
Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World

Joseph Massad

One of the more compelling issues to emerge out of the gay movement in the last two decades is the universalization of “gay rights.” This project has appropriated the prevailing U.S. discourse on human rights in order to launch itself on an international scale. Following in the footsteps of the white Western women’s movement, which had sought to universalize its issues through imposing its own colonial feminism on the women’s movements in the non-Western world—a situation that led to major schisms from the outset—the gay movement has adopted a similar missionary role. Organizations dominated by white Western males (the International Lesbian and Gay Association [ILGA] and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission [IGLHRC]) sprang up to defend the rights of “gays and lesbians” all over the world and to advocate on their behalf. ILGA, which was founded in 1978 at the height of the Carter administration’s human rights campaign against the Soviet Union and Third World enemies, asserts that one of its aims is to “create a platform for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered people internationally, in their quest for recognition, equality, and liberation, in particular through the world and regional confer-

Mervat Hatem has urged me to write this article for over ten years, while Neville Hoad has urged me to write it for seven. I thank them both for continuing to push me and hope that they are not disappointed with the outcome. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the Sawyer Seminar conference *Hatred: Confronting the Other*, held at the University of Chicago on 12 February 2000. I thank Elizabeth A. Povinelli for inviting me to participate.

ences.”¹ As for IGLHRC, which was founded in 1991, its mission is to “protect and advance the human rights of all people and communities subject to discrimination or abuse on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or HIV status.”² It is these missionary tasks, the discourse that produces them, and the organizations that represent them that constitute what I call the *Gay International*.

Like the major U.S.-based human rights groups (Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International) and many white Western feminist organizations, the Gay International has reserved a special place for the Muslim world in both its discourse and its advocacy. This orientalist impulse, borrowed from predominant representations of the Arab and Muslim worlds in the United States and Europe, continues to guide all branches of the human rights community. As a relative latecomer to this assimilationist project, the Gay International has had to catch up quickly. To do so, supporters of the Gay International’s missionary tasks have produced two kinds of literature on the Muslim world: an academic literature of historical, literary, and anthropological accounts, written mostly by white male European or American gay scholars, which purport to describe and explain “homosexuality” in the past and present of the Arab and Muslim worlds; and journalistic accounts of the lives of so-called gays and (much less so) lesbians in the contemporary Arab and Muslim worlds.³ The former seeks to unravel the mystery of Islam to a Western audience, whereas the latter aims to inform white gay sex-tourists about the region. The larger mission, as I describe below, is to liberate Arab and Muslim “gays and lesbians” from the oppression under which they allegedly live by transforming them from practitioners of same-sex contact into subjects who identify as homosexual and gay. The following remarks may be taken as typical. Lisa Power, co-secretary general of ILGA, states that “most Islamic cultures don’t take kindly to organized homosexuality, even though male homoeroticism is deep within their cultural roots! . . . most people are too nervous to organize, even in countries with a high level of homosexuality.”⁴ Robert

1. International Lesbian and Gay Association Constitution, sec. C, art. 2, clause i. Available on-line at www.ilga.org.

2. International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, “Our Mission.” Available on-line at www.iglhrc.org.

3. Bruce Dunne’s “Homosexuality in the Middle East: An Agenda for Historical Research,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 3/4 (1990): 55–82 is a notable exception to this poor scholarship. It is worth noting, however, that Dunne does not cite a single original Arabic source. Dunne’s anthropological impulse, moreover, gets the best of him in a later article cited below.

4. Quoted in Rex Wockner, “Homosexuality in the Arab and Moslem World,” in *Coming Out: An Anthology of International Gay and Lesbian Writings*, ed. Stephan Likosky (New York: Pantheon, 1992), 105. This article was reprinted in a number of U.S. gay and lesbian magazines including *Out-*

Bray, public information director for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and an officer of ILGA, understands that “cultural differences make the definition and the shading of homosexuality different among peoples. . . . But I see the real question as one of sexual freedom; and sexual freedom transcends cultures.” Describing his adventures in Morocco and southern Spain, Bray states that “at least one guy expressed a longing to just be gay and not have to live within the prescribed sexual behaviors, and he said that there were others like him.” Seemingly convinced by this one conversation, Bray declares: “I believe this longing is universal.”⁵

In contradistinction to the liberatory claims made by the Gay International in relation to what it posits as an always already homosexualized population, I argue that it is the discourse of the Gay International that both produces homosexuals, as well as gays and lesbians, where they do not exist, and represses same-sex desires and practices that refuse to be assimilated into its sexual epistemology.⁶ I show how this discourse assumes prediscursively that homosexuals, gays, and lesbians are universal categories that exist everywhere in the world, and based on this prediscursive axiom, the Gay International sets itself the mission of defending them by demanding that their rights as “homosexuals” be granted where they are denied and be respected where they are violated. In doing so, however, the Gay International produces an effect that is less than liberatory.

The Gay International, through its most well-known organization, ILGA, launched a new and aggressive universalization campaign in 1994, coinciding with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising. After ILGA achieved official NGO status at the United Nations in 1993 (which it later lost), its international activities intensified, including efforts to stop “the mass execution of homosexuals in Iran,” an unsubstantiated propagandistic claim that was also bandied about by an official of the U.S. State Department.⁷ Part of the commem-

lines, *BLK*, the *Weekly News* (Miami), and *Capital Gay* (London). It is notable that this “international” anthology relies upon a white gay American to contribute an article on gays in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

5. Wockner, “Homosexuality,” 116.

6. Because most of this literature deals with male homosexuality, my comments are likewise concerned primarily with that issue.

7. Mark Unger, “Going Global, The Internationalization of the Gay and Lesbian Community,” *Metrosource: The Gay Guide to the Metropolitan Area*, summer 1994, 49. See Wockner, “Homosexuality,” 107–111 for evidence of the Gay International’s collaboration with the U.S. State Department to malign the Iranian government. Citing a U.S. journalist and a U.S. State Department official who investigated the case, Wockner claims that there were mass executions of homosexuals in Iran.

orations of Stonewall was ILGA's convening of its sixteenth annual World Conference, 23 June to 4 July 1994 in New York. Whereas ILGA boasted delegates from Western Europe, East Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the United States, it "was working hard to bring activists from Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean."⁸ The commemorations included the "International March on the United Nations to Affirm the Human Rights of Lesbian and Gay People," which called for, among other things, the proclamation of an "International Year of the Lesbian and Gay People (possibly 1999)," and the application of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights to "lesbian, gay, bisexual, drag and transgender people."⁹ This aggressive campaign at the United Nations has continued throughout the 1990s into the present.

Rex Wockner, the author of an acutely othering article on "gays and lesbians" in the Arab world and Iran, which was reprinted in a large number of gay publications in the United States and Britain, appears baffled by Arab and Iranian men who practice both "insertive" same-sex and different-sex contact and refuse the Western identification of gayness: "Is this hypocritical? Or a different world?" he marvels. "Are these 'straight' men really 'gays' who are overdue for liberation? Or are humans by nature bisexual, with Arab and Moslem men better tuned into reality than Westerners? Probably all the above."¹⁰ It is precisely this perceived instability in the desires of Arab and Muslim men that the Gay International seeks to stabilize, as its polymorphousness confounds gay (and straight) sexual epistemology. As I show below, the assumptions underlying the mission of the Gay International demand that these resistant "Oriental" desires, which exist, according to Wockner, in "oppressive—and in some cases murderous—homelands," be re-*oriented* to and subjected by the "more enlightened" Occident.¹¹ This essay surveys the literature of the Gay International with an eye to the politics of representation it enacts and its stated project of "defending gays and lesbians." Although I look at different kinds of literature—academic studies, journalistic accounts, and human rights and tourism publications—which are governed by different professional demands, political configurations, markets, and audi-

Although the official's investigation produced no documentary evidence, the official asserts that the allegation of mass executions was "probably true"(108).

8. Unger, "Going Global," 50. It should be noted that it is not clear whether these delegates were indeed residents of the countries they represented or U.S.-based diaspora members of these regions.

