premised on the language of rights. This development

owes much to TH Marshall's theorisation of social citizenship, introduced in a lecture in 1949. Marshall divides citizenship, defined as full membership in an organised community, into 'three parts'; the civil, the political, and the social. Noting that his analysis is 'dictated by history even more clearly than by logic' (Marshall 1992, 8), he defines 'the civil' by that which concerns the rights that ensure a person's individual freedom in a given society; the right to liberty, the right to 'thought and faith', but also the right to defend these rights as against others in the spirit of universal equality – or, simply, the right to justice (1992, 8). 'The political', linked to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is characterized by those rights that enable a person's participation in the political sphere: by being electable and having suffrage. Where civil rights are regulated in courts, the institution presiding over the allocation and regulation of political rights is parliament. Finally, 'the social' covers the 'whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security' to the right to share in social heritage and to 'live the life of a civilised being' (8). These rights link to educational and social welfare institutions. Marshall's analysis is 'more' historical in that he argues for the linear development of these demarcations through time.<sup>8</sup> In this history, however, several types of bodies were excluded from becoming rights-bearing subjects: namely women, the unpropertied, and colonial subjects. Marshall was, however, not blind to the disciplining potential citizenship thus entailed, referring to it as a potential 'architect of social inequality' (1992, 9).<sup>9</sup>

Critiques of Marshall's conception of citizenship, which continues to undergird contemporary debates on the scope and extendibility of the notion, tend to focus on the citizen-subject and those bodies excluded from its status (Richardson 2000); the higher entity that regulates said subject's inclusion in a community (Maas 2014);<sup>10</sup> or the nature of the relationship between the two (Isin and Nyers 2003). Kymlicka and Norman further distinguish between approaches that study citizenship-as-status (citizenship-as-rights) and those that insist on 'citizenship-as-identity' ('citizenship-as-desirable-activity') (1994, 353). Feminist, queer, postcolonial, and critical race theorists have consistently gestured to the limits of a rights-based approach to citizenship, and the near-utopian ideal of envisioning citizenship as a great equalizer.<sup>11</sup> Arguing that the citizen-subject is always already sexed (Pateman 1990) and raced (R. Ferguson 2004), these critiques highlight how the exclusionary history of 18<sup>th</sup> century civil rights, to 19<sup>th</sup> century political rights that evolve to incorporate 20<sup>th</sup> century social rights unencumbered, reflect

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<sup>8</sup> In fact, the topic of Marshall's lecture was the legal and institutional history of England.

<sup>9</sup> This history mirrors the evolution of international human rights law (IHRL); treaties codifying civil and political rights are considered 'first generation' rights, followed by second generation socioeconomic rights, and so forth (on IHRL, see Bale 2018).

<sup>10</sup> This could be the nation-state or a supranational entity like the European Union.

<sup>11</sup> Moreover, citizenship does not technically confer *rights* upon citizens. The acquisition of certain civil, political, social, and economic rights is a *consequence* of the acquisition of citizenship, not its foundation. Citizenship *law*, then, regulates the acquisition, retention, and transfer of the *status* of citizenship only (Irving 2018)

those experiences or allowances of the working, white man only. Additionally, the justice dimension to this theorisation rests solely on the elimination of class inequality through the provision of welfare, which de-emphasises other axes of inequality such as race and gender.<sup>12</sup>

One branch of (Marxist, feminist) scholarship investigates the demise of citizenship identified with progressive rights-bearing subjects as emergent in the globalised present, struggling to tether to citizen-subject to the state. Among these are critiques of market fundamentalism and neoliberal rationality, which argue that the privileging of the free market in social organisation, and the marketisation of every aspect of public life, have fundamentally reconfigured the relationship between states and citizenry (Brown 2015; Somers 2008). Identifying the force of the free market with an erosion of public (political and civil) rights, Margaret Somers argues that market fundamentalism is enforced through a ‘contractualisation of citizenship’; a conscious effort to move the relationship between state and citizen from one rooted in affective loyalties to one of ‘qui pro quo market exchange’ (2008, 2). This, according to Somers, changes our perspective from a ‘shared fate among equals’ to one in which ‘citizenship becomes a form of conditional privilege’ (2008, 3). Much of this realignment work is done discursively in the law and the realm of ‘the social’. Relatedly, Wendy Brown conceives of neoliberalism as an ‘order of normative reason’ that has stretched to become a ‘governing rationality’ that articulates economic values at every juncture of human life (2015, 30). By disseminating the ‘model of the market’ to every conceivable aspect of social, civil, and political life, the human subject becomes exclusive a market actor – *homo oeconomicus* (31). The figuration of the citizen as *homo oeconomicus* necessarily changes their relationship to the state (2015, 39); if the foundation of citizenship is the provision of public goods and maintaining the ‘common good’, *homo oeconomicus* eliminates the desire –or perhaps the need– for shared communities. Citizenship, then, becomes a means to ensnare the individual *homo oeconomicus* with national loyalty.

Most feminist critiques have since used a multidimensional approach to citizenship that studies the relationship between citizen status and group membership. Ruth Lister (1997) reads together the liberal and civic republican traditions of citizenship, with their emphasis on rights and the wider community respectively, to argue for a dialectical relationship between citizenship as status and as practice (1997). Similarly, Yuval Davis and Werbner (1999) consider citizenship a dialogical figuration, underpinned by historical, cultural, and social factors. Linda Bosniak (2000) argues that citizenship can be conceived of along four interdependent ‘strands’, three of which focus on the communal dimension of citizenship: citizenship as legal recognition by an organized

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<sup>12</sup> This Marxist impulse is hardly surprising given the evolution of the conception in the 1950s only to fall out of fashion by the 1980s (Kymlick and Norman 1994).

political community; citizenship as the enjoyment or possession of rights in political and/or social communities; citizenship as the practice of political and social engagement, activity, and/or organization; and citizenship as identity and the collective experience of belonging to a community (2000). More recently, Naila Kabeer (2012, 220) has proposed a reading of citizenship in different contexts as '*work in progress*, an ongoing project that evolves through struggles and contestations between different groups within a society' (2012, 220). Kabeer read status as a legal imposition of rights and obligations, and 'practice' as ways in which members of the society act on these impositions and challenge them.<sup>13</sup>

Despite these trends, citizenship-as-practice as a frame has not been unanimously embraced by critical theorists, some of whom champion a narrow reading of citizenship in the name of wanting to feed an 'effective' politics. For instance, Wilson (2009) has warned of conflating social belonging with formal citizenship to the detriment of citizenship as a political signifier. Citing the strategic essentialisms that lesbian and gay politics must resort to in liberal democracies, Wilson reminds us that the claim to rights offers significant political 'purchasing power' (2009, 82).

## 2. Sexual citizenship and the Arab Middle East

An offshoot of critical citizenship studies soon began focusing specifically on the idea that it is the white, propertied, *heterosexual* man that is granted citizenship 'at the expense of his family' (Brandzel 2005, 179). Citizenship, the field argues, is sexualised. M. Jacqui Alexander (1994) has argued that, by criminalising and/or regulating lesbian and other forms of nonreproductive sex, the legal system naturalizes and links heteronormativity to a properly gendered, racialized, and sexualised citizen-subject (4-5). Sexual and gender nonnormativity become the epitome of the anti-citizen, and pose a threat to the nation (1994, 6). Shane Phelan, in turn, argues that non-heterosexual citizen-subjects are best understood as strangers: 'neither enemies nor friends neither natives, nor foreigners' (2001, 41), they are, simply put, denied.

Approaches centring the cis-and-heteronormativity of citizenship are usually grouped under the concept of sexual citizenship. Despite its popularity, sexual citizenship is a puzzle to define.<sup>14</sup> Broadly, sexual citizenship describes the relationship between states and citizens in the realm of sexual and intimate life. David Evans was the first to name the concept (1993). In his 1993 monograph, Evans describes how the state and market interact to create 'partial and

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<sup>13</sup> Kabeer argues that the modern conception of citizenship is liberal and depends on an individualized conception of personhood. I will return to this point in the next section, as part of the criticism aimed at sexual citizenship.

<sup>14</sup> A challenge that is *not* my intention to resolve here.

privatized citizenship' for sexual minorities in the United Kingdom. Sexual citizenship thus functions as a descriptor to narrate sexual minorities exclusion from –primarily– 'lifestyle'. David Bell and Jon Binnie similarly argue that 'the power that queer citizens enjoy is largely dependent on access to capital and credit' (2000, 96). This literature evokes many of the considerations that undergird Brown (2015) and Somers' (2008) more general critique of citizenship; where access to full citizenship is unlocked through successful and bountiful consumption (Rao 2020).<sup>15</sup> Another strand of theorists, perhaps more obviously, focus on sexual citizenship as it relates to legal exclusions and limitations to lesbian and gay participation in public life, notably same-sex marriage (Brandzel 2016; Heaphy et al 2013;). While accounts that focus on the legal exclusions non-heterosexual subjects are subject to theorised under a system of sexual citizenship complicate the relationship between the state and citizen, they also mirror traditional regimes of modern citizenship that recognise marriage, parenthood and military service as its basis (Pateman 1988; Richardson 2017). Others continue the work of feminist and critical race theorists that have deconstructed citizenship to focus on the normative assumptions surrounding sexuality itself.

Diane Richardson began tracing the development and interest in sexual citizenship already in the late 1990s, arguing that the field emerged in response to the uptake of the language of citizenship into sexual politics in the late 1990s and early 2000s (2000). Richardson initially worried that sexual citizenship might function to the detriment of lesbian politics since sexuality has itself been a 'key mechanism of control', given the logic that defines lesbians as deviant outsiders to heterosexual norm (2000, 266). Contributions to the canon of sexual citizenship abounded in the two decades since, with Richardson defining and advocating its utility as the rights and obligations that citizens maintain in their sexual and intimate lives (2018). Importantly, Richardson (2018) distinguishes between sexual citizenship and 'sexual rights', which have a long history in feminism, dating back to the 1960s and 1970s and women's right to sexual pleasure and self-determination. In 'sexual citizenship' the focus lies on the legal (and) discursive regulation of nonnormative sexuality and gender expression.

Given its overlaps with sexual rights discourse and lesbian and gay politics, the political utility of the 'multiscalar' concept of sexual citizenship has been questioned. Richardson (2018) delineates the four main branches of this critique. First, there are those that contest the significance and centrality of sexuality to citizenship; these critiques find more telling the role reproduction plays in the construction of 'good' citizenship than sexuality itself, for instance (Turner 2008).<sup>16</sup> Secondly, the roles homonormativity (Duggan 2002) and homonationalism (Puar 2007) play in

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<sup>15</sup> Relatedly, Rao (2002) develops 'homocapitalism'.

<sup>16</sup> I argue that heterosexuality cannot be detangled from reproduction in the context of Jordan, meaning sexuality and reproduction are co-constituting rather than hierarchized. See chapter 2.

the construction of the relationship between state and citizens must be addressed (El-Tayeb 2011).<sup>17</sup> Others lament the reductivity of the language of citizenship in sexual politics (Brandzel 2016, 2005); and, finally, some problematise how sexuality and sexual democracy as Western concepts underpin the notion (Richardson 2018, 71; Massad 2015, 213; Sabsay 2014, 2012; Fassin 2011).

Correspondingly, Richardson (2018, 2017) and Bamforth (2012) highlight the ways in which contemporary uses of sexual citizenship uncritically reproduce some of the normative underpinnings of a (Marshallian) citizenship (Richardson 2017, 212). Namely, the sexual self is embodied in a liberal, atomistic autonomous subject that, crucially, exercises a spectrum of individual choices (2017, 216). Secondly, the literature upholds liberal notions of the public/private divide, with authors arguing in favour of understanding the private as a space for enacting citizenship (Evans 1993). Richardson therefore proposes a renewed focus on and nuance to the citizen-subject, as well as an elaboration and extension of the multiple potential loci of citizenship (2017, 217). Underlying the pitfalls of sexual citizenship is the consideration of whether it, as a concept, it can travel beyond the Euro-American tradition from which it emerged; to loci where the liberal citizen-subject might be less the norm and more a particular potential figuration of (post)coloniality. I would contend that Richardson is suggesting a decolonial approach to the concept, to assess its utility elsewhere. To that end, Kamal Sadiq (2017) has argued for a notion of postcolonial citizenship that complicates the (feminist) tendency to read the progress of citizenship studies towards a dual modulation that incorporates both rights and practice (*exercisable* social and economic rights and obligations), finding that, in the post-colony, ‘the former does not necessarily lead to the latter’ (2017, 184). The nuance these considerations offer traditional (liberal) notions of citizenship become especially apparent in the context of the Arab Middle East (Joseph 1997; 2005).<sup>18</sup>

To begin with, citizenship as dependant on an individualised conception of personhood and the self, embodied by an autonomous, yet abstract and universal citizen-subject, should never be transplanted to the Arab Middle Eastern context.<sup>19</sup> Suad Joseph has argued that in Lebanon, just as in ‘all Middle Eastern countries’ (2005, 149), the self is created relationally through a system of kinship relations, which bring about rights and obligations first and foremost within its own network. This makes the public sphere, where the state is in a rights-obligations relationship with

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<sup>17</sup> This implies the geopolitical dimension potency to gender and sexuality discourse – a core theme in this project.

<sup>18</sup> The conception of citizenship feminist, anti-racist and queer theorists work with is, at the end of the day, steep in Western European democratic political thought: the tension between the liberal notion of the self as necessarily detached from state, enacting citizenship through market participation with social citizenship and the discourse of charity indicates.

<sup>19</sup> I use ‘Middle East’ mindfully and for clarity, conscious of the epistemic violence and imperialism the term implies.

citizens, an impersonal space, secondary to the family. Joseph suggests that citizen-state relationships in Lebanon are thus organised through a ‘kin contract’, under which ‘all citizens belong to families prior to membership in the state, and [where] families claim the primary and primordial loyalties of citizens’ (2005, 149). Secondly, studying Arab Middle Eastern requires consideration of the coloniality that is inscribed citizenship (Sadiq 2017). To that end, we must recognise that the self is not necessarily fashioned individually, liberally, and that ‘the very notion of the self to which sexuality attaches itself is an artefact of the colonial encounter’ (Rao 2020, xix). That is, an effect of colonial governmentality, Rao shows that native modernising elites understand their selfhood, bodies, and relationships in the same terms as their colonisers.<sup>20</sup>

Following this logic, it is unsurprising that the theoretical effort in sexual citizenship has been subjected to the charge of sexual imperialism. This argument makes of sexual citizenship little more than a neo-Orientalist frame through which the Western sexual citizen is universalised, and becomes a marker for social progress and modernisation against (Massad 2015, 2007; Sabsay 2014; 2012). Joseph Massad has rather infamously argued that (homo)sexuality is a colonial imposition. ‘By inciting discourse about homosexuals where none existed before, the Gay International is in fact *heterosexualizing* a world that is being forced to be fixed by a Western binary’ (2007, 188). That is, Arabs engaged in same-sex sexual relationships do not espouse a ‘gay identity’, save those upper-middle class Arabs that act as native informants to the international, universalising project of LGBT rights (2007, 173). Sexuality is a function of colonial governmentality (Puar and Mikdashi 2016, 217; Rao 2020, xix), which ‘is always already a mode of assimilation in the logic of narcissistic incorporation’ (Massad 2015, 272). Massad’s conception of the ‘gay international’ and the grammars of sexuality as coloniality has received significant criticism from queer Arab theorists (e.g. Atshan 2020; Moussawi 2020; Allouche 2019; Abu Odeh 2013), while others have used Massad to ground their anti-imperialist criticism of sexual citizenship. Leticia Sabsay’s (2014) concern is not so much the notion of sexual citizenship as an analytical tool that lays bare the ways in which state institutions structure and maintain heterosexuality at their core, but the construction of the neoliberal, sexual citizen-subject as a result of the use of the language of sexual politics in Euro-American discourse on citizenship, and the universalisation of human rights discourse as a result. Said differently, sexual citizenship’s attempt at ‘de-heterosexualising citizenship’ actually leaves it intact (2012, 615), and the sexual citizen that becomes a reference point for the production of cultural others (Volpp 2017, 154; Sabsay 2012, 614;).

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<sup>20</sup> This line of thought is relevant, and conflicting when considering localized, grassroots activism that mobilizes in the name of LGBT rights. Rao continues: ‘contemporary LGBT activism is both enabled by and further entrenches ontologies of personhood originally forged in conditions of colonial modernity’ (2020, xix). See chapter 4 for a case study of these dynamics (the charge of sexual imperialism versus queer organising).

Overall, these tensions speak more to the importance of careful theorising and travelling of concepts than the futility of sexual citizenship itself. The takeaway seems to be that we would do well to avoid transplanting concepts uncritically out of a conviction that academic theorising understands local iterations of life best, and without assuming the coherence of the dynamics that shape lives in contexts other than the one in which a concept emerges. Further Bell and Binnie remind us that part of the project of sexual citizenship ‘might be to broaden and open up our conception of citizenship’ in the first place (2000, 143). An underlying openness to the formation of citizenship becomes especially important at a time when global(ising) discourses of gender and sexuality become part of the everyday by virtue of the interconnectedness of the world – namely, with the transition of social justice discourse from activist collectives to social media.

### 3. Queer interventions

In *Sexuality and Citizenship* (2018), Richardson categorises analyses that study citizenship as historically grounded in normative assumptions about sexuality, so *sexual citizenship*, as a practice in ‘queering’ (68), as these critiques lead to the expansion of the category of citizenship. ‘Queer citizenship’ as a concept has, however, attained a life of its own.

Queer theory emerged out of anti-assimilationist, queer politics (Cohen 1997). Queer is, by definition, ‘whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant’ (Halperin 1995, 62), and can refer to ‘the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning’ (Sedgwick 1994). Defining itself against the ‘normal’ as opposed to the heterosexual, queerness thus includes *all* those displaced from normative regimes and practices (Warner 1993), its broad critique capturing ‘multiple social antagonisms’, including race, gender, class, and citizenship status as linked to sexuality (Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz 2005, 1). *Queering* thus amounts to a deconstructive practice that brings to light the normative underpinnings of seemingly rigid notions such as citizenship. The emphasis on deconstruction is rooted in an understanding of normalisation as a site of ‘social violence’; some subjects being rendered acceptable, legible, normal necessitates their construction against an unacceptable, unintelligible, abnormal or perverse Other (Warner 1993).

Queer theorists’ critiques of the assimilationist claims made by much of the discourse on sexual citizenship (focused as it soon became on same-sex marriage), have centred on the neoliberal foundations such approaches betray. Essential here is Lisa Duggan’s work (2002), who argues that the incorporation of the sexual Other, the anti-citizen, into the frame of the citizenship merely affirms neoliberal heteronormativity. Gay liberation is redefined as access to previously heteronormative institutions (such as marriage), in a ‘politics that does not contest dominant

heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (Duggan 2002, 179).

Jasbir Puar extends Duggan's critique by centring whiteness as a queer norm, and by studying queerness as affect (2007). Puar argues that the neoliberal state incorporates white, citizen queers under its national emblem while simultaneously excluding racial others, who are, in turn, 'castigated ... as homophobic and perverse' (2007, xii). She describes as discursive and ideological processes the ways in which the very idea of sexual progress, embodied by this good (white, citizen) queer fuels Islamophobia. The suicide bomber 'or tortured body', then, is a queer assemblage illegible as a 'rational subject' (2017, 52). Instead, their body is de-linked from sexual identity and signals 'temporal, spatial, and corporeal schisms, [where] queerness is a prerequisite for the body to function' affectively and symbolically (2012, 221).

Linking the political and economic influences on the queer citizen in the era of mass-media with the racialisation of queerness/racial-ity of queerness, David Eng proposes the concept of queer liberalism, which 'articulates a contemporary confluence of the political and economic spheres that forms the basis for the liberal inclusion of particular gay and lesbian U.S. citizen-subjects petitioning for rights and recognition before the law' (2010, 3). Importantly, while queer liberalism inherently opposes the politics of intersectionality, and abets the 'systematic dissociation of (homo)-sexuality from race as coeval and intersecting phenomena' (4), it also represents a turn to normative forms of family and kinship, which is constituted against the figure of the racialized immigrant "over there" as well as "over here." (31).

Homonormativity, homonationalism, queer liberalism are all manifestations of a neoliberal conception of citizenship that promotes consumption and self-governance, and which function as markers of the modern, white nation-state (R. Ferguson 2009). Moreover, Rahul Rao contends that the 'civilisationalist logic of homonationalism' must be supplemented with a notion that accounts for the promise of a future redundant with economic growth and productivity that embraces LGBT rights – which he calls homocapitalism (2020, 12). Homocapitalism makes a model capitalist citizen of the 'queer' and projects their upward social mobility (175), and shares with homonationalism the recognition of the incorporation of authorised forms of queerness within the state 'through processes of race/class/gender-sanitising' (151). An example is the discursive construction of 'queer Indian good life' as inherently linked to consumption (and elitism) in Indian film (149). Rao finds that these representations simultaneously provide an opportunity for 'queers' to occupy public space, but also 'constitute and consolidate queer subjectivities in what are often deeply elitist ways, rendering other expressions of queerness

intelligible' (150). A queer figuration of citizenship would thus seek to effect the de-normalisation of the heterosexuality and cisgender script of citizenship, as well as uphold promise of an (alternative) queer process of meaning-making that enables a new grammar of belonging.

#### 4. Queer(ing) citizenship

Given this framing of the potential of queerness and queering, 'queer citizenship has been dismissed as an oxymoron (Volpp 2017; Brandzel 2016, 2005). This has to do with the unresolved issue of citizenship's exclusivity, neoliberal foundations.<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey Weeks (1998, 1995), who understands queer and 'citizen' as operating in a dualism that necessitates a split between good and bad citizens, being a good sexual citizen can never be a queer strategy. Leti Volpp finds that citizenship, as a technology of governance, is simply not 'available to queered' (2017, 172); citizenship cannot serve double-duty as both a mechanism of discipline and of resistance, and 'even as it moves to embrace these new bodies, citizenship relentlessly, by its foundational logic, continues to rely upon and create new exclusions of 'those who do not or cannot fit' (ibid.). Amy Brandzel distinguishes calls for same-sex marriage as more aligned with a lesbian and gay politics than an (anti-assimilationist) queer one, because they 'believe that that "queer" and "citizen" are antithetical concepts' (197). To queer the notion, citizenship would have to be conceived without recourse to 'universalization, false imaginaries, or immersion in and acceptance of the progress narratives of U.S. citizenship.' (2005, 198). Queer citizenship would refuse to participate in the differentiation of peoples, groups, or individuals' – in short, 'it would refuse citizenship altogether' (198).

Maya Mikdashi, on the other hand, has argued for a reading of queer citizenship as a methodology (2014). To Mikdashi, queering citizenship entails exposing the normative assumptions of gender and sexuality that it harbours, as well as the 'formalized and institutionalized practices' that inform the terrain of citizenship (350). Queering citizenship thus offers a lens through which to study and regulative and disciplinary character of the law – which, of course, also manages citizenship-as-status. As such, citizenship to Mikdashi, 'may itself be queer' (350), since it takes an active role in regulating gendered and sexual regimes. Nonetheless, locating the possibility for resistance also within the notion of citizenship (by example of strategic conversion in sectarian Lebanon), Mikdashi also asserts that enacting citizenship is a performance that 'knots together sect, sex, and gender' (2013, 351). Citizenship is, in other words, performative. Mikdashi recognises that while the citizen can only emerge as a legal and embodied category against its

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<sup>21</sup> Or, in Volpp's terms, its ability to evade 'smuggling in its baggage a cultural hierarchy of the world (2017, 171).

negation, to queer citizenship is to investigate the messy ways in which this citizen status is enacted and, crucially, how it is subverted. Queer citizenship is ‘life as it is lived’ (2013, 352). In Mikdashi’s reading, which I largely adopt, queering citizenship to challenge ‘normative knowledges, identities, behaviours and spaces’ (Hunt and Holmes 2015, 156), unsettles the power relations that citizenship is based on.<sup>22</sup>

Accordingly, to dwell on at this juncture is the notion of performative citizenship. While the dialectic between citizenship-as-right and citizenship-as-practice can be traced back to the heyday of political philosophy’s re-engagement with TH Marshall, Engin Isin understands citizenship (claims) as always containing a struggle. Says Isin, ‘because citizenship is *constitutive* of rights and because who can exercise and claim these rights is *contestable*, citizenship is practiced not only by exercising these rights but also by claiming them’ (2017, 501, emphasis in original). Performative citizenship thus emerges in direct response to the question of whether ‘citizens and non-citizens perform in making rights claims [is] adequate to study citizenship in colonial and postcolonial states’ (505). Isin roots his argument in a narration of the ‘dissident citizenship practices’ enacted by noncitizen, indigenous peoples in Canada and the US, unpacking Idle No More and No One Is Illegal in particular. Isin does not claim that citizenship ceases to be a differentiating institution in this frame; citizens and noncitizens still exist relationally (508). Rather, they similarly perform acts of citizenship, and studying these rights claims in the frame of performative citizenship allows us to do so ‘without making prior assumptions about the presence of absence of that which might be called citizenship’ (505). The obvious tension between performing a right claim as a universal right and making individual rights claims is best understood as a question of performative contradiction (Butler 2005): noncitizens are excluded from this universal but belong to it anyhow. Isin here maintains that, performing citizenship acts means that we both reiterate and perform the frame, but we can break it (convention), too. Finally, by focusing on acts, performative citizenship questions the subject-citizen dichotomy (Alexander 1994); instead of existing in opposition to each other, they are implicated in one other (517). Isin’s reading of performative citizenship is highly compelling, but, if we build on an understanding of citizenship as both a legal status (associated with rights and obligations) as well as affective group membership, we must also consider performances beyond ‘rights claims’ as citizenship acts. That is cultural and linguistic acts and choices may very well amount to performances of citizenship. The analysis in chapter 4 adapts Isin’s formulation of performative citizenship accordingly.

The performative theory of citizenship emphasises the active, world-making dimensions to and transformative potentials of citizenship. If citizenship is practiced through iterations of

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<sup>22</sup> Mikdashi highlights especially sectarianism.

social, cultural, and political performances, then (sexed, gendered) citizen outlaws performing these acts pose a fundamental challenge to the coherence of the citizen-subject and to (Jordanian) citizenship. It opens a space to reform citizenship. This aligns with both the critical legal perception of the law as discourse, which observes that (citizenship) law genders, races, classes, sexualises, and embodies subjects (Hunter 2019, 51), as well as queer notions of hopeful change as linked to the future (as opposed to progress; Muñoz 2009). The concept therefore holds serious potential for studying the intentional enactment of citizenship in subversive ways – especially when it travels. As queerness is less about *being* than about *doing*, queering becomes an apt avenue to offering radical social critique of citizenship, and queer citizenship becomes compelling as a space of reconsideration and reformation.

The analysis in the following chapters is thus based on Mikdashi's notion of queering citizenship, where citizenship is understood performatively. Additionally, in light of queerness' penchant for meaning-making through its dissection of normative social and legal categories, it argues that 'Queer Citizenship' is a descriptor of alternative spaces to the public sphere, where the queer self can form for the very purpose of re-engaging with the sphere that excludes it.<sup>23</sup>

## 5. Notes on queerness in the Arab Middle East

Using a concept or theory developed primarily in anglophone academia in the Arab Middle East usually heeds one of two results; it can function as an imposition that assumes the same political and cultural dynamics that informed the origins of the concept to also be at play in the Middle East,<sup>24</sup> or it could demonstrate the (un)successful appropriation and resignification of theories as a means to better understand and –crucially– to communicate the specificities of (queer) theorising elsewhere.

To that end, Sabiha Allouche introduces (un)-queer-(y)ing as a methodology that recognises the plurality of queerness; the multiple starting points of queer narratives and their trajectories, and the innumerable ways in which scholars, activists, and students produce them

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<sup>23</sup> For an articulation of the tools at the core of my theorization here, see chapter 4 section 1.

<sup>24</sup> Analysis like these often betray preoccupation with theorisation over the careful study of their subjects. Atshan (2020) criticises Massad on these grounds, holding the fetishization of critique largely responsible for the epistemic violence done to queer organising in Palestine. Similarly, Brandzel (2016) iterates their dedication to highlighting the exclusions that a politics of (normative) inclusion necessitate; '[t]here is no such thing as a movement for inclusion and citizenship for *some* that does not further the vulnerability and disenfranchisement of *others*' (emphasis in original; x). However, Brandzel rationalises their approach to critique and contextualises it in the tension between academic critique and the rhetoric of social movements. Categorising their own approach as a type of 'epistemic violence', Brandzel expresses concern over the ways in which 'scholars can remove themselves from being accountable for the pain and violence of our critiques' (x). *Against Citizenship* is thus also concerned with the politics of responsibility and accountability within queer theorisation (xi).

around the world. Allouche defines ‘outer-queer-(y)ing’ as: ‘the forced and artificial subjugation of the fictive category of the Middle East to a queer analysis that is informed, shaped and delimited by a US experience’ (2019, 30). In addition to the emergence of a universal LGBT subject-citizen that relies on a binary understanding of sexuality under which all Arab sexuality and gender performance is necessarily perverse and backwards, this frame privileges queer theory *as queer theory* over articulations of specific contexts. It is preoccupied with queer visibility,<sup>25</sup> and overlooks gender and sexual (dissent) performativity (2019, 30). While such analyses misrepresent and make passive objects of study of ‘queerness in the Middle East’, Allouche also contextualises the epistemic violence involved in anti-imperialist critiques of queerness (Massad 2007). In this vein, she proposes (un)queer(y)ing as a ‘rectifying’ exercise; a methodology rooted in the multiplicity of queerness that takes the US example as one possible thread of queer experience along the axis of state regulation.

Furthermore, Allouche recognises in these narratives a ‘decolonizing potential’ (2020, 35). The potential of weaving together queer theory and decolonial thinking, seeing as they both emerge from a place of resistance is worth investigating. Though only in passing, Allouche implies that unsettling queer theory through an engagement with the universalisation narrative with which it is often received, as well as its preoccupation with theorising solely queer visibility rather than ‘the context in question’, could amount to a decolonial, queer lens and praxis. Pedro Paulo Gomes Pereira has argued in favour of harmonising and using together queer theory and decolonial thinking, finding that the latter, in fact, ‘approximates what we call queerness’ (2019, 407) for its natural propensity to open itself up to other theories. Further, he understands both theories as productive sites, ‘spaces of confluence between the forces of bodies and of geopolitics’ (409). Furthermore, queering and decolonising are both ‘active, interconnected, critical, and everyday practices that take place within and across diverse spaces and times’ (Hunt and Holmes 2015). Thus, while queer theory *is* ‘inserted in’ a particular geopolitical context (the global North), he insists on its usefulness for the global South *for* its ability to appropriate and transform of queer theory. Like bodies, theory travels and mutates, and authors who stem from and write about the global South with a queer lens should be understood as always also participating in this geopolitical negotiation – whether consciously or not. As such, ‘queer theory in the global South can only imagine itself through the process of permanent decolonization’ (Gomes Pereira 405).

In thinking these dynamics in the context of the Arab Middle East, Walaa Alqaisiya’s work is indispensable. Writing at the same time but contributing to the scholarly study of queer Palestine, Alqaisiya (2020; 2018) has argued for a ‘native-grounded-queering’, or indeed,

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<sup>25</sup> See also Moussawi (2020).

‘decolonial queering’, to facilitate ‘practicing and thinking decolonization in Palestine’ (2018, 31). Alqaisiya uses decolonial queering as a political commitment and analytical lens to analyse alQaw’s activism, highlighting its ability to reject mere LGBT identification and advocating for the whole of the Palestinian cause instead, thereby troubling normative notions of progress and the internalisation of a Western LGBT frame in the process. To Alqaisiya, this intersectional approach can give rise to a radical liberation, entrenched in solidarity work. Decolonial queering would thus also capture the historical continuity of settler colonial conquest, as the narratives surrounding queer Palestinians are read as part of the history of Zionism, ‘whose constitutive gendering and racializing elements cohere with a structural settler-colonial politics of Time, Space and Desire’ (2020, 100). It situates queerness in relation to the ‘hetero-conquest generated from *within* Arab self-struggle and adopted taxonomies for emancipation’.

Finally, to lay the theoretical foundations of the argument manifested in chapter 3, we must ask ourselves: even if citizenship can be successfully, self-reflectively queered and open up new spaces for the nonnormative self to form, why appropriate the language of a concept that has excluded us? Ruth Lister ask herself a similar question in the introduction to ‘Dialectics of Citizenship’: can a ‘concept originally predicated on the very exclusion of women be reformulated so as satisfactorily to include and not simply append them?’ (1997, 6). On the level of the thesis, the answer is quite straightforward: because the collective at the core of my analysis does so.<sup>26</sup> To that end, in his critique of Massad’s reductive reading of alQaws as native informants, Atshan (2020) holds Massad accountable for failing to ‘acknowledge that Palestinian society in general is increasingly connected to globalized, internationalized, and transnational institutions, communities, and networks and that these networks are shaping everyday lives and subjectivities’ (2020, 191). I would add that, if we consider the self and its identification with a specific regime and grammar of sexuality as shaped –in part– by the colonial encounter, we are working under the assumption that the local and the global are always already linked, most definitely so in the postcolonial nation-state. I depart from an understanding of transnational solidarities as inseparable from local and global discourse, and heed Lila Abu Lughod’s warning that, so long as I am writing ‘for the West’ (for a Dutch university, in English) about the Arab Middle East (Jordan), I am ‘implicated in projects that establish Western authority and cultural difference’ (2001, 105). My hope is that, by centring Arab and Jordanian voices, investigating the case study through the vocabulary and politics that it self-defines with, and centre the interactions of local with global discourses of gender and sexuality, that this project may prove an ethical engagement

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<sup>26</sup> See chapter 4 for an in-depth discussion.

with and communication (to the anglophone world) of queer Jordanian (survival) strategies – including the claim to queer Jordanian citizenship.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> This reflects how queer of colour critique the project.

## Chapter 2: The lay of the Land, the Law of the Land: Jordanian Citizenship Between Reproduction and Patriotism

In their analysis of the –at the time– booming discipline of (critical) citizenship studies, Kymlicka and Norman (1990) argue for a distinction between citizenship-as-legal-status and citizenship-as-desirable-activity, noting how contemporary scholarship had begun emphasising the latter (351). Scholars working on ‘desirable activity’ were mainly concerned with the requirements set for being a good citizen. ‘But we should expect a theory of the good citizen to be relatively independent of the legal question of what it is to be a citizen, just as a theory of the good person is distinct from the meta- physical (or legal) question of what it is to be a person’ (353). With the insights from chapter 1 in mind, chapter 2 seeks to build on the wave of critical legal scholarship that has challenged this assumption by arguing that citizenship as legal status can and should never be fully detangled from a legally (and) discursively championed good praxis of Jordanian citizenship. This is not to argue, as Kymlicka and Norman suggest, that citizenship could be stripped from individuals deemed ‘apathetic’ (353), but rather to highlight the ways in which the Jordanian citizen as inscribed in the Constitution and secondary legal texts is strictly tied to a system of expectations and mannerisms. Said differently, the chapter departs from an understanding of the law as discourse (Hunter 2019), both reflective of and reinforcing ‘desirable’ behaviour.

This lens finds its origin in a recognition of the role of the law as a tool for governance that not only polices and regulates (sexual) behaviour, but that also constitutes (sexual and gender) norms and its practicing subjects. The critical theory of law finds inspiration in Foucault’s juridico-discursive conception of law as power, according to which sex is first and foremost placed in a binary system in which it is either ‘licit’ or ‘illicit’ (Foucault 1978, 83). Next, ‘power prescribes an “order” for sex’, a framework through which it is understood. Lastly, sex is regulated, the power over it solidified and maintained, through ‘acts of discourse’ (83), as articulated in legal rules and, I argue, replicated in the media. Scholars have investigated the different dimensions of ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ sexual citizenship using a wide range of terminology, all indicative of similar dichotomies. Petrella (2019), for instance, uses ‘erotic (in)civility’ (3), finding that the sexually illicit citizen is always created in relation to the ‘erotically civil subject’. Further, most of these accounts champion the premise that good, responsible sexual citizenship, practiced by the good sexual citizen, is not only closely associated with but develops in relation to the ideals of the heterosexual, reproductive (nuclear) family (Bell and Binnie 2000; Richardson 2000).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The reproductive family ideal implies strict (cis-)gender roles. See section 1.2. on how the Jordanian legal system makes impossible transgender Jordanian citizens.

Recognising the power law wields in constituting and reproducing (sexual) citizens who (fail to) enact good citizenship, this chapter is concerned with the figure of the good Jordanian citizen. It argues that, not only is this citizen necessarily cisgender and heterosexual, but that the heteronormative family ideal has been introduced and tirelessly reproduced discursively in the last decade in Jordan, emphasising the centrality of the family in the Jordanian public sphere. The chapter thus departs from a critical reading of the 2011 amendments to the ‘rights and responsibilities’ chapter of the Jordanian Constitution; before moving to a reading of the citizen-subjects constructed in the more recent Medical Health and Accountability Law (MHAL) of 2018, and contextualising both in the contemporary socio-political landscape of the country. Finally, these legal reforms are read alongside a series of moral panics that are reflective of and further entrench the limits of good, reproductive Jordanian citizenship, defined as this is by sex, sexuality, and gender.

## 1. Legal Sexual Citizen-Subjects

### 1.1. *The 2011 Constitution*

Jordan has a mixed legal system based on civil law, religious doctrine, and customary law. Citizenship as legal status, marked by all three of these sources, brings about a set of rights and obligations that citizens acquire from and owe to the state.<sup>29</sup> As the main instrument that regulates the relationship between state and citizen, the text of the Constitution is the natural starting point for investigating the tenets of this relationship. The Jordanian Constitution was heavily amended in 2011 at the culmination of the regime’s decennial liberalisation strategy; and following a wave of protests calling for economic and social reform (P. Ferguson 2017; Abu Rish 2014). Considered a relatively calm movement in the region, popular discourse and public perception tends to be that Jordan was spared a true Arab Spring ‘moment’, with especially the failure of the women’s movement to effect constitutional reform being singled out (P. Ferguson 2017).<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, significant legislative reform has informed the last decade of Jordanian law-making.

In late 2011, King Abdullah II signed into law 38 amendments to the Constitution, adopting most of the recommendations put forward by the Royal Committee set up to ‘establish

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<sup>29</sup> At this dimension, citizenship is synonymous with nationality.

<sup>30</sup> A core goal of the Jordanian women’s movement has been the introduction of gender as grounds for claiming discrimination under the equality clause (Art. 6 (1)) of the Constitution. The latter only provides for ‘race, religion, and language’ as legitimate grounds. A prevalent argument made *against* the introduction of gender to the provision has been the facile claim that the term ‘Jordanians’ (as in, ‘all Jordanians are equal before the law’) implies gender (it does not).

a balance' between the executive, legislature, and the judiciary.<sup>31</sup> The 2011 amendments inscribed into law several provisions that the state had resisted for decades prior.<sup>32</sup> Given the mandate of the Royal Committee in the protest moment that informed the Arab Spring, it is unsurprising that the most publicised and prominent of these amendments concerned the enactment the state's liberalising agenda, effecting a shift in the scales towards a more equal division of powers in the *trias politica*. Most significant among these is the introduction of Art. 59(1), which provides the legal basis for the establishment of a Constitutional Court in Jordan (JCC).<sup>33</sup> As is the standard model for constitutional courts, the JCC has the authority to assess the legality (constitutionality) of laws passed by the legislator (Art. 4(a) Law no. 15) and is tasked with the interpretation of the Constitution (Art. 4(b)). The establishment of the JCC constitutes an attempt at increasing legislative legitimacy and transparency in Jordan, and thus signifies a commitment to the model of a constitutional monarchy proper. Crucially, the new Court not only has the authority to review laws, but also the ability to strike down those laws it deems unconstitutional with immediate effect (Art. 15(b)). The JCC thus holds ultimate authority over the legality of laws, whereas, previously, the king's refusal to sign bills into law could constitute a last resort to blocking legislation from entering into force (Al Hajjaj 2018). The new constitutional amendment and review procedures thus effectively redistribute power previously vested in the head of state to the legislature. To that end, the independence of the judiciary at large was also finally written into law with the 2011 amendments, with the condition of its 'independence' added to Article 27 of the Constitution. Interestingly, this article still maintains that courts of law issue judgements 'in the name of the King', as does Art. 15(a) of Law no. 15. Whereas Law no. 15 of 2012 sets clear limits to the executive influence over the Constitution and the relationship between citizen and state that it regulates, the text of that bill and Art. 27 Constitution maintain the tone of monarchical supremacy. Said differently, the provisions legally limit the powers of the king but simultaneously reaffirm his unilateral grip on the populace discursively.

Other proposed amendments that received significant publicity but were ultimately rejected include the addition of 'sex' to the anti-discrimination clause of Art. 6(1) Constitution, an amendment the Jordanian women's movement has championed for decades (P. Ferguson 2017; Dababneh 2012). The amendment would have given Jordanian women a legal basis for challenging

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<sup>31</sup> Royal Decree to establish a Royal Committee to review provisions of the Constitution, 26 April 2011. See: Aljazy and Nasrawi (2012, 117).

<sup>32</sup> A prime example is the introduction of the prohibition of torture in Article 8(2) Constitution. Although Jordan has been a signatory to the United Nations Convention against Torture (UNCAT) since 1991, it had not introduced an absolute ban on torture in the Constitution nor the Penal Code (PC) until 2011. After repeated instruction by the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT), the legislature *did* introduce a limited definition of acts that amount to torture in the Penal Code (Art. 208 PC).

<sup>33</sup> Law no. 15 of 2012 concerning establishing the Constitutional Court (No. 5161; 2519-2528).

their unequal treatment in the body of Jordanian law. For example, the amendment would have provided a constitutional challenge to provisions of the Personal Status Law that maintain guardianship laws for unmarried women; as well as the Nationality Law of 1952, which still does not permit matrilineal citizenship conferral (Art. 3(3); Halaseh and Alqubelat 2019).<sup>34</sup>

The failure to incorporate sex (let alone gender) as a ground for discrimination overshadowed the extensive amendments that *were* eventually made to Article 6. The article is the second provision in the ‘Rights and Responsibilities’ chapter of the Constitution. Paragraph (2), which guarantees ‘work and education’ to Jordanians ‘within the limits of [the state’s] capabilities’ as well as ‘tranquillity and equal opportunities’, was renumbered as paragraph (3), and three sub-sections were added. The new rights and obligations introduced in Article 6 read as follows:<sup>35</sup>

(2) defending the homeland,<sup>36</sup> its soil, the unity of its people, and maintaining social peace is the sacred duty of every Jordanian.

(4) the family is the foundation of society,<sup>37</sup> at core of which stand religiosity, morals, and the love of the homeland. The law protects its legal entity and strengthens its bonds and values.

(5) the law protects motherhood, childhood, and old age; it provides care for the youth and disabled, and protects them from abuse and exploitation.

Two features of this amendment immediately stand out: no longer is the article concerned with the singular Jordanian who stands ‘equal’ before law and as against all other Jordanians, but it is the family, *al-usra*, that maintains a relationship with the state, and within which the Jordanian self

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<sup>34</sup> The Jordanian women’s movement has not officially endorsed the adoption of ‘gender’ –as opposed to ‘sex’– into the provision. Gender is not a legally recognised dimension of subjecthood, of Jordanian citizenship; only biological sex is. See section 1.2. for a discussion on the erasure of gender in the construction of the Jordanian legal citizen-subject.

<sup>35</sup> Translation mine. The official gazette only publishes legislation in Arabic. For a similar translation, see: [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Jordan\\_2016.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Jordan_2016.pdf?lang=en)

<sup>36</sup> The provision uses ‘*al-watan*’, as opposed to the more neutral *balad*, meaning country, or *danla*, meaning state. Citizenship in Arabic is similarly translated as *mawatana*, a conjugation of the word for homeland (*watan*).

<sup>37</sup> Unclear here is whether the family, *al-usra*, refers to the conjugal family unit or the extended family. Much like the strict divide of the public/private sphere that informs contemporary mainstream understanding of (sexual) citizenship (Pateman 1989), the conjugal family unit is an invention of the modern nation-state – a figuration that emerged concomitant to it (Joseph 2005, 52). Muslim jurisprudence has historically organized itself around the extended family as opposed to the conjugal unit. Scholars have written widely on the development of the nuclear family as opposed to tribal kinship formations in the Middle East and North Africa, tracing juridical developments to the evolution of nationalisms and changing relationship between the state attitude to feminism as informed by the colonial encounter (ex. Cuno 2015; Voorhoeve 2012; Khloussy 2010). The (imperial) focus on the conjugal family entails the instrumentalization of sexuality as a form of governance to discipline bodies (Stoler 1995, 3). Laura Ann Stoler has famously argued that the *other* Victorian project, imperial expansion, equally entailed the management of bodies and minds, and that, accordingly, Foucault’s reading of the bourgeois family was lacking in its inability to locate racial hegemonies within it. In short, the grammars of race were constitutive of the abject subject against which the prudish Victorian defined itself (5). (Otto 2018, 142; Hoad 2000, 133).

forms. The family is the ‘foundation of society’ and the primary site of kinship formation. Second, the provision elaborately defines the (Jordanian) attributes of this family, highlighting the requirement of national loyalty and fealty within its characterisation. Evident is also a dizzying back-and-forth between the characteristics, duties, and rights of the Jordanian citizen (as a member of *al usra*) and those of the state, thus deeply entangling the two. For instance, the article promises to protect the rights of the family, and singles out motherhood, childhood, and seniority as affording specific protections, in exchange for the ‘sacred duty’ of ‘defending’ Jordan and its people (2) in the name of the ‘love of the homeland’ (4). In short, Article 6 marks the Jordanian state as the protector of the Jordanian family, the corresponding duty for which is the defence of the homeland, and the maintenance of a family whose values are rooted in patriotism, religiosity, and morality. The remainder of this section will further explore how the regulation of sex, sexuality and gender in Jordanian law (re)produce the ideal of the reproductive family and, in turn, the figure of the heterosexual, cis-gender Jordanian citizen-subject formed within the confines of the family.

### 1.2. *Regulating sex, ensuring marriage: zina versus the family*

This section is concerned with the legal production of the sexual citizen as linked to the reproductive, heterosexual family; it studies the singularity of the heterosexual family unit as a legitimate forum to practicing good sexual citizenship in Jordan and investigates the subjects that emerge from the dynamic. In this equation, the practice of other types of intimacy and kinship are at best taboo, and at worst criminalised. That is, if *al-usra* is the foundation of society, its ‘entity’ and the special relationships within it (ex. motherhood) afforded special protections by the state, it is constituted as such against other potential kinship formations and the bodies that fail to live up to its ideals.

Marriage is a biopolitical tool that allows states to regulate and maintain its subjects – its sexual citizens.<sup>38</sup> Marriage is also an institution critical to establishing and maintaining kinship ties (Atran 1985). This is certainly true for Jordan, where it constitutes the only legitimate entry point to intimate relationships and the formation of families.<sup>39</sup> However, it is far from extraordinary for states to invest in and exert power over the regulation of families within their borders. Virtually every state does this by legislating marriage, divorce, childcare, inheritance, and social benefits

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<sup>38</sup> I am building on Foucault’s theorization of biopolitics, indicating a strategy through which human life processes are managed under regimes of –in this case– the law (literally as well as the law as discourse) (2009).

<sup>39</sup> In effect, family law takes a central role in regulating (legitimate) reproduction. Family law falls mainly under the Personal Status law in Jordan.

schemes. ‘Law *constitutes* marriage’ (Stevens 1999, 109) to the extent that it places under legal regulation citizens’ intimate ties, thereby directly impacting family practices and relationships (Joseph 2005; Stevens 1999). The law ‘constitutes and regulates, punishes and self-disciplines’ citizens (2007, 16), leading Brenda Cossman to conclude that marriage is not just a right ‘in the basket of sexual citizenship’, but one of ‘citizenship’s central and constitutive practices’ (2007, 70).