9. See the list of "The Demands of Stonewall 25" in *Metrosource: The Gay Guide to the Metropolitan Area*, summer 1994, 46–47.

10. Wockner, "Homosexuality," 115.

11. Wockner, "Homosexuality," 107, 115.

ences, I do not seek to flatten them by erasing these differences but rather to demonstrate how, despite these manifest differences, a certain ontology and epistemology are taken as axiomatic by *all* of them.

Representing Arab and Muslim Desires

Western gay interest in and representations of sexuality in the Arab and Muslim worlds coincided with the emergence of Western gay scholarship on sexuality.¹² It was John Boswell who inaugurated a debate on the Muslim world in which Western white gay scholars are still engaged. Boswell's romantic and unsupported assertion that "most Muslim societies have treated homosexuality with indifference, if not admiration" was in fact a familiar claim: Christian portrayals of the Muslim world as immoral and sexually licentious have been around for centuries.¹³ Indeed, as Jeffrey Weeks informs us, "many Western gays, for a long time now, have traveled hopefully to the Muslim world and expected to find sexual paradise."¹⁴ He explains, however, that "reality is more complex" (x). Drawing upon the findings of a collection of articles edited by Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer, Weeks asserts that "the sexual privileges allowed to men [in the Muslim world] are largely at the expense of women" and that "those adult men who do not fit readily into prevailing notions of true manhood . . . are often looked down upon and despised" (x). Weeks views the present Muslim world as undergoing transformation and concludes that there are two possible outcomes of this change: "Only time will tell whether that culture will approximate more and more to the secularised Western model, or come increasingly under the sway of a new religious militancy. What can be said with some assurance is that it is unlikely to stay the same" (xi). Weeks reflexively adopts the Western model as the only possible—and universally applicable—liberatory telos.¹⁵

12. Although homoerotic and sexual representations of Arab men by Western male writers precede this period (examples include William S. Burroughs, Paul Bowles, T. E. Lawrence, André Gide, Roland Barthes, and Jean Genet), these neither constituted a genre nor precipitated a full-fledged discourse among Western gay men about Arab male sexual desires. They were rather offshoots of standard orientalist representation of the Arab world. For a good survey of some of these writings, see Joseph Boone, "Vacation Cruises; or The Homoerotics of Orientalism," *PMLA* 110 (1995): 89–107.

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

14. Jeffrey Weeks, foreword to *Sexuality and Eroticism among Males in Moslem Societies*, ed. Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1992), x.

15. Michael Warner, one of the major queer theorists of the day, is attentive to the issue of the internationalization of white U.S. sexual politics as far as "theoretical languages" are concerned but

Boswell's romantic descriptions are taken up by Schmitt, who challenges both Boswell's research and conclusions.¹⁶ Contra Boswell's essentialist claims of the timelessness of the categories of homosexual and gay, Schmitt asserts that in the Muslim world "male-male sexuality plays an important role. But in these societies there are no 'homosexuals'—there is no word for homosexuality—the concept is completely unfamiliar. There are no heterosexuals either." Schmitt, generally a more nuanced writer than Boswell, makes the essentialist claim that the absence of these categories in the Muslim world is a phenomenon that remains constant over time. Although Boswell was careful to restrict his pronouncements about Muslim societies to the classical period of Islam—the seventh through fourteenth centuries—recent scholars, including Schmitt, tend to extend whatever judgment they have to the whole of Arab Muslim history (this is tantamount to using studies of the European medieval period to generalize about all of Western history). Schmitt, like orientalist scholars who use the seventh-century Qur'an to study Muslims of the twentieth century, insists without any scholarly evidence that "because the behavior of Muslims today can be seen as modification of older behavioral patterns, the study of male-male sexuality in Muslim society should start from the old texts—although most of these reflect the viewpoint of the middle class only. Study of modern texts, conversation, and encounters with them and observations of Arabs, Iranians, Turks help us to understand not only the modern behavior, but the old texts as well."¹⁷ Schmitt's ahistoricism is compounded by the limitations of the audience he imagines. Note how the "us" in his text refers only to Westerners—gay and non-gay—but never to the Muslim objects of observation. Indeed, Schmitt and Sofer's book, which is a collection of mostly orientalist if not outright racist views, is aimed at not only Western scholars in a variety of disciplines but also "anybody in contact with Arabs, Turks, or Persians—be it a tourist in Moslem countries, a social worker 'in charge' of immigrants, or just as a friend of an immigrant." Anybody, that is,

does not question the internationalization of the epistemologies producing such languages: "As gay activists from non-Western contexts become more and more involved in setting political agendas, and as the rights discourse of internationalism is extended to more and more cultural contexts, Anglo-American queer theorists will have to be more alert to the globalizing—and localizing—tendencies of our theoretical languages" (Michael Warner, ed., *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993], xii).

16. See Arno Schmitt, "A Critique of John Boswell's Writings on Muslim Gays," in Schmitt and Sofer, *Sexuality*, 169–78.

17. Arno Schmitt, "Different Approaches to Male-Male Sexuality/Eroticism from Morocco to Uzbekistan," in Schmitt and Sofer, *Sexuality*, 5, 20.

who is *not* an Arab, a Turk, or a Persian.¹⁸ Not only is the contributor who writes about Iran *not Iranian*, he even makes a point of highlighting his disassociation with the country, where he lived temporarily. He identifies himself as “a free-lance writer now living in New York (and never again in Tehran).”¹⁹ The orientalist method deployed in this book is one where Arabs and Muslims can only be objects of European scholarship and never its subjects or audience (the inclusion of native informants notwithstanding). Still the Schmitt and Sofer volume has impressed the establishment of the Gay International so much that ILGA relies on it as a corrective to its own research.²⁰ An example of the research conducted by ILGA is its entry on Egypt in the *Second ILGA Pink Book*, where the authors inform us that “transvestite dancers, ‘Khawal’s’ [*sic*], who dance at feasts are very popular.” ILGA’s researchers seem to confuse the nineteenth-century phenomenon of the *khawal* with the present.²¹ Once again, time is not part of the analysis when the topic is the Arab and Muslim worlds.

Even careful scholars of Islam and those who seek to challenge stereotypes of Islam and Arabs commit errors of ahistoricism when the topic is Muslim Arab sexual culture. Seeking to explain a puzzling change in Arab sexual categories after the ninth century, Everett Rowson draws upon Arabic texts written in the eleventh century to conclude that these texts’ “concepts can be taken as broadly representative of Middle Eastern societies from the ninth century to the present.”²² Edward Lacey insists that “Islam . . . has always in practice been, and still is (despite the present-day activities of certain bloodthirsty heretics who do not even deserve to be called Muslims), far more acceptant and tolerant of homosexuality, far more receptive, indulgent and permissive toward it . . . than either of

18. Schmitt and Sofer, *Sexuality*, xiv.

19. Schmitt and Sofer, *Sexuality*, 194. The author’s name is David Reed.

20. Whereas ILGA’s *Pink Book*, for example, states without explanation that Jordan has laws criminalizing homosexuality, ILGA’s Web site corrects the mistake by referring to Schmitt and Sofer, who write in their book that “the Penal Code of 1951 makes no distinction between sexual intercourse by persons of the same sex or persons of different sexes.” Schmitt and Sofer, *Sexuality*, cited on the ILGA Web site; see www.ilga.org/information/legal_survey/middle%20east/jordan.htm. Indeed, this is symptomatic of the shoddy and unprofessional “research” carried out by ILGA. For the *Pink Book*, see Aart Hendriks, Rob Tielman, and Evert van der Veen, *The Third Pink Book: A Global View of Lesbian and Gay Liberation and Oppression* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1993), 297.

21. *Second ILGA Pink Book/International Lesbian and Gay Association* (Utrecht: Interfacultaire Werkgroep Homostudies, Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1988), 189.