Moreover, good sexual citizenship is also reproductive. The foundational logic of the nation-state as a heteronormative institution that needs to regulate marriage finds its root in the necessity of a state as self-perpetuating. That is, to maintain a population and thus the functioning of a state, its population must be reproducing itself. In European legal history, this logic can be traced to the core texts of what would later develop into international law. In the seminal, *Law of Nations* from 1758, Emer de Vattel declares that, since a ‘nation cannot preserve and perpetuate itself except by propagation’, it has ‘the right to procure women’ – and if its neighbours with a ‘redundancy of females’ refuse to cooperate, it justifies the use of force (2008, 321).<sup>40</sup> De Vattel thus concludes: his was ‘a nation of men’ (321). It is against this background that critical scholar of international law, Diane Otto, argues that the nation-state legible in the international legal framework is itself made *possible* through a naturalisation of heterosexual kinship arrangements (2018, 240). Building on Foucault, who argues that the Malthusian couple as an anchor of Western sexuality is monogamous, heterosexual, reproductive and ‘socially responsible’ (1978, 105), Otto reads conjugal heterosexuality as ‘produc[ing] and discipline[ing] ‘normal’ interpersonal and familial relationships’, which are ‘constitutive of the nation-state, international law’s primary subject’ (Otto 2018, 241), the sexual citizen. To that end, she studies the production of the heteronormative nation internally – through same-sex marriage discourse, and externally – in light of military fortifications and border-making. On the underlying logic behind states’ regulation of marriage and kinship, scholars have thus pointed to the ability of states to assert sovereignty; it is a way for them to prove their existence (Cott 1999, 109), as well as a means to preserve that existence by maintaining a steady population (Cossman 2007; Cott 1999). The link between statehood and maintenance of a permanent population is even inscribed in customary

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<sup>40</sup> De Vattel cites the myth of the abduction of Sabine women in the early history of Rome as a justifiable example. Recorded in Roman history by Livy, this myth holds that Romulus, upon becoming concerned with the scarcity of Roman women and their ability to maintain the population, and Rome’s strength, tried unsuccessfully to negotiate with neighbouring cities to arrange for marriages between his male followers and their women. When these failed, Romulus arranged for women of Sabine to be abducted during a Neptune Sequeter festival, leading him into war (see for example, Miles, 2018). De Vattel notes, however, that women may not be married against their will, citing again the Roman myth. Writes de Vattel: ‘no woman in particular can be constrained in her choice, nor become, by right, the wife of a man who carries her off by force’ (2008, 321). This is a typical conclusion to draw as modern European law finds its roots in the rediscovery of Roman law in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Lessaffer 2008).

international law; the Montevideo Convention of 1933 famously stipulates that a stable population is one of the four criteria for statehood.<sup>41</sup> This encapsulates the modern idea that the fate of the family becomes the fate of the nation (Cuno 2015, 4).

The interest that modern nation-states have in maintaining populations by way of regulating marriage is thus a universal concern (S. Ferguson and Yilmaz 2021). However, it would be a gross simplification, and a denial of the impact of imperialism, to claim the universalization of the ways in which the family as an institution *relates* to the state, tied as this is to local histories and kinship formations.<sup>42</sup> For example, Suad Joseph (2005) identifies the ‘systemic and institutionalized positioning of family/family values’ in politics as a peculiarity of the Middle East (150). Families and the organisation of kinship are key to understanding political discourse and social organisation more generally, as the state/citizen dynamic in Lebanon is informed by the ‘kin contract’ (2005; 2001).<sup>43</sup> This contract pertains to those formal and informal understandings that are organised around the notion that ‘that all citizens belong to families prior to membership in the state’ (2005, 149), thus creating a complex web of rights and duties that family members owe each other prior to the ones that bind them to the state. The rights and duties are unevenly distributed among family members given seniority and the gender axis, and are formalised into law (2005, 150). Finally, the instrumentalization of the family in politics and political discourse lead to continuity of kinship between the state, civil society, and the family; in contrast to ‘Western states’, thus, there exists greater continuity between the public, private and domestic spheres ‘that are linked to the centrality of the patriarchal family.’ (2001, 5). The family holds similar political and cultural discursive weight in Jordan. The 2011 amendments to Article 6 of the Constitution explicitly centre the state as the protector of the family, interrupting any potential lapse in loyalty directed primarily *to* said state. The provision ensures the continuity between the public and private sphere by first by obliging the family to act as a progenitor of and symbol for the state, and reminding it that the price for the legal privileges is the enactment of blunt patriotism – fulfilling the ‘sacred duty’ of defence. The rights and obligations that arise out of Jordanian citizenship are, in other words, conditioned on heteropatriarchal reproduction and patriotism. Further, the state’s anxious stakes in maintaining its population are mirrored within the populace.

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<sup>41</sup> Though only ratified by 16 independent states, the four statehood criteria set out in the Montevideo Convention have customarily become a reference to establishing statehood under international law. The Convention thus codifies the declarative theory of statehood, which finds that a territorial entity’s statehood is independent from its recognition as such by other states.

<sup>42</sup> Within Anglo-American citizenship studies, marriage and marriage law have further been read as sites for the reproduction of a white normative society (Brandzel 2005, 194).

<sup>43</sup> Joseph holds that this dynamic is evident in slight variation in ‘all’ of the Middle East (2005).

Marriage is increasingly a source of anxiety for young Jordanians, with public perception holding that the country is in the midst of a ‘crisis of marriage’ (Hughes 2021, 2015; Adely 2016).<sup>44</sup>

The regulation and promotion of the family is thus in the direct interest of the state, making it the only site of legitimate kinship and sexual relations (hips) under Jordanian law. While the Constitution implies this by singling out the family as the foundation of society, further legal instruments entrench the inescapability of the heteronormative and reproductive family norm in Jordan through the regulation of sex itself.

To begin with, pre-marital and extra-marital sex (*zina*) are criminalised under Art. 282 of the Penal Code: they constitute misdemeanours contrary to ‘family morals’.<sup>45</sup> The state cannot independently prosecute individuals for engaging in sexual activities, but it can act upon the submission of a complaint by a family member (Art. 284 PC). The penalty for pre-marital *zina* is a jail term of 1 to two years (Art. 282(2)). This is raised to ‘at least two years’, if one of the partners is married (Art. 282(3)), and to three years if the act is performed in the marital home of one of the partners (Art. 282(3)). Pre-marital, extra-marital, and by extension post-marital sex, are thus classed as acts contrary to ‘family morals’. They constitute offences that the state ‘protects’ and must ‘strengthen’ the family against (Art. 6(4) Constitution). Sexual activity outside the bounds of marriage is not just immoral, but illegal. This is made even more distinct by the mitigating circumstances for murder provided in Article 340 PC; if a man in catching his wife, female ascendants, descendants, or his sister committing *zina*, and in doing so murders her and/or her sexual partner or causes them serious bodily injury, benefits from mitigating circumstances (Art. 340(1)). A highly controversial rule, amendment no. 8 of 2011 introduced to Art. 340(2) mitigating circumstances also for women who, in catching their husbands committing adultery, murder or seriously injure them and/or their sexual partner(s) – as opposed to, say, eradicating mitigating circumstances for murder and grave assault.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The ways in which Middle Eastern state-building adopts surveillance and discipline through the regulation of sex and sexuality has roots in the European and Ottoman colonial enterprises that preceded independent, Arab-majority nation states (S. Ferguson and Yilmaz 2021; Bier 2011; Stoler 1995; Kandiyoti 1991; Atran 1985). Similar to the imperial rulers, in these new states sexual, family and gender are ‘central to consolidating power’ (S. Ferguson and Yilmaz 2021, 58), leading them to heavily regulate childrearing and reproduction.

<sup>45</sup> In a 2019 report detailing the ‘policing’ of women’s sexuality issued by Amnesty International, *zina* is defined as ‘all sex outside of marriage’ (2019, 5; 26); while a UNDP report from 2018 maintains that only ‘adultery’, extra-marital sex, is illegal under Art. 282 PC, meaning that consensual sex between adult men and women falls beyond the scope of the provision (2018, 16). The wording of Art. 282 is ambiguous on what constitutes *zina*, and the Amnesty report cites a personal interview with the Attorney General of the Court of Cassation as evidence that it criminalises pre-marital sex, too. Information on the actual prosecution of Art. 282 is difficult to obtain (see discussion on protective incarceration below), but High Court decision 406/2008 seems to corroborate the wider interpretation of *zina*. In the case, a man was prosecuted for raping his cousin, and the Court concluded that ‘consensual sex without due existence of a legal contract –as is evident in the documents submitted to the Court– falls under the rule in Art. 282 (1) of the Penal Code’. Translation mine.

<sup>46</sup> Previously, mitigating circumstances existed only for husbands and family members who caught their wives or women family members engaging in extra-marital sex.

By limiting the prosecution of *zina* to reports made by family members, the regulation of extra-marital sex generates becomes a responsibility shared between kin groups and the state. Coupled with the relatively high evidentiary burden to necessary to enact provisions 282-286 PC (to amount to a punishable offence, a person must be caught in the act, or judicially confess to the act, Art. 283 PC), the dynamics of state-citizen that this provokes is reflective of Hanafi legal doctrine (Azam 2013; Katz 2012), which emphasises the deterrent role the law is meant to embrace. The Penal Code is a civil law instrument in Jordan, adjudicated in civil courts. The regulation of sex however betrays its preoccupation with steering the populace towards desirable performance –or lack thereof– of sexual citizenship.<sup>47</sup> Historically, the regulation of sex within jurisdictions that apply Hanafi legal interpretation reflected a proprietary ethics of sex, under which female sexuality is perceived as a commodity attached to notions of ownership, purchase and theft (Azam 2013). This ethic makes clear the function of the dowry in the economic exchange of a woman’s sexuality for the continuity of the paternal family line and the productivity of the family (Azam 2013, 330). In contemporary Jordan the anxiety over the purity of paternal family lines (read: mitigating circumstances existing for murder committed in the name of protecting these clear lines) the dynamic clearly echoes the motivation of nation-states in regulating their kinship networks among its populace, maintaining ‘social peace’ and ensuring a stable population in the process.

It should be noted that the regulation of sexuality and desire is also highly gendered. The ‘cult of virginity’ (Bouhdiba 1975) that it tries to uphold targets women more harshly than men, although the amendment of Art. 340 PC might suggest a more equal distribution of the panic attached to regulating sex in the future. Until that materializes, one of the gravest consequences of the Jordanian approach to disciplining desire remains the systematic placement of women in administrative detention in ‘protective incarceration’. The latter entails placing women and girls in protective custody on grounds of protecting them from the threat their families might pose – usually in relation to *zina* accusations or attempts to flee the family home (Amnesty 2019; UNDP 2018; Jabiri 2016; Warrick 2005). The legal basis used in this administrative procedure is Law No. 7 on Crime Prevention (1954), which allows police to arrest any individual that ‘habitually’ commits petty crimes; any person that is ‘about to’ commit a crime or partake in the commission of a crime; as well as anyone who might otherwise pose ‘a danger to the people’ (Law No.7; Jabiri 2012, 160). Evidently, the provision is not written with women in danger of family in mind, but it has been used to hold women in administrative custody for – at least– the last two decades. The only way for women to be released from protective custody is

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<sup>47</sup> See (n 35) for a brief reflection on the relationship between religious and civil law in Jordan.

for a guarantor to sign them out. Typically, the guarantor is the father or another other male guardian, who needs to sign a guarantee that they would not harm the woman in question – which is highly ironic given the reason for their detention is often the potential ‘threat’ this very guarantor posed in the first place. Surely enough, the signed guarantee is often not honoured (Husseini 2020; Amnesty 2019, 34; Warrick 2005, 341). Afef Jabiri (2016) interprets this peculiar procedure as proof of the state’s prioritising the family’s disciplining and control ‘over the woman’s destiny’, as well as its role in ‘legitimizing violence against women through the intertwined alliance between state and patriarchy’, as women are trapped between the two (161). Moreover, I would maintain that protective custody speaks exactly to the confinement of all sexual life to the institution of the patriarchal family. The restriction of sexuality and the practice of desire under Art. 282 PC, and the –for the lack of a more suitable term– awkward instrumentalization of Law no. 7 to ground protective custody, appear in Jordan as ‘expression[s] of dominant values in a political system’ (Warrick 2005).

By strictly confining sex to the family and through marriage, Jordanian law writes into being a particularly restrained sexual citizen-subject. Just as telling as the legal regulation of certain orientations, however, are the absences of subjectivities from the law. The reproductive, heteronormative family exists at the expense of an Other who is not just deemed wrong, illicit, or an outlaw, but who is eliminated from legal text altogether. Non-heterosexual citizenship is completely absent from the Constitution (by implication) and the Jordanian legal corpus more generally. *Zina*, for example, is an act only committed by a ‘man’ and ‘a woman’ (Art. 282 PC). Unlike many of its neighbouring countries, Jordan repealed the prohibition of (male) same-sex activity introduced under section 152(2) of the British Mandate Criminal Code Ordinance, No. 74 of 1936, when adopting the Penal Code of 1952 (heavily amended in 1960). The legal corpus contains no explicit prohibitions banning same-sex sexual act or desire.<sup>48</sup> Massad has argued that, in the context of the universalisation of human rights the Western (liberal) sexual subject that finds itself a sexual outlaw, is not the Other against which the Arab subject defines itself; the subject ‘has no bearing on [these] contexts’ (2007, 40). In the Jordanian case, Massad (2001) had pushed forward the figure of the Palestinian-Jordanian as a worthy candidate; Jordanian nationalism moved from hinging on an (occasionally) pan-Arab, anti-imperialism with the British as its abject *Gegenüber*, to a postcolonial nation-state in need of cultural cohesion, to which the Palestinian body was an obstacle. However, as becomes evident in section 2, the sexual outlaw that produces normative sexuality in Jordan is very much a presence in public life in Jordan, in which it represents

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<sup>48</sup> It is important not to conflate colonial-era bans on same-sex activity with homosexual identity and drawing conclusions on relative (in)tolerance on that basis. For a complication of this common conflation, see section 2.

rejected behaviour associated with Westernisation and Americanisation. The erasure of the homosexual or sexually nonnormative citizen-subject from the Jordanian legal corpus both fortifies the presence of the normative subject as iterated through the law and media discourse (section 2), and immediately marks the latter with foreignness. The outlaw of the nation state, against whom suspicion must arise, is inextricably linked to the sexual outlaw.

### 1.3. *The Medical Health and Accountability Law*

The reproductive heteronormativity inscribed in the Jordanian Constitution, and as reified in secondary legislation that strictly regulates sex and sexuality, also relies on gender normativity. While gender as a concept is entirely absent from the Jordanian legal apparatus, sex has been normalised most explicitly in medical law – most recently in the Medical and Health Accountability Law (MHAL) of 2018, passed by Parliament after over a decade and a half of deliberations.<sup>49</sup> In this section, I argue that the MHAL makes impossible a nonnormative (non-cis-gender) Jordanian citizen-subject, marking transgender identification as alien to Jordan.

The MHAL sought to define the rights and obligations of medical service providers (MSPs) and their patients under one comprehensive instrument, amending the previous regulation of medical conduct under the Penal Code and Public Health Law No. 54 of 2002. The MHAL also introduced to the legal regulation of MSPs a definition of medical negligence,<sup>50</sup> and set the legal basis for the development of a medical liability insurance fund set up by the ‘Higher Health Council’. The latter is an independent legal entity made up of representatives of the National Hospital Association, Association of University Hospitals, and representatives of the Jordanian Doctor Syndicate (Art. 6). Despite its standardisation mandate, commentators and the Jordanian Doctor Syndicate have observed that the MHAL does much more than introduce a safety net for MSPs and patients; it has a tendency for filling in gaps left open in Jordanian law more generally (Al Hamidi 2021; Masarwa 2019). Notably, the MHAL introduces to Jordanian law the concepts of ‘sex change’ and ‘sex correction’ surgeries (Art.8(h)), banning the former and permitting the latter under strict conditions. Criticising the instrument’s wide scope, former Minister of Health, Walid Ma’ani, has singled out Art. 8(h) as especially ‘irrelevant’ to and ‘awkward’ in a bill legislating medical ‘accountability’ (Ma’ani 2018).

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<sup>49</sup> Despite coming into force in 2018, as of early 2021 many provisions of the MHAL have not been implemented – among them the insurance fund (Al Kiyali 2020).

<sup>50</sup> Article 2 MHAL defines negligence as ‘any act or omission by the service provider that deviates from accepted norms of practice within the work environment and causes an injury to the patient’. Translation mine.

Article 8 MHAL forbids, among other procedures, human cloning (e), medical experimentation on human bodies (f), and ‘sex change’ surgeries (h). ‘Sex change’, defined in Article 2, applies to: ‘a person whose sexual belonging (*iintima*) is clearly masculine or feminine, in that their physical sex characteristics are *coherent* with their physiological, biological, and genetic features, and where there is no blurring (*tashabbob*) in their sexual appearance as male or female. It therefore refers to a deviation from the process of *correcting* (*tashib*) sex’.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, lawful ‘sex correction’ refers to: ‘medical intervention for the purposes of *correcting* (*tashib*) the sex of a person whose belonging is ambiguous (*ghamid*), in that there is a blurring of masculinity and femininity. They have physical sex characteristics that contradict their physiological, biological, and genetic features’. Reference is only made to ‘sex’, *jins*, none to gender.<sup>52</sup>

By listing several medical interventions that must be prohibited to protect the bodies of its citizen-subjects, as well as one procedure that may be used to ‘correct’ otherwise illegible bodies, the MHAL writes into law intersex subjectivity and affirms the impossibility of transgender Jordanian citizenship. Article 8 MHAL criminalises medical interventions on behalf of those seeking to ‘change’ their ‘sex’ when their bodies are otherwise ‘coherent’. The seekers of ‘sex change’ surgeries are not even the targets of this prohibition; MSPs are. Transgender Jordanians are, in other words, entirely absent as legal subjects from the text of the instrument. Simultaneously, Article 8 recognises intersex citizen-subjects, whose sex characteristics are ‘ambiguous’, and are thus difficult to sort into one of the two available sex categories. This blurring must be corrected to achieve a body legible under a legal system that ascribes different sets of rights and obligations to men and women – to male and female citizens, in this context.<sup>53</sup> Being legible under the provisions of the MHAL gives these bodies access to state-regulated medical insurance and a legal procedure to resort to in case they are ever subjected to medical negligence. Since citizenship is largely enacted through the receipt of rights and the subjection to obligations, we can interpret the prohibition of ‘sex change’ –let alone gender affirmation– surgeries as an example of the erasure of transgender citizen-subjects from the realm of legible, reproductive Jordanian citizenship.

Furthermore, determining the legal sex of a person is important in jurisdictions applying ‘Islamic’ law, where, regardless of which school of Islamic jurisprudence is practiced, one’s sex

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<sup>51</sup> Translation mine, emphasis mine.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Gender’ is commonly Arabized as *jandar*, although the term ‘*naw’ ajtimae*’, literally ‘social type’, is gaining popularity. For a handy dictionary listing the terms in common use in Arabic-speaking activist and academic circles, see ‘GenderWiki’. The Wiki offers *naw’ ajtimae* as an alternative to *jandar* and translates ‘intersex’ to *thunayiya aljins*, where *thunayiya* means dual or bilateral. See: [https://genderiyya.xyz/wiki/الصفحة\\_الرئيسية](https://genderiyya.xyz/wiki/الصفحة_الرئيسية)

<sup>53</sup> As discussed in the previous section, the equality clause inscribed in art. 6 Constitution does not guarantee even the formal equality of all Jordanians, with divergences in rights and obligations in the Personal Status Law being the most prominent.

delineates one's exact legal obligations. Jordan has a mixed legal system based on civil, religious doctrine,<sup>54</sup> and customary law, with religious courts maintaining jurisdiction over matters of personal status – such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Intriguingly, the MHAL was passed only three months after the National Ifta' Department (NID) issued for the first time a decision on the 'treatment of gender identity disorder (GID)' (Res. no. 245, 2017).<sup>55</sup> This decision was issued in response to a petition that sought to ascertain the legality of gender affirmation surgery. In the case facts the two transgender men who had launched the petition are described as having 'normal female organs and hormones' that conflicted with their 'purely masculine' 'thinking and sexual orientation'. Affirming the mandatory coherence between gender and sexual identity, the NID decision thus prohibits 'transforming someone's genital apparatus' to treat GID, since it is the 'biological features' of the body, 'the most important' of which is the 'genital apparatus', that determines 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. Individuals with GID must therefore be treated in a way that 'brings things *back to normal*, but in line with the basic masculine or feminine identity of the genital apparatus of that person.'<sup>56</sup> (Res. no. 245, 2017). The decision distinguishes between 'masculinity and femininity' on the one hand, and the 'genital apparatus' on the other, linking the former to behaviour and mannerisms, to 'thinking'. Ironically,<sup>57</sup> the decision thus clumsily reproduces the constructionist distinction between sex (genital apparatus) and gender (thinking and 'orientation'). Gender must inevitably correspond to the physical features of the body, any deviation therefrom must be brought 'back to normal', leaving the 'natural' constitution of the body (that is predisposed to reproduce) undisturbed. Moreover, the identitarian frame in which gender (as a disorder that must be cured) is presented in the decision makes for an easy rejection of it as alien. With the applicability of civil and religious legal rules being dependent on the sex binary, and the texts of these rules reifying the centrality of objectively observable sex characteristics that determine said sex category, the constructed dimension of gender (over which confusion *may* arise) remains foreign to the legal order and its vocabulary.

To slightly nuance the underlying implication that the MHAL and the above NID decision are political in motivation, construing gender as a Western threat through their construction of legitimate Jordanian citizen-subjects, it is important to note that Resolution no. 245 is at least partially coherent with the regulation of intersex people in Hanafi legal doctrine throughout history. Since its inception in 1921, the National Ifta' Department in Jordan has relied in its

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<sup>54</sup> Islamic jurisprudence in Jordan is based on the Hanafi school of legal thought.

<sup>55</sup> The NID issues *fatwas* in Jordan. A *fatwa* is a highly authoritative, but not legally binding decision issued by the high authorities on Islamic (for Jordan: Hanafi) legal interpretation in a country.

<sup>56</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>57</sup> This could, of course, also be a completely intentional rejection of *gender* as a foreign concept. We may only speculate on this, though.

decision-making on Hanafi doctrine dating back to the Ottoman period (NID n.d.).<sup>58</sup> Gesink (2018) argues that contemporary legal narratives on ‘sexual reassignment surgery’ in ‘Islamic contexts’ adopt an assumption of binary sex that had been a minority strand in pre-modern ‘Islamic’ legal discourse (170). That is, while physicians aimed at achieving ‘congruence’ between the sexual identity and physical appearance of a person, they and jurists understood sex as malleable, and did not see the appearance of genitalia as sufficient to determine sex (163). Gesink holds that, even when a person’s sex was aligned to either ‘masculinity’ or ‘femininity’, they remained fundamentally categorized as *ḵbuntha* (160). As such, biological sex was understood on a spectrum, and intersex constituted a ‘medial possibility’ that could not only change but that could give rise to unique social obligations (153). Contemporary accounts such as Resolution no. 245 instead reflect a pointed anxiety over the blurring of sex and gender distinctions due to the prohibition of emulation (*tashabbub*), for one (Katz n.d.). Resolution no. 245, while acknowledging sex non-conformity, constitutes a discontinuity from the pre-modern malleability discourse in its incentive to ‘correct’ nonnormativity.<sup>59</sup>

The MHAL thus inscribes into Jordanian law an intersex subject by making ‘sex correction’ available to it. This is coherent with pre-modern Hanafi interpretation of sex nonnormative bodies to the extent that it inscribes intersex subjects into the law, while simultaneously rejecting a fluid understanding of sex, let alone gender. Importantly, by prohibiting ‘sex change’, the law also implicitly writes into being a transgender subject – *through* its explicit rejection thereof. The law creates a correctly sexed body, premised on the coherence between genital appearance and an ‘internal’ orientation to either femininity or masculinity. Furthermore, the law clearly situates sex/gender nonnormativity solely in the realm of the medical. The rejection of the transgender subject is concurrent with the medicalisation of the intersex subject – a subject that must be corrected. In his theorisation of the universalizing project of the gay international, Massad asserts that the inevitable result of the missionary project of globalised LGBT rights narratives is the creation of a *straight* planet, as opposed to a queer one (in reference to Michael Warner).<sup>60</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>58</sup> See the official NID website: <https://aliftaa.jo/ShowContentEn.aspx?Id=74#.YLCwOy0Rpp9>

<sup>59</sup> This is not to imply that what maintains harmful legal provisions in Jordan is ‘Islam’ – *Islam* is all too often used as a reductive, totalising explanation of legal marginalisations in Muslim-majority contexts (Salaymeh 2019, 106). However, it is crucial to point out that Hanafi legal doctrine does inform the Jordanian civil system. Art. 2 Constitution names Islam the state religion; in 2016 King Abdullah II made a point of officially deeming Jordan a ‘civil’ –as opposed to a ‘secular’ state– where a civil state sees ‘religion as a key contributor to the value system and social norms’ that informs legislative decision-making (Al Abdullah II 2016); the National Plan for Human Rights 2016-2025 marks Islam as central to the development of legislation pertaining to the lives and bodies of Jordanians – human rights are ‘a part of religion’, and their protection is ‘an act of worship’ (NPHR 2016); and, finally, the 2011 Constitutional amendments delineating the rights and responsibilities of Jordanians hold that the family ‘values’, that form the ‘basis of society’, are based on ‘religiosity’ (Art.6(4)).

<sup>60</sup> Incidentally, Massad lumps together his anti-imperial critique of globalized sexuality discourse with transgender identification. Arguing that there are ‘no tricks as to how to study “gender” in the Muslim world’ (2015, 211), he

in its attempt to curb the anxiety surrounding sex nonnormativity and gender identity (disorder), by banning ‘sex change’ and refusing to draw a distinction between sex and gender outright, the MHAL writes into being a transgender subject by rejecting. The MHAL is a testament to the legislative anxiety surrounding the perceived threat of sex and gender non-normativity, as these are disruptive to the (promotion of) reproductive heteronormativity. While the intersex citizen-subject (a beneficiary of the rights and protections inscribed into the new MHAL) is inherently medicalised, the impossibility of a transgender Jordanian citizen that could benefit from the protective provisions of the MHAL links gender nonnormativity to the alien, the abject, to beyond the Jordanian jurisdiction.

## 2. Sex, Gender, and Moral Panics

The Jordanian legal apparatus may have made an ontological impossibility of the good single, homosexual Jordanian citizen-subject, but the law is as much a tool for enforcing social discipline as it is a construction thereof. Said differently, the discursive force of the law –naturally– does not eliminate the actual existence of nonnormative sexuality and gender expression. However, before I turn to a discussion of the potential queer ways of ascertaining and subverting Jordanian citizenship,<sup>61</sup> the citizenship-as-rights (and obligations) framework outlined above must itself be supplemented with a cultural insight into how the specific subjecthood created therein are taken up in Jordan proper. The distances that these constructions’ have travelled become most obvious in moments of intensity, as exaggerations of underlying assumptions and normative belief systems. That is, much like the law has ‘no demonstrable meaning until it is applied’ through judicial interpretation (Erakat 2020, 7), the normalising potential of the law’s discursive power in the everyday does not become apparent until it climaxes. The following will thus outline two moral panics that reflect the discursive disciplining of sexuality and gender as measures of (good) Jordanian citizenship in the country’s mediascape.

Moral panic first emerged as a concept in the 1960s. Stanley Cohen describes moral panics as those situations in which ‘a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests’ (1972, 1). In Cohen’s definition, moral panics are produced largely through mass media, ‘the moral barricades [being] manned by editors,

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repeats his call for scholars to analyse ‘social phenomena’ based on the ‘*terms* and methods that the local situation on hand itself determine, rather than script the *a priori* with research agendas that are connected to imperial policies’ (212, emphasis mine). His stance is highly ironic given that, in his critique of organisations like alQaws, Massad simply charges LGBT and queer movements in the Arab world with being native informants and false consciousness when utilising LGBT (rights) discourse.

<sup>61</sup> See chapter 3.

bishops, political and other right-thinking people’, (1) after which they are treated in popular discourse and either disappear, deteriorate, or grow into common truths. The concept was originally meant to serve as a model for studying the emergence of and development of new social problems. Subsequent iterations of Cohen’s model have been criticized for failing to also study agency on the part of the subjects of moral panics; as well as their promotion of a reductive view of mass media as a homogenous mass of information that necessarily evoked material consequences. Moral panic as an analytical frame, however, continues to maintain a stronghold on interdisciplinary projects that seek to explain contemporary social phenomena (Crticher 2017). Ebithal Mahadeen for one, maps the emergence of ‘highly mediated moral panics’ in relation to homosexuality in Jordan, claiming that these were ‘triggered by journalists and politicians alarmed by the threat they perceived in LGBTQ identities and activism against the nation and its values’ (2021, 9). Mahadeen studies the political and public reception of conceptual webzine, My.Kali, in this light.<sup>62</sup> Building on an extensive and varied archive of popular discourse on nonnormative sexuality and gender, the analysis below avoids the pitfall of uncritical universalisation when conceiving moral panics.

### 1. *Scene Kids*,<sup>63</sup> *Devil Worshipers*, and *Homosexuals: Hardrock Café Amman*

Established in 1997, Hard Rock Café Amman was a staple of the growing Ammani middle class, and a testament to steady foreign investments into Jordan’s entertainment sector (MEED 1997). Located in the upper-middle-class neighbourhood of Abdoun, its target audience comprised well-off urban youth, and was known to host sizeable parties, otherwise a relative rarity in Amman in the 2000s. In 2012, the venue hosted a Halloween party that would become infamous for how it was crashed by a youth group of the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. The party that had been occurring annually since the mid-2010s received unprecedented public attention in 2012 after the publication of an inflammatory op-ed in the widely read *Ammon News* prior to the 31<sup>st</sup> (Hababha 2012). The opinion piece criticised the governor of Amman for not intervening in the organisation of a party that was ‘known’ to be a meeting place for ‘devil worshippers and gays’ among others, at a venue that was a hotspot for ‘obscenities and vices’ (Hababha 2012). Indicative of the natural link the piece and public opinion at the time made between nonnormative sexuality and gender expression, the article’s title first warned of ‘devil worshipping in Abdoun’ and was

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<sup>62</sup> Chapter 3 is dedicated to an analysis of My.Kali and its enacting queer citizenship.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Scene kids’, or those associated with ‘scene culture’, are members of a youth subculture that traces its origins to the emo ‘movement’. Especially influential between mid-2000s and the mid-2010s, scene culture was associated with several genres of mainstream rock – namely, emo, punk rock, and post hardcore; as well as distinctive, dark-inspired fashion. On youth subcultures, see Hodkinson (2020).

later renamed, 'Abdoun Gets Ready for Halloween Day'. A reflection piece criticising the original *Ammon News* article was published on 4 November cites the original title and tone of the article (Ammon News 2012). The second, anonymous op-ed criticises the original article for not 'understanding' the purpose of Halloween and makes light of the 'ridiculous' claim that homosexuality was inherently linked to devil worship, as well as the claim that the party had been a front adopted by a Jordanian Satanist community. Despite confusion surrounding the events of Halloween 2012 at Hard Rock Café Amman, the seed had been sewn for extensive popular debate on devil worshipping – and its inherent entanglement with sexual misdemeanours.<sup>64</sup>

A look at the archives of Jordan's biggest (online) newspapers, *Al-ghad*, *Al-rai*, *Addustour*, and *Ammon News*, reveals that discourse surrounding devil worship climaxed in early 2013, in the shadow of the Halloween controversy. Between late 2012 and the summer of 2013, *Al-ghad* et al published innumerable op-eds, and reported on increasingly aggressive petitions and arrests related to acts of 'immorality' that linked sex and devil worship.<sup>65</sup> Many of these articles conflated 'emo' and scene-kid fashions with the practice of self-harm, listening to 'foreign' music –mainly heavy metal–, and generally 'inappropriate' behaviour (Shahada 2013; Gharaibah 2013; *Al-rai* 2013a; *Al-rai* 2013b; Qablawi 2013). What is more, in 2014 a man was arrested for planning a terrorist attack in an unspecified neighbourhood of Abdoun that, he claimed, was 'known' to host 'devil worshipping parties' (*Al-ghad* 2014). He was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2015.

The panic surrounding children and teenagers turning to devil worship and the morally transgressive behaviours associated with it are exceptionally clearly set out in an opinion piece published in *Al-ghad* in March 2013. The piece opens with a description of the peculiar trends the author had witnessed taking off at his daughters' school (wearing mismatched shoes, shaggy haircuts), and links these to the youth's worrying habit of listening to 'sad, Western music'. Interestingly, the piece lists the development of relationships between teenagers as a result of a shared interest in said music (and, presumably, their satanic beliefs) as a particular danger for the community; 'the worst thing I have been told [by my daughters] is that some young men will gift phones and SIM cards to girls so that they can talk to them without their parents knowing' (Shahada 2013).<sup>66</sup> Common to all accounts similar to Shahada's is the contextualisation of Halloween, 'scene' inspired fashion trends, and pre-marital romantic relations as alien phenomena imported into Jordan. Shahada ends his piece by calling on the Ministry of Education to intervene, seeing as women had failed to 'properly raise their children' in accordance with 'Arab' norms in

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<sup>64</sup> Cultural reproductions of the panic surrounding devil worship and homosexuality abounded in the 2010s, being mentioned in both Haddad's *Guapa* (2016) and Zaghmout's *Bride of Amman* (2015).

<sup>65</sup> A few of these stories were revisited, albeit with much less fanfare, in 2014 and 2015.

<sup>66</sup> Translation mine.

the modern day – the ‘call to Westernize in the Islamic World’ had backfired (2013). Characteristic of a moral panic, Shahada makes an incredibly far-reaching claim by singling out scene subculture, linking this to homosexuality and devil worship, only to advance a call for a return to ‘tradition’ – in this case, normative gender roles. Gharaibah (2013) takes a nuanced approach and condemns the circulation of unsubstantiated claims that sew panic, yet traces the perseverance of ‘rumours’ and ‘stereotypes’ to the fact that ‘Arabs have changed’. Finally, an article published in *Al-rai* five days after the infamous party at Hard Rock Café Amman laid out the differences between devil worship and Halloween; a cultural festival with roots in ‘Gaelic traditions and religions’ (Mahariq 2012). Mahariq instead argues that Ammani youth flocking to celebrate the holiday are trying to ‘live out the American dream, which they link to modernity and progress’. To that end, Halloween ‘is not just an innocent festival for kids’, but a front of an ongoing cultural war that distances youth from Arab traditions (2012). He warns of the dangers of ‘Americanization’, *al-ta’amruk*, and also calls on the education sector to invest in and ‘protect’ young Jordanians.

The trifecta association between homosexuality, devil worship, and foreignness (or foreign interference) has thus become a recurring and omnipresent theme in Jordanian media and popular discourse. After the anxieties of late 2012 died down, the triad produced in the moral panic manifested itself in cultural reproductions. Prolific Jordanian blogger-turned-author Fadi Zaghmout spells out the relation quite literally in his 2012 debut novel, *Bride of Amman*. The novel features five characters struggling with social expectations and the pressure to get married. Ali is ‘gay man’ who finds himself in a heterosexual marriage, tormented by his own denial of his sexuality and the iron grip he maintains on his masculine gender expression. Writes Zaghmout, ‘homosexuality was something the Arab press tended to portray as going hand-in-hand with devil worship, and the gay community was there to complete the story that such people existed, fellow adherents of this cult’ (172). Zaghmout – through Ali – is even more on-the-nose when pontificating about the moral panics the Jordanian mediascape has come to embrace surrounding homosexuality and *mujtama’ al meemr*: ‘Arab regimes are not above exploiting moral taboos for the sake of popular legitimacy and cheap political victory’ (171). Said differently, the excited demonisation of a segment of the Jordanian populace in the name of protecting *taqalid* and anti-Westernisation can, to Zaghmout, amount to a successful political strategy. Mahadeen would agree (2021). The ‘gay community in the Arab World’ becomes a target and scapegoat for sensationalist politics. Despite the novel’s blunt dissection of harmful normativities that materially hurt its main characters, Zaghmout’s novel received little backlash.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Zaghmout’s blog describes the book as a ‘huge and controversial bestseller’, as do numerous English-language outlets, yet an excursion into the archives of *Al-ghad*, *Al-rai*, *Addustour*, as well as Arabic-language blogging sites such as 7iber found only positive or neutral reviews of the novel. Zaghmout himself said in an interview that the response

Hard Rock Café Amman shut its doors in 2013. The vast Abdoun mansion in which it was housed remained vacant until 2020, when a CrossFit gym named Quicksand opened its doors on the controversial location.

2. *Between Pride and fakbr*:<sup>68</sup> *From the International Day Against Homophobia 2015 to Pride 2021*

The mobilisation of the Muslim Brotherhood in response to Halloween at Hard Rock Café Amman in 2012, and the media discourse spurned in response, speak to the communal disciplining of morally transgressive behaviour as well as the sensationalist processes through which this regulation becomes common place. By aligning homosexuality with devil worship and singling out the dangers of *tashaboh* in ‘scene’ fashions, nonnormative sexuality and gender expression are coded as dangerous and treacherous – as signs of Westernisation and the abandonment of local norms and values. Nonetheless, the critique of the scene subculture,<sup>69</sup> ‘sad, Western music’, and devil worship linked to sexuality only in so far as they were represented as gateways to, or perhaps necessarily incorporating, sexually transgressive *acts*. More recently, Amman officials have taken to combatting explicitly ‘gay’ events – which, I argue, evinces not just an abjection of ‘immoral acts’, but of nonnormative identifications associated with ‘the West’.

On 16 May 2015, an ‘informal Jordanian group’ of activists and the queer webzine My.Kali organised and co-hosted an event commemorating the International Day Against Homophobia (Rahman 2015). The 3-hour event was attended by around 40 activists and other stakeholders, as well as –notably– members of diplomatic missions, including the ambassador of the United States. Ambassador Alice Wells gave an impromptu speech at the event, which she had attended in private capacity. My.Kali published a short report on the event after the fact, sharing images of speakers and a short description of the event’s aim – ‘highlighting the problem of homophobia in Jordan’ (Rahman 2015). The report, published in English, was quickly picked up by mainstream media, and 136 articles were written in response to it (Mahadeen 2021, 11; Zuhdi 2019). Mahadeen has argued that the 2015 IDAHOT, ‘[b]oth the subject and the brief presence of the American ambassador [Wells] triggered a moral panic in Jordanian media’ (2021, 10), as her presence was interpreted as proof of Western attempts at corrupting local culture. The event itself as became

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had been overwhelmingly positive also within Jordan, citing an uncomfortable Q&A session with a ‘defensive’ host as his ‘only’ negative experience in this regard. See Ink Journal: <https://www.nahlaink.com/the-bride-of-amman-fadi-zaghmout/> (accessed 22 Jun. 2021). A likely explanation is that many of the reviews either did not engage with the character of Ali at all, or only did so in passing – a not uncommon reaction to the representation of queer characters in Arabic literature (Hanna 2017).

<sup>68</sup> Arabic for ‘pride’.

<sup>69</sup> See (n 38)

proof of the deviance of contemporary Jordanian society (Mahadeen 2021, 11). Naturally, the wave of response articles adopted an anti-Westernization narrative that found in My.Kali a scapegoat for the disintegration of Jordanian morality (Asabeel 2015), all the while asserting a Jordanian exceptionalism that had to (re)emerge and insist on its superior heterosexuality.

The charges hurled at the IDAHOT event and My.Kali strictly place both homophobia and homosexuality outside the bounds of Jordan. They make of Jordanian homosexuality an ontological impossibility; the complete foreignness of nonnormative sexuality, let alone non-martial expressions of desire, eliminate access to an 'authentic' Jordanian sexual citizenship separate from the reproductive, heteronormative family unit. In fact, participation in and the organisation of events such as IDAHOT speak to the infiltration of Western ideals and values into Jordan, and the devious reproduction thereof by Westernised Jordanians, a conclusion certainly aided by My.Kali's publishing their report in English. Further, a quite literal example of the rejection and expulsion of the public performance of nonnormative sexuality and creative gender expression from Jordan (for their inauthenticity and thus ability to corrupt and disrupt the Jordanian norm), is the permanent ban placed on Lebanese band Mashrou' Leila from performing in the kingdom (BBC 2016; Al Emam 2017). Fronted by openly gay singer, Hamed Sino, the band has made a name for itself in the Arabic alternative rock scene for their politically charged lyrics and unabashed visibility.<sup>70</sup> The ban drew controversy in Jordan and beyond (Al Emam 2017; Jordan Times 2017).<sup>71</sup>

The IDAHOT controversy remains relevant in the current socio-political moment in Jordan. In June 2021, the governor of Amman announced a ban on all 'pride events' that had been planned over the month of June (Ro'ya News 2021), even if these had been scheduled to occur primarily online. In his statement, governor Saad Shehab announced that any event that 'transgresses public morals and violates the law' would be banned (Ro'ya News 2021). In the not-yet-post-pandemic moment I would be hard pressed not to agree with Mahadeen's musings on the purpose of singling out IDAHOT, pride events, and My.Kali also at this time; '[t]argeting My.Kali during these moral panics is an easy way to demonstrate alignment with an alleged set of values, and it is also a way to appease a citizenry that is unsatisfied with the lack of democratic representation, pervasive corruption, and declining freedoms and living standards' (2021, 13). The social unrest and general anxiety enveloping Jordanian cities as a result of the pandemic and the slow rollout of an efficient vaccination scheme, as well as tensions lingering since the most recent

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<sup>70</sup> For a critical discussion on queer visibility as a necessary marker of 'liberation', see chapter 4, section 3.

<sup>71</sup> It is worth remembering here the distance between the legislature, administrative decisions, and local attitudes. This project does not claim to represent the beliefs of everyday Jordanians – it is preoccupied with the state's definition of Jordanian citizenship and queer resistance to this (see chapter 4).

Israeli attacks on Gaza (which, characteristically, led to massive protests in neighbouring Jordan), it is unsurprising that the administration of the capital finds no space for queer activism beyond orienting communal frustration towards it.

Finally, it is worth shortly dwelling on the exact nature of the governor's objection to 'pride events' in 2021. In his discussion of the infamous Queen Boat 'incident',<sup>72</sup> Joseph Massad opined that Egyptian police were not pursuing men partaking in 'same-sex sexual activity' and intimacies as much as they were 'pursuing those among them who identify as "gay" on a personal level and who seek to use this identity as a group identification through social and public activities' (2007, 183). Massad of course uses this example to demonstrate the Egyptian forces' taking issue with a foreign sexual identity, as same-sex acts historically were not linked to a sexual identity that the state needed to prohibit. Unlike in most of its neighbouring countries, same-sex sexual activity is not banned in Jordan, yet the above discussion sought to expound upon the ways in which the law still creates strict codes of legible and acceptable sexual conduct and gender expression. The jarring critique of IDAHOT 2015 and the ban of 'pride events' in 2021 further speak to a fundamental rejection of the public performance of –at the very least– queer politics and awareness raising, and in the most expansive interpretation, an expulsion of queer, and nonnormative sexual and gender identity from Jordan. National pride, *fakhr*, it seems, is necessarily tied to a virile heterosexuality.

### Concluding Observations

This chapter sought to outline the characteristics of good Jordanian citizenship, as manifested in the figure of the good Jordanian, sexual citizen. It first espoused a critical legal lens to study to the 2011 amendments to the Jordanian Constitution and the 2018 MHAL, delineating the subjectivities enabled and created within them, and read these alongside provisions of the Penal Code to map the (gendered) loci of the regulation of sexuality and desire in Jordan. Not only is heterosexuality inherent to the Jordanian citizen-subject, but this sexuality is also only legitimate within the figuration of a patriotic, reproductive, heteronormative family system. Secondly, the chapter studied two of the moral panics that gave and continue to give shape to the moralising and disciplining function of the law in popular discourse. It took seriously the conflation of nonnormative sexuality and gender expression with –among others– devil worship as prevalent in print and online media, and mapped the public outrage targeted at 'pride events' in Jordan, finding

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<sup>72</sup> On 11 May 2001, 52 men who were arrested aboard a 'Queen Boat'; a floating gay nightclub. Most of the men arrested were charged with 'obscene behaviour' under Article 9C of Law no. 10, 1961 on the Combat of Prostitution. See: Seif (2018).

a common denominator anti-Westernisation. These dynamics make available a narrow understanding of Jordanian-ness that one may practice authentically.

Such an unforgiving reading of sexual citizenship in Jordan begs the question; *why*, then, do queer platforms like My.Kali insist on utilising a citizenship discourse to claim belonging – affirming the very Jordanianness that appears to exclude it? (How) does My.Kali enact Jordanian citizenship? What are the political implications of routing queer belonging through the lens of citizenship? And, finally, where do My.Kali's politics place among the overarching debates on sexual imperialism in queer activism? The following chapter will analyse these questions in detail.

### Chapter 3: Queer(ing) Jordanian Citizenship: The Case for My.Kali

Now that the limits set to Jordanian citizenship legally and as reproduced in the media have been established, this chapter returns to the (political) possibilities and potentialities of queer(ing) citizenship, taking Jordanian conceptual webzine, My.Kali, as a case study. I argue that My.Kali both queers Jordanian citizenship, through a constant disidentification from its foundations, and *enacts* queer citizenship, by creating an Arab, Jordanian queer cyberspace from which it reimagines and renegotiates citizenship and belonging (a counterpublic). Further, an analysis 'of My.Kali implies an assessment of the webzine as an entity, as an online archive of queer content published from and about the Middle East and North Africa, as well as the contents of this archive; the ways in which the editorial board's outlook is reflected in and communicated through the articles and op-eds it publishes. It is these texts, after all, that put My.Kali's politics into action, that write My.Kali's claims to and figurations of Jordanian citizenship into being.<sup>73</sup>

The chapter therefore begins with an elaboration of the theoretical framing the analysis of queer(ing) Jordanian citizenship is based on. A short introduction to the history of My.Kali, told through a series of controversies that have plagued it, follows. The chapter then forks into two, differentiating between the strategies with which My.Kali queers Jordanian citizenship, told through the frames of sexual imperialism and marriage; and how it enacts queer citizenship. The argument in both these sub-sections is based on a close reading of a selection of pieces from the My.Kali archive. The chapter concludes with a series of reflections that thread together the arguments made in section 3, based on the theoretical tools introduced in section 1 and chapter 1.

#### 1. Framing disidentification and the future

Central to the below analysis is the notion of disidentification. Introduced by José Esteban Muñoz in 1999, disidentification refers to the 'survival strategies of minority subjects' which they practice in order to 'negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship' (1999, 4). Shockingly apt to describe the ways in which, as I argue below, My.Kali and its authors expose and espouse Jordanian citizenship, Muñoz continues: '[d]isidentification is about recycling and

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<sup>73</sup> The section of course does not claim that these articles wholly represent the opinions of the My.Kali editorial board (even those written by board members), and, as such, does not understand these texts as extensions of the official statements and disclaimers My.Kali has released. Instead, it recognizes the webzine's capacity for providing a space for the circulation of discursive resistance; it is a dimension of becoming and (re)drawing, and a close reading of its output allows for a look into *how* citizenship is refigured on the platform.

rethinking encoded meaning' (31). That is, disidentification reveals the universalising –and stigmatising– 'code of the majority' only to 'proceed to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable' (31); it is a third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, sandwiched between assimilation/identification, and rejection/counter-identification. In this way, disidentification becomes a 'world-making project', a project dedicated not only to articulating the lives and desires of minoritarian subjects in the present, but one 'in which the limits of the here and now are traversed and transgressed' (2009, 169). Through disidentification, queer subjects find an *in* to the future; disidentificatory performances<sup>74</sup> 'envision and activate new social relations' which, in turn, become 'the blueprint for minoritarian counterpublic spheres' (1999, 5). Thus, it is the creation of counterpublics that connect disidentification as a survival strategy to time – to futurity. Muñoz's counterpublics are those 'subaltern groupings' that fall outside of the majoritarian public sphere, and whose discursive practices effect a reimagination of the public sphere. Here, Muñoz is building on Nancy Fraser's work on *subaltern* counterpublics. Fraser contributed to the revision of the liberal historiography of the public sphere by proposing that the ways in which members of subordinated social groups 'have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics' can be theorised as subaltern counterpublics (1992; 1990).<sup>75</sup> These are 'parallel discursive arenas' where members of subordinated groups (she lists women, workers, peoples of colour, and 'gays and lesbians') 'invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs.' Counterpublics thus function as safe spaces to withdraw to, for identity and desire to form, as well as forums for a counter-politics to be practiced, bringing to light and into public discourse those issues previously ignored or overshadowed by the majoritarian polity. Further, Michael Warner (2002) has expanded on Fraser, arguing that counterpublics are created through communicative acts, and maintain an awareness of their status as *counter*-publics, subordinate, antagonistic discursive spheres. Queer counterpublics along this theoretical trajectory, then, represent the hopeful future initiated as an alternative to the public sphere, but capable and intent on reforming the latter.