22. Everett K. Rowson, “The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Arabic Vice Lists,” in *Body Guard: Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 72–73.

the two other great monotheistic religions of the Western world.”²³ For Lacey, as for Boswell, Schmitt, and Rowson, an ahistoricism is embedded in the heart of their arguments. Using medieval Arabic texts, Lacey affirms what he calls

the constants of human nature, the universal, unvarying qualities of temperament, the unchanged, unchangeable, undying sexual appetites and weaknesses that unite human beings throughout all ages and across all gulfs of religious, cultural, and linguistic difference. . . . How edifying—and humbling—to realize, for example, that the popular belief that the size of a man’s penis may be gauged by the size of his nose was as widespread in those remote times as it is today . . . or that most queens, in the final analysis, preferred, then as now, a thick cock, whatever its length, to a thin one.²⁴

Contra Schmitt, As’ad AbuKhalil, a Lebanese political scientist who lives and teaches in the United States, affirms that “homosexual” identities and what he calls “pure homosexuals” have existed in Arab/Islamic civilization.²⁵ AbuKhalil confidently asserts that the “idea that there were no self-declared lesbians (*suhaqiyyat*) or gay men is false” (33). His evidence consists of one line that he mistranslates from the famed physician al-Razi as cited by al-Tifashi. While discussing hermaphroditism (*al-khinath*), which, according to al-Razi, results from the equality in strength of male and female sperm (wherein if the male sperm is stronger, a boy results; if the female sperm is stronger, a girl results; and in the case of equal-strength sperm, the result is a hermaphrodite), al-Razi also speaks of less extreme outcomes with cases where “you would find masculinized women (*nisa’ mudhakkarat*) as you would find feminized men (*rijal mu’annathin*) so much that some of these masculinized women either menstruate less or do not menstruate at all, and some of whom might grow beards, as I have seen weak beards and mustaches on many women. . . .”²⁶ AbuKhalil mistranslates the first part of this line as “You might find males as women and females as men” (33) and neglects to include the remainder of the line.

23. Edward A. Lacey, “English Translator’s Introduction,” in Ahmad ibn Yusuf al-Tifashi, *The Delight of Hearts, or, What You Will Not Find in Any Book* (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1988),

31. Lacey translated only the five chapters of the book that deal with “homosexual” anecdotes. The chapters were translated from a French translation and not from the Arabic original.

24. Lacey, “English Translator’s Introduction,” 30–31.

25. As’ad AbuKhalil, “A Note on the Study of Homosexuality in the Arab/Islamic Civilization,” *Arab Studies Journal* 1, no. 2 (1993): 32–34, 48.

26. Shihab al-Din Ahmad al-Tifashi, *Nuzhat al-albab fima la yuwjad fi kitab* [A promenade of the hearts in what does not exist in a book] (London: Riyad al-Rayyis, 1992), 303.

Throughout his account, AbuKhalil refers to “homosexuals,” “gays,” “heterosexuals,” and “homophobia” as transhistorical identities and phenomena and anachronistically identifies people and practices with them. For example, he cites medieval Arabic books that “contain collections of poetry and anecdotes by and about gay men and women” (33). Unlike the ahistoricists, however, AbuKhalil believes that changes *have* occurred in the Arab world, but they do not concern identities, which he sees as transhistorically present, but rather “homophobia,” which he believes is historically contingent: “The advent of westernization in the Middle East brought with it various elements of western ideologies of hostility, like . . . homophobia. This is not to say that there were not anti-homosexual . . . elements in Arab/Islamic history, but these elements never constituted an ideology of hostility as such” (34). Indeed AbuKhalil’s misreading of the evidence extends to the European scene, which he mentions for contrast, arriving at unsubstantiated conclusions: “The professed homosexual identity among Arabs allowed homosexuals historically a degree of tolerance that was denied for centuries to homosexuals in the West. When homosexuals were hunted down as criminals in much of medieval Europe, homosexuals were rulers and ministers in Islamic countries” (33). This identitarian essentialism characterizes AbuKhalil’s entire approach.

Bruce Dunne participates in this academic discourse with his essay “Power and Sexuality in the Middle East.”²⁷ He asserts that “sexual relations in Middle Eastern societies have historically articulated social hierarchies, that is, dominant and subordinate social positions: adult men on top; women, boys and slaves below” (8). Presumably, in non-Middle Eastern societies such hierarchies did not “historically” exist except in the celebrated cases of “Greek and late Roman antiquity,” (9) but certainly not in the medieval, let alone the modern, “West.” The “Middle Eastern” case is contrasted with the West; according to Dunne, the “distinction made by modern Western ‘sexuality’ between sexual and gender identity, that is, between *kinds* of sexual predilections and *degrees* of masculinity and femininity, has until recently, had little resonance in the Middle East” (8).²⁸ This

27. Bruce Dunne, “Power and Sexuality in the Middle East,” *Middle East Report* 28, no. 1 (1998): 8–11, 37.

28. A note on the designation “Middle East”: The term *Middle East* is a problematic one due to a number of reasons, not least among them is its imperial pedigree, which locates the area in relation to Europe. Other problems relate to the fact that the Muslim world extends beyond the “Middle East” into Asia and Africa and that the “Middle East” includes non-Arabs and non-Muslims (e.g., residents of the European settler colony of Israel and Armenia). It is not clear if what Dunne and others describe as “Middle Eastern” applies to all these people or not.

judgment is further illustrated by quotes from the two Egyptian native informants whom Dunne cites. The conclusion is inescapable: “Western notions of sexuality offer little insight into our contemporary young Egyptian’s apparent understanding that sexual behavior conforms to a particular concept of gender” (9). Dunne’s approach is to demonstrate that in “Middle Eastern” society, *unlike* Western society, non-“egalitarian sexual relations” predominate and sexuality is seen as gender determined. For this reason, he says, citing IGLHRC, “many homosexuals in Middle Eastern countries have sought asylum in the West as refugees from official persecution” (11). Dunne’s work exemplifies a type of anthropology that fails to problematize its own mythical idealized self, that continues to view the other as all that the self does not contain or condone, namely, nonegalitarian sexual relations, the oppressive rule of men, gender-based sexuality, patriarchy, and so forth. An anthropology that cannot abandon the mythological West as a reference point will continue to use it as the organizing principle for all of its arguments.

A more recent addition to this growing body of literature is Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe’s *Islamic Homosexualities*, a title indicative of their limited knowledge of Muslim societies: as *Islamic* is an adjective referring to the religion Islam while *Muslim* refers to people who adhere to it, it is unclear how Islam, the religion, can have a homosexuality let alone homosexualities.²⁹ Murray rejects Schmitt’s claim that Arabs have no conceptions of homosexual persons because (according to Schmitt) “Arabic synonyms for ‘to fuck’ have no form of reciprocity.”³⁰ Murray writes: “I do not know of such a verb in English or any other language. To fuck and be fucked requires more than two persons, or sequential acts, or use of a dildo: human anatomy precludes A’s penis being in B’s anus while B’s penis is in A’s.”³¹ In fact, contra Murray and Schmitt, modern Arabic has the verb *tanayaka*, which does indicate reciprocity: to say that two people *yatanayakan* is to say that they are fucking each other.³² The language-based errors and mistakes in both Schmitt’s and Roscoe and Murray’s books are too numerous to list here. Suffice it to say that this is the ground on which the fight to represent the so-

29. *Islamic* corresponds to *Judaic* as *Muslim* corresponds to *Jewish* or *Jew*.

30. Schmitt, “Different Approaches,” 10.

31. Stephen O. Murray, “The Will Not to Know: Islamic Accommodations of Male Homosexuality,” in Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, eds., *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 33.