A more cynical perspective on the (im)possibility of queer futures has been famously championed by Lee Edelman. To Edelman, futurity, the 'substrate of politics' (2004, 60), is signified through the figure of the child – its emblem and unquestioned value (3). The queer subject, in turn, is incompatible with reproductive futurity, leading political hope to fail abject bodies – the future is, simply, kids' stuff (2004; 1998). Instead of rejecting this 'negativity', Edelman

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<sup>74</sup> We must remember that Muñoz's work is that of a performance studies scholar as well as that of a queer theorist.

<sup>75</sup> Fraser builds on Gayatri Spivak's notion of the subaltern (1988) and Rita Felski's 'counterpublic' (1989).

suggests we consider ‘accepting and embracing’ it (4), to refuse insisting on hope and acceptance, to ‘fuck the social order’ instead of requesting access to it (29). In light of the above, this would likely translate into the rejection of *counterpublics*, as there is no point in reimagining a manifestation one is excluded from. The payoff for rejecting futurism’s ‘nonpartisan conservatism, [its] will to preserve identity’ (60), is access to the ‘*jouissance* that at once defines and negates us’ (5), freed, as it were, from the ‘Ponzi scheme’ that is reproductive futurism (5).<sup>76</sup> Edelman’s repudiation of the future has been criticised for its depoliticising undertone, available most freely to those whose future is likely already secure (Rao 2020, 16; Halberstam 2011). Muñoz describes Edelman’s thesis as a highly successful project in the antirelational turn in queer studies (2009, 11), which he argues against in *Cruising Utopia*. Muñoz finds in queerness not only the hope for a future but designates it as the primary vestige of the future. ‘[Q]ueerness is primarily about futurity and hope. That is to say that queerness is always on the horizon’ (2009, 11). Accordingly, while Muñoz can appreciate Edelman’s disdain for the culture of the child (22), he ‘refuse[s] to give up on concepts such as politics, hope, and a future that is not kid stuff’ (2009, 91). Accepting no future, romancing negativity, relies on the rejection of a politics that is by definition relational, reproducing in kind a ‘crypto-universal white gay subject that it weirdly atemporal’ (94). This is a subject that is freed from and/or refuses to consider what the future holds or may look like beyond the here and, importantly, beyond the *self*. Instead, Muñoz insists on queerness as collectivity, as being concerned with the desire ‘for another way of being in both the world and time’ (96) – one which does not accept that which is not enough.

To utilise disidentification and the debate on futurity into the Jordanian context implies widening the spatial frame in which these trajectories of queer politics take shape,<sup>77</sup> thus necessarily challenging the singularity and coherence of these accounts. Few scholars have used disidentification as a lens to analyse of queer Arab lives. One scholar that has, albeit briefly, is Ghassan Moussawi, who counts disidentification as one of the survival strategies LGBT Beirutis might employ in the everyday. In *Disruptive Situations*, Moussawi argues that, while disidentification ‘is useful’, it cannot fully account for the experiences of his interlocutors in Beirut; if failures of identification create moments of disruption, but disruption ‘is the norm of everyday life’ (2020, 91), Beirutis will embrace its contradictions rather than reorient them. Nonetheless, Moussawi suggests LGBT Beirutis versed in feminist and queer theory disidentify from – rather than reject outright in an act of resistance – Western normative queerness manifested through queer visibility,

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<sup>76</sup> Edelman briefly points to the role difference plays in this equation; political discourse on futurity raises ‘the banner of openness’, but, in reality, only values difference to the extent that it can reinforce the sameness of identity – ‘it values such difference only to overcome it’ (2004, 60).

<sup>77</sup> I am thinking here with Rahul Rao (2020).

thus effectively disrupting fractal Orientalist representations thereof.<sup>78</sup> The following analysis similarly centres and stresses the specificities of the Jordanian context in My.Kali's use of citizenship discourse.<sup>79</sup>

## 2. My.Kali: An Introduction

My.Kali is a 'conceptual webzine for/from the Middle East and North Africa' that 'strives to address social problems, and empower the youth to defy mainstream gender binaries in the Arab world,' and be 'a voice for social justice in oppressive societies' (My.Kali n.d.).<sup>80</sup> Described elsewhere as a 'shared blog' (My.Kali 2017), My.Kali was set up as a personal blog by Khalid Abdel-Hadi in Amman in 2007. By 2008, this was expanded to an interactive website with the help of a team of volunteers. My.Kali publishes content on arts and culture as well as (increasingly) regional politics. The articles it features range from opinion pieces to photo stories and creative writing pieces that reflect on 'queer life' in Jordan and the wider MENA region. It thus does much more than merely 'defy gender binaries in the Arab World', and – fittingly – describes its work as a 'new form of activism'.<sup>81</sup>

From its online biography, it appears that the type of activism My.Kali promises to (re)produce has three distinct dimensions; it is first and foremost a *liberatory* project, where 'visually engaging features' are intended to 'fight repressive forms and norms'. My.Kali seeks to create an archive of nonnormative voices that offer 'social commentary' and photography that is 'socially provocative and satirical' until it is no longer unseen – or punished for being seen. Secondly, the platform is meant to be 'empowering', promising to feature 'unrepresented' and 'marginalised' voices that are always 'uncensored and unabashed'. It is thus a space where solidarity through mutual identification is fostered not just among members at the fringes of Jordanian society, but within 'Arab society' as a whole – implicated as it is in unrest, the webzine offers 'a safe atmosphere of reassurance and certainty in the midst of regional turmoil'. Finally, My.Kali promises to be

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<sup>78</sup> The first part of Moussawi's book analyses how the 'LGTB Arab community' has been represented in Euro-American media – mainly in gay travelogues. He argues for a *fractal* Orientalist reading of these constructions; that is, a frame of Orientalism that considers the multiple scales in which the binary between a progressive Europe and a repressive Middle East form, how they operate simultaneously on local, regional, and global scales (2020, 7). Fractal Orientalist representations rely on normative understandings of LGBT outness and visibility as signs of modernity.

<sup>79</sup> The analysis does not translate Moussawi's model of queer time into Jordan, and thus implicitly stresses how the latter is specific to Lebanon.

<sup>80</sup> All quotations in this section are taken from My.Kali's About webpage. See: <https://www.mykalimag.com/en/about/>

<sup>81</sup> Mahadeen suggests that My.Kali's work can be understood as 'pop activism'; 'a concerted effort to deploy forms, traditions, and practices that are traditionally inscribed as 'popular culture' for the advancement of a specific social cultural or political cause' (2021, 7).

‘informative’, representing LGBT voices writing from and about the Middle East and North Africa, but doing so with a view to the global; it promises ‘a new perspective on the world that surrounds us with open doors through dialogue and awareness’. This positively gargantuan mandate materialises as bimonthly cover stories accompanied by a slew of opinion pieces, editorials, interviews, and music reviews, all centring young Arab – and, predominantly, Jordanian – voices.

The My.Kali of today has seen its fair share of transformation over the past 14 years, having repeatedly been the subject of controversy and public debate in Jordan from its inception. The very first edition of the webzine evoked public outcry when *FactJo* and popular news outlets such as *Ammon News* reprinted its cover image, featuring a shirtless Abdel-Hadi, effectively outing the 18-year-old. These news outlets framed My.Kali as a conspiracy group, readying themselves to launch a ‘conference for “sexual deviants”’ on the day of the parliamentary elections of 2007 (Mahadeen 2021; Ammon News 2007). The *Ammon News* article further described an official investigation purportedly initiated as means of ensuring the ‘security of the country and its servants’ against the evils of the ‘morally deviant group’, which is completely ‘alien to Jordanian society’.<sup>82</sup> Ebtihal Mahadeen has argued that this incident was the first in a series of moral panics that engulfed and featured My.Kali at its centre (2021),<sup>83</sup> citing the IDAHOT of 2015 outlined in chapter 3, and the launch of the first Arabic edition of My.Kali as notable others. Both these incidents have brought to the fore the Jordanian media’s propensity for circulating unverified claims, and the sensationalistic tone with which My.Kali is treated in these reports. Mahadeen emphasises that My.Kali and its editors are not victims to or in these moral panics: they show agency and active resistance through their work, as they play with nationalist symbols and the means expressing Jordanian national identity. What follows is a study of how My.Kali has, firstly, consistently laid claim to Jordanian citizenship; how, accordingly, My.Kali’s editors and writers have queered Jordanian citizenship; and, finally, how these practices of disidentification have brought to life queer counterpublics in which Jordanian queer selves can self-fashion, thereby enacting queer citizenship.

### 3. My.Kali: An Analysis

#### 3.1. (Re)claiming Jordanian citizenship: The first Arabic My.Kali

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<sup>82</sup> See also Mahadeen 2021. Our translations of the news report match.

<sup>83</sup> For a definition of moral panics, see chapter 2.

The first Arabic edition of My.Kali was published in May 2016, much to the chagrin of the Jordanian mediascape. In response to the controversy at the 2015 IDAHOT, editor and writer Musa Shadeedi (2018) reflected on the shifts in My.Kali's approach to being an 'activist' platform in a piece that uses Massad's conceptualisation 'gay international' to critique My.Kali's previous interaction with Jordanian media. Shadeedi interviews Abdel-Hadi, citing the latter's 'awakening' to the need for a different, localised narrative of queerness to be fostered on their platform, one that 'truly reflects the nature of our local queer communities', and that, in turn, was 'not marked by classism' (Shadeedi 2018). The accusation that My.Kali represented only a Westernised and, crucially, an elite fragment of Jordanian society, is framed as the main incentive for the shift in publishing the webzine also in Arabic. In addition to becoming available to those not educated in international schools, those not taught to prioritise English as a sign of modernity and status, publishing in Arabic also signifies a confrontation with the taboo of sexual(ity) discourse in Arabic (Hanna 2017; Ze'evi 2005). Writing sexuality and queer (politics) in/to Arabic makes these available to be used, reformed, (mis)understood in the Arabic-speaking world, complicating if not eschewing cultural globalisation in the process. Not writing of queerness in Arabic, after all, underlines the impossibility of queerness in Arabic (Hanna 2017, 389).

Saleem Haddad, known for *Guapa*,<sup>84</sup> has opined that open discussion about sex among 'queer Arabs' often happens in English or in French because, 'maybe these languages act as a sort of protective barrier between the person and their sexual praxis' (2016).<sup>85</sup> The essay, published on the website of the German daily, *Der Tagespiegel*, also finds that Arabic, closely associated with Islam and the Quran, is 'highly charged with social and cultural baggage'. English, on the other hand, 'creates a safe distance: from our societies, and maybe, in a way, also from ourselves.'<sup>86</sup> In *Guapa*, Haddad offers the opposite perspective, having his main character reflect on what he misses out on when speaking in English; '[t]here were some things I could only say in Arabic, and without the language I felt I had been stripped of a set of core emotions' (166). In contrast, Kifah Hanna (2017), in analysing Hoda Barakat's literary output,<sup>87</sup> suggests that writers shy away from using Arabic to articulate (their) queerness due to Arabic's inclination towards derogatory terminology to describe queerness. There have been some efforts to reclaim 'offensive' terminology, especially the term *shaath*, meaning deviant or weird, but Arab-oriented queer movements predominantly use

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<sup>84</sup> See introduction for a summary of the plot.

<sup>85</sup> See: <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/queerspiegel/homosexualitaeten-und-literatur-queer-auf-arabisch/13871972.html>

<sup>86</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>87</sup> Barakat's novels are significant for featuring queer characters when published in the 1990s.

*mithli(yya)*; and instead of reclaiming terms such as *kbuntha*, ‘*oboor jandari* is used for transgender.<sup>88</sup> Farah Barqawi, one of the initiators of the Arabic *GenderWiki*, which features a dictionary of terms relevant to ‘sex and the body’ and is producing an archive of feminist and queer activism in Arabic, laments that as queer Arabs ‘we are not taught or used to *thinking* about sexuality, let alone writing about it’ (2018).<sup>89</sup> Appropriating and testing out concepts in Arabic, making up new ones as is necessary, not only releases Arabic of its ‘rigidity’, but will enable the exchange and deepening of the understanding of ‘feminist, sexual, and gender struggles’ through consistent knowledge production (2018). To express oneself in Arabic is to make an Arab queerness possible.

Given the symbolic weight (discursive power) of writing queerness in/to Arabic, it is unsurprising that the publication of the first My.Kali issue in Arabic drew loud criticism in May 2016. *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, for instance, reported that the announcement was made, ‘without any due consideration for the conservative customs and traditions in Jordan, which reject this strange phenomenon’ (Al-Quds Al-Arabi 2016) – the ‘phenomenon’ being homosexuality. Mainstream media immediately began circulating the claim that My.Kali had been officially licensed in Jordan, implying that it was on course to print and sell the magazine across the country (Al-Madinah News 2016). Fuelling the controversy was the outrage targeted at the cover image that news outlets had used to report the story; the image, taken from a 2009 issue of My.Kali, features Abdel-Hadi shirtless but for a red and white *keffiyeh* wrapped around his shoulders. Donning the traditional headdress in an explicitly queer-coded image is highly politically as it links the Jordanian national symbol to said queerness. Mahadeen interprets the image also in its appeal to ideals of masculinity, finding that by ‘offering an alternative that equally gestures to “authentic” Jordanian identity’ the image also introduces an ‘alternative type of Jordanian masculinity’ (2021, 14). The Jordanian Media Commissioned (JMC) responded swiftly, denying any licensing agreement, and assuring the public that no publication targeted at ‘*shawaath*, sexual deviants’ have ever been licensed (Al-ghad 2016; Addustour 2016). Director of the Media Commission at the time, Amjad Al Qadi, added, ‘Jordan is distinguished by a cultural and social heritage that rejects alien and immoral practices’ (Al ghad 2016), that is, that Jordan does not tolerate and appropriately disciplines any behaviour not in line with those of the good sexual citizen. In reaction to the upheaval, My.Kali’s domain was blocked by the JMC, making the website inaccessible to those without access to a foreign IP address in Jordan.<sup>90</sup> My.Kali, in turn, began building an archive of its contents on the blogging

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<sup>88</sup> Literally, ‘gender crossing’, the term is meant to signify the constructed-ness of gender and the gender binary. See Barqawi (2018) for a discussion on the choices behind the currently in-use translations of transgender, gender nonconforming, and heteronormativity. The article –naturally– is written in Arabic.

<sup>89</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>90</sup> Using a VPN (virtual private network) would solve this issue, but reliable software is quite costly. A 3-year subscription to NordVPN, for instance, costs 100€.

website, *Medium*, and offering its readers ‘covert’ subscriptions by signing up to a newsletter delivered discreetly to their email inboxes. Further, the editorial board published a statement in response.

As an independent grassroots project, My.Kali is not sponsored or supported by any foreign government or other international organization, and has never been part of a foreign agenda. It is purely the product of an ever-changing collective of Arab and North African heterosexual and LGBTQIA youth.

The Magazine has never aimed to undermine the traditions and culture of Jordanian society, nor does it endeavor to spread homosexuality as some have claimed.

The Jordanian LGBTQ community has always been an inherent part of the country’s social fabric. It is not a foreign import or construct, nor does it have an agenda to debase Jordanian traditions. The cover picture featuring My.Kali’s Founder in a Jordanian ‘Hatta’ in 2009 is being used in sensationalist and homophobic media reports provocatively, however the original intent [sic] behind the cover was to convey a sense of belonging and pride in the Jordanian identity.

(My.Kali 2016)

In the cover story accompanying the widely circulated image of Abdel-Hadi, the latter said that he had ‘wanted to be a part of a cover that gives a sense of belonging and pride, to reflect the relation between being LGBT and Arab/Jordanian’ (Abdel-Hadi 2009). In their statement, the editorial board recognizes the core of the media’s anxiety about the image and how it represents My.Kali: as a foreign import, and thus a threat to national cohesion. Instead of dismissing the sensationalistic claims that circulated during this moral panic, the statement calmly addresses each claim, linking each dismissal of an outrageous accusation with an assertion of belonging. My.Kali is not funded by any foreign government; it is the *product* of Arab and North African LGBT youth; it does not and has not sought to undermine Jordanian traditions and culture; it takes *pride* in its Jordanian roots, it belongs in Jordan, and it wants to celebrate that publicly.<sup>91</sup>

Even though it had been effectively geo-blocked since 2016, MP for the Islamic Action Front,<sup>92</sup> Dima Tahboub, ushered My.Kali into the mainstream news again in 2017, calling for its censoring. Tahboub went on record saying that she had issued a complaint with the Jordanian

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<sup>91</sup> Multiple international, queer-oriented news outlets picked up the story as well, reproducing much of the editorial team’s official statement (e.g Hayes 2016; Morgan 2016; Bizawe 2016). Hayes and Morgan wrote for Gay Star News and Pink News respectively, while Bizawe’s piece appeared in *Haaretz*, the Israeli daily.

<sup>92</sup> The IAF is the political branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan.

Media Commission, seeking to right the wrongs of a publication that sought to normalise homosexuality in Jordan. '[W]e regard gays... as a community who is completely rejected, alien to our religion and tradition and the Jordanian people's cultural norms' (Ro'ya 2017). Tahboub received further attention for her suggestion that Jordan should not accede to any Human Rights treaty that invoked LGBT rights, as well as an interview with *Deutsche Welle*, where she reiterated that, 'homosexuals are not welcome in Jordan' (Ro'ya 2017; DW 2017). Mahadeen interviewed the new director of the JMC, Mohammad Qtaishat, who denied ever even having received the complaint, and affirmed that the My.Kali website had indeed been blocked for a year already (2021,12). Further, Mahadeen reads the incident as further proof of how My.Kali acts as a scapegoat for politicians 'wishing to brand themselves as champions of alleged traditional Jordanian values'. I would add that, in Tahboub's case, they also seek to position themselves as champions of the religiosity (and thus: legitimacy) of Jordanian values – religiosity and love for homeland are, after all, core tenets of good Jordanian citizenship.<sup>93</sup> My.Kali responded to Tahboub in an open letter.

[P]ublic demonization of the LGBTQ+ community will undermine public health and safety, encouraging physical violence against a vulnerable group of Jordanians. As we all aspire for a Jordan that is safe for all—a country governed by the rule of law, justice, and pluralism—we believe that we must begin to live and let live, thrive and let thrive, accept and be accepted.

Along with voicing our opinions through the magazine, we vote, pay taxes and electricity bills, work normal boring jobs, spend time with our families, and complain about the weather and traffic, just like all Jordanians.

(My.Kali 2017)

Written by 'the My.Kali family', the letter further seeks to entrench sexual and gender nonnormativity in Jordan, appealing to Tahboub as a parliamentarian meant to represent and help protect all Jordanians. What is more, the letter makes explicit reference to multiple dimensions of citizenship that its writers have access to – that they enact and perform, 'just like all Jordanians'. Voting evokes the image of LGBT Jordanians enacting their political rights the legal status of citizenship bestows upon them; paying taxes 'and electricity bills' references the obligations attached to the status of legal citizenship, as does working 'normal, boring jobs' that either

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<sup>93</sup> See chapter 2.

stimulate the economy or further the functioning of the state (in the case of employment in the public sector); and the last two examples speak to the interpersonal and affective dimension of citizenship – citizenship-as-group-membership. Spending time with their families and ‘complaining about the traffic and the weather’ appear as normal, *Jordanian* things to do. This mention of the family might not connote the grander theme of reproductive futurity as such, but it directly places nonnormativity within the central pillar of Jordanian society: the family. By resorting to the same utterings about bad weather and the congested streets of Amman, the editors place themselves squarely within the Jordanian everyday and the practices of an ordinary Jordanian citizen. The very mention of family in this short list speaks to the team’s understanding of its centrality to public legibility and legitimacy – the hope and implication being that, if the ‘foundation of society’ (Constitution Art. 6(4)) recognizes the authenticity of the writers, this might trickle upwards. Finally, the ‘opinions’ voiced by My.Kali are not framed as an exception to their ability to effectively practice citizenship, but as the very means by which they do so.

### 3.2. *Queering Jordanian citizenship: storytelling versus sexual imperialism*

My.Kali’s content queers Jordanian citizenship, firstly, by working against its rigid boundaries and insisting on the authenticity of homosexuality and nonnormative gender expression in Jordanian collective memory – all the while distancing itself from the charge of sexual and conceptual imperialism. Through storytelling and critique its authors *disidentify* from Jordanian citizenship: they recycle and rethink the meanings of (performative) Jordanian citizenship to make it liveable for themselves and their readership. Said differently, they make the queer Jordanian citizen-subject an ontological possibility.

The close reading done below reflects the ways in which My.Kali’s writers employ anti-imperial storytelling to assert the Jordanianness of nonnormativity. If the successful performance of Jordanian citizenship hinges on the cultivation and maintenance of reproductive, heterosexual relationships (marriage) that, in turn, perform the script of a patriotic, religious, cell in the public sphere, then sexual and gender nonnormative expressions that would upset this equation are seen as external threats to the stability of the family as well as the nation.<sup>94</sup> At the same time, nonnormative sexuality and gender expression is always already racialised – as Western, as white.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ebtihal Mahadeen, in her media analysis of My.Kali, has described as characteristic of the Jordanian media a ‘discourse of homophobic authenticity circulated...[that] represents heterosexuality as a marker of Jordanian national and social identity and constructs homosexuality (or LGBTQ identities) as alien and un-Jordanian’ (2021, 3).

<sup>95</sup> The relationship between the embodiment of an Arab identity and whiteness (in a post- 9/11 securitized world) deserves thorough consideration. This project does not have the capacity to do so.

3.2.1. 'Gone but not Forgotten', or: boys of our neighbourhood

Published on My.Kali in March 2018, 'Gone but not forgotten' makes a personal claim to Jordanian citizenship by asserting the authenticity of 'homosexuality' in 'our society' (Al-Akbar 2018a). The article was originally written in Arabic under the title 'Boys of our neighbourhood',<sup>96</sup> by an author writing under the pseudonym, El Dob Al-Akbar – literally, 'the bigger bear'. Although most of the articles written for My.Kali post-2016 are published in both English and Arabic, Al-Akbar's text was preceded by a disclaimer alerting readers to this fact, reminding them that 'a lot of the original language got lost in translation'. The disclaimer also notes that the writer hails from the city of Zarqa,<sup>97</sup> and is 'reflecting on a reality he lived'. Al-Akbar approaches his challenge to Jordanian history and the lives it deems recordable through memory. He mourns Jordanian society's 'denial' of its past and the oppressive nature of a selective collective memory, and is concerned with 'lost memories, or memories intentionally forgotten by our society.'

The author is quick not to speak too broadly. Though he locates memory beyond the individual, this memory is shared by 'cities, neighbourhoods, alleys'. Al-Akbar thus roots his experience and grief squarely in Zarqa but also holds that his are memories that speak to Jordanian and Middle Eastern cultural dynamics more generally. He also limits himself to discussing homosexuality and 'homosexual practices' among the young men in the neighbourhood in which he grew up, Al-Ghuwayriah, reminding us that his reflection is personal – and thus, presumably, a compelling and 'true' assessment. It is this Zarqa, known for its industry, being a 'stronghold of the Muslim brotherhood', as well as the birthplace of 'one of the founders of Daesh',<sup>98</sup> whose memory he confronts. By immediately drawing Zarqa out to be dull and conservative, the author builds a provocative launching pad to poignantly juxtapose the 'forgotten' history of homosexuality in Jordan with.

The article thus takes the form of a series of personal recollections put in conversation with said memory. That is, anecdotes are narrated with reference to social norms and 'accepted' behaviour, local myths, and the stories that 'people talked about'. First, Al-Akbar describes 'accepted' homosexual relationships among male teenagers in Zarqa in the 1990s. They were holding hands, kissing, sitting on each other's laps – in Al-Akbar's youth physical intimacy among

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<sup>96</sup> This is my translation of the original title of the article, *Avlad haritna. Hara*, literally meaning lane, is Levantine Arabic slang for 'neighbourhood', although it is more a cultural term than a strict geographical categorisation.

<sup>97</sup> Zarqa, located to the northeast of capital city, is the capital of the Zarqa Governate, and the second most populous city in Jordan after Amman. The city is known for being the industrial centre of Jordan.

<sup>98</sup> Daesh is the Anglicised form of the Arabic acronym for ISIS/ISIL. The 'founder' of Daesh that the author is referring to is Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a former head of al-Qaeda whose vision for a Sunni caliphate is often understood as a central source shaping ISIS ideology. Historians also tend to agree that ISIS emerged out of al-Qaeda after the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. For an account on the origins and history of ISIS that nuances these axioms, see: Michael and Hassan (2015).

young men was widespread and normalised. But, he argues, it was not platonic friendship that they were nursing, but profound feelings for one another; ‘love among men lasts forever, the love for women fades’,<sup>99</sup> they would insist, appearing jealous of their intimate friends who found girlfriends. The intense feelings enveloping these friendships ‘were closer to regret, or even *‘ishq*’, the latter implying a profound, passionate love.<sup>100</sup> And yet, while they were fantasizing about acting on their feelings, and openly ‘discussing homosexuality’ amongst them, they would often stop ‘at the pre-practical stage’, concerned with the politics of assigning active/passive sex roles. Like so, Al-Akbar argues that ‘homosexual practices’ were not shunned ‘out of principle’; their (‘and society’s’) issue was with the stigma attached to being ‘a bottom’, which marked one with inferiority and, accordingly, femininity.

About halfway through his recollections, Al-Akbar moves from discussing his personal experiences and desires to attesting to the (myth surrounding the) institutionalisation of homosexuality and “sodomy” in well-respected professions – namely, the military and the clergy. Both were regarded as hotspots for ‘homosexuality’, engulfing them in rumour, but Al-Akbar presents the latter as dry facts, common knowledge that held little room for sensation. Singling out the military and the ‘Muslim clergy’ is a highly symbolic choice,<sup>101</sup> though mention is also made of an individual gym operator ‘known’ to have entertained sexual favours in lieu of payment, linking two institutions that stand at the core of the Jordanian national imaginary holds significant weight. The importance of the military and religion in the construction of national identity in postcolonial nation-states cannot be overstated (Massad 2001), and we might recall that, constitutionally, good Jordanian citizenship is not only defined by one’s ability to successfully reproduce the nation, but by a foundation that is ‘based on religion, and the love of the homeland’ (Constitution Art. 6). Legitimacy and value can be derived from association with institutions like the military and the clergy, and employment within them indicates successful patriotic conduct. Locating and narrating homosexuality in the halls of these institutions, then, at once shocks the reader and serves to ingrain the former within the functioning and the image of the nation.

Interestingly, after linking the indigeneity of homosexuality to both the youth and established members of society –as linked to institutionalised nationalism and the state religion– the article turns to ‘the story of the “Sudanese guys”’. In the late 1990s, the dwelling of a group of Sudanese migrant workers in Zarqa amassed local attention when a group of Zarqawi youths began

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<sup>99</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>100</sup> There are many words that mean ‘love’ in Arabic. The most common and most directly translatable to ‘love’ is *hob*. *‘ishq* implies longing as well as profound affection.

<sup>101</sup> Of course, we would be tempted to read it also as a strategic choice. I am, however, less concerned with the intent of the author than with its effects – which I have attempted to articulate in the main text.

visiting the house a little too frequently not to arouse suspicion. Inserting himself in this ‘myth’, Al-Akbar claims to have seen the ‘Sudanese house’ and its goings-on personally, explaining that he and his friends ‘soon discovered that those Sudanese men were gay, and that the visitors went to them to fulfil their sexual needs’. Going to the ‘Sudanese house’ thus reads as metaphor for having sex.

The effect of this last story is twofold; it centres the claim that homosexuality is a foreign import to Jordan, and it further convolutes the author’s use of ‘homosexuality’ as a stand-in for sexual activity, and ‘gay’ as a(n) (foreign) identity. Al-Akbar muses: the sexual relationships Zarqawi men built with migrant workers were not a result of negative, outward influence, but of the relative ease with which one could engage in ‘temporary’ sexual relationships. He introduces the foreign subject precisely to dispel any doubt as to the ‘real’ presence of nonnormative sexual experiences and desires in Jordan.

Less transparent is the article’s stance on whether the *‘ishq* of youth, and the ‘sexual activity’ of adult men, constitute for Al-Akbar a sexual *identity*. The Sudanese migrant workers are described as ‘gay’, the only time the term is used in the article, rather than practitioners of ‘homosexuality’—the latter being reserved for Zarqawi men. In its English translation, the piece maintains a binary dissociation between sexual identity and sexual acts, claiming only the latter as an inherent part of Jordan’s history and society’s intentionally neglected collective memory. However, both a homosexual subject as well as homosexuality (as sexual acts) is written into the history of Al-Ghuwayriah; it argues against the idea that ‘homosexuals and their activities’ were new-age, Western developments. At a later point, Al-Akbar speaks of popular disdain for ‘criticizing homosexuality and homosexuals’. His descriptions of the intense affection shared among male youths, and the register of desire that prompted them to embark on casual sexual relationships with migrant workers, are distinguished from being ‘gay’. The English translation, it seems, creates space for a Zarqawi grammar of sexual desire that, although disciplined in Jordan, is not imported from elsewhere. The ‘homosexuality’ that for Al-Akbar was ‘an accepted reality’ was the covert world of sexual encounters and profound feelings shared among his peers, but not a dimension of his identity to navigate. In the Arabic original, the ‘pursuit/practice of homosexuality’,<sup>102</sup> is the operative descriptor that is translated as homosexuality and homosexual activity in English. In turn, the Sudanese migrant workers are described in slang, to the effect of ‘boy followers/chasers’.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Emphasis mine. Original: *‘almumarasat aljinsia almitbliyya’*.

<sup>103</sup> Original: *tabieen wilad*.

My interest in the Arabic original arises not out of a facile need to fact-check the English translation, nor to ascertain the author's intent. Rather, highlighting these divergences reminds us that, while My.Kali's Arabic content sought to represent and voice local desires, what is communicated to an Anglophone audience can and does take on a life of its own. In this way, My.Kali bears the double burden of representing the local and defending it or standing firm in light of a global audience ready to tear its utterances apart – not unlike this analysis.

'Gone but not Forgotten', the 'boys' of Al- Ghuwayriah, are a call to action; the article seeks to represent the beginning of an archive of similar personal reflections on the history of homosexuality in Jordan. As Al-Akbar's is an account limited to 'the memories I have lived and experienced', he hopes it to be the first in a series that chronicles 'lesbian relationships in addition to male homosexuality'. It takes an active part in rewriting more 'truthfully' the recent history of sexuality in Jordan, implicitly also rejecting the curtain taboo of the discourse of sexuality. The piece's self-reflective character and its claims to 'truth', based on the personal experience of the anonymous author, as well as its emergence out of a firmly Zarqawi life history, *as well as* the editorial decision to pre-empt it with a disclaimer pointing to the fact that it is a translation, all strongly speak to the article's central theme: contrary to the reigning, selective collective memory, homosexuality and homosexual praxis are indigenous to and reflective of Zarqawi, Jordanian life. 'Homosexuality *was* an accepted reality',<sup>104</sup> '*is* a legitimate part of our societies', and under no conditions a 'foreign product or a western conspiracy against Islam'. Al-Akbar rounds his piece off with the latter charge, linking it to the emergence of social media. Finding that 'nothing ha[d] changed in this society', social media –and presumably platforms like My.Kali– have simply made it possible to ascertain a collective history and memory that includes (gender and) sexual nonnormativity. As a result, it is on an online platform that the author chooses to challenge the collective memory that excludes homosexuality from its canon, his article acting as 'proof of [the] absurdity' of this exclusivist Jordanian imago.

### 3.2.2. ... and its forgotten daughters

Half a year after the above article was published, El Dob Al Akbar was again featured on My.Kali, this time with the companion piece, 'Daughters of our Neighbourhood' (2018b). Unlike the original contribution, a self-reflection ascertaining personal and social 'truths', this piece is an experiment in storytelling. Al-Akbar sets out to record the life history of Samira, one of his childhood neighbours in Al-Ghuwayriah. A 'true story', the author had 'always dreamed of writing

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<sup>104</sup> Emphasis mine.

it' but hesitated as he was not a 'proper' writer. He finally succumbed to the urge to record Samira's story to honour her; not only did it 'deserve' to be told, but it could also function as a letter and an 'invitation' to contemporary residents of the Al-Ghuwayriah neighbourhood to question the disciplinary norms they are expected to follow. The short story was never translated into English, perhaps heeding My.Kali's disclaimer that a lot –perhaps too much– is lost in/to translation. Alternatively, or additionally, perhaps the editors understood the audience of the piece to be the residents of Al-Ghuwayriah and its daughters; its purpose on My.Kali would thus not be the representation of a certain type of Jordanian queerness and its consequent suppression to the Anglophone world, but as a reckoning with its Arabic speaking audience.

A story of 'resistance and rebellion', Al-Akbar recounts Samira's youth in Al-Ghuwayriah, describing in detail the resistance that her androgynous gender expression, her explosive and contrarian mannerisms, and her sexuality were met with. The story highlights the emotional toll a decades long struggle against social pressure to confine herself to her mother's house, adopt a feminine exterior, to don a veil and get married had taken on Samira, and juxtaposes it to the 'strength' she would show in defending those she understood were more vulnerable than her. The story ends with a sharp intervention to its otherwise defeated tone: after revealing that in her mid-thirties Samira, defeatedly, began wearing a *hijab* and married a work colleague, moving with him to Amman, Al-Akbar demands to know: 'is the story of the daughter of our neighbourhood over?'<sup>105</sup>

Much like his first article, the short story's introduction bluntly states Al-Akbar's motivation: storytelling, as opposed to an academic reading of gender and sexual non-normativity in Jordan, 'prove[s] that these topics are neither a foreign product nor a Western conspiracy against Islam'. Instead, Samira represents, 'a "legitimate" daughter of our Jordanian and Arab societies', one whose opinions and choices are not easily explained away as outward influence. Emphasizing that Samira is a *daughter* of Zarqa and not 'just' a woman immediately evokes the image of the of the family as the foundation of Jordanian society, which he sets out to shake up. Context is very telling in this instance; Samira does not hail from cosmopolitan Amman, 'not even' from new Zarqa, but from the conservative Al-Ghuwayriah, where she was far and wide the only one who dressed and behaved in the ways she did. Al-Akbar tells us that Samira's personal, 'feminist philosophy' was 'not at all circumstantial', a result of her exposure to alternative (read: Western) ways of thinking, but one that stemmed from a 'deep' understanding of Jordanian culture and knowledge production. Giving force to this claim is the explicit timestamp accompanying the story: raised in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Samira could not even count on the internet to 'corrupt'

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<sup>105</sup> Translation mine.

her into the ‘rude’, ‘ill-mannered’ woman all of Al-Ghuwayriah –and especially the author’s father’– decided she was.<sup>106</sup> The author mentions a number of classically Jordanian affronts that Samira had had thrown at her, placing them all in quotation marks. For the Jordanian reader (or Levantine dialect speaker) the effect is tangible: behaviour deemed inappropriate is chastised with the very same abuses to this day. Other than insults, the story’s tone further solidifies its excruciating Jordanianness. For instance, when she started studying at the University of Jordan, Samira is described as *fayi’a*, flamboyant;<sup>107</sup> and the author’s father dismisses the former’s concerns about Samira by saying that they just needed to stay out of it, they did not have time for more trouble; *ihna mish naqisna*.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, the articles’ imagery make Samira’s an undeniably Jordanian tale: she uses a *qashbata*, a long squeegee, to defend herself against a home intruder; one of her early hobbies is raising pigeons on the roof of her mother’s house;<sup>109</sup> and her rebellious nature is established through her disruptive presence at *sabrat*,<sup>110</sup> where she would constantly bicker with the rest of the women sitting in a circle on one of their porches. Finally, the author mobilises religious imagery to dispel any remaining doubts as to the Jordanian authenticity of his retelling and Samira’s very existence. When the relationship between Samira and her first love interest turns sour, when Wafaa does not return Samira’s romantic affections and is engaged to a man instead, the author’s mother ‘and the rest of the women in the neighbourhood’ described the link as ‘wrathful’, *maghdoob ‘alayha*. The expression is taken directly from the first *surah* –chapter– of the Quran, *al fatiba*, in which Muslims ask Allah to guide them down the ‘straight’ and narrow path: the path of those he had blessed, not of those who had invoked his anger, his wrath.<sup>111</sup> Like the Jordanian colloquialisms before it, this invocation of a religious text so omnipresent in the Jordanian and Muslim everyday makes it impossible to divorce Samira’s lived reality from that of every Zarqawi woman, and every Jordanian.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>106</sup> The author mentions three insults, all placed in quotation marks. *Wiqba*, *qalilat haya*, and *mish mrabiya* are all common insults to women and girls in Jordan, all questioning how one was raised. *Wiqba* is common in other Arabic-speaking countries as well. For an explanation of Jordanian (and other dialects) colloquialisms (in Arabic), see: <https://ar.mo3jam.com/term/فياعة>

<sup>107</sup> A Jordanian expression that can also mean expressive or allude to metrosexuality. See the dictionary of Arabic colloquialisms (n 34).

<sup>108</sup> Literally: we are not missing it/deficient in it.

<sup>109</sup> This is a widespread practice in Jordan, though I can only attest to it through anecdotal evidence. Upon learning that my sister and I loved animals, one of my great uncles promptly gifted us two of his favourite pigeons to raise on our roof. Though our family found it odd that we had multiple cats that lived *inside* our house, having pigeons as pets was seen as a sign of good fortune

<sup>110</sup> A *sabra* is most easily likened to a soiree; it is a get-together that extends (far) into the night, especially common during summer and the month of Ramadan.

<sup>111</sup> Translation mine. For the Arabic text and an English translation of *al fatiba*, see: <https://quran.com/1>

<sup>112</sup> This is not to deny the existence of other religious minorities in Jordan, Christians being the most numerous among them, but to highlight the very direct association between Jordanianness and Islam – one that is most evident in the sources of its legal system.

El Dob Al Akbar's two pieces on the one hand function as correctives to Jordanian history/memory and its heteronormative public imaginary (and resultant Jordanian identity), and, on the other, perfectly capture My.Kali's functioning as a space of becoming. The short story captures the everyday practices of Jordanian citizenship (ex. raising pigeons), mirrors them to grander projects in the embodiment of Jordanian identity and serving its people (attending the University of Jordan after *tanjih*<sup>113</sup>), critically assesses the exclusions to which the normative practices of citizenship such as finding a job (to pay taxes) and getting married (to literally reproduce the nation) subject Samira; and, finally, offers a claim to Jordanian citizenship in Samira's name to right the wrongs that has been done to her and, in effect, to re-figure citizenship through its critique.

### 3.2.3. 'Globalizing the closet' and orientalising pride: negotiations of the local versus the global

Also originally written in Arabic, in 'Globalizing the Closet' (2018) usual suspect Musa Shadeedi discusses the 'Western model of coming out' through the metaphor of the closet, using personal experiences and reflecting on interviews and discussions they had had with 'members of the Arab LGBTQI community'.<sup>114</sup> Shadeedi questions both the origins and the 'usefulness' of the closet as a metaphor, and coming out as a praxis, given that many of their interlocutors 'did not even understand the meaning of the term [sic]'. Indeed, they chose to study 'coming out' for its presumed global relevance, as well as its status as a metric to measure progress in the Western mediascape.

Shadeedi opens with a personal anecdote.<sup>115</sup> After an anti-climactic attempt at 'coming out' to their mother, they wonder whether explaining to her that they 'like[d] boys' was even necessary – why had they been convinced that they needed to come out of the closet? To offer a preliminary overview of the potential draws to coming out as part of 'Arab LGBTQI' life, they summarise two prevalent standpoints that associated with the Middle East and North Africa; one of their interlocutors understands coming out as a natural process, since people 'love talking about

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<sup>113</sup> The high school diploma in the Jordanian school system.

<sup>114</sup> *Mujtama' al meem*, or *meem* community, in the Arabic original. The expression is widely used in activist and academic circles as an Arabic alternative to 'LGBTQI+'. Recent projects among queer, pan-Arab movements have focused on articulating their politics in Arabic. A direct outcome of such a movement is the *Gender Wiki*, which offers Arabic equivalents and translations of terms central to queer politics in the Anglophone world. For the definition of *mujtama' al meem*, see: [https://genderiyya.xyz/wiki/الصفحة\\_الرئيسية](https://genderiyya.xyz/wiki/الصفحة_الرئيسية)

<sup>115</sup> In the English translation, 'homosexual' and 'gay' are used interchangeably – although notably, in the opening anecdote, Shadeedi writes that they had told their mother that they 'like[d] boys', not that they were 'gay'. In contrast, the websites Shadeedi uses to showcase Islamophobic progress narratives are described as 'gay', as are references to individual people. In those instances, the Arabic original sticks to *mithli* as an adjective, and referring to homosexuality as *mithliyya jinsiya*.

themselves' and sharing one's sexual identity with friends and family was a 'human need'. The other suggests that the practice of coming out is an inherently 'western product',<sup>116</sup> as it constitutes a celebration of the self, which is always to the detriment of the community as a whole – an entirely alien motivation. Identity is never 'individual', but always tied to the collective in 'the Arab world'.<sup>117</sup> Shadeedi's interlocutor thus finds that while the 'Western' coming out model would try to reassure her that, if her parents loved her, they would continue to do so after she came out to them, she would reject the compulsion to reveal her sexual identity to her family precisely because she cares about them; 'I should not force them to accept something that they do not want'.<sup>118</sup>

Shadeedi rationalises their own take on rejecting a practice for its 'Western' origins, by virtue of their intrinsic incompatibility with 'the Arab World', by extending his interlocutors' comments to a short reflection on International Coming Out Day (October 11). Already the name concerns them; naming anything that stems from the West 'international' inevitably universalises western formations of sexual identity and affirms 'the western experience as the only right one'. Immediately nuancing their remarks, Shadeedi questions whether a strict division can even be drawn between the West and 'our cultures', finding that they 'have always [been] intertwined, overlapped, and cause[ed] several changes in each other'. If then, the closet and the process of coming out is not entirely foreign, why renounce it if it could benefit 'the individual Arab gay'? Afterall, the Arab world had 'imported' other 'indispensable' ideas, such as 'human rights' from 'other cultures', too.<sup>119</sup> 'Coming out' could perhaps also function as a hopeful ideal, it 'would mean the end of that constant fear' of being 'discovered', and an end to a heteronormative performance that encompasses everything from the way one dresses to one's posture.

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<sup>116</sup> Given the Arabic original, I read this as a conflation of the process of coming out and the closet as a metaphor; the mandatory making visible of sexual identity is being critiqued, recognizing the closet –and thus the need to escape it– as a western *product*.

<sup>117</sup> The Arabic version of the article spells this distinction out more elaborately, with the speaker's use of the first person firmly placing her beyond the reach and applicability of an 'individual identity'. Directly translated, the section reads: 'coming out of the closet is a Western product because it revolves around the individual ('I') identity that is present in the West, while it does not revolve around collective identity (we), that we have as Arabs'. The rejection of the Western conception is rooted in its inherent incompatibility with the social structure of identity in the Arab world. In Shadeedi's own engagement with this argument they emphasize the entanglement of the Arab world with the West; though the nature of this relationship [coloniality] is left out of the discussion, the examples they offer speak to context-sensitivity and the violence mindless universalization can heed.

<sup>118</sup> In his ethnographic study on queer survival strategies that LGBT Beirutis employ, Moussawi finds a similar strategy at play; one of his interlocutors describes the decision not to out oneself to one's family 'as a way of empathizing with family members and a means of maintaining family ties' (2020, 92).

<sup>119</sup> A distinction between 'human rights' and the (international) human rights law framework would make Shadeedi's claim here more poignant; while it is true that the history of international human rights law is indivisible from European legal history, tied as it is to the two World Wars, the Cold War, and the emergence of global capitalism (Bates 2018), it seems unnecessarily reductive to relegate the very notion of human rights to the outside of the 'Arab World'. In fact, this conclusion seems to betray the assumption that only rights codified in Western-style legal codes can be recognized as such.

Switching gears again, Shadeedi nonetheless concludes that coming out is a ‘useless’ praxis ‘even in western cultures’ since it only serves to reinforce the abnormality of homosexuality in a heteronormative –and thus unequal– world. Further, the coming out model, when applied uncritically to the Arab Middle East, ignores the real-life violence public identification with a nonnormative sexual identity could potentially lead to. For Shadeedi, such a public declaration is necessarily alien to Jordan, but the decision remains a deeply personal one that even the anti-imperialist Shadeedi does not reduce to a false consciousness. The final section of the article presents a media critique that assesses the universalization of the concept of the closet as a litmus test for gay liberation; of the ‘international standard’ that the closet has become to assess the status of a country’s modernization. Several articles from European and North America-based ‘gay websites’ are cited to expound on the ways in which Western media outlets represent gay Arabs’ inability and unwillingness to come out as proof of their oppression, evoking pity for them and drawing a Middle East that was a ‘barbaric world is lagging behind’.<sup>120</sup>

Uncritical of articulating same-sex desire as identity, Shadeedi ultimately insists on finding what makes sense for ‘our identity’ – their critique is meant to showcase the necessity of ‘having an alternative [to coming out] that stems from our own culture and our authentic needs’. This motivation is necessary also to prevent their discussion becoming merely ‘elitist nonsense’, bourgeois musings published on a website inaccessible to those without the tech-savvy needed to get around My.Kali’s geo-blocking. Nonetheless, the text offers few practical examples of what an alternative, ‘authentic’ Jordanian model might look like, concluding as highlighted above, that heeding the call to come out is a personal decision necessarily negotiated and given meaning through the relationship between the (Arab) Middle East and the ‘West’. Their interlocutors however point to the active, embodied character of such an approach, suggesting that keeping same-sex relationships ‘private’ (invisible) and, instead of articulating sexual identity, simply ‘bring[ing] your boyfriend home’, would help protect oneself while remaining emotionally fulfilled. The strict West/Middle East binary reflected in the repeated disidentifications of both Shadeedi and his interlocutors through their varied use of the first person and collective ‘our’ is disrupted; it is with the recognition of the global politics of visibility and the embodied needs of Arab and Jordanian ‘LGBTQI community’ that they must make a decision. The closet, then, is ‘unfavourable to *our* culture, not *only* because it is *Western*’,<sup>121</sup> but because it can have real-life consequences for those pressured to perform under it, although rejecting the model only by virtue of it being ‘imported’ would also be legitimate. If not patriotic, the subversion of the West/Middle East

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<sup>120</sup> For an in-depth analysis of progress narratives as related to LGBT representation in the Middle East, see Moussawi (2020).

<sup>121</sup> Emphasis mine.

dichotomy through appeals to an ‘authentic’ means of making (in)visible sexual identity constitutes both a rejection of a globalised discourse on LGBT identity that posits the Arab World as ‘barbaric’, and of Jordan’s outright dismissal of such identification. This is not to say that Shadeedi’s rejection of Westernisation is a strategic means to claim tolerance within the country (although shared anti-colonial sentiment will likely always have the power to unite), but to point to the sheer Arab-ness that (not) coming out and sexual identity can and do claim.

Evidently, Shadeedi, who is a writer and an editor for My.Kali, is well-versed in decolonial and feminist thought. They make their habit for engaging with theory and the symptomatic debates in global(ised) queer politics even more apparent in ‘Pride marches and freak shows’ (2019), an article published only in Arabic.<sup>122</sup> In this contribution, Shadeedi studies the histories of pride (marches) and freak shows alongside one another, finding that both cultural artefacts turned profits on nonnormative, previously unemployable and thus unproductive bodies. While they appreciate the material differences between pride –as a celebration– and freak shows –as exploitation– they emphasize that in both cases, the dynamics of capitalism have put in place a system in which the ‘legitimate public visibility and presence’ of nonnormative bodies hinges on their generation of profit. That is, while the medicalisation turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century loosened capitalism’s grip on physically unusual bodies by extinguishing the mystery surrounding them, Shadeedi understands pride parades as having devolved into merely ‘an ideal marketing opportunity’ that betrays their history of resistance.<sup>123</sup> The ‘liberalization of Stonewall’ constitutes a ‘grave affront to all the brave souls who started disobeying’, and whose a legacy it is ‘our duty’ to protect from ‘theft and appropriation’. As such, they seek to respond to local queer movement’s calls for adopting pride (marches) as a form of resistance and claiming space in Jordan and the Arab Middle East more generally.

In narrating these histories, Shadeedi makes two central claims. Firstly, pride parades as seen in the United States and Europe, with their floats, ‘theatrical costumes’, and loud music, have become as a means of solidifying *mujtama’ al meem*’s difference rather than celebrating its inclusion and/or assimilation into the public sphere. They have become ‘a way of saying “we are the new freaks”’. Interestingly, they read the theatrics central to pride as a means of further ‘concealing’ one’s identity in public, literally ‘masking’ oneself in an embrace of ‘invisibility’. Therefore, secondly, it is essential for Shadeedi that in Jordan we first decide on whether visibility is ‘indeed one of our goals in the region’ – if it is, then ‘we must choose our visibility ourselves, on our own

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<sup>122</sup> Translation in this section: mine.