32. Historically, the verb *tanayaka* referred to the eyelids closing on each other, literally fucking each other, as in *tanayakat al-ajfan*, or to indicate that people have been overcome with drowsiness as in *tanayaka al-qawm*. See Aba al-Fadl Jamal al-Din Muhammad Bin Mukarram Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-‘Arab* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1990), 10: 502.

called real Arab or Muslim position on male-male sexuality is being staged. Moreover, Roscoe and Murray—like so many others discussed here—are not terribly concerned with historical specificity. After a range of quotes from sources or stories dating back to the classical period of Muslim civilization and to contemporary oral reports by Arab native informants, including one “Omar, a cosmopolitan Saudi studying in the United States,” Murray concludes that “with females segregated and tightly controlled, young and/or effeminate males available for sexual penetration are tacitly accepted—and very carefully ignored in Muslim societies, past and present.”³³ Indeed, time in the context of the Arab world and Islam is not an agent of change but rather the proof of its lack.

Incitement to Discourse

The advent of colonialism in the Arab and Muslim worlds, its sponsorship of what came to be known as “modernization” projects, as well as the proliferation and hegemony of Western cultural products have indeed had their effects. Basim Musallam has shown how such contact has influenced attitudes toward contraception and abortion: at the beginning of the nineteenth century, most schools of Islamic jurisprudence—previously supportive of women’s rights to birth control and abortion—adopted stances on these issues that were more in line with the Christian Western position (both Catholic and Protestant).³⁴ Indeed as Western cultural encroachment continued, its hegemonic impact was also felt at the level of language. For example, the Arabic word for sex, *jins*, appeared sometime in the early twentieth century carrying with it not only its new meanings of *biological sex* and *national origin* but also its old meanings of *type* and *kind* and *ethnolinguistic origin*, among others. The word in the sense of *type* and *kind* has existed in Arabic since time immemorial and is derived from the Greek *genus*. As late as 1870, its connotation of *sex* had not yet come into usage.³⁵ An unspecific word for sexuality, *jinsiyyah*—which also means *nationality* and *citizenship*—was coined in the 1950s by translators of the works of Freud (such as Mustafa Safwan, a

33. Murray, “The Will,” 42.

34. Basim Musallam, *Sex and Society in Islam: Birth Control before the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

35. Butrus al-Bustani, *Muḥit al-Muḥit: Qamus mutawwal lil-lughah al-ʿArabiyyah* (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnan Nashirun, 1987), 129. Al-Bustani’s dictionary dates from 1870, at which time the word *jins* had still not acquired the meaning of *sex*. For medieval dictionaries that identify *jins* as *genus*, see Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-ʿArab*, 6: 43, and Majd al-Din Muhammad ibn Yaʿqub al-Fayruzaʿbadi, *al-Qamus al-muḥit* (Beirut: Dar Ihya’ al-Turath al-ʿArabi, 1997), 1: 738.

major psychoanalytic scholar based in France, and Jurj Tarabishi, the most prominent Arab literary critic writing in Arabic today).³⁶ More recently Muta' al-Safadi, translator of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, has introduced the more specific term, *jinsaniyyah*.³⁷ This new term, however, is understood by only a few, even among the literati. Words for homo- or heterosexuality were also invented recently as direct translations of the Latin original: *mithliyyah* (sameness) in reference to homosexuality, and *ghayriyyah* (differentness) in reference to heterosexuality. Arab translators of psychology books³⁸ as well as Arab behavioral psychologists adopted the European expression *sexual deviance* in the mid-1950s, translating it literally as *al-shudhudh al-jinsi*, a coinage commonly used in the media and in polite company to refer to the Western concept of homosexuality.³⁹

Although the advent of colonialism and Western capital in the Arab world has transformed most aspects of daily life, efforts to impose a European heterosexual regime on Arab men have succeeded among only the upper classes and the increasingly Westernized middle classes. It is among members of these wealthier segments of society that the Gay International has found native informants.⁴⁰

36. See, for example, Mustafa Safwan, trans., *Tafsir al-ahlam* [The Interpretation of Dreams], by Sigmund Freud (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif bi Misr, 1969; originally published in 1958), 181; Jurj Tarabishi, trans., *Thalathat mabahith fi nazariyyat al-jins* [Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality], by Sigmund Freud (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'ah, 1983).

37. See Muta' al-Safadi, trans., *Iradat al-ma'rifah, al-juz 'al-awwal min tarikh al-jinsaniyya* [The Will to Know, Volume 1: The History of Sexuality], by Michel Foucault (Beirut: Markaz al-Inma' al-Qawmi, 1990).

38. A notable exception can be found in translations of Freud, in which the term *mithliyyah* was introduced as the translation for *homosexuality*. See, e.g., Mustafa Safwan, *Tafsir al-ahlam*, 182, 301, 337, 390, 391, 396, and 400.

39. See, for example, the biologically essentialist and pathologizing account of homosexuality provided by Nawal al-Sa'dawi in a chapter titled "al-Rajul wa al-shudhudh al-jinsi" [Men and sexual deviance] in her *al-Rajul wa al-jins* [Man and sex] (Beirut: Al-Mu'assassa al-'Arabiyya lil-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 1986; originally published in 1977). As'ad AbuKhalil seems to think that the use of the term *shudhudh jinsi* in the Arab press constitutes oppression of homosexuals in the Arab world today. See his "New Arab Ideology? The Rejuvenation of Arab Nationalism," *Middle East Journal* 46 (1992): 35 and 35 n. 52, where such use is the only evidence provided by AbuKhalil to support the charge of antihomosexual oppression.

40. One such example is the short essay written by an upper-class, educated Jordanian lesbian for a book compiled by IGLHRC. The author uses a silly and wrongly transliterated and orientalist pseudonym "Akhadar Assfar." Properly transliterated, the pseudonym would read Akhdar Asfar (Green Yellow), words that are not used as names in Arabic. See Akhdar Assfar, "Jordan," in *Unspoken Rules: Sexual Orientation and Women's Human Rights*, ed. Rachel Rosenbloom (New York: Cassell, 1996), 103–4. Although the author is careful to say that her statement "was written to reflect my personal, individual perspective and not to speak on behalf of other lesbians in Jordan" (103), she ends her essay by affirming that "lesbians in Jordan are without a mention, without recognition, very marginalized . . . YET WE EXIST" (104). A Tunisian native informant, who identifies himself as a "liberal intellectual" living in England, provides information to Françoise Gollain in her "Bisexuality in

Although members of these classes who engage in same-sex relations have more recently adopted a Western identity (as part of a more general, classwide adoption of everything Western), they remain a minuscule minority among those men who engage in same-sex relations and who do not identify as “gay” or express a need for gay politics. (The literature of the Gay International points to examples of same-sex contact as proof of cross-cultural, cross-class gay identity, but in reality there is no evidence of gay movements anywhere in the Arab world or even of gay group identity outside of the small groups of men in metropolitan areas such as Cairo and Beirut.)

It is this minority and its diaspora members who staff groups such as the U.S.-based Gay and Lesbian Arabic [*sic*] Society (GLAS), founded in 1989 by a Palestinian in Washington, D.C. Indeed, as members of the Gay International, this minority is one of the main poles of the campaign to incite discourse on homosexuality in the Arab world. GLAS defines itself as “a networking organization for Gays and Lesbians of Arab descent or those living in Arab countries. We aim to promote positive images of Gays and Lesbians in Arab communities worldwide. We also provide a support network for our members while fighting for our human rights wherever they are oppressed. We are part of the global Gay and Lesbian movement seeking an end to injustice and discrimination based on sexual orientation.”⁴¹ GLAS’s newsletter *Ahbab* declares that “since we started this site, we have witnessed the development of a global family of Gay/Lesbian Arabs and friends.”⁴² According to the founder of GLAS and its current outreach director, Ramzi Zakharia, “since the concept of same-sex relations does not exist in the Arab world, being ‘Gay’ is *still* considered to be sexual behavior. . . . Just because you sleep with a member of the same sex does not mean that you are Gay . . . it means that you are engaging in homosexual activity. Once a relationship develops beyond sex (i.e., love) this is when the term gay applies” (emphasis added).⁴³ Indeed for Zakharia, the issue of time is crucial. In the Arab world,

the Arab World: Interview with Muhammad,” in *Bisexual Horizons, Politics, Histories, Lives*, ed. Sharon Rose and Chris Stevens and others (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996), 58–61. See the interview conducted by the two gay editors (one is an Israeli Jew and the other an American Jew) with an upper-middle-class Palestinian Israeli man named Walid who identifies as gay in Amir Sumaka’i Fink and Jacob Press, eds., *Independence Park: The Lives of Gay Men in Israel* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 197–219.