<sup>123</sup> The Arabic original uses the term, *nidhal*.

terms, and based on our local means of struggle'.<sup>124</sup> They use Beirut Pride as an example, implying that Beirut queer activists had better launch protests against Art. 354 of the Penal Code, which prohibits 'sexual acts against nature' under which homosexual conduct can be caught (a remnant of the French colonial influence on Lebanese legislation), than host pride marches without a clear target for resistance. While the history of queer resistance would indicate that celebration and resistance do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive, Shadeedi's point here is to unambiguously highlight their promotion of 'local alternatives', of truly Lebanese, Jordanian, *Arab* approaches. Shadeedi's claim to Jordanian citizenship in this passage is evident in its repudiation of outward influence, and a clear emphasis on the locality of any approaches developed by a queer movement. They insert themselves directly and unequivocally in the narrative; it is 'our' version of resistance, and 'our' bodies whose (in)visibility 'we' must negotiate. If *we* pay attention to what works for *our* region, then we can develop an approach that is attentive to our needs, that avoids the mindless liberalisation of pride, and that becomes a feature of Jordanian queer resistance.

Interestingly, in their designation of pride as a foundational pillar of the 'Western gay calendar', Shadeedi briefly quotes a 2011 article published by alQaws – officially, alQaws for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society. alQaws is a civil society organization that seeks to 'build' 'LGBTQ communities' and promote knowledge of gender and sexual diversity within Palestine.<sup>125</sup> In the article, the authors critique the discourse of resistance 'appropriate' for the Palestinian context; a focus on 'homophobia', as in the International Day Against Homophobia, would divert attention away from the 'main' issues making life difficult for (queer) Palestinians – a taboo on talking about sexuality, and the recognition of the implication of homophobia in a patriarchal and paternalistic society. Focusing on homophobia effectively 'whitewashes' the Palestinian queer movement and implies that it can be addressed separately from Palestinian resistance. Additionally, IDAHOT and resistance modelled after its ideals would 'enforce a foreign/western vision and experience onto the rest of the queer movements of the world', 'universalizing queer experience as if there were one correct variation thereof, ignorant of area-specific differences'. The article reaches a conclusion that Shadeedi's reproduces, re-emphasising: 'perhaps the worst of it all' is that liberalising queer resistance by insisting on its separatism 'prevents the and queer community from taking an active role in the general social agenda', noting

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<sup>124</sup> In the Arabic original, Shadeedi speaks of '*abyana*'; as in, 'we must choose our '*abyana* ourselves'. '*abyana* literally translates to publicity, and Shadeedi uses it to denote being in public and taking up space within it. I have translated it as visibility for this reason.

<sup>125</sup> alQaws is one of the organisations Joseph Massad singles out to diagnose with having been affected by the 'gay international'. His critique is based on alQaws' aim to 'build LGBTQ communities' where, according to Massad, there *were none*. (2015, 271 n157). For a reading of alQaws as a productive site for thinking and practicing decolonization, see Alqaisyia (2018). Similarly, Sa'ed Atshan reads alQaws' work as 'indigeniz[ing] Western LGBTQ terms' and engaging in, primarily, anti-imperial work (Atshan 2020).

that ‘sexual and gender struggle, including homosexuality’ are an integral part of a broader ‘resistance agenda’. They believe in a localized resistance agenda that reflects the entanglement of all forms of Palestinian resistance, ‘from the feminist and the queer struggle’ to an overarching decolonial politics.

Shadeedi’s call for the adoption of ‘local solutions’ and modes of resistance (without being too specific on the contours of these solutions, seeing as they should evolve from individual contexts), indicates that their claim to Jordanian citizenship is always already negotiated against the global, as well as in solidarity with other social justice movements. Their dedication to reforming Jordanian citizenship, performed in part through the (implied) patriotic, discursive defence of Jordan in light of orientalisating Anglophone media, and the refusal to uncritically adopt a Western model of queer identification, clearly speak to Shadeedi’s active disidentification from Jordanian citizenship.

### 3.3. *Queering Jordanian citizenship: The Marriage Issue versus reproductive futures*

Not all reckonings with the future – enacted through a reformation of Jordanian citizenship made necessary by the upset of its critical dissection through My.Kali’s voices – that are assembled on My.Kali’s website retain a utopian outlook. Not (yet) published in Arabic, in ‘I want to make sure you are alright before I die’ (2021), anonymous author S.J. conceives of a future in which fear (of)/and loneliness reign for LGBT Jordanians. Keenly aware of the social pressure to settle in a reproductive heterosexual marriage, they interview LGBT Jordanians and describe their and their interlocutors’ fears of aging on their own. Equally fear-inducing, S.J. and their interviewees agree, is the possibility of being caught in ‘relationships that we do not want, out of the fear that our parents and society talked us into’. Failing or refusing to follow the ‘roadmap to the future’ that ‘society’ had drawn up would leave one vulnerable and alone, as if confined to a ‘cold, 1 by 1-meter room, untouched by the sun’. A future sans spouse is one in which fulfilling the golden tenets of good Jordanian citizenship are impossible; the ‘light’ of the future does not extend to those confined to single rooms. ‘I want to make sure you are alright before I die’,<sup>126</sup> a rather clichéd saying in Arabic, is code for one’s dwindling marriageability and the exasperation of family members as a result; as well as a reminder that the well-being of the individual citizen, the son or the daughter,<sup>127</sup> is tied to the collective good. Although the article acts as an exposé more than a

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<sup>126</sup> Original: *bidi atma’in aleik qabl ma amoot*.

<sup>127</sup> The reproductive norm foresees progress only in the strict division of gender and gender roles. An example of the institutionalization of this is the 2018 MHAL that writes out of legal (and thus public) legibility transgender, genderqueer, and nonbinary Jordanian subjects. For a discussion on the MHAL see chapter 2.

hopeful theorisation of nonnormativity, the author does dream of a future where ‘acceptance’ would open alternative paths to the ‘sun’. Crucially, they do not offer the legalization of same-sex marriage as a clear-cut solution or indeed a requirement for the liberation of their body beyond the coldness of the single room, though they entertain the idea. The ontological violence the queer Arab subject is subjected to in the frame of compulsory marriage is exposed but not treated in the article. Further, the absence of fear for this author would require the rewriting of the reproductive norm underscoring Jordanian citizenship.

S.J.’s piece was published as part of the *Weddings & Marriages* issue of My.Kali (2020). This issue is perhaps the most literal representation of My.Kali’s continued disidentification from traditional notions of reproduction and kinship that are fundamental to the (Jordanian) nation-state. The issue, published in late 2020 through to early 2021, is ‘one of the largest, if not *the* largest’ collection of articles that My.Kali has produced thus far. Inspired by previous collaboration with Palestinian fashion brand, tRASHY Clothing (concerning alternative wedding attire), the issue asks two central questions: how does the stringent institution of marriage ‘affect’ the Arab, Jordanian queer ‘community’; and ‘how can we encourage conversation that represents the spectrum of emotions related to marriage, from joy to crisis, pressure, and psychological entrapment?’ The editors frame the issue as an opportunity to ‘question’ the ‘idea’ of marriage: whether it was simply ‘a way of the world’ or an institution collectively ‘imposed upon most of us and used to stigmatize those who do not abide by its rules’ (Abdel-Hadi, Shadeedi, and Marks 2020). Despite the latter question sounding indubitably leading, the issue provides a rather nuanced take on marriage; it is neither fully rejected as an archaic means of disciplining abject bodies and alternative kinship formation, nor is it championed as a bastion of queer liberation, insisting on a pro-same-sex marriage campaign in Jordan. The issue features two articles that collect responses from questionnaires shared on My.Kali’s social media pages that asked participants to elaborate on their personal approach to marriage (My.Kali 2020), whether it was indeed responsible for ‘controlling our destiny’, as well as the ‘fears and pressures’ they associated with it (Abdel-Hadi, Shadeedi, and Marks 2020).

In the act of posing the question, what does marriage *mean* to you is disruptive; My.Kali frames its issue as immediately critical of the institution of marriage, and places the family and traditional notions of kinship and reproduction – as the constitutional ‘foundation of society’ – on the hot seat. In ‘A Marriage of Convenience’ (Shusha 2020), the author interviews a pair of Jordanians bound in, indeed, a marriage of convenience. Narrated under strict pseudonyms, the article lays out the incentives that led Wissam, a lesbian, to wed her ‘gay husband’, Nour. Crucially, the article begins with a three-tier explanation of why Jordanians resort to marriage in the first

place; it can be a form of commitment; a confinement; or a 'catalyst for change'. Marriage is neither unquestionably about a loving commitment made to one's partner, nor a necessary evil for the participation in Jordanian public life. For some, it is a practical solution, a means to access 'a less restrictive lifestyle, travelling abroad, changing nationality, or protection' (Shusha 2020). Wissam and Nour explain that they had found in each other a platonic life partner and their most trusted confidant. However, they do not necessarily 'recommend' marriages of convenience to other LGBT Jordanians; they count themselves lucky, noting the opportunities for blackmail such arrangements could provide those with malevolent intentions. Additionally, the pair still feel guilty for having lied to their families about the nature of their relationship, even if, as they note, they lie to them to make them happy. By fulfilling their social roles, enacting proper (sexual) Jordanian citizenship, they are 'secure' in the eyes of their families, having obtained access to the privileges of marriage. This evinces how the affective dimension, 'making sure [their children] are alright' (S.J. 2021) of citizenship, performed through this marriage, is entangled with the legal security it offers. However, the 'pressure' exerted on Wissam and Nour from their parents did not die down with their marriage; soon after, the pair were bombarded with questions about and tips for conceiving. Membership in the Jordanian family is, after all, equally premised on reproduction. The couple decided to divulge to their parents that they were both 'completely sterile'; which would 'circumvent the possibility of [Nour's] family suggesting that he marry another woman'.

Despite the underlying discomfort Wissam and Nour feel for deceiving their parents, they do not regret their decision to enter into a marriage. 'On the contrary, I gained a person I can say I want to grow old with', opines Wissam. She thus reorients her sense of loyalty and desire for safety to her relationship with Wissam – nestled in a marriage of convenience. Wissam at no point laments not being able to marry her girlfriend, finding that she is more than satisfied sharing a life with her romantic partner as well as her 'best friend'. A manifestation of a queer kinship network formed within a compulsory institution within Jordan, through their relationship Wissam and Nour disidentify from reproductive Jordanian citizenship. They see it for what it is (an institution that can be manipulated) and reimagine it for their own benefit – for their ability to survive and even thrive within it.

### *3.4. Enacting queer (Jordanian) citizenship: between queer cyberspaces and counterpublics*

Perhaps more radically, on the dimension of abstract creation which is freed from the material concerns of protecting and making liveable LGBT Jordanian lives and identities in the present

(which *is* one of its core missions), My.Kali also enables queer, inventive kinning to take place in the digital sphere.<sup>128</sup>

My.Kali is an online, queer collectivity – a ‘shared blog’, a ‘family’ (My.Kali 2017), an archive of stories, that foregrounds recognition and connection. This collective functions as a queer counterpublic, disidentifying with Jordanian citizenship to launch a resistance that is both legible in nationalist terms, potent for its appropriation of Arabic and Jordanian national symbols, and yet dedicated to the nation state, affirming Jordanian citizenship while rewriting it. In a recent interview with international broadcaster – ‘with a French perspective’ –<sup>129</sup> France 24, Abdel-Hadi described My.Kali as a ‘digital conceptual publication [that] claims digital space and creates a safe space for people who are nonconforming, queer, and feminist. It’s basically a platform that documents the stories of queer people in the Middle East and North Africa region’.<sup>130</sup> My.Kali has maintained its commitment to documenting these ‘stories and opinions’ since its inception, more recently finding that if they failed to do so, ‘one day the world will forget us’ (Abdel-Hadi 2018). Similarly, in their open letter to MP Dima Tahboub, My.Kali’s editorial board describe their platform as featuring the work of writers and artists from all over the MENA region, as well as those ‘of living, breathing Jordanian citizens who care about issues of human rights, social justice, and feminism’. They are not, that is, a ‘political news source’, but a space of creation, identification, and sharing, cognizant and (re)productive of a shared culture and language. While sexual and gender nonnormative Jordanians are denied public visibility and legal recognition, all the while being exposed to the wrath of the popular media, the cyberspace becomes a plane of expression, where exasperation is shared, and political intentions are fostered. My.Kali, in other words, enacts queer citizenship in the digital sphere. The voices of My.Kali’s contributors lay claim to both the legal and affective dimensions of citizenship; they point out legal exclusions and legislative inequality, and they write themselves into a Jordanian identity that amplifies their belonging within it and test its flexibility, but they create a safe haven where they can ‘envision and activate new social relations’ in the process (Muñoz 1999). The digital sphere thus becomes a space of becoming for those complex identifications that simultaneously question and reclaim their constitution within Jordanian public.

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<sup>128</sup> With ‘inventive kinning’ I am invoking Sophie Lewis (2019).

<sup>129</sup> See ‘Who are we?’: <https://www.france24.com/en/about-us>

<sup>130</sup> See: <https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/perspective/20210610-my-kali-challenging-gender-norms-across-the-arab-world>

In its most recent issue, *Hopefully Tomorrow*,<sup>131</sup> guest authors explicitly link the formative capacities of the digital sphere to a queer future – a future that hinges strongly on a refiguration of Jordanian citizenship. In the introduction to the issue, the editors wonder: ‘[w]ill the internet become an intimate space that is truly inclusive, which can incorporate the affordances of “real” public spaces from which queer people and women are so often marginalized?’ (Marks, Abdel-Hadi and Shadeedi 2021). This question references the most theoretical contribution of the collection, in which Aryana Ghazi Hessami posits that My.Kali and similar platforms function as ‘queer intimate publics’ (2021). To that end, she reads together Lauren Berlant’s concept of intimate publics ‘as shared community of sentiment around queer issues’, with Gayatri Gopinath’s queer regional imaginary, ‘to specify how new diasporic connections and framings of region can take hold in digital space, without a centralised Euro-American focus’. Within this frame, Hessami understands the digital as a space that necessarily bypasses the national, allowing concepts and identities to travel, and analogizing the queer identities formed and shared there with the diasporic. It is in this space, ‘unencumbered’ by physical geography, that queer bodies can break from dominant constructions ‘of sex, nation state, and region’. The analytical value of these spheres? Fluid conversations, creations, and identifications taking shape in the digital sphere will inevitably trickle down into and will be addressed in the everyday. Such is Hessami’s hopeful assessment. Similarly, in the same issue Fatima Kried argues that ‘a revolution of sorts is brewing online’, with ‘pockets of representation’ popping up on all social media platforms imaginable. My.Kali’s readership benefits from a representation that validates its experiences and provides a ‘sense of hope’ for better understanding themselves and their surroundings. Kried sees these spheres as alternatives to ‘activist stances’ – as well as, presumably, academic interventions. Taking the promise of the future more literally, she links the hope of representation with the promise of visibility; My.Kali, (queer) Arab TikTok, and various awareness-raising themed Instagram accounts promise to not only ‘normalize’ ‘queer Arabs’, but to ‘fully accept’ them.<sup>132</sup> Both pieces speak to the potentialities of a future formed in the digital, liberated from physical boundaries, yet both allude to the discursive powers of these transgression. Rather than tackling sexual and gender nonnormativity in Jordan by name, they hope to first bolster their cause online, knowing that the boundary between the digital and the physical is porous at best, and oftentimes merely an illusion.

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<sup>131</sup> The Arabic title of the issue is rather witty and lines up with themes discussed in the previous sections; ‘*Inshallah Tomorrow*’ parodies the stereotype that Arabs are unreliable, saying ‘inshallah’ instead of completing tasks. The quintessentially Arab title is sure to make Arabic-speakers chuckle, and, again, is indisputably Arab and Jordanian.

<sup>132</sup> This piece, presenting queer visibility as liberation, is uncharacteristically unnuanced when compared to other recent publications (mainly Shadeedi), which tend to investigate the potency of such frames in the Jordanian context first. For a discussion of visibility in the queer Arab formation, see section 3.2.3 above, and Moussawi (2020).

This begs the question: is queer citizenship necessarily the manifestation of a post-state imaginary? And, by extension, is enacting queer citizenship merely a reference to the dynamics of belonging fostered on digital platforms in favour of national loyalties? Rather than a disavowal of the literal barriers of the nation state, Hessami sees in queer digital publics the potential for, firstly, queer publics to take form, and secondly, providing the space for navigating patriarchy and capitalism, ‘to demand social justice’, in a receptive forum. This necessitates ‘looking beyond the digital as an isolated entity’, but it absolutely requires a public *to* transform. It is, effectively, a practice in queering. The spatio-temporal dimension that queer intimate publics eventually seek to make liveable, *is* the nation state.<sup>133</sup> Hessami’s thesis is entirely compatible with Mahadeen’s interpretation of My.Kali’s work; Mahadeen understands the webzine as a queer counterpublic, ‘unique in its ability to articulate the concerns of LGBTQ individuals and proud of its role as a space for representation and support for the community in Jordan and across the region’ (2021, 16). In creating a queer collectivity online, My.Kali has consistently laid claim to Jordanianness, to citizenship as belonging and identity, as well as public (and legal) recognition thereof, but it has reoriented the loyalty demanded of the state towards the members of its own ‘community’. Citizenship is thus formed beyond the bounds and counter to the imagined community *of* the nation state – and yet, not a post-state, but queer kinning in a fundamentally reformed nation-state is suggested, betraying My.Kali’s (authors’) investment in the wellbeing of its members over its attachment to an abstract ideal. Nonetheless, the dynamic remains radical in a state so deeply anxious about its existence hinging on heteronormative reproductive futurity, that it has geoblocked a queer webzine attempting to fuel compassion and solidarity. My.Kali is a queer counterpublic that reflects how disidentifying with Jordanian citizenship is both a conscious mode of surviving without assimilating, and a nod to a hopeful futurity.

Enacting queer citizenship online, thus entails the reorientation of the formation of (queer) Jordanian identity and the self towards the online forum, though not wholly at the expense of the family and the state. Scholars have long argued that the primary site of identification, the forum in which the self is construed, and solidarity is practiced, is the Arab family (Jabiri 2016; Joseph 2005; Kandiyoti 1991), leading to both a disciplinary dimension to kinship and the need for states to intervene *in* that dynamic to ensure the loyalty of their citizens. Sophie Lewis has maintained that ‘inventive kinning’ has however also taken place ‘in every corner of the planet’ since the forced imposition of the institution of marriage on poor, indigenous and colonised peoples (2019, 162), citing a wealth of scholarship that has discussed the extent to which ‘racial, ethnic, and working-

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<sup>133</sup> This is reminiscent of Diane Otto’s argument that, emancipatory queer strategies do not necessitate a post-state world; rather, the primacy of national loyalty needs to be displaced and give way for queer ‘assemblages of human kinship’, which inherently undo by refusing to participate in natural reproductive ties (2018, 239).

class communities have maintained expansive notions of kinship that ‘supersede the genealogical grid’ (Freeman 2007, 303). However, legibility even in these expanded networks of kinship and solidarity will often depend on principles that queer(ed) bodies cannot, do not, or refuse to subscribe to. Additionally, there persists a risk in anthropological research focusing on the Middle East to reductively treat the family as the sole organising principle in society, and the only mirror for selves to form against. To that end, more recent scholarship on the formation of the self in Arab and Muslim-majority societies has found that the self evolves ‘actively and in creative ways’ also outside the family (Odgaard 2020; Sehlíkoglu 2018). This is indubitably, in part, due to the emergence of the internet as a space for making connections and locating like-mindedness. The queer Arab self, then, is likely to also be influenced by and find form in the digital (queer) cyberspace – and, indeed, on the queer counterpublic that My.Kali provides.

A final consideration might be made to the representation-impulse that My.Kali fosters in this digital sphere: does this, in turn, stabilise a queer Jordanian identity? I find that the enactment of queer citizenship online, which in the ideal (utopian) situation would eventually refigure Jordanian citizenship through the power of discourse, lines up with previous theorisations of Jordanian *national* identity. In his 2001 monograph, Joseph Massad concludes that Jordanian national identity is, in essence, a colonial effect – a product of colonial and postcolonial institutions (mainly the law and the military). The cultural features of this national identity, its national symbols, are invented and/or effected by these institutions. A national identity was thus crafted first in an anti-imperial frame, in reaction to the British mandate; only to be later replaced by the tension between ‘Jordanian-Jordanians’ and Jordanians of Palestinian origin,<sup>134</sup> following the two-week civil war of 1970.<sup>135</sup> Though a seminal contribution to the study of the often ignored kingdom, Massad’s analysis has been criticised for discrediting the creative ways in which Jordanians have (re)articulated their cultural and national identities. Writes Andrew Shryock, ‘Massad is committed to the idea that Jordanian identity is a kind of *ersatz* replacement culture devised by British colonial officers and then imposed on a subject population who unwittingly accepted it as the real thing’ (2006, 479). At the core of this debate remains the recognition that Jordanian national identity (like all national(ist) identities) is a construct and is performed culturally. The elasticity of the Jordanian national imaginary, the malleability of Jordanian identity, makes possible and likely their (re)formation in creative ways – in queer counterpublics, for example. Its elasticity might, in other

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<sup>134</sup> With this I refer to holders of Jordanian passports of Palestinian origin. Between 1948 and 1988 all Palestinian refugees living in the West bank and the East bank of the Jordan river were granted Jordanian nationality. Following the 1988 disengagement from the West Bank, many residents who continued to live there had their Jordanian passports turned into temporary ones, or had their nationality withdrawn. See: Shibliak (1996).

<sup>135</sup> For an overview of the (political effects of the) civil war, see Massad (2001, 240-450).

words, be re-oriented to create a more liveable citizenship for LGBT Jordanians, reflective of the every-changing, always self-reflective tendencies of a world-making project like My.Kali.

#### **4. Concluding Interventions: Queer citizenship, My.Kali, and the ‘why question’**

##### *4.1 Queer Citizenship*

Assessing My.Kali’s turbulent maturation in the Jordanian mediascape through the lens of moral panics, and close reading a selection of its published articles chosen for their representation of the grand themes accumulated in its archive, still leaves open several questions as regards the choice of citizenship as a site of intervention for My.Kali and, indeed, this thesis; and begs a return to the particularities of my theorisation of queer citizenship started in chapter 1. Especially the close reading above illustrates the often subtle ways in which Jordanian identity (and through these, claims to Jordanian citizenship) are claimed and communicated by My.Kali’s editorial board and its guest authors. But why use the language of citizenship in the first place? What are the theoretical and political implications of the utilisation of queer citizenship by My.Kali? And how are we to interpret My.Kali’s politics in light of global trajectories of queer/ness?

My.Kali is first and foremost a magazine that seeks to foster LGBTQ Arab voices and cultural production. However, it also maintains and writes into being a highly political engagement with the Jordanian public sphere – which Mahadeen has termed, pop activism (2021). Citizenship appears an apt site to queer in the context of a postcolonial Middle East for two main reasons. Firstly, claims to citizenship do not constitute abstract calls for belonging but tangible tools for survival in a context where patriotism is rewarded, and citizenship is a site of legitimation. Dismissing these as merely assimilationist would also disregard the ways in which inclusion into the systems of citizenship-as-rights and its correspondent affective dimension would necessitates a revaluation of citizenship itself. Secondly, in a postcolonial nation state whose physical borders were artificially drawn up, a serious intervention into citizenship further highlights the absurdity of the fiction of the nation state in the first place. That My.Kali markets itself as a pan-Arab publication that creates belonging online, aiming for the digital discourse to trickle down into the everyday, showcases how it operates beyond physical barriers to reshape the discursive and social limitations within Jordan. If postcolonial citizenship emerged through the imposition of restrictions (Sadiq 187), (My.Kali’s) reimagination of citizenship as a site for solidarity and inclusion speaks to a liberatory, and arguably anti-imperial impulse. Citizenship is at once a strategically beneficial starting point for its persistent hegemony on the politics (and material realities) of belonging, and an anti-imperial engagement that seeks to build a liveable Jordan as opposed to

fleeing it. A (queer) citizenship discourse still speaks the language of the state but renegotiates its place within the national discourse through an appraisal of the global, and the conscious choice to reform the former. My.Kali uncouples citizenship and patriotism from heterosexuality and virility with which it is inscribed in the constitution. Why decentre citizenship (or the law) when intervention in other discourses is not as productive? (Hunter 2019, 55; Lacey 2018).