41. See GLAS’s Web site at www.glas.org.

42. See the *Ahbab* Web site at www.glas.org/ahbab/home.htm.

43. Nur Sati, “Equivocal Lifestyles,” *Arabia* (Web publication available on-line at www.arabia.com) 30 July 1998. Posted on the *Ahbab* Web site, www.glas.org/ahbab/Articles/arabia1.html.

being gay is “still” considered sexual behavior. The implicit statement is that the Arab world has not yet caught up with the liberatory Western model of gayness—and this is the transformation that GLAS seeks to expedite. GLAS’s Western sexual epistemology is clearest in its claim to represent those Arab men who practice same-sex contact but do not identify as gay or seek to be involved in gay politics through GLAS or any other organization.⁴⁴

The Gay International and this small minority of Arab same-sex practitioners who adopt its epistemology have embarked on a project that can best be described as *incitement to discourse*.⁴⁵ As same-sex contact between men has not been a topic of government or journalistic discourse in the Arab world of the last two centuries, the Gay International’s campaign since the early 1980s to universalize itself has incited such discourse. The fact that the incited discourse is characterized by negativity toward the mission of the Gay International is immaterial. By inciting discourse on homosexual and gay and lesbian rights and identities, the very ontology of gayness is instituted in a discourse that could have only two reactions to the claims of universal gayness: support them or oppose them without ever questioning their epistemological underpinnings. Indeed it is exactly these reactions that anchor and strengthen and drive the Gay International’s universal agenda. In a world where no one questions the identification of gayness, gay epistemology and ontology can institute themselves safely. The Gay International’s fight is therefore not an epistemological one but rather a simple political struggle where the world is divided between the supporters and opponents of gay rights.

The Gay International is aided by two other phenomena accompanying its infiltration into the international public sphere: the spread of AIDS on an international scale, with the Western homophobic identification of it as the “gay” disease, and the rise of Islamism in the Arab and Muslim worlds, with its stricter

44. In an article discussing the gay-bashing of a Pakistani living in Chicago, an otherwise careful observer, Alexander Cockburn (who argues persuasively against hate crimes legislation as a misguided strategy that does not deal with the causes of hate crimes or with the legal inequalities of gays and lesbians in U.S. society) urges the U.S.-based Al-Fatiha Foundation, which he identifies as “an international gay Muslim organization,” not to “wast[e] time on hate-crimes issues in Chicago when their Muslim comrades round the world are confronted by forces of intolerance even grimmer than [Chicago] Mayor Daley’s Blue Knights. . . . Seven Islamic nations prescribe the death penalty for homosexuality” (Cockburn, “Beat the Devil,” *The Nation*, 21 May 2001, 10). When Al-Fatiha turned its attention to the people who *actually* created it, Cockburn urges the organization to *represent* people who never sought its creation, much less its “defense” of their rights.

45. I borrow the notion of incitement to discourse from Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 17–35.

sexual mores. The Gay International has succeeded in inciting discourse by attracting antigay Islamist and nationalist reactions to its efforts.⁴⁶

While the premodern West attacked the Muslim world's alleged sexual licentiousness, the modern West attacks its alleged *repression* of sexual freedoms. Representations of the Arab world in the discourse of the Gay International, which includes the popular publication *Spartacus*, an "International Gay Guide," range from the horrific to the splendid, the latter on account of the availability of Arab men willing to engage in insertive anal intercourse with Western (read white) gay men. In the context of an Arab anticolonial nationalism or the more recent Islamism seeking Western technological modernization while preserving its version of cultural or religious authenticity, the Gay International is *correctly* perceived as part of Western encroachment on Arab and Muslim cultures. The fact that the Gay International relies on the same organizations (e.g., the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Congress, U.S.-based human rights organizations, the American media), practices, and discourse that advance U.S. imperial interests is certainly a cause for suspicion. This is an issue for not only the Arab world but also many Muslim countries as well as other national and cultural contexts outside of Europe and North America.⁴⁷ Faisal Alam, the Pakistani American founder of the Al-Fatiha Foundation, a new U.S.-based organization for gay and lesbian Muslims, tells his Western audience that Islam is "200 years behind Christianity in terms of progress on gay issues."⁴⁸ Alam, not surprisingly (like Robert Bray, who was quoted above), is a field associate with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in Washington, D.C.

The representation of the Muslim world as a homosexual paradise has led some European gay men to convert to Islam. Khalid Duran, a Moroccan social scientist, reports on such occurrences in Britain and Germany: "Such converts

46. For one of the earlier and measured Islamist responses to Western scholarship on homosexuality in Arabic, see Muhammad Jalal Kishk's engagement with the work of John Boswell in his *Khawatir Muslim fi al-mas'alah al-jinsiyyah* [A Muslim's thoughts on the sexual question] (Beirut: Dar al-Jalil, 1992; originally published in 1984 in Cairo).

47. On the case of southern African nationalist responses, see Neville Hoad, "Between the White Man's Burden and the White Man's Disease: Tracking Lesbian and Gay Human Rights in Southern Africa," *GLQ* 5 (1999): 559–84. On the case of Cuba and the reactions to the Gay International in the context of the Cold War, see Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich, "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution: Notes toward an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Male Experience, Part 1," *Signs* 9 (1984): 683–99, and part 2 of their essay in *Signs* 11 (1985): 120–35.

48. David Goldman, "Gay Muslims," *Southern Voice*, summer 1999 (available on-line at www.al-fatiha.net/svoice.html). Alam has become increasingly important in Washington circles; he was featured in an article on gay Muslims in the *Washington Post* (Emily Wax, "Gay Muslims United in Face of Rejection," *Washington Post*, 3 April 2000, B1).

are drawn to Islam by the erroneous assumption that Muslims are more tolerant. . . .” Indeed it is such beliefs that account for why “Morocco has become a favorite playground for European gay men.” As a result, religious circles “are reacting with increasing bitterness to this type of prostitution engendered by tourists from affluent societies. The long-standing indulgence was certainly not rooted in Islam. On the contrary, an Islamic backlash is gaining momentum, despite the abject poverty.”⁴⁹ Still, the phenomenon Duran discerned in Europe seems to be reproducing itself in the United States. The founder of a new U.S. group called Queer Jihad is a white American convert to Islam who goes by the name Sulayman X.⁵⁰

As a result of this touristic assault, writes Duran:

A dispassionate discussion of the human rights of homosexuals is particularly hard to initiate in Muslim societies confronted with a kind of Western homosexual aggression. An instance in point is a representative of a European political foundation who was stationed in North Africa for many years. Extremely extroverted, he projects his homosexuality as a mark of distinction above and beyond his redoubtable academic merits. Such Western extravagances make the task of human rights activists among Muslims very difficult indeed. (186–87)

Duran understands that gay sex-tourism in Morocco incites a discourse that has negative effects. However, he falls in the Western gay epistemological trap that identifies as *homosexual* only those Arab and Muslim practitioners of same-sex contact who are “passive.” Duran describes “active” partners as having “no other homosexual inclinations” or as suffering from “emergency homosexuality.”⁵¹ It is the passive ones who are gay and therefore at risk for human rights violations.

49. Khalid Duran, “Homosexuality and Islam,” in *Homosexuality and World Religions*, ed. Arlene Swidler (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1993), 186.

50. See the site of his group Queer Jihad on-line at www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Heights/8977/aboutqj.htm and the “Confessions of Sulayman X” posted on-line at www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Heights/8977/confessions.htm. Note that Sulayman X’s pretensions are made possible within a post–World War II context of African American appropriations of Islam and the appropriation in turn by white U.S. youth culture of African American popular culture. Note also that Faisal Alam, the founder of Al-Fatiha, met one such convert. He tells the *Washington Post* reporter that his first homosexual encounter was a “relationship with an older male convert to Islam” in the United States (Wax, “Gay Muslims”).

51. Although Duran does not clearly define what he means by “emergency homosexuality,” the sense is of men who have sex with men when there are no women available. His notion of “emergency homosexuality” seems related to Freud’s notion of “contingent homosexuality.” See Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1962), 3.

Duran notes that Western “gays seeking active partners in North African countries usually do not realize that their local lovers are often motivated by a hostile attitude toward them as citizens of nations that had once been colonial masters. To sodomize a Westerner provides a kind of psychological relief for some people from among the former ‘subject races’ who now have a chance to take it out on their oppressors. This also holds true of some other African regions; to do it to a white man is like taking revenge, along with having a source of income” (189). By reducing the desire of Moroccan men who are “active” in same-sex contact to the economic, anticolonial, or “emergency” realm, Duran need not account for the different workings of sexual epistemology and sexual desire to which Moroccan men subscribe; sexual desire is simply and conveniently eliminated from his account altogether.

Duran’s semianthropological study, which is punctuated by data that he provides as a native informant, differentiates between what he considers “the more genuine, or genetic type of homosexuality . . . [which is] generally less common among the peoples of the ‘Islamic belt’ than in Europe” and the more prevalent “emergency homosexuality” that he thinks exists in the Arab world and Iran (187–88). Like AbuKhalil, Duran seems to think that the categories of “gay” or “straight” are transhistorical; he writes of “two important historical figures [who are] known to have been gay, Sultan Mehmet Fatih, the Ottoman conqueror of Constantinople (Istanbul), and Sultan Mahmud Ghaznawi, who invaded India from Afghanistan” (190).

Since the early 1980s, in the wake of the Iranian Revolution and the rise of Islamism in the Arab world and the beginnings of the internationalization of the Western gay movements, a steady, albeit infrequent, discourse about Western “sexual deviance” and later about AIDS could be found in the Arab press. Much of it represented the Western gay and lesbian movements, following Western conservative and fundamentalist Christian descriptions, as part of the degradation of Western sexual mores in general. Still, this limited discourse rarely mentioned sexual deviance in the Arab world and remained infrequent until the 1990s when it became more vociferous, although still infrequent, in response to the crusading efforts of the Gay International.

An example of this is the exchange that took place between the editor of the prestigious London-based Arabic newspaper, *al-Hayah*, and a representative of a U.S.-based Arab gay and lesbian group. Railing against Western cable and satellite channels for broadcasting programs containing violence, sexual material, and gay and lesbian weddings, Jihad al-Khazin, editor in chief of *al-Hayah*, referred to

gays by the Arabic term meaning sexual deviants.⁵² Al-Khazin's conservative and procensorship argument chastised Arab liberals who fight government control of television and defended Arab governments as the bearers of "the responsibility to protect their societies from the worst aspects of degeneration." Al-Khazin, who often espouses Western conservative opinion on social matters, concluded his tirade by quoting Western sources that sexual deviants constitute no more than 1 to 2 percent of Western society and by asserting that the focus of television representations on "violence without punishment or pain has led to the spread of violence in society. The danger now [lies in the possibility] that the focus on deviance, among women and men, might lead to the acceptance of deviance as a normal, not a deviant, issue, its subsequent spread in the West, and then its reaching us."⁵³ Incensed by the use of the term *deviant* but not by the procensorship argument, Ramzi Zakharia, the founder of GLAS, wrote a letter to the editor in protest. Zakharia insisted that the term *deviant* "insults me as an Arab who desires people of the same sex as it insults millions like me." Zakharia explained how deviance does not describe people like himself since homosexuality is "genetic" and since his relationship to his sexual partner is not based only on sex but also on love. After hinting at the withdrawal of his company's advertising in *al-Hayah*, Zakharia declared that his group's goals in the Arab world are like those of the feminist movement, namely, to "remove the old and tribalist patriarchal system which has strangled and continues to strangle our people. . . . This system is based on the use of 'traditions,' and 'honor,' as weapons to repress pluralism in our societies in order to make democracy in them practically impossible, and to maintain the tribalist mentality whose effects are very clear in the contemporary Arab world."⁵⁴ In response to Zakharia, al-Khazin, whose own concern about "degeneration" is borrowed wholesale from late-nineteenth-century European discourse, asserted that he did not intend to insult anyone by his comments but was simply using the Arabic term for homosexuals. The other term that exists, he correctly added, is *mithliyyah* (sameness), a term that is hardly known to most readers.⁵⁵ Al-

52. Jihad al-Khazin, "'Uyun wa adhan" [Eyes and ears], *al-Hayah*, 9 February 1996, 24.

53. al-Khazin, "'Uyun wa adhan."

54. Ramzi Zakharia, "al-Nizam al-abawiyy wa aslihatuhu al-qam'iyya" [The patriarchal system and its repressive weapons], *al-Hayah*, 3 March 1996, 18.

55. I should note here that in the last few years, in their coverage of gay- and lesbian-related news, *al-Hayah* and other Arabic newspapers have begun to employ intermittently the expression *mithliyyah*, indicating a transitional, ambivalent phase in language use between *shudhudh* and *mithliyyah*. See, for example, "Mithliyu al-jins ila al-qafas al-dhahabi fi Kanada . . . wa al-baritaniyyun yantazirun al-faraj" [Canada's homosexuals (enter) the golden cage (of marriage) while the(ir) British (counterparts) are still waiting (to follow in their footsteps)], *al-Hayah*, 13 April 2000, back page.

Khazin concluded by asserting that although most of Zakharia's long letter was published, "the editor in chief and *al-Hayah* are both against sameness (*mith-liyyah*), or deviance (*shudhudh*), or whatever the reader would like to call it, for reasons of traditions, religion, and inherited conventions, but without insulting anyone and without coercion, imposition, or oppression and without making a case out of it, as this was not the intention. . . . moreover, the editor in chief admits his ignorance of this issue more generally as he did not realize that this issue was on the table."⁵⁶ Indeed it was not, as al-Khazin's concern was with the spread of "deviance" from the West to the Arab world and not its actual existence in the Arab world. Neither the editor of *al-Hayah* nor the newspaper itself would have declared explicit opposition to "sameness" in the Arab world had Zakharia, a resident of the United States, not incited this condemnation—which will affect not him but people in the Arab world. Zakharia's letter elicited another response from a physician in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, who felt it incumbent to assert that the punishment for homosexuals is death and to respond to Zakharia's claim of the genetic basis of "sexual deviance" by calling it a "disease."⁵⁷

Such incitement has not been confined to the pages of *al-Hayah*; in the mid-1990s it exploded on the pages of many Arabic newspapers. At the UN-sponsored International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 and the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the agenda of the Gay International—produced by American and European NGOs—was forcefully promoted to a global audience. In many cases, translations of platform texts and resolutions were distorted, thus concealing the more controversial aspects from conference participants. The scandal of distorted translations of texts of platforms and other resolutions became a major issue in the preparation of both conferences. It was in this context that Arab columnists began to rail against the "lobby of deviants" in America who want to impose their debauchery on the rest of the world.⁵⁸ At the 1999 International Conference on Population and Development in The Hague, a follow-up to the 1994 conference, this "deviant lobby" showed its less than peaceful face. Repeating the same performance of 1994, the conference organizers denied most delegates translations of conference resolu-

56. Response of editor in chief (al-Khazin), *al-Hayah*, 3 March 1996, 18.

57. Dr. 'Abdullah Bin Hamad, "al-Shudhudh al-jinsi marad wa laysa amran mafrudan" [Sexual deviance is a disease, not an imposed fate], *al-Hayah*, 15 March 1999, 18.