On the level of this thesis, the answer to the first of these questions is rather straightforward: My.Kali utilises citizenship discourse,<sup>136</sup> and to dismiss that as merely a matter of false consciousness – due to its editors' and authors' ignorance of the theoretical implications thereof – would be to advance the rift between academic theorisation and activist intervention, asserting the hegemony of the former. It would serve us well not to assume superior knowledge on the part of individual scholars (often writing far away from the context that the platforms and activist groups they analyse are negotiating everyday), and, instead, dedicate our efforts to understanding the choice of strategies they employ, taking seriously their competence 'to name their own reality' (Atshan 2020, 200). The flipside to this starting point is, of course, the danger of reading too much into the activities of queer activist groups or webzines like My.Kali, by producing knowledge that fetishizes 'local' efforts as opposed to interrogating them. Put banally: nuance is important. As such, this thesis is concerned with the implications of the instrumentalization of citizenship discourse by a queer webzine in Jordan (namely, the very public re-imagining of Jordanian citizenship by busting open its contours through direct critique), and the shape these processes take in practice. The analysis sought to engage with the work My.Kali already *does*, reading it alongside a theoretical consideration of the different political motivations behind such a move. Entering the discussion through citizenship is, inevitably, an ethical decision.

Further, the dynamic tide within which Jordanian citizenship is negotiated deserves to be lingered on. The close reading performed in the previous section, as well as the collection of public statements and disclaimers that My.Kali has published through various moral panics over the past decade, reveal a constant and consistent occupation with the –presumed– dyad between assimilation to, on the one hand, Western models of sexual identity and the public expression thereof, and an Arab, Jordanian identity that necessitates either the veiling of queer orientations or, in the worst case scenario, the forced practice of a (good) Jordanian citizenship that is incompatible with it. More accurately, a tug-of-war between assimilation and repudiation emerges both at the level of (not) identifying with and adopting global(ised) (narratives of) sexual and

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<sup>136</sup> As has become evident from the close reading done above, the appeals to citizenship that abound in its archive are of the affective order; careful not to self-define as an activist group in its public pronouncements (see: 'Disclaimer'), the editorial team and its authors reference the cultural and felt grammars of belonging to make their claim to Jordanianness; complaining about traffic, controversy arising during a *sabha*.

gender identity, *and* at the dimension of Jordanian citizenship. The first of these relationships is used to legitimate the resolution of the second; the ‘West’ is rejected and Jordanianness (re)claimed, arguably to legitimate the choice for the latter. For example, I would argue that the claim to Jordanian citizenship through the discourse of empathetic and relational identity reflects one figuration that *is* consistently rejected among the webzine’s tentative dance between assimilation and resistance: neoliberal individualism. Discussed quite bluntly in some articles (AW Rahman 2018; Shadeddi 2018), My.Kali’s editorial board and its authors have consistently problematised the role the sexual self plays in Arab and Muslim contexts. Suad Joseph, as discussed in chapter 1, has argued that (gendered) selfhood is formed within the Arab family, through the rhythms of care and control (‘patriarchal connectivity’; 2005).<sup>137</sup> The self is relational and intimately tied to kin. This stands in contrast to a neoliberal European model that prioritises the individual over society; and where desires are linked to individual productivity rather than connectivity within groups.<sup>138</sup> Nonetheless, recent scholarship on the formation of selfhood and care in Arab and Muslim-majority societies has argued that the self does evolve ‘actively and in creative ways’ also outside the family (Odgaard 2020; Sehlíkoglu 2018). Queer selfhood is a becoming within different facets of relationality. My.Kali has become a space beyond the family, beyond the ‘single room’, where the (queer) self can flourish – a self that could upset the whole notion of a disciplinary Jordanian self. Nonetheless, My.Kali has also gone to great lengths *not* to dismiss the centrality of the family to the formation of the Jordanian self, and to the functioning of Jordanian society. The *Weddings & Marriages Issue* for example contains multiple articles assembling different perspectives on the relevance of marriage to LGBT Arabs and the strategies Jordanians had employed to both appease their parents and to live emotionally fulfilled lives (Barikah 2020; Shusha 2020). Whereas in its earlier content, same-sex marriage was consistently brought into focus,<sup>139</sup> this dimension of good citizenship has more recently been figured as a site of queer negotiation. This may be read as a strategic pre-empting of the accusation that My.Kali had a hand of corrupting ‘traditions’ and local ‘values’, which it and – the nonnormative citizen-subject – are commonly subjected to in the Jordanian mediascape. However, and importantly, it is also reflective of the in-between space in which My.Kali operates in its articulations of belonging and claim to citizenship, as well as its

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<sup>137</sup> This perspective is also evident in cultural products – even those presumably made for an Anglophone audience. For instance, the relation of the self to the family is a core theme in Saleem Haddad’s *Guaqa*. See quotation in introduction: the ‘family is the core of who we are as people. Without his family, an Arab is nothing.’” (2016, 147).

<sup>138</sup> Wendy Brown has described neoliberalism as a form of reason that ‘configures all aspects of existence in economic terms’ (2015, 17).

<sup>139</sup> In most of its published interviews in the period from 2009-2013 one of the concluding questions asked whether the interviewee supported marriage being made available to same-sex couples.

position as a supranational space for the formation of new connections, kinships, and solidarities – and, if not a new collectivism, then certainly a rejection of individualism.

My.Kali's model of resistance by engaging with Jordanian citizenship is queer to the extent that it navigates the viability of using the discourse of citizenship to claim a space for nonnormative sexual and gender expressions and figurations of kin in Jordan as *against* a global discourse thereof. What is queer, here (beyond the fact that citizenship is figured as performance rather than mere rights claims), is the negotiation itself, the constant critique, and the political orientation underlying this choice. This dynamic is manifested through disidentification.

This reading of queerness is thus also a repudiation of what Sabiha Allouche terms, 'outer-queer-(y)ing' (2020); the affected, 'forced and artificial subjugation of the fictive category of the Middle East to a queer analysis that is informed, shaped and delimited by a US experience' (30). Instead of 'privileg[ing] the theoretical scope of queer theory itself', it sought to investigate the specific context in which critical citizenship discourse arises and takes seriously how it is deployed. The 'indigenous theorization' argument holds that a 'crippling' Eurocentric lens can be avoided by relying on the work of (queer) scholars whose work constitutes a 'native' outlook on the objects of a study (Arondekar 2005). 'Local' truths/figurations/understandings have thus become the standard, decolonial answer to research projects plagued by and seeking liberation from the hegemony of Western modes of thinking/being/theorising. The indisputable counterargument to this rather straightforward solution is that such theorisations, especially when taken up again in Anglophone academia as exemplary, risk committing similar homogenisations and essentialisations as their predecessors. My.Kali's, and especially Musa Shadeedi's, insistence on finding 'local alternatives' to frames of resistance and identification that must be approached critically for their Western origins is clearly a practice hereof. However, it is not just absolutist tone such approaches take that should sound an alarm, but the overall claim to an 'authenticity' that can bear uncomfortable fruit. The urge to locate an untouched original, an honest and true 'local' figuration conjures up Orientalist images of discovery and the search for virginal materials with which to make original claims. I interpret My.Kali's approach to recognising the implication of its own formation as part of a global discourse of queer activism and cultural production as a careful queer resistance/survival strategy.

4.2. Queer *Citizenship*

Furthermore, this queer strategy appears to be manifested through a disidentification with Jordanian citizenship.<sup>140</sup> Muñoz's descriptive relies on a conceptualization of identity as a struggle and a fluid creation, lending the book to expound on a politics that 'imagines a reconstructed narrative of identity formation that locates the enacting self at precisely the point where discourses of essentialism and constructivism short-circuit' (6). The minoritarian politics that Muñoz describes through this lens read as a 'third mode of dealing with dominant ideology' (11); one that neither directly assimilates nor rejects it, but one that works 'on and against' it and seeks to change it from within. Disidentification is, in other words, a thoroughly queer (of colour) political praxis and mode of becoming/identifying. Moreover, E. Patrick Johnson suggests that we can suture the gaps left open between discourse and lived experience by Muñoz's conceptualization by focusing on performance – where performance is a 'strategy of survival' (2001, 13).<sup>141</sup>

Reading Muñoz and Johnson together provides an indispensable entry point to the individual politics practiced by My.Kali's editors, as embodied by the statements and disclaimers it has issued, as well as its guest authors' contributions. Jordanian citizenship is tackled head-on, its exclusions articulated, and its disciplinary boundaries critiqued. At the same time, the webzine insists on its Jordanianness: being an 'integral part of Jordanian society', LGBT Jordanians are *citizens* that have a 'right to claim their rights' (Abu Taha 2018). The webzine and its contents disidentify both with exclusivist nationalist discourse that restricts its access to Jordanian citizenship (literally by geo-blocking it), as well as a globalised construction of queerness and queer politics that cannot be dissociated from a universalising praxis. That is, disidentifying from Jordanian citizenship –as a way of queering it– also materializes as a rejection of liberal progress narratives that, in the global digital sphere, become associated with queer visibility. Entangled in this process is, of course, a second disidentification – with queerness and sexual identity. Here, the majoritarian politics that discipline bodies occur not in legislative system but (mainly) in the digital realm, in a queer cyberspace that understands Arab sexuality and gender expression only as repressive.<sup>142</sup> My.Kali thus becomes a regenerative, space-making project that interrogates Jordan

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<sup>140</sup> Disidentification with citizenship has been the subject of sociological and psychological research, where it indicates problematics in 'integration' figured as resistance to one's 'host country'. In my limited foray into the field, it seems that much of contemporary scholarship on the matter is concerned with Muslims 'adapting' to Western Europe. See for example: Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind and Solheim 2008; Maliepaard and Verkuyten 2017; Moulin-Stozek and Schirr 2017.

<sup>141</sup> Johnson reads together performance with *quare* theory, as an alternative to the increasingly streamlined politics of 'queer', which seeks to simultaneously critique stable identities and locate its class and racial knowledges (2001, 3). 'Quare studies is a theory of and for gays and lesbians of color' (2001, 3). I have engaged with the underlying motivations of Johnson's critique in my theoretical orientation; thesis presents a queer of colour critique.

<sup>142</sup> For a more in-depth reflection on the notion of queer cyberspaces see 'Future Outlooks' below.

by re-imagining citizenship, and permanently critiquing it. It is a call for a Jordan that could be, a Jordanianness that *should* be, formed in an interlinkage with global narratives of queerness and citizenship.

A postcolonial lens would perhaps critique the above for insinuating that the (re)formation strategies of My.Kali and its writers only emanate in reaction to a Western discourse of queerness. I, however, propose that we read its public confrontation with these charges as an acknowledgement of the underlying logic of coloniality that inform (Jordanian) citizenship's disciplining of gender and sexuality.<sup>143</sup> It is not a denial of Jordan(ians)' capacities to self-fashion a national imaginary/identity/culture, but a recognition of the hegemony of western sexual and gender epistemology that targeted acts of active citizenship (engaging in public discourse, claiming rights) seek to displace. Sexuality and gender are necessarily negotiated in relation to the global, and to the academic charge of sexual imperialism, as it is also against these that the Jordanian Constitution and the media discipline its citizens.

Dismissing citizenship as a site of queer intervention outright, then, would be to not take seriously the context in which this intervention takes place, where patriotism is rewarded, and citizenship is a site of legitimation. The latter does not necessitate a process of assimilation when the praxis of queering citizenship implies its complete rewriting. When claiming rights, be they political or social, and (re)claiming the (performance of) everyday, mundane acts of citizenship, one brings to the light citizenship's disciplinary character. Writing a Jordanian queerness into the digital sphere, in Arabic, is both a claim to 'legitimate' Jordanianness and a critique thereof. My claim is therefore that My.Kali both invokes and enacts queer citizenship.

Despite the potential for intervening in both queer (and) citizenship conceptually, and their evocation in a praxis of disidentification that seeks to break them open and create new possibilities within them, both queer theory and citizenship studies are indubitably steeped in a geopolitical context. They have travelled to the global South where, writes Larissa Pelúcio, 'it has been received and incorporated without a critique of imperialism' (2014). However, like bodies, theories travel and amass new meaning through these journeys. I interpret Gomes Pereira's claim that, 'queer theory in the global South can only imagine itself through the process of permanent decolonization' (2019, 405), to mean that queer theory's propensity to bring to light normativities through a 'broad' social critique that includes also race, class, and nationality,<sup>144</sup> would always also necessitate its interrogation also along the lines of imperialism.<sup>145</sup> Pelúcio, for one, is not critical of

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<sup>143</sup> This reads as a decolonial queer praxis, materialised through a discourse of queer(ing) citizenship. See below.

<sup>144</sup> Reference here is made to Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz (2005, 4).

<sup>145</sup> For perspectives on how/why queer theory enacts a settler subjectivity in its invocation of futurity and progress, see chapter 2 as well as Barker (2011) and Morgensen (2011).

the potential of ‘queer’, but of how it has been unsuccessfully and uncritically transplanted into the global South. Rather than reject queer theory and citizenship, then, the ways in which queerness and citizenship discourse have been taken up on My.Kali speaks to their breaking and ‘recuperat[ing]’ these theories (Gomes Pereira), thereby creating something new – something *local*.

I therefore understand My.Kali’s invocation of citizenship discourse in the light of a queer and an anti-imperial politics. Reading together Allouche (2020), Gomes Pereira (2019), and Alqaisyia (2020; 2018), My.Kali’s claims to Jordanian citizenship read as filtered through a decolonial queer lens. The webzine’s editors and authors insist on its and their own Jordanianness by (re)claiming performative acts of citizenship but hold on to a queer identification that would deny them the practice thereof. They distance themselves from the charge of Westernisation – My.Kali is not funded by the US government; it is not launching a conspiracy against Islam; and the unsubstantiated charges that have proliferated in the media to that extent prove to its editors the dire state of Jordanian journalism. Its authors disidentify from Jordanian citizenship in a bid to survive the literal and epistemic violence of its disciplinary regime that utilizes sex and gender as operative modi. My.Kali moreover, whether consciously or implicitly, understands that the queer, the abject body is constituted *in* the tension between East and West. Put less euphemistically, the queer body finds shape and meaning in the colonial difference. Gomes Pereira reminds us, ‘there is no way to separate abject bodies and dissident sexuality from geographic location, from language, from history, from culture’ (2019, 409), and the bodies My.Kali seeks to represent are constituted in a violent history shaped by colonial encounters, that have learned to articulate their nonnormativity in a language not their own. The radical potential that My.Kali holds appears most poignantly in articles and statements that have the harsh task of re-learning self-description in Arabic, and disidentification with Jordan take centre stage. The relationship between East and West ‘is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony’ (Said 1978, 5), and My.Kali finds meaning in the subversion of the dyad of the two.

#### 4.3 Future outlooks: is the (decolonised) future in cyberspaces queer?

So far, this project has insisted on the strategic disidentification from Jordanian citizenship that My.Kali as an entity and its contents have professed, reading the latter as a conscious means of queering citizenship as a queer survival strategy. As is the nature of a queer intervention, it is worth and necessary to also dwell on the political implications of such an approach. Is refusing to frame resistance beyond the boundaries of the nation-state not queer after all – according to whose definition of queerness?

Lee Edelman has, rather infamously, taken to locating the ‘burden’ and potential of the queerness lies in its opposition ‘to politics as the fantasy of realizing, in an always indefinite future, imaginary identities’, rather than in the articulation, ‘assertion or reification’ of an oppositional political identity (1998, 24). Edelman is arguing that a queer lens exposes the fiction of a politics, a reality, or indeed a future ‘that invests us as subjects’ (1998, 24). This is the ‘strategic value’ of queerness that makes clear that the political mobilisation of queerness cannot do with merely insisting on its subjects’ ‘right to enjoy on an equal footing the various prerogatives of the social order’ (29) – in our case, the privileges that good citizenship brings with it. Instead, it also requires and implies the explicit articulation, ‘in every public avowal of queer sexuality or identity’, that it wholly *rejects* this social order. In Edelman’s terms, ‘Fuck the social order’ (29). This seems to also be Amy L. Brandzel’s conceptual conviction in their reading of the impossibility of a queer citizenship. Their rejection of same-sex marriage discourse as little more than an assimilationist desire rests on their understanding of ‘queer’ as always requiring not just ‘a critique of citizenship, the nation-state, of normalization and heteronormativity’ (2005, 198), but a commitment to the obliteration of the production and promotion of all normativity in citizenship. The queer citizen is necessarily the anti-citizen since ‘it would refuse to participate in the differentiation of people’s, groups, or individuals; it would refuse citizenship altogether’ (2005, 198). In short, all normativity is violence (2016).

Essential here is to realise and acknowledge that to be able to ‘fuck’ the social order, to ‘refuse’ citizenship, is a privilege.<sup>146</sup> Citizenship as civil, political, economic and social rights, as well as the fact of group membership and the affect of belonging are indispensable to a liveable life – hence why queer movements employ its discourse. Brandzel holds that the nonnormative citizen-subjects that are already the ‘spectres’ and the products of the ‘boundary machinations of citizenship (Brandzel 2016, 2) by assimilating to the order of citizenship will simply create further nonnormative outlaws. My.Kali, however, does not insist on gaining access to the disciplinary foundations of citizenship like compulsory heteronormative reproduction and blind patriotism. Their public challenge to remain visible, to make legible and accepted nonnormative bodies and sexualities, rests on a critique of their disciplinary enforcer – on a legislative system and a sadistic media machine that make living beyond them impossible. Further, what is My.Kali’s claim to Jordanianness if not an appeal to rewriting the future that excludes the bodies of its writers? Like the entanglement of queer and decolonial approaches, My.Kali signals to the seemingly normative concepts it employs (citizenship within the bounds of the nation-state), moves away from them,

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<sup>146</sup> Brandzel briefly acknowledges this, saying that only those that can afford to refuse citizenship should do so (2005, 198).

and creates something entirely new. In My.Kali's model of the digital future, being Jordanian, practicing Jordanian citizenship, becomes a mode of queer self-expression. My.Kali is, in short, a queer cyberspace/counterpublic.

A final caveat to the hopeful tone generated above must be made as regards this process of becoming and look to the future that begins in the digital sphere – in a queer cyberspace. My discussion of My.Kali's politics and the potentials it offers for subject formation through disidentification with and the re-imagining of Jordanian citizenship has done little to question the liberatory potential of the digital sphere. The study of queer cyberspaces in the context of the Middle East has been sparse (Mahadeen 2020, 2015; Kuntsman and Al-Qasimi 2012). In the highly excited accounts that abound in the (overwhelmingly and unquestionably Euro-American) field, the queer cyberspace is figured as the ultimate site of queer liberation: it is where queer identity forms; coming out stories are swapped; and kin formations are extended (Alexander 2002). In their introduction to the JMEWS special issue, 'Queering the Middle East Cyberspace', Adi Kuntsman and Noor Al-Qasimi therefore ask: 'how can critical cyberqueer scholarship write about non-Western or non-white queerness, without reaffirming whiteness and the Eurocentre as an epistemic center, thus recreating Eurocentric, Orientalist, and colonial mappings of the world into liberal and backward, queer and heteronormative?'

The core aim of this thesis has been to reflect on the legal and (sensationalist) media production of good Jordanian citizens by locating the queer challenge to these through the language and form chosen by the latter. It has become abundantly clear that My.Kali is aware of and interacts with the globalisation of discourses of gender and sexuality, leaving open the possibility that the queer Jordanian citizen is inherently shaped in an interaction with the global. More than a critique, however, My.Kali allows for the creation of a space for queer Jordanian becoming, amounting to a survival strategy bolstered by disidentification with Jordanian citizenship, and given shape by the assumption that discursive deconstruction and the sheer force of representation will trickle down into the discursive everyday and into simple conversation. Taking into account how My.Kali engages with both Jordanian grammars of sexuality and the global debates that envelope them, does not lead to the (patronising) conclusion that the Jordanian self, the nation, or indeed sexuality and gender are incapable of forming outside an interaction with the West. Rather, it is an acknowledgement of the logic of coloniality underlying also queer cyberspaces, which would simplistically read the Jordanian Media Commission's response to My.Kali as proof of its backwardness. If to decolonise is to extricate oneself from the logic of coloniality and relocating systemic valorisation of meaning from Europe to the local, then My.Kali's role in queer cyberspace cannot but be read as anything but decolonial. It always

launches a challenge to both the disciplinary cis-and-heteronormativity of Jordanian governance as well as the uncritical adoption of Western queerness, liberation narratives, and identification processes.

## Conclusion

This project set out to achieve three things: map the development and theoretical utility of queer(ing) citizenship; outline the contours of Jordanian (sexual) citizenship and the sexual and gendered outlaws the Jordanian legal corpus creates; and study the reclamation of Jordanian citizenship by My.Kali as queer resistance and an act of world-making. With this incentive in mind, it first argued that queer citizenship is a viable theoretical excursion into the relationship between anglophone academia and the context it studies; that the limitations set to Jordanian citizenship root legitimate sexuality and desire entirely in the reproductive, heteronormative family by penalising behaviour that could threaten this ideal; and that queering citizenship through a consistent disidentification amounts to a queer survival strategy for queer Jordanians, making possible the enactment of queer resistance online. Moreover, this digital sphere becomes a space for establishing a Jordanian queer self beyond the family, *al usra*, as proscribed legally and reinforced through popular discourse.

In engaging with the potentialities of queer theorising in the Arab Middle East, the project also insisted on the utility of travelling concepts. ‘Queer’ transforms, mutates, and generates new meanings when it travels to Jordan. The appropriation of the concept – and the enactment of the critical reorientation it calls for – can inspire radical challenges to the restrictive figuration of Jordanian citizenship, rather than fortify a universalised queer identity. Thus, by dissecting and reclaiming Jordanian citizenship through the queer praxis of disidentification, queering citizenship appears as a strategy that seeks to make life liveable for queer-identifying Jordanians, whose bodies are tethered to the present, and who can ill afford to ‘reject citizenship altogether’ (Brandzel 2005, 194). Concurrently, My.Kali’s mode of queering Jordanian citizenship makes available the future from which abject bodies had previously been erased and denied. My.Kali and similar platforms create queer counterpublics online that act as a utopian orientation in the present, but whose ultimate aim is transformation in the future. In other words, rather than ‘a capitalist pipe dream’,<sup>147</sup> queer(ing) citizenship in Jordan is part and parcel of a strategic effort to influence popular discourse and make life more liveable.

The thesis’s preoccupation with citizenship and the creative ways in which it may be manipulated betrays my investment in the relationships between states and citizens, between *homeland* and the (queer) *self*, and how transitional discourses of gender and sexuality influence (dis)identification with either. The global negotiation of gender and sexuality in tandem with Jordanian citizenship is also significant in light of a growing Jordanian diaspora, given how much

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<sup>147</sup> This references a question I pose in the introduction, page 10.

the ‘abroad’ figures in the consciousness of queer Arab youth who have a habit of glamorising ‘the West’ (Kilani 2019). The analysis of My.Kali above indicates that it is simply not efficient for a queer politics in Jordan to work only towards the future, abandoning the generation of belonging within the nation state itself. This begs a slew of further questions: is the hopeful, queer future necessarily a post-state figuration? Would citizenship as a lens and orientation make sense also beyond the nation-state? Given how citizenship is steeped in a colonial history and the violent fragmentation of land in the imperial era, abandoning citizenship may well appear as the most decolonial ‘queer’ strategy. For the moment, however, the inalienability of citizenship in Jordan, mirrored by the inalienability of identitarian categories in the Euro-American context (Denike 2010),<sup>148</sup> reflects the malleability and adaptability of all theoretical concepts, and betrays the multiplicity of queer resistance and praxis, rather than insisting on their universalisation. It may very well be that ‘no concept is inherently critical’ (Fassin 2011, 157), but we would do well to recognise how these concepts attain a life of their own that is always informed by its geopolitical context. Like so, we can successfully avoid providing academic explanations that dismiss ‘local’ efforts to document queer life.

Thus, to bluntly address the core question of the project, *is* citizenship available (and useful) to be queered? In short, it depends. It certainly is in Jordan.

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<sup>148</sup> The possibility for a non-identitarian, intersectional politics is as discussion the thesis cannot explore. This statement is not meant to champion the view that a non-identitarian politics *is* impossible, but merely to reference the difficulties of imagining it – which, again, also similarly applies to citizenship.

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