58. See, for example, Zaynab 'Abd al-'Aziz, "Kawalis mu'tamar al-mar'ah fi bikin" [Behind the scenes at the Women's Conference in Beijing], *al-Sha'b* (Cairo), 7 July 1995, 11; and Zaynab 'Abd al-'Aziz, "Tafakhur al-shawadh . . . wa Mu'tamar al-Mar'ah" [The pride of the deviants and the Women's Conference], *al-Sha'b*, 28 July 1995, 11.

tions by producing texts in French, English, and Spanish only.⁵⁹ The resolutions included statements about guaranteeing for the youth the “freedom of [sexual] expression and sexual orientation.” The word *orientation* was subsequently translated into Arabic in newspaper coverage as *tawajjuh* (direction, which has no idiomatic meaning whatsoever) and translated for readers as “sexual deviance.”⁶⁰ Bashshar al-Jammali, a Belgian journalist of Muslim Arab origin working as a correspondent for the Islamist magazine *al-Mustaqbal al-Islami*, alerted the Arab youth delegations to these ambiguous terms and their meanings, prompting the delegations to oppose them and to ask that they be removed from the resolutions. As punishment for his efforts, the UN conference coordinator denied al-Jammali journalistic access to the conference and instructed the UN security guards to take his press card and beat him. Unconscious and handcuffed, he was found and released by the Dutch police. Al-Jammali pressed charges against the UN, sent letters to the 187 UN delegations, and involved members of the U.S. Congress and the Dutch police in what became a cause célèbre condemning the machinations of the Gay International. Articles and interviews with al-Jammali appeared in the Arabic press with all the gory details of his beating.⁶¹

More recently, the Egyptian authorities have begun to crack down on Cairo locations where Westernized Egyptian gay-identified men and their European and American tourist cohorts congregate. On 11 May 2001, the police raided a discotheque housed in a boat on the Nile in the upper-class neighborhood of Zamalik and arrested fifty-five people.⁶² Women and foreign (i.e., mostly European and American) men who were detained were released on the spot, and three Egyptian men found to be the sons of prominent people were released shortly afterward.⁶³ The arrested men—all Egyptian—were reportedly roughed up and insulted by the police. They were later subjected to so-called medical (read rectal) exams to verify their “deviance.”⁶⁴ The official charges brought against these

59. See Danya Amin's report, “Muntada fi lahay jama'a mu'assasat hukumiyah wa ahliyyah” [A symposium in the Hague includes government and private organizations], *al-Hayah mulhaq al-shabab*, 30 March 1999, 1.

60. Amin, “Muntada fi lahay.”

61. See Muhammad al-Shaq'a, “Hal yasma' Anan anin Bashshar?” (Does Anan hear Bashshar's groaning?), *al-Hayah mulhaq al-shabab*, 18 May 1999, 20.

62. Thirty-four of the men were at the disco at the time of the arrests, and the rest were arrested in their homes.

63. The arrested men were alleged to be members of a cult that considers the medieval Arab/Persian poet Abu al-Nuwwas their “prophet.” This allegation was based on a book found at the home of one of the suspects that elaborates this view and wherein same-sex practitioners are enjoined to go on a pilgrimage to the Dead Sea annually to commemorate the death of the people of Lot.

64. For journalistic coverage of the arrests, see Muhammad Salah, “‘Abadat al-shaytan yastal-

men by the state prosecutor were those of “offending religion” (one of the accused had allegedly written a text that advances a “heretical” interpretation of Islam as a religion that revels in same-sex contact) and of “practicing debauchery”—Egyptian law has no provisions against same-sex practice. Because Egypt has been under emergency regulations since the early 1980s, the men were tried by a special emergency state security court—an indication that the state considers this a national security issue. One person (the alleged author of the “heretical” text) was sentenced to a five-year prison term with hard labor, and his associate received a three-year term. One person received a one-year prison term, and twenty others were found guilty of practicing debauchery and were sentenced to two-year prison terms with hard labor, while the remaining twenty-nine were found innocent of all charges and released. IGLHRC representative Scott Long (misidentified by *al-Hayah* as ILGA’s representative or, more precisely, according to *al-Hayah*, “The International Association of Sexual Deviants”) was at the trial and spoke with journalists. He condemned the court decisions and asserted that the “government exploits religion in an attempt to oppress the suspects.” The court had declared that “Eastern society” as well as all monotheistic religions “condemn deviance and perversion/delinquency” (*shudhudh* and *inhiraf*).⁶⁵

This crackdown followed an increasing visibility of Westernized, Cairo-based, upper- and middle-class Egyptian men who identify as gay and consort with European and American tourists, as well as the related increase in Internet activity among these men to arrange for meetings. It should be noted that the police

himun qawm Lut” [Satan worshipers receive their inspiration from “the people of Lot”], *al-Hayah*, 14 May 2001, 7, and *al-Hayah*’s subsequent coverage on the following dates: 15 May 2001, 7; 16 May 2001, 7; 29 June 2001, 5. Note that originally it was reported that fifty-five people had been arrested; by late June the number was reduced to fifty-two—the three upper-class men who were released in the meantime were dropped unceremoniously from the count. See also Muhammad Salah, “‘Qawm Lut al-judud’ yabkun fi al-jalsah al-ula li-muhakamatihim” [“The new people of Lot” cry at their first trial hearing], *al-Hayah*, 19 July 2001, 4, for coverage of the first trial hearing; and Bonnie Eslinger and Hossam Bahgat, “Egypt Steps Up Anti-Gay Campaign: 52 Men Face Obscenity Trial,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 July 2001, A12. See also Hossam Bahgat, “Explaining Egypt’s Targeting of Gays,” *Middle East Report*, 23 July 2001 (press information note available on-line at www.merip.org). See also *al-Hayah*, 16 August 2001, 1, 5, 6; 28 August 2001, 15; 29 August 2001, 6; 30 August 2001, 6. On rectal exams performed on the suspects, see “‘Qawm Lut al-judud’ al-difa’ yata’ahhad taqdim watha’iq li-tabri’at al-muttahamin” [“The new people of Lot”: The defense promises to provide documents to exonerate the suspects], *al-Hayah*, 5 September 2001, 6. Apparently no exams were made on the penises of the men (for traces of fecal matter, for example) to ascertain if they were “deviant.”

65. See Muhammad Salah, “‘Qadiyyat qawm Lut al-judud’ fi Misr: al-ashghal al-shaqqaq li 23 muttahaman wa tabri’at 29” (The “case of the new people of Lot” in Egypt: Hard labor for 23 suspects and the acquittal of 29), *al-Hayah*, 15 November 2001, 8.

were able to pursue these men mostly through monitoring their Internet correspondence. The most prominent of the Web sites, gayegypt.com, is in English and features tips for European and American gay tourists coming to Egypt.⁶⁶ Clearly most Egyptian men who practice same-sex contact neither know English nor have the wherewithal to afford Internet access, much less know how to use it. This is important in that the police do not seek to, and cannot if they were so inclined, arrest men practicing same-sex contact but rather are 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. The campaign of the Gay International misses this important distinction. The point being that it is not same-sex sexual practices that are being repressed by the Egyptian police but rather the sociopolitical identification of these practices with the Western identity of gayness and the publicness that these gay-identified men seek.

The arrests prompted a torrent of media collusion with the government, condemning the practice of “deviance” as a new Western imposition—ironically, the hysteria that gripped the Gay International and their local agents only further ignited the rhetoric. IGLHRC was joined by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International in condemning the arrests and in orchestrating a letter-writing campaign to Egyptian officials.⁶⁷ They were joined by GLAS and by Al-Fatiha’s now-infamous founder Faisal Alam who not only called for worldwide demonstrations in support of the arrested men, but also solicited the signatures of members of the U.S. Congress, who were recruited by openly gay Massachusetts congressman Barney Frank and by the anti-Arab and anti-Egyptian Tom Lantos to sign a petition threatening a cutoff of U.S. aid to Egypt if the government failed to release the men.⁶⁸ Western diplomats and the Western press, who are usually silent about

66. For example, the site has a Web page called “Gay Arabic” in which it states the following: “Welcome to gayegypt.com’s gay arabic page—perfect for gay tourists wishing to use a few words in their encounters with Egyptians. Even remembering a few of these phrases will raise eyebrows and enhance your prospects of a profitable holiday.” The rest of the Web site acts as a guide to gay tourists visiting Cairo and Egypt more generally.

67. See also Bahgat, “Explaining Egypt’s Targeting of Gays,” and Howard Schneider, “Cultural Struggle Finds Symbol in Gay Cairo: Arrests of 52 Men Reflect Tension between Islamic Traditionalists, Secularists,” *Washington Post*, 9 September 2001, A24.

68. A GLAS flyer circulated via e-mail called for the 15 August 2001 demonstration in New York City at the Egyptian consulate. The flyer called on people to “join us for a rally outside the office of the Egyptian Consulate as we send a clear message that Gay Rights are Human Rights and that our tax dollars will not continue to fund the brutal oppression of our brothers and sisters in Egypt or any other Arab country.” Al-Fatiha’s Faisal Alam issued an Action Alert on 14 August 2001, entitled “International Day of Solidarity and Mourning in Support of 52 Detained Men in Egypt,” calling for the 15 August worldwide demonstrations and asserting that “the Egyptian government [should] know

most human rights abuses in Egypt as well as the poverty that afflicts the country, flocked to the trial hearings in droves and registered their horror at the proceedings. The reaction of the Egyptian press and of the Egyptian government was swift: more vilification campaigns of deviant sex as an imperialist plot, as evidenced by the real alliances that the Gay International makes with imperialists—Al-Fatihah's activities were seen as particularly egregious. Indeed, the vilification campaign against these men intensified precisely as a result of the actions of the Gay International and the Western politicians whose support it solicited. During the hearings, the prosecution frequently referenced the Gay International's campaign, pledged to defend the "manhood" of Egypt against attempts to "violate" it, and wondered what would become of a nation who sits by idly as its "men become like its women" through "deviance."⁶⁹ The press and conservative Islamists have begun to call for explicit laws criminalizing same-sex practice.⁷⁰ The Gay International and its activities are largely responsible for the intensity of this repressive campaign. Despite the overwhelming evidence that gayness, as a choice, is proving to bring about more repression, not "liberation," and less sexual freedom rather than more for Arab men practicing same-sex contact, the Gay International is undeterred in its missionary campaign.

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. Because most non-Western civilizations, including Muslim Arab civilization, have not subscribed historically to these categories, their imposition is producing less than liberatory outcomes: men who are considered the passive or receptive parties in male-male sexual contacts are forced to have one

that the world will not sit back and watch injustice and oppression take place!" On Alam's call to members of Congress, including Barney Frank, to sign the threatening petition, which many, including Frank, did, see *al-Hayah*, 15 August 2001, 1, 6. See also the *Washington Post*, 9 September 2001, A24, and *al-Ahram al-'Arabi*, 25 August 2001 (on-line version). Alam had already met Frank at least a year earlier when he "presented a copy of the Koran to a group of Jewish gay leaders, including U.S. Representative Barney Frank." See Wax, "Gay Muslims." Lantos's anti-Arab and anti-Egyptian views are noted in *al-Hayah*, "al-Mithliyyun fi al-'alam yatahaddun li nasrat qawm Lut fi Misr" [Homosexuals in the world (launch a) challenge in solidarity with the "people of Lot" in Egypt], 15 August 2001, 1, 6. His unwavering support of Israel and enmity to Arab countries and the Palestinians is discussed in Janine Zacharia, "Lantos's List," *Jerusalem Post*, 13 April 2001 (on-line version).

69. See Khalid Miri, "Ma'rakah sakhinah bayn al-niyabah wa al-difa' fi qadiyyat al-shawaz" [A heated battle between the prosecution and the defense in the case of the deviants], *Al-Hawadith* (Cairo), 6 September 2001 (on-line version).

70. See, for example, "al-Qanun la yu'aqib al-shawaz" [The law does not punish deviants], *Al-Ahram al-'Arabi* (Cairo), 25 August 2001, which includes calls for the criminalization of same-sex contact among men in the country.

object choice and identify as homosexual or gay, just as men who are the “active” partners are also forced to limit their sexual aim to one object choice, women or men. Most “active” partners see themselves as part of a societal norm, so heterosexuality becomes compulsory given that the alternative, as presented by the Gay International, means becoming marked outside the norm—with all the attendant risks and disadvantages of such a marking.⁷¹ Also, most Arab and Muslim countries that do not have laws against sexual contact between men respond to the Gay International’s incitement to discourse by professing antihomosexual stances on a nationalist basis. This is leading to harassment by police in some cases and could lead to antihomosexual legislation. Those countries that already have unenforced laws have begun to enforce them.⁷² Ironically, this is the very process through which “homosexuality” was invented in the West.⁷³

It is not the Gay International or its upper-class supporters in the Arab diaspora who will be persecuted but rather the poor and nonurban men who practice same-sex contact and who do not identify as homosexual or gay. The so-called passive homosexual whom the Gay International wants to defend against social denigration will find himself in a double bind: first, his sexual desires will be unfulfilled because he will no longer have access to his previously available sexual object choice (i.e., exclusively active partners, as in the interim they will have become heterosexual); and second, he will fall victim to legal and police persecu-

71. On compulsory heterosexuality’s coercion of women in the West, see Adrienne Rich’s classic “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs* 5 (1980): 631–60.

72. E.g., in April 2000 the Lebanese vice police harassed the managing director of an Internet service provider in Beirut for allowing a Web site for “gay” Lebanese; the general manager and a human rights activist were charged with defaming the Lebanese army and Lebanese flag, interrogated by the police, and arraigned before a military court. IGLHRC’s intervention in this case is exemplary of the incitement to discourse that contributes to even further criminalization and harassment. In one of its campaign mailings, IGLHRC enjoined its supporters to write letters to the Lebanese authorities demanding an “end [to] discrimination and harassment against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in Lebanon.” The Gay Lebanon Web site—featuring a buff blond European man on the first page—itself incited discourse on gay issues in the press. Even human rights activists in the country ran a gay-unfriendly article on the topic. See Nada Iliyya, “Luwat Lubnan wa suhaquhu aydan” [The male homosexuality of Lebanon and its lesbianism too], *Hurriyyat*, February 2000, 39. The Web site content, like the corresponding Egyptian Web site, is in English exclusively and includes cruising tips for not only Lebanese men who identify as “gay” (and who obviously must be able to read English and must have Internet access) but also foreign visitors (read white Europeans and Americans) who are duly informed in the tradition of Lebanese chauvinism that homosexuality in Lebanon (a country which, unlike many of its neighbors, has colonial French laws from the 1930s criminalizing homosexuality) is “more tolerated” than in other “Middle Eastern” countries. The Web site address is <http://surf.to/gay.lebanon>.

73. On the invention of homosexuality, see Foucault, *History of Sexuality*.

tion as well as heightened social denigration as his sexual practice becomes a topic of public discourse that transforms it from a practice into an identity.

When the Gay International incites discourse on homosexuality in the non-Western world, it claims that the “liberation” of those it defends lies in the balance. In espousing this liberation project, the Gay International is destroying social and sexual configurations of desire in the interest of reproducing a world in its own image, one wherein its sexual categories and desires are safe from being questioned. Because it has solicited and received some support from Arab and Muslim native informants who are mostly located in the United States and who accept its sexual categories and identities, the Gay International’s imperialist epistemological task is proceeding apace with little opposition from the majority of the sexual beings it wants to “liberate” and whose social and sexual worlds it is destroying in the process. In undertaking this universalizing project, the Gay International ultimately makes itself feel better about a world it forces to share its identifications. Its missionary achievement, however, will be the creation not of a *queer* planet but rather a *straight* one.

Joseph Massad teaches modern Arab politics and intellectual history at Columbia University. He is the author of *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (2001) and numerous articles on Palestinian and Israeli society and politics.